

How to Address Racism in the Workplace with Minda Harts

The Cru founder Tiffany Dufu advised viewers, particularly women of color, to be aware of upcoming triggers in this talk. She invited them, and you, to create “sensory boundaries,” such as lighting a scented candle. Have a snack, a beverage, or a box of tissues nearby, anything to help you feel safe and comforted as past traumas may be unearthed. Be gentle with yourself as we approach this difficult subject together.

Today’s speaker, [Minda Hart](#), is the CEO of The Memo, a career development platform for women of color. In 2018, she was named one of 25 emerging innovators by American Express, and in 2020, she was named LinkedIn’s Top Voice. She’s a professor of public service at NYU Wagner, she hosts the podcast *Secure Your Seat*, and she’s the author of [Right Within: How to Heal from Racial Trauma in the Workplace](#).

Minda wrote *Right Within* because she never felt seen in the workplace. Even when people mentioned “women in the workplace” at her job, she knew they weren’t referring to her. It’s an unfortunate fact that working as a woman of color means that you will work alongside bigotry, but you can heal from that racial trauma. Here’s how to address racism in the workplace:

Don’t normalize racism. Fifteen years ago, Minda’s manager was a white man, who would make daily comments about her race. She wore burnt orange nail polish to work once, and he laughed and said, “You people love your bright colors.” She tried hard to convince herself he didn’t mean any harm. She has since learned that two things can be true at the same time: Someone may not have *intended* harm but nevertheless *cause* harm. Holding on to these experiences, swallowing the word “racist,” can lead to trauma, and she didn’t want to do that to herself anymore.

Don’t minimize your pain. The burnt orange nail polish example may look like a small grievance on the surface, but this reminded Minda that the people around her viewed her as the “other.” It reminded her that, in *their* eyes, she wasn’t one of them. If Minda were to rate that experience on a pain scale from one to 10, she would have rated it a three, she says—“But the threes add up.” These things happen all the time for women of color in the workplace, and it’s important to recognize that very real pain. You don’t have to wait for other people to affirm you; affirm yourself.

Remember you have a voice. Talk about the experiences you’ve had in the workplace, in safe spaces. Go to the women who look like you, who you know also share your struggle, and open up. You cannot confront what you don’t name. We all have a voice; we just have to decide how we want to use it.

Bring your authentic self to work. When Minda first entered the workforce, she learned that she received more callbacks if she wrote “Minda” on her resume instead of her legal name. If she got her hair braided on vacation, she would take the braids out the night before she went back to work. Right away, she learned that it wasn’t safe to be her authentic self. “The work place doesn’t work for everybody the same,” she said. But she also learned that minimizing who she was every moment of the work day took a toll on her mental health. It even affected her physically by worsening her asthma. Relearn to see yourself through your own eyes, not the eyes of other people.

Decide how you want to address workplace racism. There is no right way to address racism that impacts you personally because the subject of this talk (and Minda’s book) is about your individual healing. Will you document what happened? Are you willing to spend the emotional energy to have a one-on-one conversation with the person who hurt you? (Are you able to speak on your own behalf, sharing your feelings as a statement, rather than waiting for a certain response from the other person?) Are you willing to make some compromises (maybe, like Tiffany, wearing your natural hair but forgoing jewelry that jingles)? Making these decisions is a huge step to take to solidify your boundaries and reclaim your space in the workplace.

Get more about addressing racism in the workplace from experts like Minda: [Apply to The Cru.](#)