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Porter Braswell explores the role race plays in our careers and lives.

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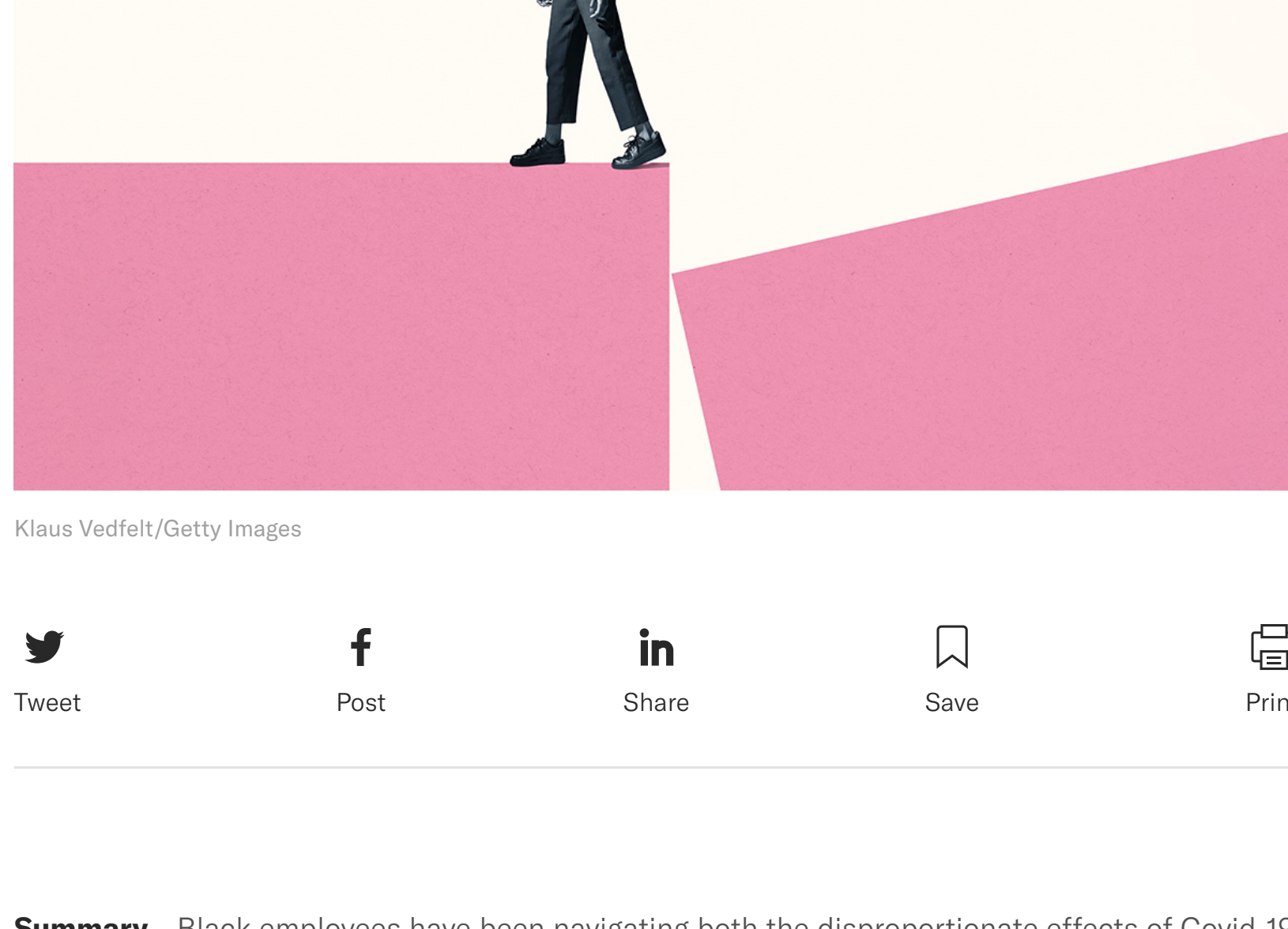


Race

# Give Black Employees Time to Rest and Recover

by Danielle D. King, Abdifatah A. Ali, Courtney L. McCluney, and Courtney Bryant

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**Summary.** Black employees have been navigating both the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 and systemic racism over the past year. Prioritizing recovery and resilience, both from an organizational and personal perspective, is vital. To do this, focus on four key areas... [more](#)

Black employees are exhausted. Over the past year, their cognitive, emotional, and physical resources have been disproportionately depleted due to two deadly and intertwined pandemics: Covid-19 and structural racism. Black people are more likely to lose their jobs and be hospitalized or die from Covid-19, while still facing disproportionate threats of brutalization and death from policing compared to white people.

Additional factors exacerbate these experiences. First, assaults against Black people were major news stories in 2020, broadcasted regularly across all types of media. This is what's known as a racial mega-threat — a negative, large-scale, race-related event that receives significant media attention — which heightens racial trauma. Research shows that this type of ongoing experience creates psychological racial battle fatigue — a natural depletion response to commonplace, consistent experiences of heightened distress due to racism.

Second, Black employees and leaders are also often asked to educate non-Black individuals about racism and, in many cases, to lead the antiracism charge in their organizations. Responding to such requests and/or fulfilling them requires both physical and emotional labor, which can heighten existing fatigue. All of this is being added to the weight of ongoing disparities in the workplace, including pay inequality and lack of representation in leadership.

Against this backdrop, recovery is more critical than ever. Defined as a restoration process that returns stress-induced strain and resources to pre-stressor levels, recovery can involve relaxation, psychological detachment from stressors, hobbies, and having control over one's time. The act of restoring one's physical and psychological resources has been shown to positively affect employee well-being and work engagement.

Companies can and should look inward to directly address the cumulative depleting effects of systemic racism on Black employees — antiracism efforts are incomplete and may exacerbate racial trauma and fatigue if recovery is absent. We also recognize that, for so many Black employees, recovery can't wait. Although it may not be possible to fully "heal" from an ongoing trauma, both managers and employees can start creating space for recovery and resilience today; below is a tailored resource guide that offers a place to start.

**Rest.** It may seem counterintuitive to rest when there is so much work needed for meaningful change. Yet, consistently disengaging from work can facilitate recovery, as rest is critical for resilience to adversity. This includes taking time off from work when needed to prioritize mental health and well-being. For example, we theorize that employees may need to "call in Black" instead of showing up to work when racially traumatic events occur, especially for those who work in organizations lacking resources to support their coping process. Employers can offer paid time off in a way that is specifically intended to support Black employees.

Quality sleep is critical for recovery, too. Several individuals, groups, and organizations such as The Nap Ministry are exploring how people can experience rest as resistance to and liberation from systemic racism. Naps also help to boost mood, alertness, and performance. Thus, rest is a useful tool for organizations to offer and support for Black employees' recovery.

**Say "no."** We acknowledge that many people feel empowered to speak out about their experiences with racism. Some are leading DEI efforts. However, without adequate space and time to recover from these requests, we fear that Black employees may feel more depleted than ever.

To address this, active recovery requires Black employees and their managers to impose boundaries with their organizations and colleagues. Having autonomy to decide when and how one engages in race work offers a sense of control and a potential reprieve from the emotional labor that race-related work often requires. Saying "no" to requests large or small is challenging for many employees who want to maintain collegiality and harmony, but the burden of racism is too heavy a load for the targets to carry alone.

Black employees can start saying "no" by reminding solicitors of the boundaries of their job description and requesting time off. Employers can ensure that Black employees are adequately compensated for any (in-role or extra-role) work being performed. Instead of depending on Black employees to do all of this work, other organizational leaders can develop their skills in interrogating, creating, and leading anti-racist systems in their organizations.

**Make space for collective healing and care.** Collective healing is group-based processing and coping among those who share a common identity (e.g., race) and, therefore, share an adversity experience (e.g., anti-Black racism). It counters individualistic approaches to self-care and may remove key barriers such as costs. These self-care strategies can include Black communities, neighborhoods, and cities, all of which are necessary to eradicate systemic racism, and involves offering and gaining the critical resource of social support, which has been shown to consistently facilitate recovery and resilience.

As individuals commune with others who share their social identity, seeing that this group stands united despite shared adversity may facilitate resilience. Several companies have Black employee resource groups (ERGs) that can provide space and time for Black employees to collectively heal and recover from racial trauma through company-sponsored resources. Collective healing may be a useful means to recovery and resilience for Black employees.

**Positively affirm Black identity.** Finding comfort and esteem in Black identity and experiences can replenish depleted psychological resources. Anti-Black racism casts elements of Black culture, including music, vernacular, and hair, as devalued, especially in professional spaces. Further, Black identity is stigmatized as associated with sub-humanness and criminality. Black professionals might often find themselves engaging in identity work to adapt and present "professional selves" by distancing from Black culture. Yet, research shows that Black people who view their racial group positively experience boosts to their well-being and reduced job burnout.

Personally interrogating and countering the harmful ways that anti-Black racism may inadvertently become internalized as imposter phenomenon — the internal experience of believing you are not capable or deserving of high achievement — may be a productive place for Black employees to start. In addition, leaders can support this process by amplifying positive perceptions through explicitly countering racist ideology and promoting efforts that recognize and value Blackness at work.

Over the past year, many organizations have stated that they value Black lives. One important way of showing this is to value Black recovery and tangibly support Black resilience. It is our hope that leaders create environments where Black employees are welcomed to join, be themselves, lead, and thrive, despite adversity — and that they recognize just how vital recovery is in this process. It is also our hope that Black employees feel safe and empowered to embody the words of Audre Lorde: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation."

DK

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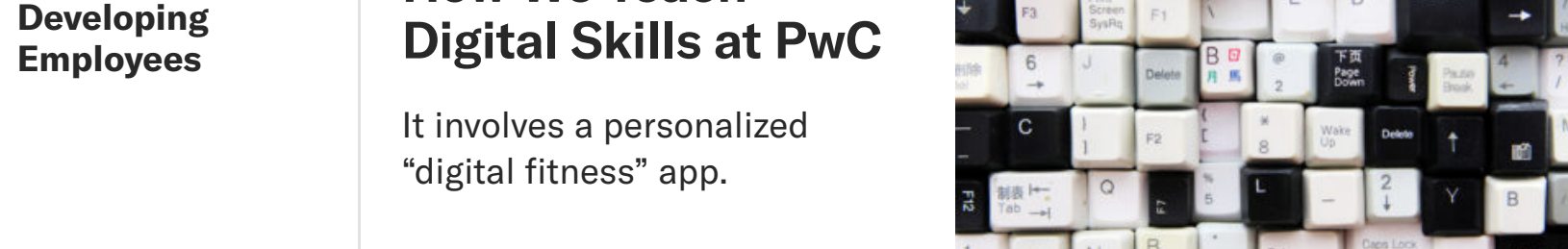
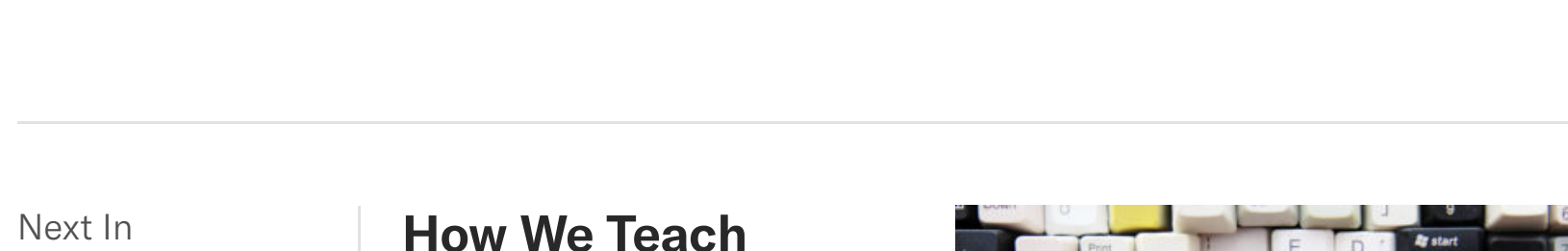
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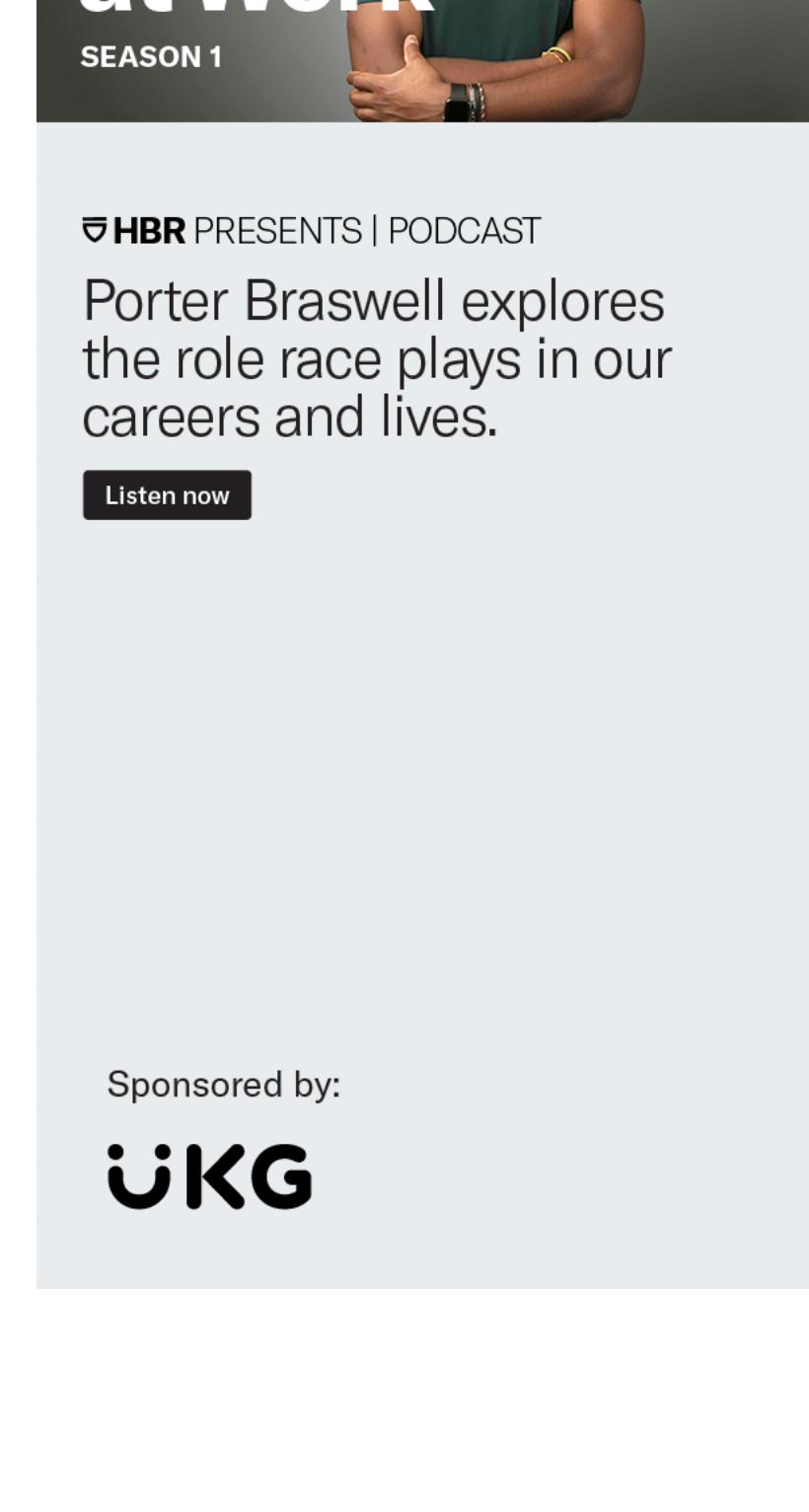
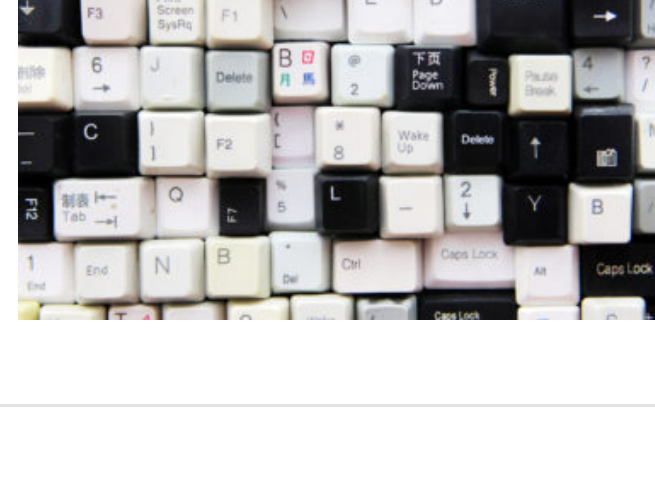
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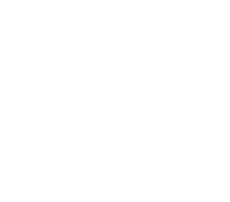


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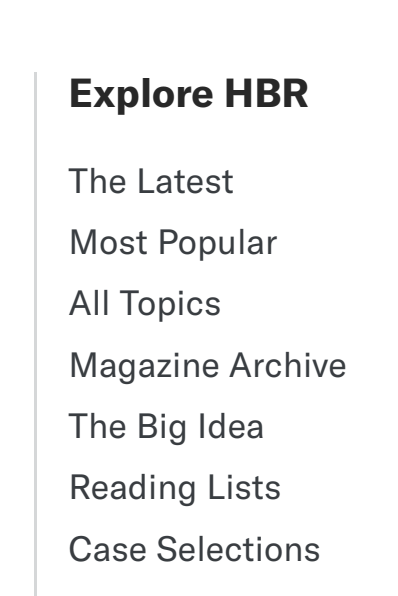
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