Opinion
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I am a 32-year-old white man. It is my belief that white people must educate other white people about racism, privilege and value-judgements entrenched in the systemic injustices that pervade professional life.

As someone who has held many positions in leadership, I write for other white people in positions of leadership or supervision at work.

My value judgments are inextricably linked to my experiences and privileges. While I've not changed my leadership style from the "See-Judge-Act" model exemplified by the Young Christian Workers Movement, I have come to realize just how subjective and incomplete my "seeing," my "judging" and my "actions" are. I recognize I have planks-a-plenty in my own eyes.

Still I would like to share my observations on how white people like me need to talk about race, and how we can be anti-racist at work. I think it is imperative to speak on this now, when so many people face such dire economic and employment situations due to the pandemic. I agree with Pope Francis that this pandemic presents us with the opportunity to develop new, better ways of living. In light of this, here are my professional experiences:

- A colorblind approach, no matter how well-intended is suboptimal if not exclusively harmful. To those who say, "I don't see color…" Whether you go straight to Isaiah, or you skip to Luke 4:18, let's bring some sight to the blind: Color exists and it is used systematically in our language. One might consider a list of microaggressions as a place to begin a personal introspection.
- Discussing race is fraught with peril in part because we've been taught not to talk about race. As such, you need to consult the employee handbook and your human resources designee. Take a look at your handbook's personal hygiene section and see if there's still a section on what professional grooming/hair looks like. It can be helpful to ask yourself if you can apply the following truism to a recent work experience to get a sense of who is privileged: *for our friends we interpret the law, for our enemies we enforce it*.
- Ask your direct supervisor if you could start a book club or discussion group on race and participate in it during work time. In 2017, I along with four other colleagues participated in a months-long book club where we read and discussed the book *Witnessing Whiteness* at work. It was well worth the time

and professional development for us white employees to discuss these matters and thus be better persons and employees. Again, in life we talk about what is important. By not talking about race, we could send a message that race is not important.

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- Of more recent experience: Black Lives Matter. For some people, this is easy to say. For others it is near impossible to say. Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe space for employees to express themselves after this particularly traumatic summer. If an employer has not yet initiated this staff development, why not? If an employer says they feel ill-equipped to handle this, why have they not put up the resources in providing a skilled facilitator in matters of diversity, trauma or race?
- My disposition — certainly not shared by everyone — is summed up in this quote from the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley: "It is better to relieve one hundred imposters, if there be any, than to suffer one distressed person to be sent away." When someone says, "They're just playing the race card," yes, and? The race card wouldn't exist were it not for the systemic issues that allow it to be "played."
- When someone presents the issue of race or even calls you out for being racist, do try not to respond in haste or defensiveness. Do not explain away racism. Practice the following phrase, "Can you help me understand what you mean by that?" Furthermore, do not shut down but rather be open to either listening and/or dialogue. This is where I believe I have grown in wisdom and grace the most in leadership positions. My default is no longer,"Oh, come on, it's not race, it's [insert some other issue here]" as a default response.
- Listen; listen to what your colleagues of color say to you. None of us can grow in wisdom, understanding or even the certainty or our positions without listening, without respectful dialogue.
- Human dignity is not partisan. It's not liberal wordsmithing or progressive virtue signaling to say privilege is real. I have seen privilege working in my professional life — in Catholic ministries as much as secular endeavors. It does not define my career or my workplaces, but it exists. Many value judgements at work are steeped in race. When I remember this, I can lead with a more complete understanding of policies and behaviors and make work more

equitable for non-white colleagues. Ignorance of privilege is indefensible. And yes, I struggle in being anti-racist in my life, in my leadership positions.

I am still learning about race, my biases, what leadership really looks like, and I am still living out this faith of mine, too. I have been told my hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. This thirst doesn't cease at 9 a.m. to resume promptly at 5 p.m. It is constant.

If we want to make holy our work, until all are satisfied, we in leadership, we of privilege, or in aggregate, we white people must act justly, love mercy, walk humbly and thirst with the same intensity for which our colleagues of color thirst for justice.

We can do this, if we talk about race and value judgements; if we provide opportunities for dialogue on race, if we practice listening, if we follow up on public pronouncements of solidarity, if we provide places of privilege (board tables, pulpits, standing committees) for persons of color, if we examine our work structures from hiring to retention and see what must be done differently, and commit to doing things differently, if we believe that the image of God is imprinted within all, then our prayers and our acts of faith must honor that.

[Mark Piper, a Packers fan in an unholy land, works in the nonprofit sector. He resides in Chicago with his family and holds a master's in leadership and policy studies from DePaul University and a bachelor's from St. Xavier University; he is an alumnus of Amate House, a year of service organization sponsored by the Chicago Archdiocese.]

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