

Projecting Anti-Racism: Asking For Free Labor

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Developing anti-racist businesses, organizations, philanthropic ventures and so on, requires considerable long-term investments in labor and education. The nature of working towards a future without racism is complex, nuanced, place-specific, and emergent (ever-evolving). Companies that have recently decided to pursue “becoming anti-racist” have much work to do.

The trending phenomena of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) being solicited for free labor has spiked since the uprisings around the United States in defense of Black lives. Industry professionals in all sectors have been put on the defensive: where they do not know how to--or do not want to-- pursue an internal review of their operations and so they post a black square, virtue signaling solidarity without real change. They might also contribute to the flooded inboxes of BIPOC and JEDI experts without offering to hire them.

In the act of asking for “advice”, the result is often harmful. It is extractive and perpetuates the narrative that anti-racist work can be an afterthought and not the driving force behind our socioeconomic pursuits.

You are not the only gym, brand, publication, club, team or, well, anyone in any industry, really, to decide now is a good time to make some changes. You are not the only one to track down that person who seems to be doing this kind of work, either professionally or because they have invested in their community.

In fact, you are one of countless others who email them, or worse, direct message them on Instagram, with a paragraph explaining who you are and how dedicated you are to making changes before asking them to chat. No mention of compensation, no acknowledgment of their work as work.

This looks like something a lot of BIPOC have seen before - the image of a white person or institution extracting information without really doing any labor or investing anything themselves. This becomes devastating. The practice of understanding these racial optics is an anti-racist practice. Are you perpetuating a pattern of harm? Can you learn to see the bigger picture?

These solicitations lead to burnout for BIPOC and while you may be thinking, "it's just a conversation," or, "well, the person I messaged seemed happy to help," you need to consider your own impact.

It is essential to understand that these are not casual conversations for non-white people. There is an extreme lack of perspective from the industry when it comes to the harm that befalls BIPOC put in these positions of having "friendly conversations" with industry members in the early stages of unlearning their own racism. Know what you're asking: this is trauma.

You wouldn't expect an engineer to build you a bridge for free, so it is not appropriate to ask a BIPOC person for their guidance without compensation. And no, a punch pass to your gym doesn't count as currency. If you don't have the budget to pay someone, then tap into the deep pool of online resources to educate yourself further. What you'll invest, instead, is your time until you've restructured in such a way that you are able to afford hiring a consultant for your business.

Read/Follow/Learn:

Books

- *The New Jim Crow* [Michelle Alexander](#)
- *Me & White Supremacy* [Layla F. Saad](#)
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* [Ijeoma Oluo](#)

Resource Guide

- [Resources for Climbers of Color: For Allies](#)

Instagram Accounts

- [Sonya Renee Taylor](#)
- [@outdoorceopledge](#)

Prioritize this labor. Pay for this labor. Hire a facilitator, guide, or coach to help you

along your journey. Just make sure you appreciate the skill and expertise involved in this work, as well as the toll it takes on the educators.

About the Author



[Anaheed Saatchi](#) is a queer and non-binary writer and community organizer. They cover themes of social justice, diaspora, the outdoors industry and identity politics. In 2018, they co-founded the rock climbing initiative BelayALL, based on the unceded territories of the sə́lilwətaʔt̓ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish), and šxʷməθkʷəy̓əmaʔt̓ təməxʷ (Musqueam) nations. Examples of their work can be found in *Alpinist Magazine* and online at *Melanin Base Camp*.



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