

Black History Month: A Time to Walk the Black Lives Matter Talk?



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Think for a moment about the questions below:

1. Did your company/agency issue a statement or post support for Black Lives Matter?
2. Do you plan to attend a Black History Month event?
3. Do you plan to use Black History Month as an opportunity to discuss the contributions of black PR professionals to the industry at your company/agency?

If you answered yes to the first and no to either the second or third, PR leaders who are self-proclaimed allies of the

African American community need to ask another question: Are you walking the BLM talk?

Over the last few years, I have attended and supported Black History Month events. Every year I have been surprised at the modest number of PR professionals who were not African American in attendance.

On the sidelines of one event, when I asked a senior African American media relations professional, why more of her white colleagues had not joined, she told me that a common refrain was that it wasn't an event "for them."

With the Black Lives Matter protests still fresh and raw, the majority white PR community's engagement around Black History Month will be a litmus test of whether or not those who claim to be "woke" are truly awake.

If we are truly awake to the issue of racism and the importance of diversity in the industry, we understand that what we do this month, and every day in the future matters, far more than what we say when the spotlight is upon us.

If we are truly awake to the need for concrete action, it will be measured not only by participating in events, but also by convening them in agencies and communications departments.

And, if we are truly awake, we will want to know the stories of African-American pioneers in our industry and hear their inspiring stories.

Those who look at Black History Month as not "for them", and yet say they are allies, cannot claim this moral high ground unless they are prepared to walk the talk to earn it.

There are many in the industry who understand that the statements of support for the Black Lives Matter movement from both clients and agencies have to be backed by action and real change. By embracing a long-term commitment to addressing

inequality they recognize a path to opportunity. The opportunity to forge a more perfect union and to address systemic racism, to echo the words spoken during the inauguration. And, at the same time, to build stronger more profitable businesses.

Whether or not we choose to celebrate the contributions of fellow Americans who helped build this country and our industry, provided much of our cultural heritage and who have inspired many of us to do and be better, will say much about whether or not we are an industry of empty words or deeds.

I encourage communicators who consider themselves allies, as well as those on the sidelines, to take the time this month to attend a virtual Black History Month event, to learn about the African American professionals who have done so much to shape the industry, and to join the ranks of professionals in the industry who, through their actions, will leave the industry stronger than they found it.

The Museum of Public Relations' free 2021 Black History Event on Tuesday, February 9 is one such opportunity among many to step up and support greater diversity in the PR industry. See you there!



About the Author: Simon Erskine Locke is CEO of communications agency and professional search and services platform, CommunicationsMatch™. He is a regular contributor to CommPRO.biz and vice president of the Foreign Press Association. Search for Agencies, Professionals & Service providers. Create a profile on CommunicationsMatch.

