



Speak out or stay silent?

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Fou Brown discusses why it's imperative that people and brands alike question their own role in the problem; and try to take affirmative steps to address it.

Race relations and racism have infiltrated our society and workplace for generations. In society and in the workplace. The recent events have heightened everyone's awareness of this, and it is an uncomfortable feeling. But to be on the right side of history is to question one's own role in the problem; and try to take affirmative steps to address it.

To speak out or to stay silent; that is the challenge all people and brands face right now.

To speak out is to potentially come under scrutiny for past decisions made, or for having too shallow an understanding of the issue, for not taking enough steps to help make

meaningful change; or indeed having a current company structure that could be perceived as not anti-racist.

To stay silent is to potentially come under scrutiny for ignoring the issue altogether; and putting self-preservation before all else.

On Black Out Tuesday, the advertising industry faced a moral dilemma. A day that called for solidarity meant that some viewed advertising as insensitive and callous.

But with the background of Covid-19, where some industries have come to a stand-still and people are at risk of losing jobs; is it also important to protect the livelihoods of our employees – many of whom are Black and/or are sympathisers with the cause? It is difficult to know what the right thing to do is, when one decision impacts the lives of so many.

Whichever way brands and agencies decide to act going forward, the first and most important step should be to look internally at the structures they have in place, and the people they have in positions of power. Not just at an executive level, but at a middle-management level, and any level where a person can make a decision that impacts the life of another. Privilege is a thing. Subconscious bias is a thing. Hiring people who look like you IS a thing. Questioning the capabilities of people of colour is a thing. I have seen and experienced it many times throughout my career.

As an industry we have an important role to play in shaping the future. We are the media that people consume. The media they consume shapes their points of view. Their points of view determine their actions. As many brands have said, “We have a duty of care”...

But supporting this anti-racism agenda in business is not about ticking the box on having one black person in each team. It's about fair and equal employment opportunities. It's about hiring and promoting people on their merits, not their skin colour. It's about stamping out racial prejudice in the working environment. It's about creating safe spaces for these types of discussions. It's about calling out behaviours that propagate racial stereotypes. It's about holding a mirror up to a past that is potentially not pretty. And particularly at this time, it is about paying particular attention to how we treat black people in the work force, and in

our campaigns. Are they well represented? Are they represented at all?

All this being said, I am proud to work for a company that champions equality across the board, that implements initiatives around diversity, Black History education, gender equality, LGBT and mental health. I am proud to work in a company where, as a woman of colour, I feel listened to, empowered and invested in.

I am proud to say my team is diverse. 50% of us are from an ethnic minority of which 20% are Black. This was not on purpose, it is because I hired on capability, initiative and drive – these people were the most qualified, and they happened to be a mix of ethnicities and mostly female (83%). I'm pleased to say that many other teams in the company are also just as diverse.

But we can always do more. My agency can do more. I can do more.

I am beginning by educating myself through literature highlighted by MediaCom's Roots network, and by researching ways that I can use my influence to help break down systemic racism in life and in the workplace. I am beginning by vocalising support for the Black Lives Matter movement on all my platforms. I am beginning with a commitment to do better, not just think better. And I encourage all my friends and colleagues to do the same.

If we all take responsibility for our own areas of influence, we might be able to create something meaningful out of time that right now feels quite dark. #BlackLivesMatter and even after the news has quelled, Black Lives will Still Matter.