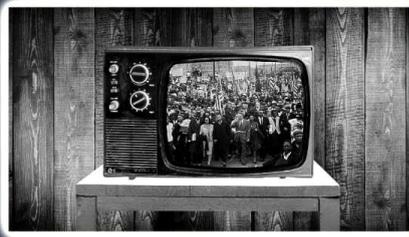


1960's

2020's



## Timing

I have a standing weekly date. Hold the "Ah" for a moment. *This* date is with my mom. (*Lest you worry, my hubby and I are on the calendar for a different time!*) Now, while this isn't our only mother-daughter contact, people in our circles have been well-schooled not to attempt to interrupt this almost 40-year, Thursday night ritual.

One topic (of many) from our last conversation was the heightened awareness about race-based inequality in America. Being students of history, we delved deep into comparisons between the most recent triggering incidents and the countless others that have preceded them in our lifetimes. And, we spotted an interesting set of connections between awareness around racial injustice a la the 1960's and racial injustice a la 2020. The connection -- visuals and timing!

You see, in the late '50's and the '60's, Americans became intimately aware of attack dogs, fire-hosed children, and other tactics used against peaceful protesters because these events coincided with the growing prevalence of television. TV ushered the visuals, in unmistakable ways, right into our living rooms -- first in black and white and then in technicolor. Fast-forward to today. COVID has slowed our whole world down. The pandemic has made us a captive audience (*humor not intended*). So, like our 1960's counterparts, we've not had much opportunity to escape the myriad images. Today they flood in, 24/7, from one's tech device of choice...and without the usual diversions that have been lost to us due to stay-at-home restrictions.

Thus, the introduction, or the reminder, of challenges still faced by too many in our country has provoked us all to grapple in productive (and some unproductive) ways with the issues, attitudes, and actions we ourselves hold, tolerate, or witness. In our communities, businesses, churches, schools, homes, and circles of friends, we've been prompted to have conversations about what has happened, why, and...with hope, where we go from here.

So, allow me to aid your discourse. In this issue of **EA Insights**, let's focus on some tips for engaging in difficult conversations. Whether the topic is justice or otherwise, may this issue help you open the door to meaningful dialogue, and even more importantly, assist you to work with others for resolution that leads to positive results for all involved.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

## Can We Talk?

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

All across our nation, we are struggling with some difficult conversations. Clearly, there is a need for people to come together and deal with the issues of racial injustice dramatically highlighted as of late and how this all impacts us -- yes, in policing -- but also in the places and



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## Quotes

*"No matter what message you are about to deliver somewhere, whether it is holding out a hand of friendship, or making clear that you disapprove of something, is the fact that the person sitting across the table is a human being, so the goal is to always establish common ground."*

~Madeleine Albright

*"Embrace a diversity of ideas. Embrace the fact that you can disagree with people and not be disagreeable. Embrace the fact that you can find common ground - if you disagree on nine out of 10 things, but can find common ground on that 10th, maybe you can make progress. If you can find common ground, you can accomplish great things."*

~David Boies

*"Patriotism is love of country. But you can't love your country without loving your countrymen and countrywomen. We don't always have to agree, but we must empower each other, we must find the common ground, we must build bridges across our differences to pursue the common good."*

~Cory Booker

*"Vulnerability is the birthplace of connection and the path to the feeling of worthiness. If it doesn't feel vulnerable, the sharing is probably not constructive."*

ways that we each work, live, study, are entertained, legislate, and more.

So, how do we come together...whatever the challenging topic? How do we have an actual conversation that produces a beneficial outcome rather than one that spirals into the abyss of additional hurt? Try these four tips.

### Tip #1: Let Vulnerability Lead

Put the power positioning aside. Drop the strategizing. Toss the defensiveness. When broaching a conversation around a difficult topic, especially one involving people from different backgrounds and/or roles, it will go south quickly if you come across as a know-it-all or as the person in control. Talk about an attitude that tends to have a chilling effect on everything that follows!

Instead, let vulnerability lead. Admit that the topic is difficult. Acknowledge that you have much to learn. Be sincere; be willing to show your heart; be ready to earn trust. People generally are more willing to open up; to stay in the conversation; and to partner with, rather than push against, you when authenticity and humility take the place of posturing and control.

### Tip #2: Listen (REALLY Listen)

To learn someone else's story, you've got to hush up long enough to listen.

*Listening* is more than *hearing*. It's receiving what is being shared without distraction -- that's tuning out any external noise and activity as well as internal thoughts, including those about an upcoming response. It's absorbing both words and mannerisms -- the verbal and nonverbal communication of the other person. It's pushing "pause" on your own agenda for a moment and simply dialing in so that you're doing your best to understand...and, when you don't, earnestly asking for more or for clarification.

Listening's intent is not to assume that, by hearing the other person's story, you now have it all figured out. The intent simply is to receive so that you get a glimpse into the other person's window -- to better understand a perspective, experience, or history that may not be yours and that will aid you to have greater sensitivity now and for what lies ahead.

### Tip 3: Find Common Ground

Differences there will be. However, as you each share, look for areas where there is common ground.

You see, your paths or approaches may not be the same, but there likely are underlying dreams, desires, priorities, and needs that transcend the differences. Identify what those are. Call them out so you both can see and agree that they do indeed exist. You may be surprised how much in common there actually is. Finding common ground forges the linkages that remind you, when you do stumble upon the points that cause a clash, that when you get right down to it, there likely is more that connects than that divides.

### Tip 4: Commit to Share the Hard Work of Resolving Disagreements

What do you do with the issues for which there is not a meeting of the minds?

Well, for minor points -- particularly those of preference versus absolutes -- the decision you reach may be to agree to disagree. And, that's fine...as a mutually reached understanding.

When the matter rises to a higher level, though, a different approach is needed. In some instances, the conflict matter will be limited to the two of you and must be resolved privately so you can work together. At other times, through your conversation, you are able to reach common ground together but then recognize that issue resolution will require you to unite (and possibly join with like-minded others) in order to elevate the conversation. In either instance, there is hard work ahead. The vulnerability, listening, and even reaching of common ground becomes a nice, but useless, set of exercises unless the two of you commit to tackling the hard work that follows together. Now is the time to roll up your sleeves and leverage what you each offer as you seek to settle the important area(s) about which you disagree or, for matters that go beyond you two, as you collaborate in order to work toward broader resolution.

Have an area in which a difficult conversation is looming? Need some help preparing yourself for, or even facilitating, the exchange? Feel free to call on us at **Executive Advantage**. Let us assist you to identify, engage in healthy discussion, and do the hard work to overcome the challenges that divide and negatively impact all involved. [Contact us today](#).



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~Brene Brown

*"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."*

~Winston Churchill

*"When you really listen to another person from their point of view, and reflect back to them that understanding, it's like giving them emotional oxygen."*

~Stephen Covey

*"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."*

~Ernest Hemingway

*"[N]ever lose sight of the need to reach out and talk to other people who don't share your view. Listen to them and see if you can find a way to compromise."*

~Colin Powell

*"If there are differences of views or divergence of ideas, they can be resolved through discussion and dialogue."*

~Azim Premji

*"We simply must find ways both to bridge the differences that still seem to divide us and focus on the things that we share."*

~Janet Reno

*"I really do feel like the work and time we spend avoiding ... difficult conversations is so much more wasteful and painful and time-consuming than actually having the difficult conversation."*

~Shonda Rhimes

*"Whether I'm speaking to conservative or liberal audiences, I don't find that people are close-minded about the things I say. I'm still optimistic that we can bridge a divide between these various bubbles. But ... it requires a little bit of effort."*

~J. D. Vance

## About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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