

A photograph of two women in an office setting. The woman on the left has short, light-colored hair and is wearing glasses. The woman on the right has dark, curly hair and is wearing a light-colored blazer. They are both looking at a laptop screen held by the woman on the right. The background shows a modern office interior with large windows.

DEI SPECIAL REPORT

# 20 STATE OF WORKPLACE 22 EMPATHY

Exposing Empathy Gaps Among Marginalized Employees  
is Key to Deepening DEI in Workplace Culture



# When it comes to driving social change, hashtags ring hollow.

If recent U.S. efforts toward greater diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have proven anything, it's this: Social movements can't live solely on social media.

In October 2017, the hashtag #MeToo was used some 6 million times in just one day, many of them among social media users in the United States.

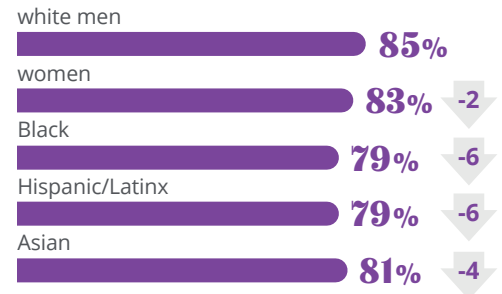
In June 2020, more than 28 million Instagram users posted a plain black square in honor of "Blackout Tuesday," a silent online protest following the murder of George Floyd. The hashtag #blacklivesmatter appeared on social media almost 50 million times from May 26 (the day immediately following Floyd's death) through June 7.

Pew Research finds that by October 2020, nearly one-fifth (17%) of U.S. adults changed their views about a political or social issue because of something they saw on social media. However, in the time since, when it comes to amplifying women and people of color in the workplace, it turns out **hashtags are the only things trending:**

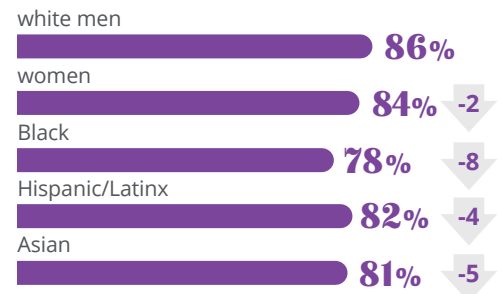
- Since March 2020, at least **2.3 million women have left the U.S. workforce**, compared to 1.8 million men.
- More than 2 in 5 of the **12.2 million women's jobs lost** between February and April 2020 have not yet returned.
- For every 100 men promoted to manager in 2020, **85 women** were promoted (only 58 Black women and 71 Latinas). As a result, **women held just 38% of manager positions.**
- **85% of U.S. professionals** say there has been “a **lack of meaningful progress** toward a more equitable workplace **for employees of color.**”
- **32% of BIPOC professionals** (Black, Indigenous, people of color) say they have “**felt unable to speak out against workplace discrimination** they have witnessed or experienced based on their race or ethnicity.”
- While America’s 50 biggest public companies and their foundations collectively committed almost **\$50 billion** to address racial inequality, only \$70 million—or **0.14%—actually went to organizations** focused specifically on doing so.

These clear gaps between results-focused activism and performative “slacktivism” are affirmed by data from the **Businessolver 2022 State of Workplace Empathy Study**. Now in our seventh year surveying how empathy is perceived and supported in workplaces nationwide, the 2022 results reveal that as empathy has evolved through recent social movements and the COVID-19 pandemic, women and people of color are being left behind.

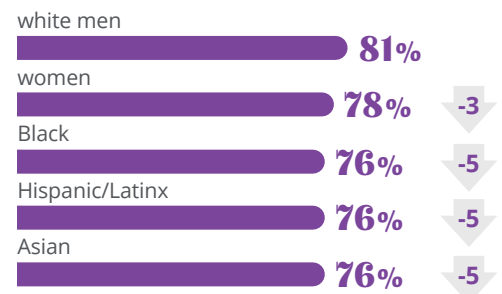
### I feel like I belong at work



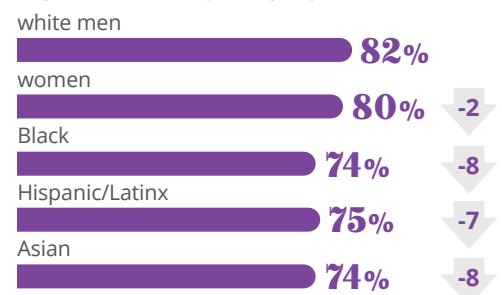
### My employer is inclusive



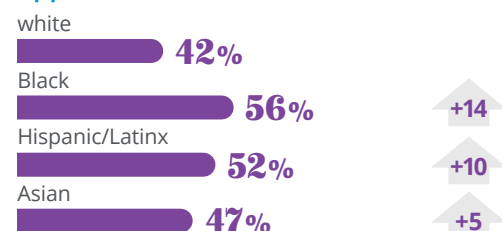
### I can be my authentic self at work



### Compensation and benefits are equitable at my employer



### I have limited advancement opportunities at work because of race




As employers, specifically HR professionals and executive leaders, look to take up the mantle of moving workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives from **awareness to action and accountability**, they can center their efforts in three focus areas:

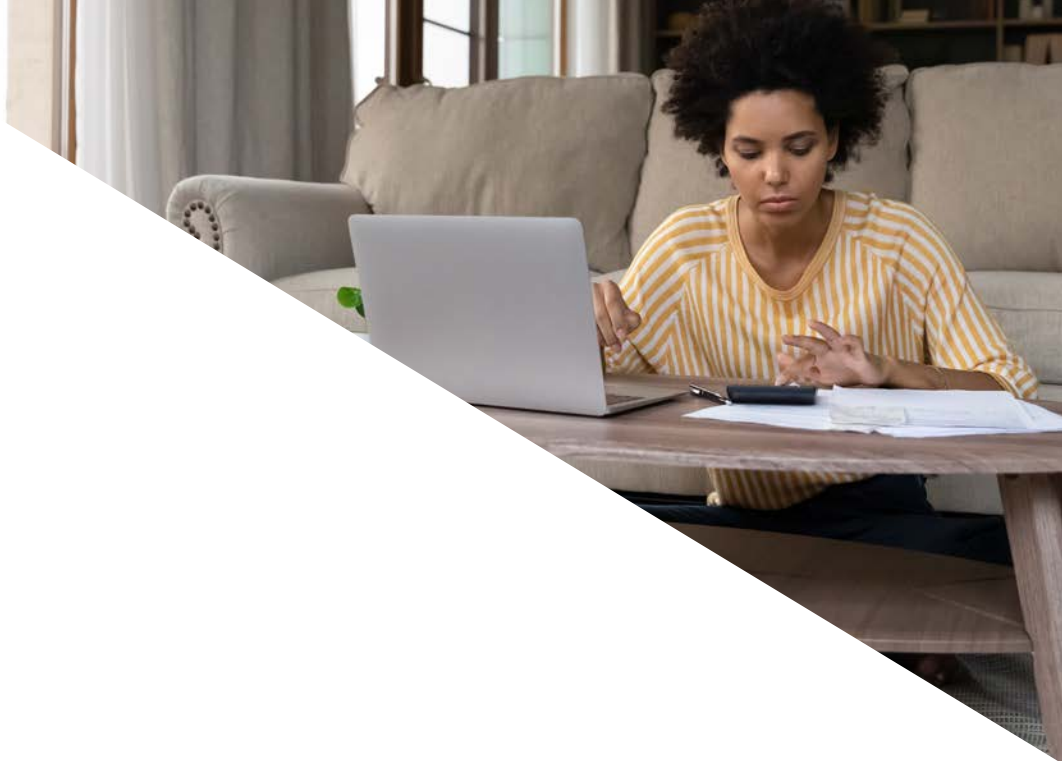
- 1 Bring balance to pay scales.
- 2 Speak up without speaking over.
- 3 Role model without martyrdom.

## About the State of Workplace Empathy Study

Since 2016, Businessolver has surveyed a diverse cross-section of more than 3,000 employees, HR professionals, and CEOs across six industries to examine the behaviors and benefits that make a workplace empathetic. In the survey, empathy is defined as “the ability to understand and experience the feelings of another.”

 Learn more and find historical trend data from 2016 to today at [businessolver.com/empathy](https://businessolver.com/empathy).





# 1 Bring balance to pay scales.

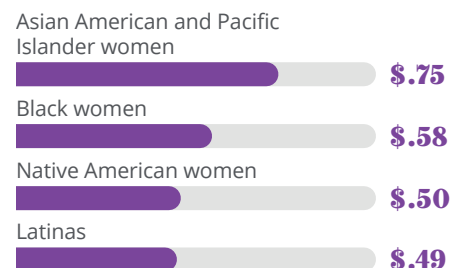
In the years since the 2017 Women’s March and the rekindling of the Me Too movement that same year, the gender pay gap held as steady as it had for the better part of two decades, with women earning about 82 cents for every dollar earned by a white man. Accompanying data shows that the gender pay gap only widens when accounting for race and ethnicity:

- Asian American and Pacific Islander women are paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- Black women are paid 58 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- Native American women are paid 50 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- Latinas are paid 49 cents for every dollar paid to white men.

Persistent salary stagnation has not only served as a catalyst for the 2020-2021 women’s workforce exodus and 2021-2022 Great Resignation, but also fueled employee disillusionment: According to Businessolver’s 2022 State of Workplace Empathy data, employees’ belief in their employer’s commitment to pay equity has nosedived since last year—across all genders, generations, and employment levels.



## Gender pay gap by race and ethnicity



HR and benefits leaders looking to take action on this data toward greater pay equity are not alone: 66% of employers say addressing the pay gap is in their 2022 plans. Yet, among these same business leaders 64% don't know what the gender pay gap is at their organization, and 71% say the same about the racial pay gap.

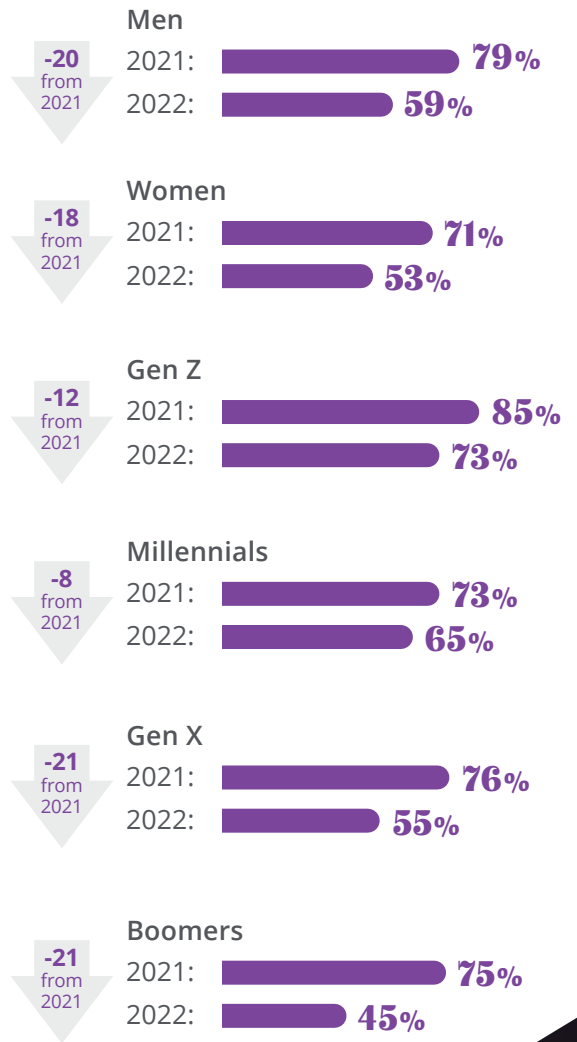


Equal gender pay is a priority for my employer

## Awareness to Action:

**Conduct an organization-wide salary audit to identify and correct gaps in pay for “like for like” work.**

Using internal or independent auditors, investigate pay differences for equal work, after accounting for differences in work experience, education/training, and job performance. Accurate employee data is critical to compare “like for like,” in terms of job titles, responsibilities, and necessary skills. Then, this data can be cross-referenced by demographics—gender, race/ethnicity, age, and even less examined segments like parenthood—to identify and correct pay inequities.

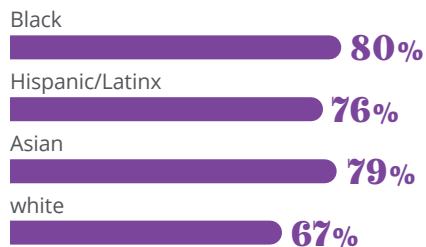




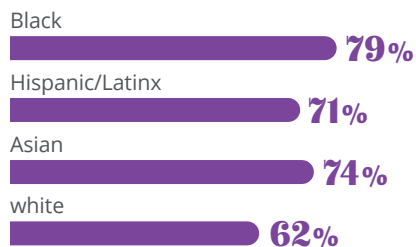
## 2 Speak up without speaking over.

During the 2020 and 2021 reckoning and reawakening around America’s racial/ethnic systemic inequality, the word “allyship” made its way to the forefront of our national lexicon—so much so, that Dictionary.com named allyship its 2021 Word of the Year. However, our 2022 Empathy data shows that allyship is not being felt among employee segments that need it most.

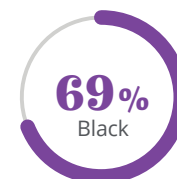
### Organizations would be more empathetic if they had greater diversity in leadership (gender, racial/ethnic, generational, sexual orientation)



### I believe it is important for employers to address social/political unrest



My employer is empathetic



\* Asian employees were surveyed for the first time in 2022.

While white employees see initiatives to expand empathy and DEI in the workplace as less important than employees of color, our 2022 Empathy results show that white employees are more aware than ever of their employer's efforts to do so. At the same time, though, awareness among marginalized employee segments has dropped.

The disconnects in perceived awareness and importance of DEI as a purveyor of workplace empathy appears to indicate that many employers launched DEI programs as an attempt to de-center whiteness, the efforts may have had the opposite effect. While of course unintentional, this effect also is unsurprising, according to Dr. Tracey A. Benson, Ed.L.D.

"DEI infrastructure often subscribes to an ethos of white supremacy, because process and practice are often designed and developed by white people with very low racial literacy who are more interested in maintaining white comfort and giving the impression that they care about DEI rather than doing substantive work to alleviate oppression on people of color," Benson wrote for *Forbes*. "In my experience, the vast majority of DEI efforts are reduced to performative antiracism—when a person, group of people or organization intentionally performs an action to signal their desire to 'be seen as antiracist' with no connection to how these actions will address the racial oppression of people of color."

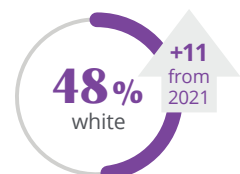
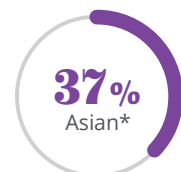
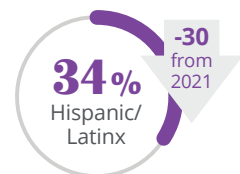
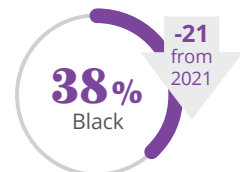
## Awareness to Action:

### Stand up ERGs (employee resource groups) for marginalized groups and open-minded allies.

Hiring, then empowering, organizational DEI leaders to create affinity groups for employees from traditionally marginalized communities—women, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and differently abled—can help provide the "safe space" those employees need to take the first steps toward bringing their authentic selves to work. Once groups are firmly established, they can take steps to broaden their circles to include open-minded allies willing to unlearn privileged language, attitudes, and behaviors from colleagues who feel seen and valued in imparting the benefit of their lived experiences.



**My organization currently offers DEI programs**



*\* Asian employees were surveyed for the first time in 2022.*





## 3 Role model without martyrdom.

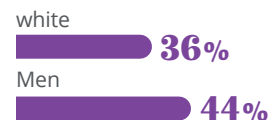
In the years following the resurgence of the Me Too movement and murder of George Floyd, many Americans from historically privileged groups have “done the work” to become more aware of that privilege and dismantle it to become stronger allies to traditionally marginalized people in their workplaces and communities.

In shining a light on privilege, however, participants in the 2022 Businessolver State of Workplace Empathy Study show that a shadow of martyrdom appears to have emerged among some well-intentioned allies at the same time. Although pay and promotion data shows that male and white employees outpace their female and BIPOC counterparts in both areas, our Empathy data shows that more than one-third of male and white employees indicate feelings of workplace bias or discrimination based on their race or gender.

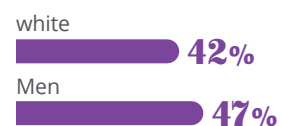
Everyone at my employer has the opportunity to grow within the organization, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability



I am treated differently at work because of my race or gender



I have limited advancement opportunities at work because of my race



## Awareness to Action:

### Cultivate a workplace culture that makes allyship a verb.

Ultimately, driving greater empathy and DEI within the workplace involves perspective taking. Granted, that is more difficult when lived experiences vary so greatly according to one's privilege and/or marginalization. However, most of us possess privilege in one or more aspects of life—gender, race, sexual orientation, age, income, physical/mental ability, family status. Effective allyship, then, is using existing privilege to reduce another's marginalization.

That takes ongoing work and engagement. Which is why many experts advise employers to encourage employees to think of allyship as a verb to be practiced consistently, rather than a noun that indicates closure or completion.

"Identity is complex; you can be privileged in one area but marginalized in another. That means that we all need to be allies to each other," Dr. Evelyn Carter, a Los Angeles-based DEI expert, wrote for [White & Case](#). "[However], you can't simply 'be' an ally. You need to practice it. You need to use your identity and privilege to make change happen. If you speak up and challenge injustice, especially when the marginalized person or group is not in the room, that's when it really counts. **Ultimately, it's about feeling that others have 'got your back' and being prepared to step up to offer them the same support in return.**"





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