

Blog: Ask, listen, learn, change for the better.

Colin Storrar, CEO

We live in societies where everyone knows people who are different to themselves. Many of us will have seen first-hand how racial slights and taunts affected them; listened to them talk about how others have defined them by the colour of their skin alone and heard them say how much it hurts. As someone who has never experienced that kind of discrimination, I can never truly understand the impact racism has on a person, but I have always tried to understand how it has affected the people I know.

Growing up in the North East of England in the 1970's and 80's meant my personal experience of race and racism was limited. I was never stopped and searched by the police on the way to school because of the colour of my skin.

I was consequently never nervous, let alone fearful, of the police. Never aware of racial profiling. Never scared of being chased around my estate and attacked by a racist gang.

At college in a new city, I never had to worry about wandering into the wrong postcode. One where I might stand out. One where I might be challenged as to what I was doing there. Or where I came from.

My family never had to worry about whether I would be attacked because of the colour of my skin, never had to explain to me that being black would mean I would face fear and danger those with a white skin tone would not.

After college, I worked in organisations in which I believed I would be judged on what I did and how I did it. I never had to question whether my career path would be limited by the colour of my skin.

That is white privilege.

White privilege is not something I asked for. It is however something I've benefitted from. I didn't ask for it, but it is real, and it is one of the reasons why this blog is difficult to write. I worry that anything I say might appear insincere. Copying a black box onto my Instagram or sharing slogans on Facebook seems like it would be a simple way to show support, but I wonder if it is enough on its own.

I believe more is needed – discussion, education and action.

'Compassion', one of our [Values](#), is hugely important to us in Lowell: 'being fair to everyone, showing that we appreciate them and their circumstances. By treating people as individuals, and finding ways to support and respect their needs, we build understanding that improves how we work together, whether that's a colleague, a customer or a client. And by working consistently and considerately, we can achieve great things together.'

Our Values alone mean that our offices should be comfortable places to discuss race, to acknowledge differences and talk about such things as inherent bias and, indeed, discrimination. And when we launched our new 'Lowell 23' strategy earlier this year, we put Company Culture as one of the five pillars: diversity and inclusion are an essential part of us reaching our goals.

I want everyone to enjoy being part of Lowell. I want our people to be judged on their behaviours and results alone; for them to be able to do the best job they can; to have the same chances to develop, and equal opportunities to progress as far as their ability and desires allow.

At Lowell, we have tried to give our colleagues, and candidates, that equality of opportunity but we need to do more. We need to ask ourselves not just whether we clamp down on discrimination but whether we are actively anti-racist? To that end, I have tasked our three regional CEOs: John, Johan and Holger, and our Chief People Officer (CPO), Bitte, with ensuring there is an open and safe dialogue in each country, so that we can understand where we could be better, and then act on that.

It's important to continue to talk about diversity and inclusion. We must challenge ourselves as to what more we can do... What is our promotion track record? Are there unconscious biases in place that disadvantage certain people either in terms of recruitment, performance assessment or promotion? If so, how can those biases be removed? I'm reminded of the comment of Karen Blackett OBE, the race equality business champion, that we live in societies where "talent is everywhere but opportunity is not".

At this point, I think it's appropriate that I address the composition of our leadership team. Like many businesses, we find ourselves lacking racial diversity at a senior level. It is essential that we hire the right people for the roles: the best people we can get, irrespective of race, gender, colour or anything else, other than ability and character. I believe we have done that. I am also conscious that whenever we do look to add to the executive team, we do so from the widest possible pool of candidates to ensure we bring in the skills, knowledge and experience to improve our business. That is why I will be working with Bitte, our CPO, to ensure that this happens.

These are just first steps, we will continue to listen to our colleagues, customers and clients: to educate ourselves about racial discrimination, to understand how it affects them and what we could do to play our part in making things better. Doing the right thing for a fairer Lowell, for a fairer society, is not about what we say but what we do, but this is such an important issue to me and to our colleagues that I believe it is right speak at this time.

One of my privileges as CEO is that I can promote dialogue and create change, to 'leverage my platform' so to speak. And where we find the need to change, it will happen.

I want to be very, very clear - there is no place for racism in any workplace. There is no place for racism in Lowell.

Colin