



CXO BRIEF:

# A 10-STEP STRATEGY ON HOW TO RESPOND TO GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER

A clear, compassionate and courageous response.

BY  
SHAVON LINDLEY  
CHRISTINA ASBATY  
BRANDON PEELE  
PAUL MINIFEE, PHD



## Introduction

While many leaders are still processing, or are confused about how to address George Floyd's murder and the ongoing unwarranted murders of black people by police, many have already taken action. Perhaps you have begun to respond. Perhaps you've shared a social media post like [VMware](#), or maybe even a manifesto like [Ben & Jerry's](#).

This moment calls for a powerful response. It calls us to feel what came up for us when we watched the blatant, unyielding, and yet casual murder of George Floyd. It calls us to lead with courage and compassion, as [Kim Foxx, the State's Attorney for Cook County, Illinois](#), did so beautifully. It calls us to question who we are as leaders in the face of not only this tragedy, but who we are in the face of a system that continually inflicts such unconscionable trauma. We are called to heal the hurting and transform the complicit and complacent.

This moment also calls us to shine a light on the underlying issues, such as unconscious bias, institutionalized racism, police brutality, economic inequality / oppression, and the prison-industrial complex.

## Leaders Must Do More Than Talk About George Floyd's Murder

A swift, substantial, and sustained effort is required.

Leaders must also do more, a lot more, than offer statements of support. While these sentiments convey positive intent, they lack commitment and impact. As such, leaders must be out in the open about what went wrong, why it went wrong, how our organization and industry may be complicit in enforcing divisiveness and oppression, what we can do about it, and what resources we will commit to the cause.

This is a centuries-deep wound, and anything less than total transparency and a long-term commitment to healing, empowerment, inclusion, diversity, and equity would perpetuate further harm. Leaders must risk something substantial--new

policies, actions, and budgets--to make change happen. This may also put at risk your reputation with customers, employees, and investors.

However, this is the price of leadership. When you commit and risk, your effort will have teeth and your legacy will not be labeled as “performative allyship”.

## **How Leaders Facilitate Healing and Change**

We need multiple conversations over a period of weeks, so that we have an opportunity to learn, absorb, and reflect on how what we are learning shows up in life and work. We need intimacy and trust to be able to share how we feel, what has happened to us personally, and what we’re learning. In short, to create a safe space, we need to have multiple curated conversations in small groups over a period of several weeks. As it turns out, we learn better and are more likely to change when it happens consistently over time, with intention and accountability. Without these, we forget [90% of what we learn within 1 week](#).

We recommend that CXOs take the following ten steps:

1. **EMPATHIZE:** People are hurting and confused and they need to know that something is being done by you and your organization. Today, vulnerably share your experience of seeing the video of George Floyd’s murder via a video sent out to your team. In that email, offer paid time off and childcare to any person who wishes to grieve or exercise their right to protest. Everyone is affected differently and needs a variety of resources to help them process how they’re feeling.
2. **HEAL:** Anyone who has seen the video of George’s murder is more than likely experiencing trauma or grief. Make grief counselors available to your employees.
3. **DEDICATE:** Racism is baked into our history, laws, media, national identity, markets, neighborhoods, and language. A critical first step is to declare ourselves anti-racist and learn about how to eliminate systemic discriminatory practices and policies. Begin by dedicating a few hours a week to

understanding the history and complexities of racism and invite your senior leadership team to join you in this commitment. Here is a good list of resources from vaco: <https://resources.vaco.com/antiracismresources>

4. **LISTEN:** If your organization has Employee Resource Groups (e.g., African American employees, GLBTQ, Women’s Leadership Network, etc.) ask the leaders of each if they have the desire and ability to help you lead in this moment. Depending on where they are in the grief process, they might not be willing, so give them space to say ‘no.’ If they say ‘yes,’ then ask them how they think you should lead. Ask them what their members most need to hear and receive from you and the organization. If you do not have ERGs at your organization, consider forming and supporting them.
5. **COMMUNICATE:** Today, schedule the first of at least 5 weekly virtual all-hands meetings. If possible, include in the message your preliminary version of a plan of action and your request for their input. In each meeting, you’ll be the first to let people know that it’s ok to be honest, messy, and/or emotional.
6. **CONNECT:** For these 5+ discussions, divide the entire organization into small groups of 3-4 employees who will be placed in the same Zoom breakout room throughout this series, so that trust, intimacy, and relatedness build over time. Ideally, these groups are optimized for multiple factors of diversity, e.g., ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, religion, etc.
7. **ACTIVATE:** To ensure your team is transformed by this experience, utilize the head - heart - hands model. This trusted framework asks people to reflect on something factual (head), then asks them to share related personal stories and how they feel (heart), and finally urges them to take a new action related to how they feel (hands).
  - a. The first discussion should focus on grief and healing related to George Floyd’s murder.
  - b. The second discussion should focus on the impacts of discrimination and privilege in society and in your organization.
  - c. The third discussion should focus on inclusionary values and behaviors in the workplace.
  - d. The fourth discussion should focus on opportunities to use the company’s brand, buying power, and recruiting power to heal and

transform your organization and community, as well as organizational structures and policies that make inclusion real, measurable, transparent, and accountable.

- e. The fifth meeting is a re-cap and a plan (leveraging the feedback generated in the 4th discussion) for what the organization is going to do differently in the next 6 months and beyond.
8. **ENLIST:** Promote a Chief Inclusion Officer who reports to the CEO/President and has the same level of authority as other CXOs. This leader should be accountable for diverse hiring, retention, equity, transparency, ERGs, people development, community engagement, inclusive internal and external communication, culture crafting, and inclusive business practices (partnering with production, HR, sales, research, finance, wellness, procurement, etc. on shared inclusion goals).
9. **SYSTEMATIZE:** Once your 5+ discussions are complete, continue the inclusion conversation, such as baking inclusive leadership skills into onboarding, career development plans, and leadership development programs. Create an Inclusion and Social Justice Task Force to meet monthly so that the company can always be on the forefront of the social justice conversation and upgrade its commitment and plan. Ensure that the executive team understands that this is an ongoing process that requires regularly improving “how we do things around here”.
10. **EVANGELIZE:** Share with your team what you’re learning and new actions you’re taking. Also, share these insights on social media and with your alumni, industry, and professional associations, and publicly encourage your colleagues and friends to do the same. Offer your support in helping them think through their inclusion and social justice endeavors.

As we mentioned, this moment demands swift, substantial, and sustained action. If you’d like help in developing your plan, utilizing best practices for facilitating these important conversations, and avoiding the common pitfalls, our team is available for a 30-minute strategy session.

In this session, we'll help you map out your strategy and walk you through our S.H.O.W. L.O.V.E.® framework. This model empowers you to hold intentional space, ensure equitable participation, honor and recognize diverse contributions, and create greater connection, empathy, trust, and alignment within your team. These conversations are what we live for, and they are the essence of our model of enterprise-wide culture change. We would be happy to serve you and share what we know so that you can lead your people with dignity and care.

In solidarity,

Your friends at **ion.**

Shavon Lindley, CEO [[book a time](#)]

Christina Asbaty, COO

Brandon Peele, VP, People Science [[book a time](#)]

Paul Miniffee, VP, Curriculum Design [[book a time](#)]