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## OD Consultants and Friends

### A Narrative About Women and Race

By Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams and Deborah Howard

When little girls gather, brown or beige palms, ivory or olive fingers scoop up a handful of jacks and catch a quarter-size rubber ball. Cheers easily erupt among our little sisterhood while playing a competitive-friendly sport. Girls then grow up into a society of biased media images, disparaging voices, and prejudiced institutions that paint a different meaning, defining the worthiness of the shades of hands once embraced in friendship. We, Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams, a heterosexual African American woman, and Deborah Howard, a White Jewish heterosexual woman, come from this experience. Our story is one of unlearning old societal narratives and embarking upon a journey of trust as colleagues, that bloomed into a deep friendship and love.

In this article, we share our inner thoughts and discoveries about our cross-race relationship as professionals and friends. Our connection grew out of the significance we place on authenticity, lifelong personal growth, and self-determination. Key to building our relationship was owning and working with personal awareness and choice. We used ourselves to explore the role of race and other differences at the individual, group, and systemic levels, and uncovered three critical factors in the ways we use ourselves that led to our strong work and personal relationship:

1. We explore race: It is integral to our work and relationship;
2. We are courageous and trust each other; and
3. We support each other.

And, we discovered that it is the heart, soul, and spirit that nourish our relationship.

In our desire to work together, we discovered our mutual disenchantment with traditional “diversity work.” Traditional diversity work tends to focus either on a didactic examination of systemic racism and oppression or on superficially increasing awareness of and sensitivity to differences, using limiting binary views of race and social identity. We balked at those either/or approaches, wanting to find ways to surface and unravel intertwined social identities in ways that create both individual and systemic awareness. Both of us use narrative and metaphors in our personal growth, leadership development, and executive coaching work. We chose, therefore, to explore creative and heartfelt ways of engaging people in cross-race dialogue that would lead to personal and societal change, using expressive arts. We wanted to design a holistic, comprehensive learning program that would:

- » Lead to a deep intellectual and emotional understanding of self, others, and systems;
- » Take people out of their heads and into their hearts, souls, and spirits; and

- » Incorporate issues of power and privilege, dominance and subordination, and an analysis of the individual, group, and systemic levels.

This led to the idea of developing a multi-disciplinary, multi-level community leadership development program in which individuals could acknowledge and heal from the psychic traumas of racism and other isms and engage in group level dialogues across differences that would enable them to co-develop strategies for creating and sustaining healthy teams, organizations, and communities. Below are our stories:

### Yvette's Story

My main interest is using narrative and expressive writing, while Deb uses metaphor and story. I created a model and approach called *transformative narratives* that uses written and verbal stories to create a foundation to unearth the multiple perspectives and intersectionality of group identities such as race, gender, etc. With a history as a long time artist, musician, and writer, I found it difficult to publicly embrace my social identity of "artist" in my corporate life. But Deb welcomed this part of me. What drew me close to her was her excitement and how she "got" the way art and creativity activate the right side of brain, allowing access to emotions, the unconscious, and the whole person. She readily joined me in integrating the arts (narrative writing, textile arts, etc.) as a vehicle for exploring differences and developing and sustaining authentic relationships across race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other social identities. We created a learning platform where poetry and creative writing, mixed-media, and textile arts would become manifestations of individual and group identity; powerful, transformative storytelling would follow the art-making. Deb's steadfast joining and support of my work indicated she saw all of me, and that meant everything to me.

Connecting at the individual level with Deb lay a warm ground for building trust. A meaningful experience for me was when

Deb and I wrote e-letters to each other. These letters were mixed with what we were learning as applied behavioral science practitioners, and grew even more complex with more personal topics and group level conversations about race. I then had to work on my ghosts—the realities of my cumulative experiences of negative impact from "colorblind" practicing White women. Deb and I were race conscious, curious, and eager to explore our histories, behaviors, and actions. There were no "untouchable" topics. This helped me see White women as more complex, and I peeled away the lines that framed boxes where I sometimes placed them. How I enter in relationship with and authentically support White women today has profoundly changed as a result of my relationship with Deb.

### Deb's Story

For my relationship with Yvette to be based on authenticity and openness, race had to be an on-the-table topic. If it were a taboo topic for us, our relationship would likely have remained superficial. I have to see and acknowledge my whiteness, and the unearned privilege, internalized racism, and White racial lens that accompany it. As a White woman, what I bring to our friendship is not having some expertise in being a White ally. I claim no such expertise. I bring a heartfelt desire to personally and professionally support Yvette, and an understanding that I will never reach the end of my learning journey. My relationship with Yvette is not about being her White ally – it's about being a fellow traveler on a spiritual journey.

When we talk about race, I feel seen and heard. If I say something that doesn't resonate with her, she asks questions to understand my perspective, rather than try to convince me that I'm wrong. Once, when we were talking about racial identity, I shared that I'm not comfortable with the idea that because I am White, I should "own White people." As a writer, words carry enormous significance for me and the word "own" didn't sit right with me. Yvette didn't insist that I accept specific terminology or jump to conclusions about

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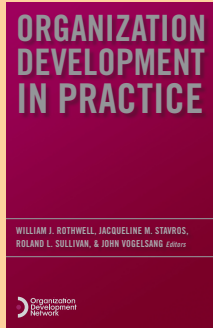
**Deborah Howard, Esq., M.S.O.D., P.C.C.**, President of Guiding Change Consulting, Inc., is a leading organizational consultant, professional certified coach, and author who previously worked as a public interest lawyer. She helps leaders and their teams transform themselves and the world by tapping into their wisdom and creative potential. She can be reached at: [debhoward@guidingchange.com](mailto:debhoward@guidingchange.com).

what I meant. Curious about how that phrase impacted me, she asked me to tell her why I felt that way. I explained that while I don't feel I own White people, I do "own my whiteness." I claim it as my racial identity, own the unearned privileges and internalized racism that come with it, and acknowledge the lived reality of the social construct of race. I choose not to buy into the social construct of race by claiming a group of individuals as "my people" simply because we share the same skin color. My people are those whom I consider my closest friends with whom I identify a kindred spirit and heart-to-heart connection.

### Conclusion

Our work in personal and social change, and our support of each other, is about nurturing our own and each other's personal and spiritual growth, something author, feminist, and social activist bell hooks speaks to in her book, *All About Love*. We are about being open to dialogue and holding each other in loving-kindness and good faith—and that is all about love.

## A New e-Book Resource for Practitioners



# Organization Development in Practice

Editors

William J. Rothwell, Jacqueline M. Stavros,  
Roland L. Sullivan, and John Vogelsang

Available from the Organization Development Network

*OD Network*

**Organization Development in Practice** brings together experienced OD professionals who share their methods for developing more effective and resilient organizations, enabling organizational and social change, and being responsive to continuous change.

Some of the chapters include:

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**Teri Eagan**, **Julie Chesley**, and **Suzanne Lahl** believe that the early promise of OD was inspired by a desire to influence human systems towards greater levels of justice, participation, and excellence. They propose that a critical and integrative neurobiological perspective holds the potential to advance OD in two ways: what we do—the nature and quality of our ability to assess and intervene in service of more effective organizations and a better world; and who we are—our competencies, resilience, and agility as practitioners.

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## Guidelines for Authors

### Journal Information

The *OD Practitioner (ODP)* is published by the Organization Development Network. The purpose of the *ODP* is to foster critical reflection on OD theory and practice and to share applied research, innovative approaches, evidence based practices, and new developments in the OD field. We welcome articles by authors who are OD practitioners, clients of OD processes, Human Resource staff who have partnered with OD practitioners or are practicing OD, and academics who teach OD theory and practice. As part of our commitment to ensure all OD Network programs and activities expand the culture of inclusion, we encourage submissions from authors who represent diversity of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual practice, economic class, education, nationality, experience, opinion, and viewpoint.

### The Review Process

The *ODP* is a peer reviewed journal. Authors can choose between two review processes and should notify the Editor which they prefer when they submit an article:

**Process 1 (open peer review):** Submit articles with a cover page with the article's title, all authors' identifying and contact information, and a 50–80 word biography for each of the authors; also include any acknowledgements. Two members of the *ODP* Review Board will review the article. They will recommend accepting the article for publication, pursuing publication after suggested changes,

or rejecting the article. If they decide the article is publishable with changes, one of the Review Board members will email or call the primary author to discuss the suggested changes. Once the author has made the changes to the satisfaction of the two Review Board members, the *ODP* Editor will work with the author to prepare the article for publication.

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- » Bridges academic rigor and relevance to practice
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- » References sources for ideas, theories, and practices
- » Reflects OD values: respect and inclusion, collaboration, authenticity, self-awareness, and empowerment.

#### Stylistic

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- » Presents ideas logically and with clear transitions
- » Includes section headings to help guide the reader
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- » Avoids jargon and overly formal expressions
- » Avoids self-promotion

If the article is accepted for publication, the author will receive a PDF proof of the article for final approval before publication. At this stage the author may make only minor changes to the text. After publication, the Editor will send the author a PDF of the article and of the complete issue of *ODP* in which the article appears.

*(continued next page)*

## Guidelines for Authors (contd.)

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Although publication in the *ODP* is a way of letting the OD community know about an author's work, and is therefore good publicity, the purpose of the *ODP* is to exchange ideas and information. Consequently, it is the policy of the OD Network to not accept articles that are primarily for the purpose of marketing or advertising an author's practice.

#### Submission Deadlines

Authors should email articles to the editor, John Vogelsang, at [jvogelsang@earthlink.net](mailto:jvogelsang@earthlink.net). The deadlines for submitting articles are as follow: **October 1** for the winter issue; **January 1** for the spring issue; **April 1** for the summer issue; and **July 1** for the fall issue.

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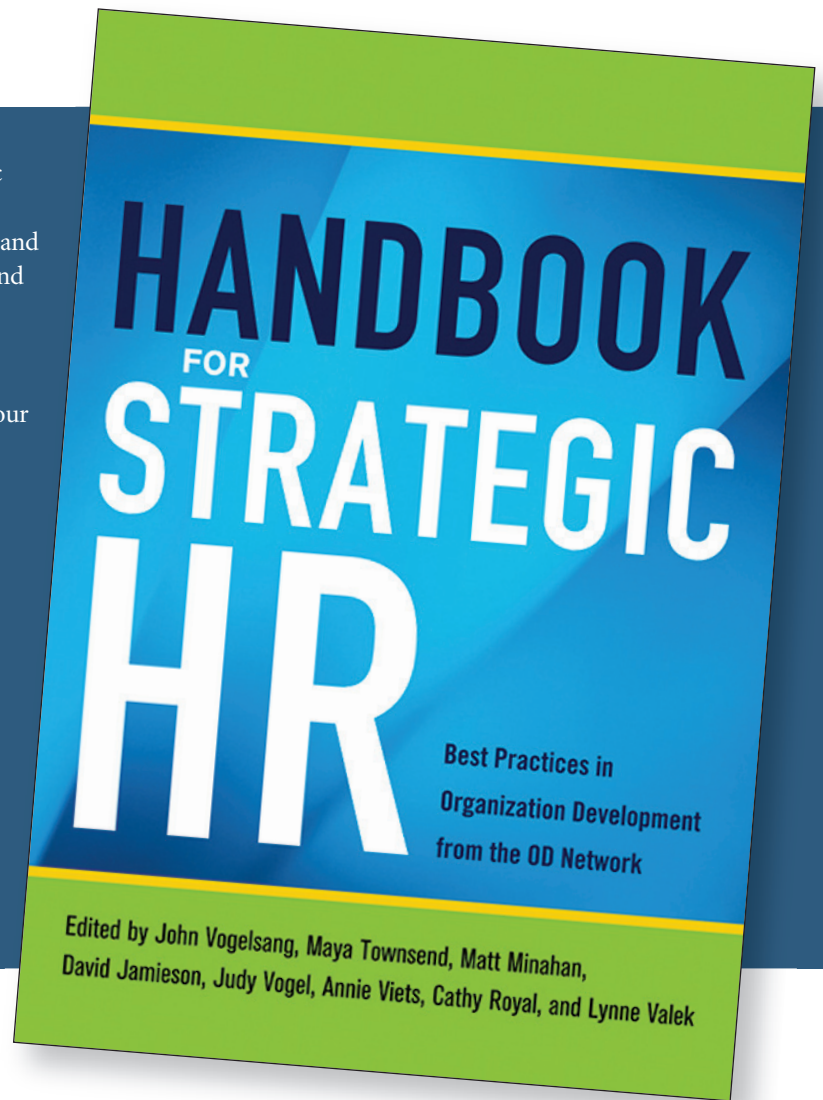
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