



How To Deal With False Allegations Of Racism

Different Voice Initiative

Introduction

Essentialist ideas such as "all white people are inherently racist" have meant that many white people approach complex race-related conversations with extreme caution (if at all) for fear of being labelled "racist."

This fear is highly problematic not just because it does little to improve race relations and restore racial harmony, but also because it frequently thwarts the candid, heartfelt dialogue required for racial equity progression.

The purpose of this mini guide is to provide tips on how to deal with false claims of racism. Whilst any member of any racial group can be a victim of racial prejudice, abuse or discrimination, it is more common that members of the white racial group are accused of racism - whether falsely or genuinely. It is also important to note that racial allegations are not just limited to individuals but can also extend to schools, colleges, companies, institutions and even processes, laws and regulations.

This guide is not intended to minimise true incidents of racism, nor is it a denial that racism does negatively impact marginalised groups. However, racism cannot and should not be used as a weapon to tarnish the reputation and character of individuals or groups.

FIRST AND FOREMOST....

Do Not Panic.

False accusations of any kind, including being falsely labelled a racist, can be emotionally draining and overwhelming. However, it is critical that if you find yourself in this unpleasant situation, you don't panic and become overly emotional. Do not let negative emotions enter your heart and cause you to respond to your accuser out of fear and hatred. It is never a good idea.

People who make false accusations against others are typically highly emotional, at least at the time. When statements and claims are made emotionally, they lose objectivity. This means that the majority of their accusations will be based on feelings rather than facts, which gives you, as the accused, an advantage. Maintain your objectivity, and don't get emotional about the details.

Dealing with false racist accusations does not have a one-size-fits-all approach, and certainly there can be no simplistic solution to the situation. This guide will suggest two broad approaches for tackling the situation: the hard approach and the soft approach.



The hard approach will be necessary if you are certain that the accusation is false and that it was made maliciously to cancel you, to virtue signal at your expense, to race bait, or to take advantage of the situation for personal gain.



The soft approach is recommended if you acted with good intentions but are unsure whether or not your behavior, comment or attitude was racist or could be reasonably interpreted as racist.

So let us first explore tips using the “hard approach”

1. Skip The Apologies

Admit no guilt if you are confident that neither your intentions nor your actions were racist.

Do not apologise or attempt to defend or justify yourself. Do not try to play all your virtuous cards, such as claiming to have a large number of non-white friends.

Even if the accusations have no basis, there is usually a reason you were labelled a racist, such as to elicit a defensive response from you or to make you feel guilty for something you did not do. In such a scenario, it might be best to ignore the accusation and if possible, walk away.

Remember that we are living in an era of unprecedented vitriol and mob justice. People are no longer satisfied with an apology, so offering one can prove futile.

2. Challenge Your Accuser

Do not be afraid to engage in racially charged conversations. Instead, maintain your composure and ask your accuser to back up their statements with evidence. Most false accusers would expect you to cower. Do not take the bait. Be ready to stand your ground and remain confident, yet rational, in your responses.

In addition, if you show that you are unafraid of their accusation, it will make them think twice before making a baseless accusation of racism against you or anyone else in the future. However, if your accuser persists after this step, then proceed to step 3.

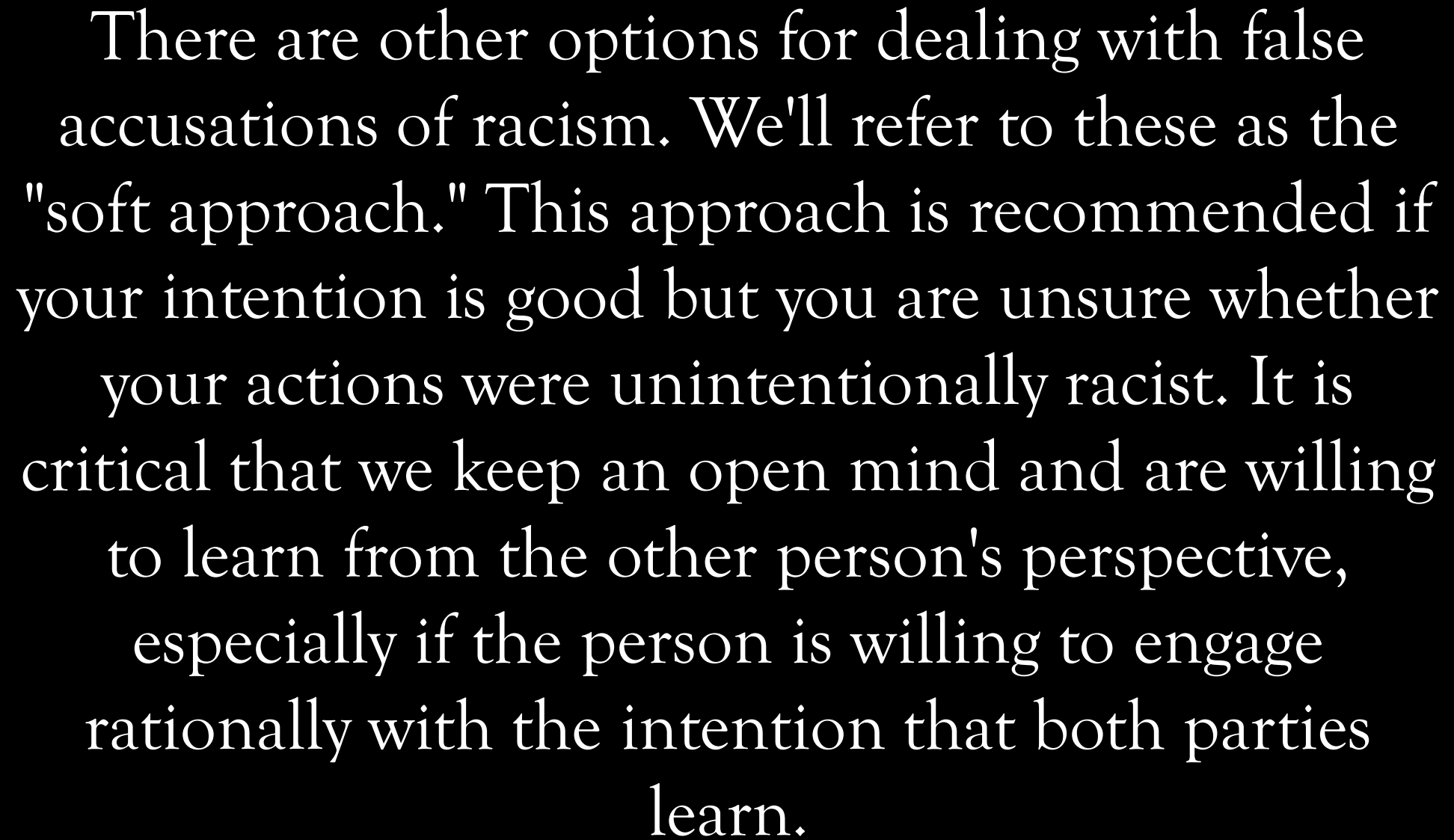
3. Time To Talk Legalities.

This could be necessary for a reality check and to see if the accuser will apologise and withdraw the accusation. Defamation is a legal action that seeks redress for false statements that cause reputational harm. By reminding your accuser that falsely accusing you of racism can be a form of defamation that could harm your reputation, you are also giving the person the opportunity to retract their comment if it was made carelessly.

If the accuser refuses to withdraw the accusation, you are within your rights to take legal action.

4. Take Further Action.

A false accusation may be considered slander or libel depending on how it is made. Slander occurs when false information about you is written or published. Libel occurs when someone makes false accusations in public. Both libel and slander are considered defamation if made maliciously with the intent to harm your reputation. Defamation is a crime, and anyone wrongfully accused has the right to clear their name. The area of defamation and racism is complicated, but in some cases (if certain criteria are met), you may be able to file a lawsuit against the person who has harmed your reputation. It is also critical that you gather evidence at this point in case you decide to seek legal redress. Text messages, audio recordings, video recordings, publications, and other media will be useful in this case.



There are other options for dealing with false accusations of racism. We'll refer to these as the "soft approach." This approach is recommended if your intention is good but you are unsure whether your actions were unintentionally racist. It is critical that we keep an open mind and are willing to learn from the other person's perspective, especially if the person is willing to engage rationally with the intention that both parties learn.



These "soft approach" tips were culled from the work of psychotherapist and author of *Grappling: White Men's Journey from Fragile to Agile*, Andrew Horning.

While scapegoating any group, such as "white males," is counterproductive to progress in race relations and racial equity, these suggestions can still serve as a guide for when one is accused of racism and wishes to see the situation from the perspective of the one accused, taking into account the ongoing social issues that many "people of colour" *do* face in society.

1. Answer The Call

Recognize that you have been called out or called in to respond to a [potentially] racist comment or action. Instead of ignoring it, don't be afraid to respond and engage. That call can take many forms, including feedback from a colleague, a social media post, or even a nagging question that won't go away. The simple truth is that it can be tempting to simply bury your head in the sand, pretend you didn't hear the comment, or otherwise choose denial over acknowledgment. We are not perfect, and we all make mistakes; therefore, mistakes should be viewed as opportunities to learn.

2. “Engage In The Struggle”

Once you've answered the call, resist the urge to check out or become defensive, and instead lean in and engage with curiosity. "Being engaged means being willing to be uncomfortable, to go deeper into uncertainty, and to let go of what we thought was true," Horning explains. "At this stage, we learn more about ourselves and the world around us, but we can't quite make sense of it." There is a distinct difference between listening and waiting to speak, and for the time being, choose listening. Try to listen to understand rather than to respond. Your response will follow, but for now, concentrate on better understanding the other person.

Also, during any discussions or interactions, remember to thank them; not for "educating" you, but for taking the time to explain.

3. Love The Learning

The key to reaching a common understanding is frequently shifting your perspective so that you can better understand the impact from the other person's point of view. Consider the following scenario: the only black female engineer on a team informs a coworker that she was insulted by comments made about how articulate she was after one of her presentations. At first glance, the comments appeared to be nothing but compliments, so it is understandable that the coworker was surprised and confused.

By focusing on the impact (how the words were received), the coworker will be able to recognise that the remark (and tone) suggested that it was somewhat surprising that she presented herself articulately.

If the coworker engages in the conversation in good faith, they will undoubtedly gain a deeper understanding of how words and actions can unwittingly reflect deeply embedded social biases.

Summary

Racism is far from over, and it continues to be a thorn in humanity's side.

Stop Hate UK, an anti-hate and anti-discrimination organisation, reports that racially motivated hate crimes are the most frequently reported form of hate crime in the United Kingdom, with over 80,000 racially motivated crimes reported in 2020/2021.

Such statistics demonstrate that racism has not been eliminated. Numerous individuals' negative encounters with racism demonstrate that it has not been eliminated.

Nonetheless, just as we demand zero tolerance for actual instances of racism, the same standard must be applied to false allegations made intentionally or recklessly to smear a person, a group, or an institution.

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