

DIFFERENT.

The Rapid Response Framework for Leaders



A step by step guide to engaging more intentionally around societal issues



What's the challenge?



Today, businesses and their leaders are being urged to speak up and take a stance around current events and societal issues. Both employees and customers demand it, but leaders are often unsure how to approach these topics in a sensitive manner. Oftentimes, leaders can be largely reactive, rather than proactively meeting these demands in an intentional way. As a result, missteps and mistakes are made, and sometimes organizations contribute more to the problem instead of helping – as we saw in 2020 and again in 2023. It's particularly noticeable among teams that let go of their DEI leaders during the pandemic. Now more than ever, businesses and their leaders require a clear and consistent framework for intentionally engaging with current events to bring about positive change, attract employees and retain clients and customers.





According to research from the Edelman Trust Barometer, **54% of employees** globally believe that CEOs should speak publicly on controversial political and social issues they care about. Similarly, **53% of consumers** agree that every brand has a responsibility to get involved in at least one social issue that does not directly impact its business.

Where do you start?

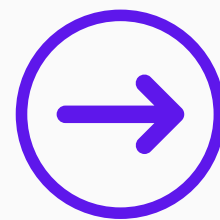
Different recommends implementing a Rapid Response Framework to help leaders navigate sensitive and sometimes divisive current events. Start by assembling a diverse, cross-functional group of employees, or leveraging existing ones (e.g. DEI Councils or ERGs), to provide informed responses to the questions outlined in our guide. This group can then advise leaders on future responses that are intentional, informed and inclusive, and that consider the impact on employees, customers, clients and communities. By doing so, your organization can establish a clear and consistent methodology for addressing current events.





Rapid Response Questions

Want to develop a tailored Rapid Response Framework to enable your leaders to more effectively engage around current events? Bring together a diverse, cross-functional group of employees and leaders to answer the questions in this guide to get you started.



It can be helpful to have leaders and non-leaders complete these questions independently via an anonymous questionnaire before hosting a broader facilitated conversation. Comparing findings across levels will almost always have interesting insights to inform the discussion.

Defining Your Organization's Role

First things first, it's important to figure out what your organization stands for in relation to the wider issues that exist in our society.

- ✔ What role do you believe our organization plays in bettering society, if at all?
- ✔ Do you believe our organization should be a *values neutral* or *values directive* organization? Why?
- ✔ What objective(s) should our organization have for employees or external stakeholders following a current event?



A **values-directive** culture is one where the company's values, along with the personal values of its leaders and key influencers, strongly guide the culture. This approach makes it evident to employees which socio-political beliefs are favored, and those who align with these beliefs are considered to fit well within the organization.



Evaluating Your Current State

Before defining your organization's new approach to how it will thoughtfully engage around current events, it's always a good idea to take stock of how your business has responded (or not) in the past. Identifying times when your organization has succeeded or failed will give you insights that you can use to determine how to proceed in the best interest of your business, your clients and consumers and your employees.

- ✔ What have you learned from how our organization has responded to current events in the past? What positive or critical feedback have you heard/received from our staff, customers, clients and other stakeholders around this?
- ✔ What do you believe our organization could do differently to have its communications and actions resonate better with our various stakeholders?



Finding Your Focus

To ensure that your organization is proactive in responding to current events, it's important to narrow down the focus areas that require a response. Keep in mind that your organization may not be able to respond to everything so it's also important to communicate these focus areas to your employees so they know what to expect.

- ✔ What types of current events or issues do you feel our organization should take a stance on?
- ✔ What types of current events or issues do you feel our organization should not take a stance on?



Informing Intentional Follow-up

Merely speaking on an issue is often inadequate. It is crucial to determine what concrete measures your organization will implement in response to an event or issue that directly affects your employees, clients, customers or the communities in which your organization operates.

- ✔ What inclusive actions should our organization prioritize following a current event?
- ✔ If our organization were to take a stance around current events or issues, should it lead to internal communications and actions, external communications and actions, or both?



Not sure what intentional follow-up from the top looks like? Having emotionally intelligent leaders who are skilled in building trust, supporting employees and fostering psychological safety across difference is key. Learn more [here](#).



Understanding the Landscape

When it comes to speaking up around current events, especially divisive ones, there are both advantages and disadvantages to consider. Identifying these can help you determine the level of risk your organization is willing or able to take and where your leaders stand on leading with your values.

- ✔ What do you believe are the benefits of our organization taking a company stance around current events?
- ✔ What do you believe are the downsides of our organization taking a company stance around current events?
- ✔ How do our competitors and peer organizations typically respond to current events? If they do so publicly, what can we learn and then leverage from their prior efforts?



Envisioning Your Future State

After gathering valuable insights, it's time to determine how your organization will address societal issues and events in the future. This requires paying attention to the details and logistics to ensure everyone is informed of the rapid response game plan going forward. This will help maintain consistency and clarity for all those involved.

- ✓ If our organization were to take a stance on a particular current event or issue, what perspectives do you believe should be taken into consideration? How might we accomplish this in a more structured ongoing manner?
- ✓ If our organization were to take a stance on a current event or issue, who do you believe would be the appropriate messenger(s) to enlist?
- ✓ If our organization were to take a stance on a current event or issue, what do you believe would be the appropriate channel(s) to utilize?
- ✓ If our organization were not to take a stance on a current event or issue, how might we encourage employees to effectively engage with other staff around these issues, if at all? What would be the appropriate channel(s)/medium(s) to utilize?
- ✓ If our organization were to take a stance on a current event or issue, how quickly should communications and follow-up actions be implemented?

According to research from Gallup, Americans are divided about whether businesses should take a public stance on political and social issues, with **48% believing they should** and 52% saying they should not.

Younger adults are more likely than older adults to believe businesses should take a stance: 59% of those aged 18 to 29 think as much, compared with 51% of those aged 30 to 44, 41% of those aged 45 to 59, and 43% of those aged 60 and older.



Closing Thoughts

At Different, we prioritize relationships over transactions, and people over profit. With younger generations expecting more from their workplaces, representatives and communities, it is crucial for leaders to learn how to meet the new demands placed on organizations in today's competitive and sometimes divisive landscape. We hope this guide serves as the start to the conversation, not the end point.



It's time to do DEI differently.

Who we are

At Different, we're as custom as they come because we believe in order to drive real, meaningful, and sustainable change through your diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, we must co-create a way forward together that resonates with the unique needs of your business and your team. Your people already know what needs to change – we're just here to help make that happen.

Our team knows that solutions that have served us historically, are not the ones that will set us up for a better tomorrow. This work requires a bolder, more holistic, and impact-driven approach with partners who are willing to really go there to get shit done.



We're a new kind of DEI consulting firm.

Different is a Black, Asian, LGBTQIA+ and women owned DEI consulting firm and we believe in doing DEI differently. We cultivate human connection as a means to propel purpose-driven organizations into a different tomorrow. One where organizations foster diverse, equitable, and inclusive human-centered workplaces that welcome all people to bring their authentic selves to work – to do their best work.



Want to help your leaders become more emotionally intelligent culture champions? Learn more [here](#).

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