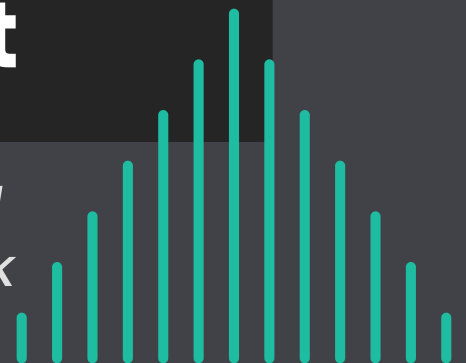


# Building on the Momentum of Black History Month for Year-Round Impact

*Insights from Black professionals and  
business leaders on celebrating Black  
History Month and elevating  
underrepresented talent all year.*





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**True diversity, equity, and inclusion happens when we create opportunities for every employee to learn new skills and make connections.** If you're building an inclusive organization that aims to develop, engage, and retain your diverse employees, you can't leave your Black employees behind. Organizations owe it to their employees to no longer take a surface-level approach to diversity initiatives, and instead commit to year-round allyship and initiatives that genuinely uplift the experiences of Black professionals.

Back in 2020, in the US alone, Fortune 500 companies from Wall Street to Silicon Valley pledged almost \$50 billion to confront systemic racism. In Canada, 209 corporations committed in July 2020 to tackling systemic racism through the BlackNorth Initiative, by hiring more Black people and elevating them into senior leadership roles. But a year later in 2021, a Globe & Mail survey revealed that most of the participating companies made little progress toward these commitments.

Since then, corporations have discovered that while making pledges and financial commitments may be simple, the real challenge lies in fostering a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment that effectively supports Black employees. And beyond hiring efforts, it's critical to actively support and uplift the experiences of Black professionals once they are within your organization.



*"By identifying the systemic problems, you inevitably position yourself to create effective systemic solutions to work. And out of that systemic solution comes accountability."*

**Jarvis Sam, former Chief DEI Officer of Nike**

# Supporting Black talent starts early

In our discussions with Black Leaders from backgrounds in HR, DEI, recruitment, leadership, and social impact, we learned that supporting Black talent and employees starts early. It starts before Black professionals are recruited, before they go to a corporate job website, and even before they apply to college. According to Diavin Miller, Head of Customer Experience at Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN), the largest Black community of tech and business professionals in North America, it starts in kindergarten. “From the time that Black students are in the educational system, they are treated differently based on how people see their potential. They endure a gauntlet of barriers even before they knock on the corporate’s door.”



## 10KC's DEI Mentoring Solution

Advance diverse talent in the workplace with a DEI mentorship program that increases engagement, retention, and belonging.

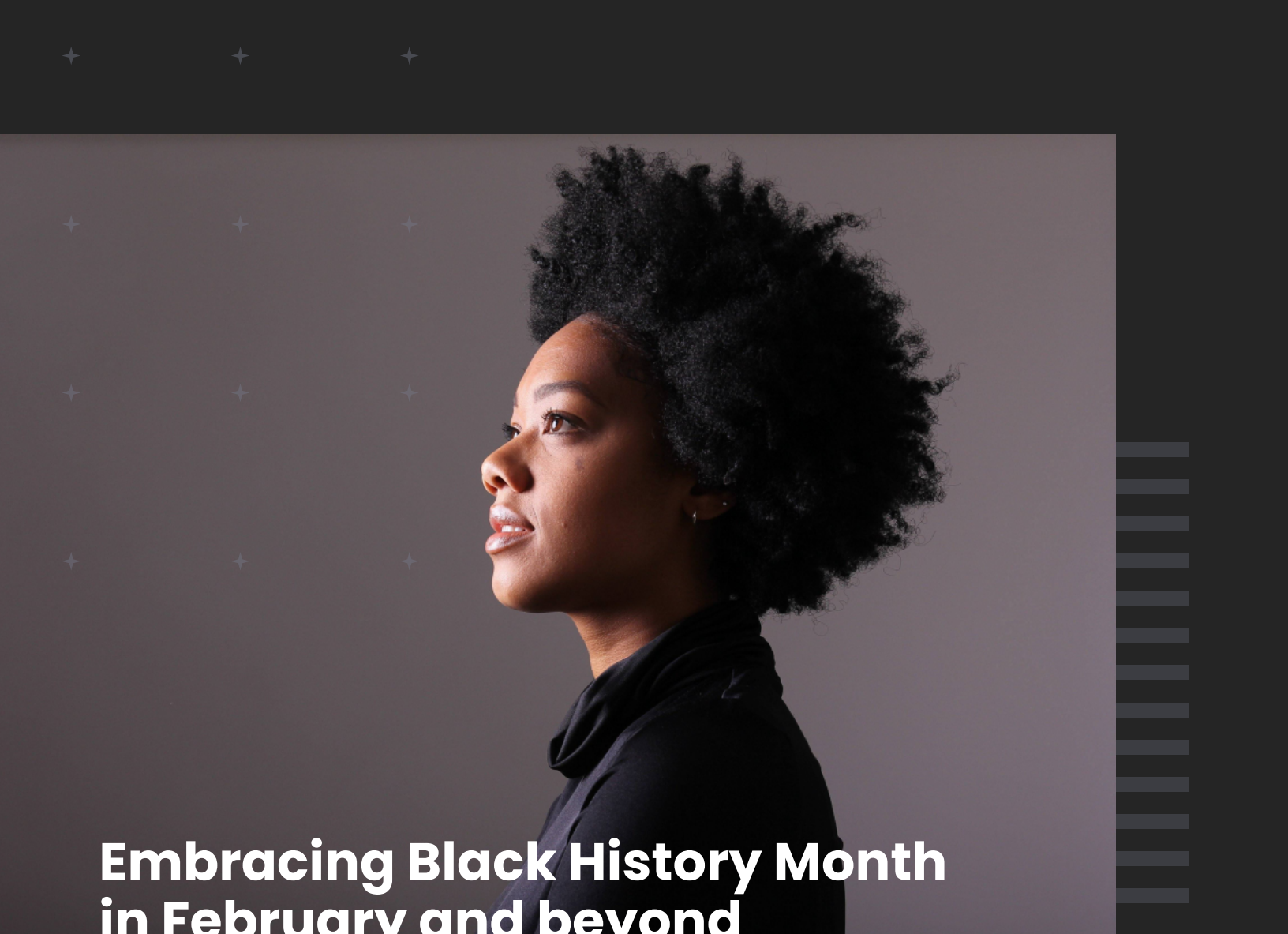
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Although deeply entrenched systemic issues against Black individuals cannot be resolved overnight, corporations have a significant opportunity to support their Black employees. As business leaders, you can wield considerable influence over their policies, programs, and culture, enabling them to create an environment that supports people of all backgrounds effectively.

**At Ten Thousand Coffees (10KC), one of our goals is to help organizations drive measurable DEI impact while engaging, retaining, and developing employees through inclusive mentorship and networking initiatives. Working with 200+ enterprises and social impact partners, we aim increase access to inclusive mentoring and networking experiences with our all-in-one, tech-enabled platform.**

Representation of equity-seeking groups at management level increases by up to 24% with a mentoring program. 70–85% of open positions are filled through networking and relationships. For Black and underrepresented talent, unconscious bias, preferential treatment, and limited access to these networks pose significant barriers to career advancement, affecting their chances for essential mentorship and sponsorship opportunities.





## Embracing Black History Month in February and beyond

Each year, many companies choose to honor Black employees through Black History Month (BHM). However, this recognition should extend beyond a month-long initiative and serve as a catalyst for continuous action and learning. The conclusion of February does not signify the end of efforts required to establish equitable workplaces for Black individuals; instead, it marks a beginning for sustained commitment throughout the year.

**READ MORE** ➔ [How to Celebrate Black History Month at Work](#)

This report distills insights from discussions with Black leaders on how their organizations commemorate Black History Month and implement programs to engage, develop, mentor, and uplift their Black employees. Designed as a toolkit for HR, DEI, and leaders across the organization, it provides strategies and recommendations for enhancing the networks of Black employees, delivering impactful mentorship, and fostering inclusive workplaces for Black and other underrepresented talents not just in February, but throughout the entire year.

# Voices of the report

The professionals who shaped this report come from some of the largest and most respected companies in North America. They include RBC, T. Rowe Price, Accenture, and more. We also captured the voices of leaders at agencies and organizations working directly to support Black talent, including the Black Professionals in Tech Network, Black Talent Initiative, and the Onyx Initiative.



**Jason Murray**

Founder, President, and Managing Partner of BIPOC Executive Search



**Mark Beckles**

Vice President of Social Impact and Innovation at RBC



**Mark Harrison**

CEO T1 Agency and Founder, Black Talent Initiative



**Michelle Thompson-Dolberry**

Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer at MFS Investment Management



**Natalie Royer**

Belonging Consultant at Saroy Group



**Nicole Stibbe**

Career Success Coach at the Onyx Initiative



**Anissa Thompson**

Managing Director of Software and Platforms at Accenture



**Austin Walters**

Senior Director of Inclusive Client Strategy at CIBC



**Cherifta Daniel**

Senior Talent Acquisition Specialist at Ten Thousand Coffees



**Crystal Barney**

Vice President and Head of Global Talent Management at T. Rowe Price



**Denise Pereira**

Team Lead, Customer Success at Ten Thousand Coffees



**Diavin Miller**

Head of Partner Success at the Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN)



**Gillian Davies**

Former Director of Organization Development, Culture, and Learning at Benevity



**Janelle St. Omer**

Regional Vice President at Benevity



**Sam Effah**

Youth Strategy, Innovation, and Marketing at RBC

# Glossary of inclusive terms:

- **Ally** - People who choose to stand up and take on the problems of oppressed people as their own, without removal or distance. They do this even if they can't fully understand what it's like to be oppressed because of their race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical or mental abilities, class, religion, or other markers of identity. (Definition from Roxane Gay)
- **Anti-racist** - A person who continually works toward equality for all races and strives to undo racism in their mind, their environment, and the wider world. (Definition from NPR)
- **Belonging** - Is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can bring their authentic self to work. (Definition from Cornell University)
- **BIPOC** - Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- **Colonial mentality** - The perception of ethnic and cultural inferiority and a form of internalized racial oppression experienced by underrepresented groups. (Definition from Smith ScholarWorks)
- **DEI** - Diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting. Equity is the process of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial, fair and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging in the workplace. (Definition from builtin)
- **Intersectionality** - A lens for seeing how various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. Where race inequality is often talked about as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status, what's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts. (Definition from Kimberlé Crenshaw)
- **Microaggression** - More than just insults, insensitive comments, or rude behavior. The kinds of remarks, questions, or actions that are painful because they have to do with a person's membership in a group that's discriminated against or subject to stereotypes. (Example: A black man notices that a white woman flinches and clutches her bag as she sees him in the elevator she's about to enter.) A key part of what makes them so disconcerting is that they happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended, in everyday life. (Definition from Vox)
- **Privilege** - Certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by belonging to certain social identity groups. Within American and other Western societies, these privileged social identities — of people who have historically occupied positions of dominance over others — include whites, males, heterosexuals, Christians, and the wealthy, among others. (Definition from Rider University)
- **Psychological safety** - The belief that a person won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. (Definition from the Center for Creative Leadership)

# How to Recognize and Celebrate Black History Month at Your Organization

Black History Month (BHM) began nearly a century ago, initiated by Carter G. Woodson, often called the "Father of Black History." Woodson's goal was to counteract racist beliefs about Black people by highlighting the accomplishments of Black leaders and innovators. He chose February for BHM to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, both key figures in the fight against slavery in the United States.

***"Black History Month presents a natural inflection point in the calendar each year to evaluate progress, reinforce our commitments, and make commitments to further advance progress"***



**Austin Walters**

Senior Director of Inclusive  
Client Strategy at CIBC

**READ MORE → [Make Black History Month a Catalyst for Year-Long Inclusive Action](#)**

Celebrating heritage months like BHM tells employees that organizations care about them and want to honor their identities. Organizations can also help recognize the current and historical struggles that BIPOC talent has faced breaking into the corporate world and how they can actively support them when they're there. It's also a time for reflection and renewed action, and to see how organizations and leaders are measuring up against their DEI initiatives.

One theme that was consistent with the leaders was not to treat BHM as a "one and done" annual initiative to support Black employees.

"It's helpful to reflect on the expected outcomes of the initiatives and evaluate what messages the organization needs to send, what culture needs to be built, how this month can play a role, and how the BHM strategy and activities play a part in the organization's broader [DEI] strategy," said Nicole Stibbe, a Career Success Coach at the Onyx Initiative, a professional development network for young Black Canadians.

The recommendations below are a collection from the leaders that we interviewed, and will help companies create programs that speak to the needs of their employees during this important month.



## Seek employee input

Allow your BHM initiatives to authentically reflect the needs and desires of employees, rather than being solely driven by leadership. This bottom-up approach can lead to more diverse and personalized activities and shows a genuine company-wide commitment to honoring the month.

Benevity, a corporate social responsibility platform with 850 employees, is an example of a company taking an employee-first approach to plan for BHM and all of its DEI initiatives.

One month before BHM, Benevity sent a Slack survey to select employees, asking them to rank which elements of BHM they most wanted to see celebrated. The categories included history, arts and culture, intersectionality, as well as an “other” selection where they could submit their ideas. Their sessions and workshops were championed by their employee resource group (ERG) for Black employees named the Black Employee and Friends Network (BEN).

## Have tough conversations

In addition to joyful celebrations, part of honoring Black History is to address systemic issues for Black employees within the workplace.

They may feel that they have to prove themselves more than their non-Black colleagues, said Natalie Royer, a Belonging Consultant at Saroy Group, who helps organizations create equitable spaces for all employees. “Due to our implicit biases, and being entrenched in a world dominated by capitalism and white supremacy, I think we do not humanize Black people.”

Royer says that she is regularly told by Black employees, specifically Black women that they do not feel seen, valued, or acknowledged in the workplace. “The awareness of being hyper-visible and at the same time feeling invisible to your non-Black counterparts is a phenomenon that Black employees face,” she adds. “Letting people know they bring value to the organization and appreciating it out loud is so important.”

Gillian Davies, Benevity’s former Director of Organization Development, Culture, and Learning, is from the Caribbean. Where she grew up, Black History Month was not celebrated in the same way it is today in North America. Living in Canada has widened her lens of the importance of celebrating BHM.

***“In this space and work, it’s important to create and hold the space to have those conversations which can be uncomfortable.”***



**Gillian Davies**

Dormer Director of Organization Development, Culture, and Learning at Benevity



## Examples of conversations to address the Black experience at work:

- Host an open forum / listening session where leaders can receive feedback about workplace challenges.
- Learn about microaggressions, implicit biases, and examine how Black and underrepresented people are treated in the workplace.
- Analyze surveys from Black employees about their work experiences, and let data speak the truth.
- Dig into statistics on hiring and promotion of Black and diverse employees.

**READ MORE** ➡ [How to Conduct a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Audit at the Enterprise Level](#)

When organizations have these conversations, it allows them to openly acknowledge the struggles of BIPOC employees and to fully recognize painful histories. They can also elicit empathy from non-minority colleagues so they can become allies.

Mark Harrison, the CEO of T1 Agency, an integrated brand engagement agency of more than 100 employees, said leaders need to be intentional about their DEI initiatives year-long, and it's important that Black History Month is not all about checking boxes.

It was during a conversation with one of his employees that he realized it was his mission to help the Black community. In 2020, one of his employees asked how many Black employees worked for Harrison. When it occurred to him that the answer was zero, he knew it had to change, and as a result, he founded the Black Talent Initiative (BTI). Now, Harrison runs regular BTI events for its members, volunteers, and community of partners.

"For all those that might have just the old organic approach to say, 'Go find your own mentors. It's just how our company operates.' There's a lot of bias built into that, which a lot of executives have the privilege to not really have to think through, because they're now executives." - **Dave Wilkin, CEO, 10KC**

*"I think that a lot of companies today shy away from having conversations about race because they see it as something that could potentially become controversial and they are afraid to say the wrong thing, so they take a more diplomatic approach."*

*"For me, learning about the experiences of others and being able to share this with other BIPOC professionals is extremely important because it helps to create a community amongst different cultures, encourages authenticity, and also builds empathy."*



**Cherifita Daniel**

Senior Talent Acquisition Specialist  
at Ten Thousand Coffees

## Find ways to celebrate culture

For many organizations, some of the most important parts of BHM were about creating a dialogue and an experience that was engaging, even in virtual formats. Programming examples we heard from the leaders we interviewed included:

- **Culinary Journeys:** Showcase dishes from Black cultures worldwide, led by enthusiastic employee volunteers or featuring local black-owned restaurants.
- **Create Black artist playlists:** Feature music by Black artists and create a joint playlist for employees to contribute to and share their favorite tracks.
- **Inspirational Speakers:** Bring in voices with stories that inspire and perspectives that spark conversations on intersectionality.

To make these programs accessible and inclusive, all sessions should be conducted during the workday, and all employees should be invited to each session with the option to participate or not. For program managers to best understand the impact they are having on their employees, exit surveys after the sessions are recommended. These surveys should ask participants to share how they felt, what they learned, and what action they planned to take after participating in the session.

“The employee response to this type of programming was overwhelmingly positive,” said Janelle St. Omer, Benevity’s Regional Vice President. “We have great allies among our colleagues at Benevity. There is still a lot of work to be done but our colleagues are open, curious and inspired to act. I am confident we will rally together and get there. I am proud of our Black Employee Network for driving change through learning and engagement.”

Janelle is the leader of Benevity’s Black Employee & Friends Network (BEN) and the Chair of their Belonging Champions Network.

## Additional programming ideas:

- **Support Black-owned businesses** through investment or purchasing of their goods/ services.
- **Volunteer at or raise money** for organizations that benefit Black people.
- **Form a book club** to read books and cultural works by Black authors and poets to discuss issues related to the Black experience in North America. Examples include Hood Feminism by Mikki Kendall, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? by Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D., Noughts and Crosses by Malorie Blackman, How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi, All About Love by bell hooks and literary works of poet, social activist, novelist, and playwright Langston Hughes.
- **Connect with BIPOC students** in a university or high school and offer professional services, such as resume reviews, cover letter writing, and career advice.

# How to Elevate Black Talent at Your Organization Through Mentorship, Networking, and Career Development

Building networks and mentors is essential to forge a professional career. Most professionals admit that who you know is as important as skills and experience.

For people who have traditionally faced barriers to employment, building a network can be all the more difficult. It's true that 70–85% of open positions are filled through networking and relationships, according to research from PayScale and the Institute for Gender and the Economy, published by Boston Consulting Group (BCG). And Black Canadians are 30% less likely to be candidates.

The good news: Representation of equity-seeking groups at management level increases by up to 24% with a mentoring program. Mentoring creates opportunities for employees to gain knowledge and advice from leadership, improve professional skills, build networks, and feel connected. Structured initiatives can help advance employees from underrepresented backgrounds while creating the connections and network they need to ensure belonging.



***"There is no question that mentorship is critical to the success of young people and key to the success of individuals early in career, mid-career, or even late stage."***

**Mark Beckles**

Vice President of Social Impact and Innovation at RBC

RBC's Future Launch program and Mark Beckles, Vice President of Social Impact and Innovation, have driven great impact through mentorship. Beckles oversees the 10-year, \$500 million program aimed at empowering youth for the jobs of tomorrow.

With a focus on networking, practical work experience, skills development, and supporting mental wellbeing, the initiative aims to help break down the barriers facing young people, particularly BIPOC youth, as they enter the workforce. What they have heard consistently from young graduates is they don't feel any better prepared to get a job after earning a post-secondary education.

Many, especially those from underrepresented groups, are in need of a job-ready network and a mentor when they graduate, but they don't have access to one. Professionals that have the most success have consistent access to mentorship that leads to strong networks for their entire careers. Beckles said he has benefited from mentorship throughout his career and regularly mentors others.

*"There are a lot of barriers that BIPOC youth face, such as access to mentorship and seeing others who look like them succeed. There needs to be more equitable representation in senior roles across the corporate world. Mentors can provide mentees access to scholarships, advice, and the networks that are needed to succeed."*



**Sam Effah**

Youth Strategy, Innovation, and Marketing at RBC



### **10KC's DEI Mentoring Solution**

Advance diverse talent in the workplace with a DEI mentorship program that increases engagement, retention, and belonging.

**LEARN MORE**

## **Create structured mentorship programs to enable opportunities for advancement**

Mentorship is a critical aspect of professional growth and a proven way to show ongoing support for your Black and diverse talent, beyond just celebrating Black History Month. Without it, employees can struggle with opportunities for career advancement.

"It is about finding those leaders who are willing to champion you, willing to support you, and willing to mentor you," said Anissa Thompson, a Managing Director at Accenture.

When formal corporate mentorship programs aren't in place, opportunities for mentorship often rely on chance, bias, or an employee's existing personal network. This can put employees who might be less visible (like remote team members) or those from underrepresented backgrounds at a disadvantage.



*"My question is always: why isn't your leadership program generating Black leaders and why aren't you looking at solving that? Mentorship is not democratized within organizations. It's usually information and access that is held by very few people. It's almost a secret in terms of who gets tapped on the shoulder."* - **Diavin Miller, Head of Partner Success at Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN)**



**The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)** implemented a reverse-mentorship program, where more junior staff mentor senior employees – Directors/Senior Directors from the Black community and members of the Global Leadership Team. They fostered mutual understanding and expanded networks to support career advancement. The results? A handful of the participants were promoted or moved into new roles.



**Michelle Rojas, Associate Director of DEI at Spring Health**, hosted listening sessions for Black and Hispanic or Latino team members and found that mentorship top of mind for them. Her efforts to launch and scale mentorship initiatives have resulted in slicing attrition in half for this priority talent group.

**WATCH NOW** ➡ [How Spring Health doubled retention of diverse within a year through mentorship](#)

## Leverage employee resource groups

ERGs are highlighted as a key method to support and engage diverse talent, varying by organizational size and engagement levels. Their primary aim is to enable members with similar identities to connect, network, and feel a sense of belonging, while providing a forum for discussing workplace challenges.

ERGs offer monthly meetings, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, increasingly in digital formats, which boosts participation. Many might also encourage allies—those not from the designated background—to join. Recognizing the importance of DEI, companies are beginning to compensate ERG leaders for their efforts. For instance, LinkedIn pays its ERG leaders \$20,000 for a two-year term, underscoring the value placed on these initiatives and their contributions to the workplace.



*"A lot of our folks that were leading our ERGs were doing invisible work. So for us, it was really important that we leverage platforms like 10KC [...] because then we shifted away from invisible work to visible work, and we were able to tie it directly to leadership development. These individuals are demonstrating capability, and that visibility then made it really important for our leadership to understand that there's value being generated from these ERGs."* - **James Grate, Head of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion - Global, Thoughtworks**

**WATCH NOW** ➡ [How B/ERG leaders build and scale inclusive mentoring programs](#)

## Take mentorship a step further with sponsorship

Think of a mentor as the trusted guide offering wisdom to navigate the professional world. On the other hand, a sponsor is the powerhouse advocate championing their sponsee, propelling them toward new opportunities and greater visibility.

Sponsorship holds immense value for everyone, but it's especially crucial for diverse talent that may lack the visibility and network compared to more privileged colleagues. Having a sponsor increases the likelihood of a Black manager advancing to the next level by 65%. When it comes to tangible outcomes that improve DEI, sponsorship can be a primary driver.



*Having spent a ton of time working in a number of different organizations, most recently as the Global Chief DEI Officer at Nike, as the first Head of DEI for Snapchat, and then some time at Google and Deloitte in various DEI roles, people often ask me, 'what is the most important principled approach when building effective diversity programs?' The answer is undoubtedly sponsorship. - Jarvis Sam, former Chief DEI Officer of Nike*

**LEARN MORE** ➔ [\*\*Sponsorship Programs Decoded: 10 Expert Insights for Success\*\*](#)

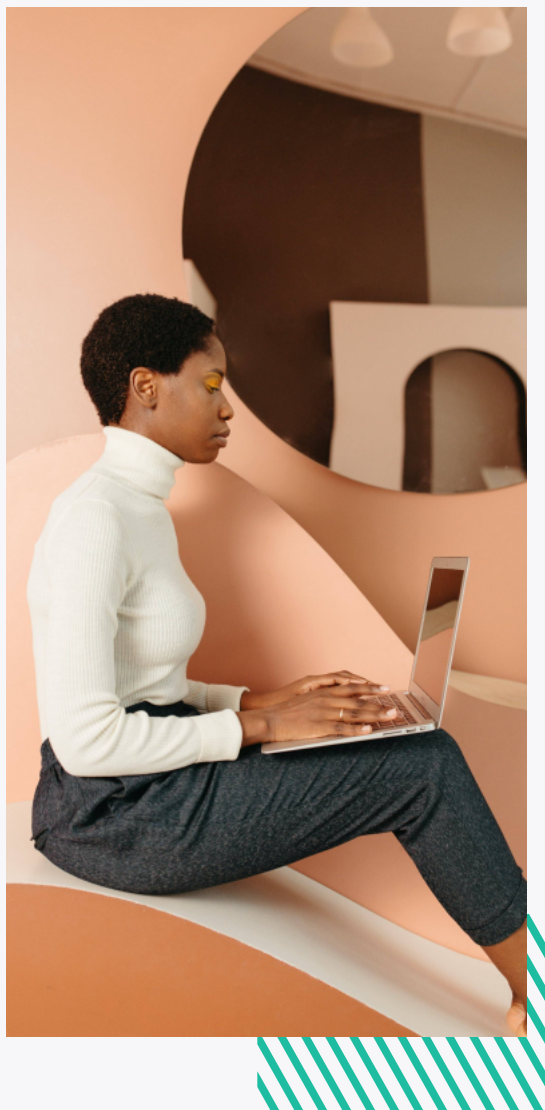
## Create an inclusive recruitment experience and engage young employees

Recruiting and promoting diverse talent stem from one key issue: BIPOC professionals need to see and feel that workplaces are accepting and supportive environments. If an office is known for a racist company culture or one that tries to appeal too much to “both sides,” the chances are that BIPOC talent won’t even take a call from a recruiter.

Jason Murray is the Founder, President, and Managing Partner of BIPOC Executive Search, a firm that works with North American organizations to match them with senior talent. They perform recruitment as well as training, workshops, and inclusion audits that evaluate an organization’s efforts to create a sense of belonging.

Building trust is a key part of his job, and it starts with advising the companies searching for candidates on culturally competent recruiting practices. Murray also works closely with the clients to make sure they have inclusive environments where diverse talent wants to work.

“Some leaders can be heard saying that ‘the talent isn’t out there,’ such as Black talent for example” says Murray. “The problem is that some organizations aren’t where they need to be culturally to drive diverse talent to apply, or they aren’t taking the right approach in their recruitment efforts to spark interest. With the right approach we’re showing our clients that the talent is out there.”



Anissa Thompson of Accenture leads DEI programming for a global client account team. She said that one of Accenture's initiatives that she's most proud of is its Skills to Succeed intern program.

This program has partnered with non-profits based in the US to hire students who are economically disadvantaged or who attend colleges that they wouldn't normally recruit from. The successful program has given these students valuable experiences and an understanding of the opportunities that are available to them and their careers.

Sam Effah also acknowledged that RBC's vision is to be among the most inclusive and successful companies, putting diversity into action to help employees, clients and communities thrive. When racial justice protection swept the globe in 2020, he was impressed that RBC announced new commitments to address systemic racism and bias against people who are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. RBC is committed to hiring 40% BIPOC representation for summer students globally. As an employee, and sponsored athlete it made Sam feel supported and proud.

"It's great to have a company that's behind you, that always supports you, and inspires you to speak up for inclusion" said Effah.

## Promote & elevate internal BIPOC talent

Hiring and finding ways to recruit BIPOC talent is as critical as elevating and promoting the diverse talent within the organization to fill leadership roles. Diavin Miller, who works for the Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN), emphasizes the importance of searching within. Only 39% of Black Canadians agree that their company has a process in place to make sure promotions are bias-free, according to BCG, Centre for Canada's Future Diversity and Inclusion . Issues like microaggressions, pay equity, and unconscious biases are prevalent for Black talent looking to advance their careers.

Miller gives this example. Say an organization is looking for a Black employee to fill their Director of Engineering position. Rather than looking externally, they should look to their senior engineers. There's likely someone who has been informally managing and developing the skills needed to be a director without getting a promotion or recognition.



And when it comes to compensation for a new hire or a newly promoted employee, this process must also be fair and take bias into account. On average, Black college graduates in Canada earn only 80 cents for every dollar earned by white university graduates, according to research by The Conference Board of Canada and published by BCG.

"It's why we exist," Miller said about BPTN. "It's why over 45,000 people saw a need to join a network like this."

## Design onboarding with inclusion in mind

An effective strategy to creating a welcoming work environment for BIPOC talent is to acknowledge that as soon as they start, the organization knows that their experience at work is different from their white colleagues.

One way to approach this is to offer additional outreach during onboarding through a company's ERGs. At Benevity, employees are introduced to the various ERGs during their onboarding process. New hires who are Black get specific outreach from their ERG for Black employees. A member will schedule a one-on-one meeting to create a connection and offer support. There's also an internal channel where new Black hires can ask questions to the group at large.



### 10KC's Onboarding Solution

Engage every new hire with an employee onboarding and mentoring experience that drives belonging, productivity, and retention.

[LEARN MORE](#)





## CHAPTER 3

# How Managers and Colleagues Can Become Allies



While companies strive toward making all aspects of their businesses more inclusive, white employees and those from non-minority backgrounds also need to play their part. The root of this work is unlearning the racism society was built upon. This is allyship.

“The hard work is putting your hand up and asking for change,” said Mark Harrison of the Black Talent Initiative. “It’s not about you, it’s about stopping racism. Full stop.”

For so long, white, cisgender, heterosexual men have dominated the ranks of the professional world — it was and remains a difficult realm for underrepresented people to break into. So, those who have easily worked their way through the traditional corporate ladder need to evaluate biases that have developed, consciously or unconsciously, through that process.

Many of the leaders we spoke with emphasized that allyship doesn’t have to be a grand gesture. It is the small actions that make workplaces more accepting and safe spaces for underrepresented groups. These are actions like advocating for more BIPOC professionals in leadership roles or prompting someone to speak in a meeting when you see they’re being ignored.

“Allyship comes from a place of knowledge, it’s continuous and subtle,” Mark Beckles of RBC said.

***“Senior leaders set the tone for inclusion at a given company, and they have significant power to make a change.”***



**Michelle Thompson-Dolberry**

Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at MFS Investment Management

## Senior leaders must model inclusion work

What typically happens when new diversity initiatives are introduced is that the interested people mobilize and take action. Those who don’t are what DEI leaders call the “missing middle,” a group of folks who question what promoting inclusion really means for them. These employees are the most challenging group to get on board to create more inclusive workplaces, Dolberry said.

However, when organizations continue to emphasize these initiatives to recruit and support diverse talent, it becomes habit-forming, and the benefits start to come to life. No longer is the missing middle questioning, delaying, or hesitating to get on board, they're now doing what's been instructed to them. It becomes the status quo. The hope is that this moves the missing middle toward empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by underrepresented groups.

## More ideas for fostering allyship at your company:



**Participate in implicit bias training** - Organizations of all sizes are starting to offer bias training as they do sexual harassment or privacy training. It's critical to understand the blind spots white and non-minority people have when it comes to inclusion and equity in the workplace.



**Work to build a diverse network** - Professionals need to be conscious of who is in their professional networks. They can start by scanning LinkedIn or scrolling through digital contacts to see if they have a diverse network of contacts or ones that mostly look like them.



**Listen and continue to learn** - The biggest part of being an ally is continually challenging previously held notions about race, identity, equity, and history. An ally can do this by continually reading, listening, and practicing.

***"BPTN exists for Black professionals, but none of this work is possible without the work of allies," said Diavin Miller of BPTN. "We are a network of allies."***

**Diavin Miller**

Head of Partner Success at the Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN)



## With Strategy and Vision, Organizations Will See Meaningful Results

It's a daunting but imperative task to make workplaces less racist and more inclusive. When society at large is still steeped in racism — whether that's individual people, governments, or workplaces themselves — it can seem impossible to make a significant change. But leaders have the opportunity to take a small slice of the world — their company — and create systems, processes, and environments that are fair, inclusive, and supportive of people from all backgrounds. The whole system can't be changed by one organization alone, but the lives of thousands of employees can be positively impacted.

"It's okay for organizations to admit that they are listening and learning," Mark Beckles of RBC said. "It's never perfect."

So, what can an organization do now to get started? It begins with a commitment to change, no matter how difficult the task. Leaders and organizations can start by:

1. Talking to and surveying their employees to uncover issues and to see what needs to improve.
2. Outsourcing to a third-party consultant or a firm to assess the current state of inclusion and belonging in their workplace.
3. Creating DEI priorities and communicating them widely.
4. Creating measurable goals around their DEI initiatives and tracking them as part of leaders' performance plans and corporate mandates.
5. Putting in place programs to support, uplift, and develop underrepresented talent — mentorship programs, networking groups, ERGs, and more.
6. Allocating resources (personnel and money) to bolstering these initiatives.
7. Modeling and promoting allyship.

### 10KC's DEI Mentoring Solution

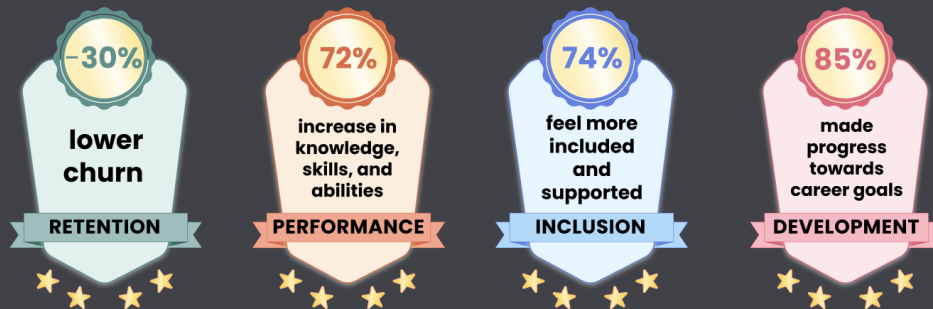
Advance diverse talent in the workplace with a DEI mentorship program that increases engagement, retention, and belonging.

[LEARN MORE](#)

# Make DEI a priority year-round with 10KC.

Ten Thousand Coffees (10KC) is your all-in-one platform for inclusive mentoring, networking, and skill development to drive DEI impact while increasing employee engagement and retention.

Offering a robust suite of solutions, 10KC is relied on by over 200+ top global organizations to build, manage, scale, and measure all of their mentoring and networking experiences in one fully integrated platform.



*\*based on 10KC clients*

Discover how 10KC can transform your organizations DEI and mentoring efforts into tangible outcomes.

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*Disclaimer: 10KC has used data from various sources and assumptions provided to 10KC from other sources. 10KC has not independently verified the data and assumptions from these sources used in these analyses. 10KC has cited and quoted appropriate authors and sources to the best of its ability.*