

9 WAYS TO *stand up* TO RACISM

CPA firms and companies can be diverse and inclusive environments, and we can confront racism and unconscious bias head on.



The events over the last few months related to race have reminded us all: Diversity matters. What we say and do at work matters. So how do we change? How do we become the leaders and co-workers we want to be? How can we shape our firms and companies so they reflect a diverse and tolerant society? Here's what we're doing to start the conversation and how you can, too.

1. Make your position clear.

If you lead a company and haven't made a case against injustice, it's never too late. See the VSCPA's statement (at right) from VSCPA Chair Henry Davis III, CPA, and VSCPA President & CEO Stephanie Peters, CAE.

2. Take a pledge.

Last year, the VSCPA Board asked Stephanie Peters to sign on to the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion pledge, the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. You can, too. Find more at ceoaction.com.

3. Embed diversity into company values.

The VSCPA has made diversity and inclusion a core value of organizational culture, demonstrating that the Society aims to foster a collaborative environment that reflects diverse people, cultures

and perspectives. Project Include at projectinclude.com has sample D&I policies.

4. Confront your biases.

Both the VSCPA Board of Directors and VSCPA staff have undergone unconscious bias training in the past year and we've held member webinars and conference sessions on the topic. Many groups offer training and speakers, and you can check out the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities at inclusiveva.org. The Harvard Implicit Bias test is free and also a way for you to see where your biases stand now.

5. Have hard conversations.

Confronting your biases (see above) and taking training can help you be more comfortable tackling difficult conversations about race, equity and more. Do colleagues with a disability feel welcomed at work? Do LGBTQ co-workers feel like there's a culture of inclusion? Ask questions and begin the conversations. Firms and companies can also regularly survey their workforce to see if they are making headway.

6. Start task forces and volunteer groups.

Last year the VSCPA formed a special Diversity & Inclusion Task Force on the Board of Directors to discuss challenges underrepresented minorities

face in the CPA profession, recommend actions to advance our efforts and ask: What can we do better? Several initiatives came out of the task force, including increasing our collaboration with the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) and the new Ruth Coles Harris Advancing Diversity & Inclusion Award (meet this year's winner on page 31).

7. Educate yourself and your staff.

The VSCPA has educational opportunities and webinars tackling tough topics. Visit our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Resource Center at vscca.com/diversity to access links to articles, toolkits, assessments, seminars, an unconscious bias members-only webinar recording and more.

8. Learn from the experts.

There are a variety of excellent articles and resources available for you to get the conversation started at work. Former American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) Chair Kimberly Ellison-Taylor, CPA, drafted a plan: "Together, We Can Make a Difference: A 12-Step Plan to Address Racism and Unconscious Bias." Find it at vscca.com/diversity. The CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion site, ceoaction.com, has resources, including an article on what PWC is doing to stand up against racism.

9. Encourage minority students to pursue accounting careers.

Changing the makeup of the CPA profession starts at the beginning. The VSCPA Educational Foundation offers the VSCPA Minority Scholarship, which you can contribute to as well as promote to your network. Our CPA Ready Workshops encourage entry into the profession. And you can get involved, too, by participating in our CPAs in the Classroom program. Email VSCPA Academic Relations Director Molly Wash at mwash@vscca.com for more information. ■

RESOURCES & MORE

Find links to the sites mentioned above in the VSCPA Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Resource Center at vscca.com/diversity. We welcome your thoughts on how we can improve the profession and bring our communities together. Send feedback anytime to diversity@vscca.com.

VSCPA STATEMENT ON RACIAL INJUSTICE

In light of recent tragic events that have affected the African-American community, the VSCPA firmly supports those who are advocating for change in the justice and economic systems in America. It is clear that in the past these systems have worked for some people — but not all people. We believe that injustice for any race can never be tolerated.

The VSCPA strongly values and reflects a diversity of people, cultures and perspectives, and we are committed to taking actions to eliminate systemic racism in our communities by increasing dialogue, education and awareness. Please look for information from us in the coming weeks on our action plan and resources prioritizing diversity, inclusion and equity; incorporating these resources more fully in our strategic plan; and creating facilitated stakeholder discussions so that we may all learn, grow and heal together.

We appreciate all you do as CPAs to listen, learn and work with others to be part of the solution. We welcome your input and thoughts on how we can improve our profession and bring communities together. We strongly encourage you to send comments to diversity@vscca.com. We want to hear what you are thinking and feeling, and what we can do as we continue learning.

Henry Davis III, CPA
VSCPA Chair of the Board

Stephanie Peters, CAE
VSCPA President & CEO