

THE HASKAYNE REPORT



The Broken Rung in the Corporate Ladder: Experiences of Visible Minorities

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Representation in Business

For centuries dating back to the Industrial Revolution, the presence of People of Colour (POC) in positions of prominence has been a rarity. This phenomenon can be traced back to the Atlantic Slave Trade, Anti-Asian Violence, and Anti-Latino Discrimination just to name a few. As it pertains to the corporate world, what we see today is a more diverse and inclusive industry. Through necessary controversial conversations that challenge the status quo, business, and all that it entails has seen an increase in the number of (POC) working that makes up its population. Slowly but surely, the racial segregation and discrimination engrained in our society are being broken down. For instance, as reported by The Toronto Star, POCS make up 4.5% of the Canadian corporate sector (Ravilojan, 2020).

Although this number is significantly low it is important to highlight that historically, there was no percentage to represent the presence of POCs in the industry. Therefore, it should be celebrated and seen as a step in the right direction. However, there is more work to be done.

Issues POCs face in the corporate world

According to a study by Dr. Monnica Williams, “stereotypes contribute to keeping people of colour in a disadvantaged status” (Momentous Institute, 2017). With stereotypes such as POCs being perceived as “lazy”, POCs are direly affected in completing certain milestones as they relate to career advancement. As a result, opportunities are given to their colleagues to advance in the ranks of the company whilst POCs are left with projects and business undertakings for the company that has little to no impact

on helping them make their way to the top. As a result, some POCs can experience low self-esteem and periods of self-doubt.

Culturally, minorities have a unique way of carrying themselves in all that they do. Nevertheless, an article from BBC News titled “Why it’s hard for people of colour to be themselves at work” discusses how minorities seem to code-switch to be accepted in their place of work. Code-switching refers to the way (often marginalized) people conform their behaviour, appearance, and language to corporate culture, which usually tends to be “systemically white” (Ekemezie, 2021). For example, this even goes as far as specifically affecting the way Black individuals wear their hair. Renee Jarvis, an individual cited in the stated article, reveals that she subconsciously puts on a wig to be “more presentable on camera” (Ekemezie, 2021). The notion that a Black woman wearing her hair in its natural state like in the case of Jarvis is seen as unpresentable is mind-boggling. One may suggest that for a reason such as this, she may not be invited to a meeting with a top client because it might not be a “good look” for the company.

One might argue that the world has changed and evolved and that spaces are being made and created for minorities to thrive in the corporate world. As we’ve seen in the past two years, companies are seen implementing diversity and inclusion into the structure of their companies, with positions being made specifically for POCs. Seems like a step in the right direction, right? Somewhat. A BBC News article suggests that “as companies around the world rush to implement diversity and inclusion programs, the burden to launch these initiatives are unduly falling on employees of colour” (Nance-Nash, 2020). It seems apparent that some of these companies are turning to methods that are the “easiest and most convenient” and utilizing diversity

and inclusion as mere buzzwords to avoid backlash from society (Nance-Nash, 2020). Instead of employing surface-level “fixes”, the educating aspect surrounding the roots of systemic racial discrimination and its impact on one’s career advancement is just as pivotal.

Onward and Upward

A system that has been prominent for centuries cannot be easily deconstructed in a matter of years. So how do we move forward? By not writing off a person based on their last name on their resume. By giving everyone an equal chance to vie for a position. By making the position available to the person that is qualified regardless of their skin tone. By making opportunities accessible to all. It can be argued that this is easier said than done, however, it starts with one initiative. It is beyond creating a positive image for a corporation. It is about fostering a warm and welcoming workplace for individuals of all stripes. One can promote equality and equity in the workplace through more inclusive hiring practices, emphasizing the importance of training and mentoring programs, bridging the pay gap, and fostering a work environment that embraces differences. The benefits are significant. When adopting proper and valuable diversity and inclusion methods, corporations open doors to attracting and retaining higher talent, increasing overall productivity and collaboration, and enhancing employee engagement (Reynolds, 2018).

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