



Black Women in Leadership:

SHARING AND SHAPING OUR JOURNEY



Black Women in Leadership: Sharing and Shaping Our Journey

was a two-part, online forum designed to provide a space for Black women in leadership to be in dialogue and to help others, especially employers and decision makers, understand what they can do as individuals and organizations to improve and support the leadership journey of Black women. This report outlines the learning from the forum to help senior leaders in our region understand their role in changing the landscape for Black women.

Black Lives Matter is a response to the experience of silencing, exclusion and violence that has been perpetrated upon Black people to the point of exhaustion and even death, and this forum is a response to the silencing, suffocation and exclusion of Black women and their voices in professional settings. Barriers to their opportunities, options, resources and freedom of full self-expression have been active and oppressive. Inspired by the Honourable Mayann Francis' memoir, *Mayann Francis: An Honourable Life*, **Black Women in Leadership** was a forum in which we heard the stories of Black women and learned about our capacity, opportunity and obligation to make change, and influence and improve the experience of present and future Black women leaders.

In the first session, held on October 30, 2020, the Honourable Dr. Mayann Francis, O.N.S. delivered the keynote address, *Ascending the Ladder*. Yvonne Atwell, Barbara Manning, Sharon Davis-Murdoch and Cora Tolliver, all esteemed Black women who have risen in their leadership, generously shared their stories with courage and vulnerability to

shed light on the challenges they have faced and the strategies that have served them, in order to sow seeds of change.

Breakout sessions with participants sought to gather the questions that can be put to decision makers to further the conversation.

In the second session, held on November 6, panelists responded to these questions to initiate greater collaboration and understanding. A panel of well-respected senior decision makers from various sectors shared their thoughts on the stories they had heard in the first session and responded to the questions gathered from participants. Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, Vivek Sood, Chris Ronald and Nancy Chahwan discussed what work is being done to improve the experience of Black women leaders and explored what more their organizations will do to make significant and lasting change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing systemic barriers. The time for change is now. The success of Black women leaders is essential to all of us for so many reasons, including a more just and equitable society, and our economic recovery and future prosperity. Much more needs to be done to address anti-Black racism and help Black women leaders rise. Each one of us has a role to play in educating ourselves and taking real action to contribute to the success of Black women leaders.

One of the most important outcomes of this forum is the learning that emerged from these conversations. As promised, this report outlines the learning from the forum, including some of the key actions that individuals and organizations can take to make real change for Black women in leadership roles.



») [VIEW SPEAKER RECORDING](#)

Keynote Speaker Dr. Mayann Francis

The Honourable Dr. Mayann Francis, O.N.S. inspired the Black Women in Leadership forum and generously shared her insights and advice in her keynote speech, *Ascending the Ladder*. Dr. Francis served as Lieutenant Governor for the province of Nova Scotia from 2006-2012. She was the first African Nova Scotian and second woman to be appointed as the vice regal representative.

If your goal is to ascend the ladder, then education and constant learning is mandatory. Never underestimate the value of education. Whether it is in a university, community college or other avenue, please keep learning.

“

As Black women, we must not unconsciously internalize negative stereotypes about who we are. It takes regular and conscious effort to shake off internalized beliefs and we must be a united Black front.

“

A godparent is usually somewhere behind the scenes in a very powerful position, watching and observing everything you are doing and lending their quiet support.

“

I hope that by the conclusion of this forum, there will be understanding and determination to more fully utilize the largely untapped potential of women of African descent. To exclude skills and talent because of race and gender is suicide for our society. It crushes hopes and dreams, while demeaning all of us.

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») VIEW SPEAKER RECORDING

Storyteller Yvonne Atwell

Yvonne Thomas-Atwell has engaged in Community Development and Social Change, primarily in African Nova Scotian communities, for more than 20 years. Ms. Atwell was elected as the first African Nova Scotian Woman to sit in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

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I would walk with a little book and a pen and record things that were uncomfortable with me – at a board meeting, in a caucus meeting or sitting with staff. I would always make notes when people challenged me for no reason at all.

“

Be a mentor or just call to ask ‘How are you doing?’. Just let them know that they can trust you, that there is an ear that will listen. If you don’t find it in the workplace, you have to find it somewhere else.

“

Being first is great. It’s wonderful. Yet where is the support – not necessarily individual support but the cultural support within our own community once you enter that frame? And what is there to help you understand what you’re about to go through?

“

I have found a centre and a self-acceptance and an identity in this Black and woman’s skin that I so joyfully wear. I wear it joyfully. I wear it big. I wear it womanly. And I wear it Black. Black. Black.

Maxine Tynes



») VIEW SPEAKER RECORDING

Storyteller Barbara Manning

Barbara Manning is an accomplished business leader and entrepreneur. She is the founder of MillerManning, a consulting firm focusing on business growth and strategy, and past CEO and President of GenieKnows Inc. Ms. Manning is a strong proponent of businesses reinventing themselves by creating innovative business models.

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There is a major decline in trust as it refers to Black people, whether it is justice, access or recognizing the well of potential in our young Black people.

“

Systems don’t change. People change systems. And people don’t give up power. We aren’t asking for that. We are asking for them to share the power.

“

Today is an opportunity for all of us to amplify our voices, create brave spaces. Speak your truth and accept that it won’t be accepted by everyone. In brave spaces we can struggle together. I feel that is the way forward.

“

Do not judge me by my successes. Judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.

Nelson Mandela



») VIEW SPEAKER RECORDING

Storyteller Sharon Davis-Murdoch

Sharon Davis-Murdoch is a social justice champion. Retired from the Nova Scotia Public Service, Ms. Davis-Murdoch's political science background and public policy experience inform her current work in community. She is Co-President of the Health Association of African Canadians.

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Do not be risk averse. You mustn't be afraid, but if you are a Black person, you should be risk certain. You have to be disciplined and wait for the circumstances, opportunity and people to be right in order to move to the next level.

“

Do something that no one has ever done. Do it with excellence, but make sure that they know that you're doing it.

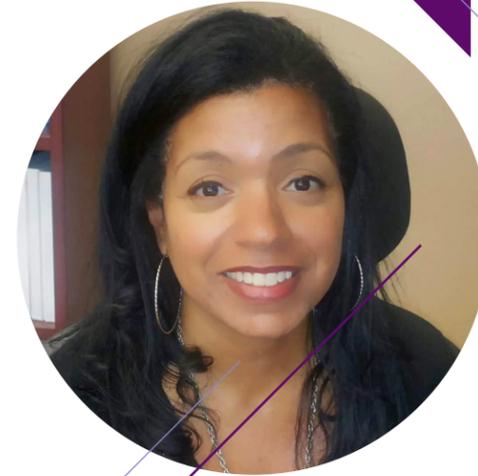
“

We live in a system that is systemically racist and it impacts every one of us. You don't have a choice. It affects you, whatever shade of the rainbow you might be.

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Real change comes about one step at a time.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg



») VIEW SPEAKER RECORDING

Storyteller Cora Tolliver

Cora Tolliver is Regional Director, Conflict and Complaint Management Services, Atlantic Canada, Department National Defence. With a serve-first approach to leadership, Ms. Tolliver has seen some of her biggest obstacles as her greatest opportunity for unlocking potential and purpose in others and herself.

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I was one of, every time. I sat in silence because of fear. I found myself fearful and silent. Fearful to lose my job, to be judged, or not invited back.

“

But for the challenging environment that I work in, I never would have understood what it meant to bring power to my voice. I learned to have power in my voice in any circumstance.

“

When we have the privilege to help others out who look like us, then I think it is upon us to do something. It's also up to us as Black women to be prepared and equipped to take on those opportunities for ourselves when they come.

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If you have come to help me you are wasting your time but if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound together, we can walk together.

Lilla Watson



Emcee Crystal Taylor

Crystal Taylor has over three decades of experience developing and leading corporate employment equity policies, including diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives, in senior management positions and as a senior consultant. Ms. Taylor is the owner of Ebony Consulting.

“ After listening to our storytellers and her Honour share their stories, I am hopeful about the possibilities that lie ahead for all of us. I am so inspired by all of my sisters and their voices.

“ Many leaders must recognize: you are not doing a favour for Black women, but Black women are doing a favour for the organization in enhancing your business and the services that you provide to your customers.

“ We all have a role to play in moving this work forward. All of us. So please give thought to what you can do to make a difference and elevate Black women in leadership roles.

“ Any time you can get more than a couple of Black women together you are creating a very powerful mechanism for change.

“ Kimberly Bryant

Participant Discussion

The forum included breakout sessions for participants hosted by experienced facilitators. The themes uncovered during the conversations formed the basis of questions to senior decision makers in the November 30 session.

Questions to panelists:

1. In a recent report by *Lean In*, it was found that 49% of Black women feel that their race or ethnicity will make it harder for them to get a raise, promotion, or a chance to get ahead, compared to just 3% of white women and 11% of women overall. What significant strategies can organizations and human resource departments employ to make Black women's advancement a priority to better enable them to tap into and leverage the talent pool of Black women?
2. How can an organization embed the advancement of Black women in its overall strategic direction and then hold itself accountable?
3. Once Black women leaders get to the table, what supports or resources can be put in place to ensure that they are empowered to work to their full capacity, where their voices are invited, welcomed, valued and heard?
4. We can put great strategies in place, but we have all heard that culture eats strategy for breakfast. How can we hold everyone inside the organization accountable, and get their buy-in, so we can truly shift an organization's culture to become more inclusive?
5. What are you doing inside your organization to ensure racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory employees are not doing it as part of your organization? What mechanisms do you have in place to address racist behaviours?
6. As Black women, we keep hearing about pipeline issues but we know talent is not a supply problem. What succession and talent management plans do you have in place to establish roles for Black women and move them through the pipeline?
7. What clear next steps will you take within your organization for Black women in leadership, based on what you have learned during this forum?



Changing the Landscape

We heard from four well-respected senior decision makers on what work is being done to improve the experience of Black women leaders inside their organizations and explored what more they can do to make significant and lasting change.



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DR. THERESA RAJACK-TALLEY
Inaugural Vice-Provost for Equity and Inclusion at Dalhousie University

Throughout the social movements, we see Black women playing important roles - we make things happen but are viewed as fixers. When we exhibit quiet strengths, we are seen as weak. If we are vocal, we are seen as divas.

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VIEW
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VIVEK SOOD
Executive Vice President of Related Businesses Sobeys Inc.

At Sobeys, this is no longer a discussion, this is a plan we are putting in place. We know we have to be bold. We understand that by moving fast and being decisive we may not get everything right but that's okay because we can learn from our mistakes and continue to improve.

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VIEW
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CHRIS RONALD
Regional President-Atlantic Canada

As one of the largest employers in this region, RBC has the ability and, I believe, the responsibility to be leaders in diversity and inclusion. For me, the status quo is not okay.

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VIEW
SPEAKER
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NANCY CHAHWAN
Chief Human Resources Officer Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

We are on a journey to change hearts and minds. Decisions are made by humans. Policy and laws signal the intention and set the ambition, but they aren't as effective in allowing people's voices to be heard.

“

We need to actively support and encourage women like ourselves to become leaders. As a Black woman, if you are contemplating stepping into leadership, do not second guess your ability to become a leader.

“

I am proud of what we have done in a short period of time but make no mistake, we are at the beginning. It has to come faster and it has to become paramount inside our organization.

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This is not a numbers game. Putting people in a role simply to check a box, doesn't set them, our clients or our businesses up for success.

“

I feel the onus on me as someone who has 'made it' to the senior ranks to really make a difference and open the path for others.

“

We don't have to be like Black male leaders, white women leaders or white male leaders. We just have to be Black women leaders.

“

It's not enough to recruit and attract - ongoing mentoring and support is essential. This is not a project, it is a true culture change - that has to be our focus.

“

I want to listen to Black women within the organization and hear their experiences and learn about their different needs and what we can do to support them.

“

To Black women, we hear your stories, we see your determination, we feel your resilience, and today we heed your call for action. We want to walk together with you.

“

What organizations and senior leaders can do

The forum generated many thoughtful ideas on how organizations and senior leaders can change the landscape for Black women leaders. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Please consider what more you can do to elevate Black women in your organization.

Prioritizing the advancement of Black women leaders in the strategic direction of an organization

- Our current definition is based on white, patriarchal symbolism. We must ask: What is leadership? What are the characteristics of leadership?

And how do we assess it? We must change the definition of leadership, incorporating everything Black women bring to the table, and not see differences as weaknesses.

- Review key leadership competencies and behaviours to reveal embedded barriers. Look at who defines these behaviours and how we are perpetuating barriers. Co-develop competencies with Black women and minorities to help us to better screen candidates.
- Reserve seats and jobs for people. It's not always a popular approach, but when you look at women and francophones, it has made a difference when employment equity is embedded.
- Unpack the barriers at every level of the career continuum and make deliberate decisions to create space for Black women.
- We are failing at retaining good people. We need to be deliberate and support Black women as they come into the organization with mentorships and sponsorships to help them expand their skill sets and continue to grow and develop.

- Organizations must be deliberate in their intentions of advancing equity and diversity.
- Diversity is an act but inclusion is where organizations struggle because they have to work at it. We must be more intentional and strategically infuse the advancement of Black women in our overall equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) plans.
- Companies tend to adopt a one-size fits all equity, diversity and inclusion strategy. We know from listening to our employee groups, we need specific strategies for specific issues for various groups within our teams.
- Black women leaders face gender discrimination and racism. A gender strategy will not help with inclusion.
- A key enabler of success is an EDI strategy that goes across all of the other tactics in the organizational strategy.
- We can't go in thinking we know what the answers are. We learn every day by listening.
- Organizations must be held accountable so it is a strategic part of our work, embedded in our strategic direction. And we must measure how well we do against the benchmarks.

- We have to have goals, objectives, and hold ourselves accountable to what we have set out to do to improve the organization.
- We must see EDI as equally as important as our purpose. Everything we do has to be looked at through the lens of an EDI perspective.
- If we want to be the best, most innovative and thoughtful company, we must understand that we need that diversity of perspective.

Ensuring Black women are empowered to work to their full capacity and that their voices are invited, welcomed, valued and heard

- If Black women are valued and recognized, then their voices will be heard. For example, when we do recruitment, we have to attach retention to it to show we value Black women and aren't just creating a revolving door.
- We have to shift culture. The Civil Rights Act did not result in civil rights. We have to work at the cultural aspects of change. That happens at institutional levels but also within units and departments.

- We must admit that we have a problem. Having a policy or statement is not admitting a problem.
- Patriarchal and racist ideas are normalized within our structures, that is where unconscious bias comes in. We have normalized the way we are assessing people and it is hard to prove otherwise.
- Look at the positions Black women are placed in – they tend to hold roles as fixers rather than leaders.
- Organizations, units, departments must take on the responsibility of preparing to receive Black women, rather than the other way around.
- We have to be deliberate in the way we listen and show that we are hearing what Black women have to say.
- Culture has to go right through the organization. How we hold ourselves accountable in the C-suite has to go right through the VP level, director level, manager level and front line.
- Create a cross-departmental strategy with the HR team but pressure test it from an everyday employee perspective, business operations perspective and retail perspective, to understand what they need and, of course, test it from the exceptional young Black women leaders' perspective.
- It's our job to activate the EDI strategy across the organization – in town halls, in every business meeting. We must ask: are we exhibiting the culture we are trying to build throughout the organization? If we aren't, it's just C-suite rhetoric. It won't bring real change.
- Ensure every aspect of the business is building the culture and be sure to address the issues across the organization.
- Hire inclusive leaders and assess how inclusive they are at the appointment stage. We must also assess existing leaders to make sure change is happening.
- Seek out opinions from Black women, create space for them and make sure they are acknowledged and heard.
- Acknowledge and appreciate that this culture shift and behaviour shift, will take time.
- All people in the organization need to read the codes inside the culture and move together to understand it's impact on all equity seeking sub-groups – as more space is created within the mainstream culture, it will become easier.

Holding everyone inside the organization accountable

- Culture is our people, practices and behaviours. We must get everyone on board and on the same page.
- If we don't have people inside our organization on board and buying into the vision of more Black women in leadership, it will hamper our success in shifting the culture.
- It goes through recruitment, retention and culture.
- Some organizations may say 'you belong'. But whose voice is saying 'you belong'? 'You belong' defeats the whole concept of belonging.
- We have to accept that we have many different cultures and that each brings something to it. We are a collective of differences. Assimilation to one culture means assimilation to a white patriarchal culture.
- Re-examine the extent to which our practices are embracing race, gender and culture in a way that makes it stronger. Re-examine criteria to define excellence and how we are assessing people. Understand what the assessment tools are based on.
- We encourage people to talk to us about experiencing unconscious bias but how often are we defensive when they do come to us? We need to be honest with ourselves.
- We have to live what we espouse around equity, diversity and inclusion from the moment people interact with the organization – there needs to be an understanding that if you don't believe in that vision, there isn't room for you within our organization.
- Systemic barriers exist outside organizations as well. We need Black women applicants, and to dig deep into the whole spectrum of the issue, including coming through university with the qualifications, etc. We need to start now.
- Raise awareness through storytelling and creating a better sense of accountability throughout the organization.
- Neurological research shows that culture is based on many different things that take a long time to shift, including mindsets and behaviours. Make sure you are assessing mindsets and behaviours at the managerial level from the outset.

- Be very clear on expectations around behaviour – share them, assess them and include them in every opportunity for feedback.
- Basing accountability on the numbers alone will not succeed, especially within big organizations, where one manager may have a large scope of control.
- There must be a path of escalation for issues. It's an easy answer that you need to have it in place, but how do you do it in a way that rewards courage and helps us address the issue?
- Black women are often the only one, it can be very risky for them to share their voice. We need to create spaces where we can increase representation, but when there is one, we need to be very mindful that we don't expect that one to have all the responsibility and bear the weight of Black womanhood on her shoulders. They must feel they can speak their truth and be supported within the workplace.

Dealing with racist or discriminatory people within the organization

- Ensure the right filters are in place so that people with discriminatory views do not become managers, but that is a long-term goal.
- We need more tools to assess and root out these people and in the short-term, we need an escalation approach in place.
- Assess whether a team has become more diverse. Sit in meetings to listen in on conversations to make sure people are engaged and having an opportunity to be heard.
- Ultimately, we have to find a path for employees to be able to share what is going on that protects them and then demonstrate that we will act.
- Learning workshops and creating awareness of what racism is - ensure education is happening.
- Create various places and opportunities where employees feel comfortable and protected to speak up.
- Employees are representing our organization all the time, and they must understand that

when they share personal views, they are representing those of the organization.

- Share that organizational values are paramount and put steps in place that hold people accountable to live up to them.
- The size and history of organizations make it very difficult to hold everyone accountable.
- It's important to take a team approach, with all departments involved, always referencing our core values, putting anti-racism, racialized violence and discrimination policies in place. Policies help but they won't result in complete transformation. We need to apologize and own up to it, address it head on.
- Aggregate and disaggregate data helps us map information with employee perception, developing business intelligence, and helping us identify where discrimination is happening.
- People start to realize that discrimination is not accepted over time and that we are serious. It's no longer normalized within the institution. It is slow but firm progress.

• We use a three step approach:

1. Give no excuse – create awareness, provide education, give immediate feedback as soon as you see it.
2. There is no wrong door – people can come forward through all different channels with no retaliation for speaking up.
3. Take visible action but also fair action, with a transparent process to keep trust in the system.

Succession and talent management planning to move Black women through the pipeline

- Work with other organizations, create internships and opportunities to deliberately hire Black women, improve the flow and increase our opportunity to identify candidates with the skills we need.
- Be better at recruiting and retaining. Partnering with organizations to identify candidates and create a pipeline.

- Succession planning – map every role in the organization to understand the 2-, 3- and 5-year plans for the evolution of each one. We know where the gaps are and address them so that in the future we will be a better organization.
- Succession and EDI are linked together in a long-term plan.
- There is a real pipeline issue linked to structural barriers and the invisible pipeline that we use as an excuse. We need to advertise in the right places, reach out more in the right places, network more, create community engagement to bring more people into the pipeline.
- Redefine criteria to consider excellence, admissions and requirements.
- Operate within the real and imaginary pipelines to make change.

Taking action as a result of this forum

- Create strong structures so that EDI is not a project. We want sustainable changes. We want a cultural shift.
- Listen to Black women within the organization and hear their

experiences and learn about their different needs and what we can do to support them.

- Be accountable to what I have said I will do.
- Have a strategy but be nimble and adjust.
- Create an escalation approach for our Black women leaders and all employees. We need to hear the issues and be able to address them.
- Look at attraction and retention – if there is a falsehood in the pipeline supply issues, I want to make sure we are looking at that and that we are partnering with the right organizations to improve.
- Focus on retention, developing and growing leaders, and creating a succession plan – make sure we build good structures and that everyone has a voice in these networks.
- Act and adjust – if something isn't working then address it as soon as possible.
- Invest my own time, one-on-one and in groups with Black women to understand their experience, share my experience, mentor those who want to invest further in their career.

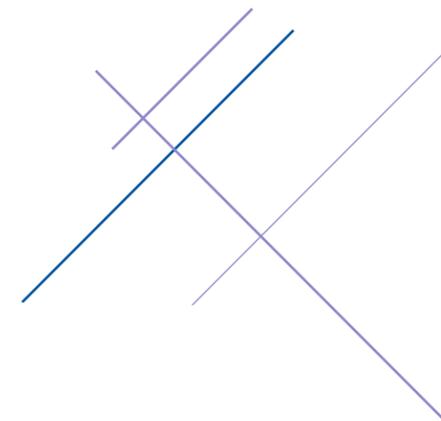
- When I unearth unacceptable practices, address it by going directly to my colleagues and intervening.
- Give it my personal attention.
- Take a personal stance. Leadership is about credibility and courage.
- Ensure that those who have been able and lucky enough to create a space for themselves, are extending that to others around them.

Other steps organizations can take

- Organizations cannot and should not park Black women in certain positions in order to bolster their management statistics. They must be prepared to totally diversify and support qualified people once they have been identified.
- Be creative and serious about having an inclusive and more diverse workforce, which includes Black women at top levels or a strong commitment to ensure the road is clear for them to ascend the ladder.
- Make sure you have the proper people in place as mentors

within and external to your organization. You need people who will be strong in building people's confidence. Some volunteers can be too fearful.

- Nothing replaces seeking out the best people when you are building an organization or a company. 'Best' includes practicing inclusion and empowering your people.
- This important discussion should be in the schools P-12. Black History month is not enough.
- An unshakable faith nurtured by religion/spirituality is essential for minority women leaders to heal and empower themselves. It is imperative to re-evaluate the role of religion in postsecondary curriculum, especially in business school management and leadership education programs.
- Language barrier is an extra layer of burden for EAL minority women. These people are not given sufficient time, opportunity, or support, to use their voice in any English-speaking meetings in the workplace.
- Create heightened awareness of the English language hegemony and adoption of alternative meeting procedures (e.g., the



Advice from Black Women for Black Women

- council practice/listening circle) to practice deep-listening and communication equity in the workplace.
- Look at the existing tools and change the inherent bias; what type of engagement is being used? Examine what is not working and what someone is experiencing on the ground.
- Be prepared to create a healthy working space for Black women you hire.
- Succession planning – ensure performance development and a growth planning system are in place for career paths that include opportunities to supervise and be supervised with constructive support.
- Equity hiring must be revised from time to time - create accountability and strategies to not just check a box by hiring a Black woman.
- Create appropriate check ins with your employees. Are you creating a safe space and a brave space?
- Make sure you have the appropriate training to understand how to work well with other ethnicities.
- Provide appropriate training for ombudsmen, HR and others to build trust with members of minority groups in the organization. Create appropriate criteria to select the candidate for an ombudsman's position.
- Create a more inclusive communication space where our EAL (English as an additional language) co-workers are able to better participate in and contribute to the decision-making process in the workplace.
- Look for ways to continue these conversations.
- Create a space and a network of people who can be part of a safe and trusted circle.
- Build trust with Black women, so that they may be willing to speak truth about discriminations and difficulties.
- There is limited quantitative data available. Data on the evolution of representation of Black women in public, private and academia sectors could be valuable. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat offers diversity and inclusion statistics. [View data for the public service core administration.](#)

Personal Power

- Be aware of your surroundings. Know the difference between your true allies and those who pretend to be your ally.
- Confidence in one's abilities and talents is vital for advancement and promotion. And so is self-pride as a Black woman.
- As Black women, we must not unconsciously internalize negative stereotypes about who we are. It takes regular and conscious effort to shake off internalized beliefs and we must be a united Black front.
- Never forget who you are because if you do forget, someone may remind you in a way that is overt or covert.
- Until we live in a world where skin colour or other outward characteristics does not matter, we have very little choice but to be better than everyone else. This means total sacrifice.
- I learned to trust me first.
- If you aren't strong inside, go find that kind of inner strength that lets you know who you are.
- Don't you ever let anyone tell you you can't play wherever you want to.
- The most challenging environment and situations are sometimes where we find our biggest growth opportunities.
- Where do I get my strength when I'm struggling? I reach back for the resilience and perseverance my parents taught me. And reach out to my family.
- I'm a woman of faith. Proverbs 3: 5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
- I believe there is a purpose. If God is for me then who can be against me?
- Talking to people on a personal level can help deal with your personal stress, discussing it with someone who has been there, and can just offer you support without expecting something from you.

Leadership Advice

- If your goal is to ascend the ladder, then education and constant learning is mandatory. Never underestimate the value of education, whether it is in a university, community college or other avenue, please keep learning.
- One of the lessons I have learned is to swallow my pride and ask for help.
- Be honest with yourself and find your purpose. Know your strengths and your weaknesses. Know who is for you and against you. Develop a thick skin.

- If you put your heart into it, you put your head into it, you can do it. If you put the work in, you will get the benefit.
- We have to do more, know more, be more. This has been a 400-year marathon and we're still at the start.
- Nothing replaces hard work and how to build collaboration and relationships and caring about people.
- For me, the solution was a withdrawal. Sometimes you have to retreat just to regain some resilience because you do get beaten down.
- You must see the future. You must be intentional about reaching where you want to go. You must be disciplined.
- Be kind to one another. Strive for balance. Do not ruminate. Always lift as you climb.
- As Black women, we are always on a journey. Through each stage, there will be mountains of sand and they may present them to us as friends, teachers, those we believe are our allies, clients, colleagues, bosses, institutions.
- I used to chase positions and titles that I believed equated with power. When I found my voice, I began chasing purpose not position.
- Finding my voice was great. And how I used my voice was significantly important. I take four steps before I speak:
 - Do I believe it?
 - Can I back it up?
 - Can I say it with love and respect?
 - Can I say it in a way to influence others to follow?
- Mentorship: we forget that we have support mechanisms amongst ourselves. As Black women, I'm not sure we do a great job of lifting one another up. We need to build camaraderie, trust and understanding.
- Every time that I walk through a certain door, I'm always a first. Every time I walk through a door as a first, I feel like I'm carrying a community with me. And whatever I do, I intend to represent well in an effort to blaze a trail for others.
- When we are blazing trails, we can't quit. We are there for reasons bigger than ourselves.
- Be a firm decision maker but be a good listener. Make decisions and know the potential impact those decisions might make.
- Have access to outside advisors – not tell you what to do, but to give you examples so you can make a good decision.
- If you are contemplating stepping up as a leader, do not second guess your ability to become a leader.
- Be prepared to face racism and gender discrimination.
- There are no safe spaces. So let's work within that understanding.
- We don't have to be like Black male leaders, white women leaders or white male leaders. We just have to be Black women leaders.

Speaking Truth

- If you are in a good organization, they don't mind if you bring concerns. Just be

mindful of the processes in place. I had to know what I was doing before I stepped out.

- To make a complaint, it's important for you to know your environment and that you can trust it. There is a lot of insight there. How you make it a complaint is what is essential and how you communicate it.
- Understand the opportunity when you speak truth to power. It isn't about getting it off of your chest.
- When you speak truth, think about how the person receiving it understands this to be a win for them as well. Be strategic in terms of connecting what you are asking for or recommending so that it may be helpful to the work of the organization. Be collective. In unity there is strength.
- "It isn't always what you say, it's how you say it." That's good advice for you for the rest of your life.

Community Support

- Where do we go within our own communities to find support? Who is supposed to do that? We all have some responsibility in terms of helping each other out.
- You need allies and godparents. You need to be supportive of one another.
- We need to actively support and encourage women like ourselves to become leaders – we are stuck with the patriarchal style that we ourselves have adopted. We sometimes vote against our own interests. Beware of that.

I greatly appreciated the knowledge shared during the forum. I felt a part of a collective, as systematic racism was common among all the Black Women who shared their experiences working within certain structures or institutions.

“ Participant

It has helped build understanding and reflection for those in the room who are not Black, to better understand the issues and how they can help support colleagues in the future.

“ Participant

Hearing the stories for people outside of Nova Scotia as there are parallels in other jurisdictions. I'm inspired by the stories and how Black women have faced challenges and dealt with them in innovative and creative ways.

“ Participant

Thank You

Thank you to those who have made this forum possible. First and foremost, we thank the Black women leaders who have so generously and courageously shared their stories in an effort to sow the seeds of change for future generations of Black women leaders. *Thank you.*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

The Honourable Mayann Francis, O.N.S.

STORYTELLERS

Yvonne Atwell
Barbara Manning
Sharon Davis-Murdoch
Cora Tolliver

PANELISTS

Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley
Vivek Sood
Chris Ronald
Nancy Chahwan

EMCEE

Crystal Taylor

OPENING PRAYERS

Cathy Martin, O.C.

OPENING REMARKS

The Honourable Lena Metledge Diab Q.C.

OUR PRESENTING SPONSOR

RBC's purpose is to help our clients thrive and communities prosper. It mobilizes us to create meaningful value in everything we do as a bank in ways that extend beyond our walls. We believe in engaging in important conversations and events like the Black Women in Leadership forum, taking a stand on issues that matter, and developing insights that drive debate and advance our collective understanding, for a prosperous, sustainable future.



CO-HOST

The Rev. Dr. Neale Bennet, President

AST Leadership Learning is a new kind of leadership initiative, providing space for understanding ourselves and how we can lead



from our values to co-create a more just, compassionate world. By holding a mirror up to expose old patterns and ways of thinking, and reflecting on new, alternative perspectives and ideas, we are empowering leaders to reimagine how they can best show up and contribute to a new normal. AST Leadership Learning is an extension of AST's mission: to shape faithful and effective leaders; it builds on our ecumenical and welcoming nature, and 50-year history, as a community that invites and welcomes diverse perspectives.

CO-HOST

Dr. Mary Bluechardt, President & Vice-Chancellor



The history of the Mount is a story of humanity and growth. From its inception, the University has been concerned about the welfare and fortune of individuals and communities, at home and abroad. Established by the Sisters of Charity in 1873, the Mount was one of the only institutions of higher education for women in Canada. At a time when women could not vote, the Mount provided an opportunity for women to learn and participate equally in society.

Building on its distinct features and esteemed history, the Mount will become an environment for transformative learning and a university with unparalleled social impact – at home, across the country, and overseas. It is these distinctive features that make the Mount unique in the post-secondary landscape and connect our past to our future.

OUR SUPPORTERS

The Mount's Business & Tourism department offers an inclusive and innovative environment that values the diversity in our student body and aims to provide all our students with essential leadership skills for the future.



ACWPS

The African Canadian Women in the Public Service Network (ACWPS), an employee-led initiative to support and advance women of African descent in the public service.

OUR BREAKOUT SESSION FACILITATORS

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