



## **Why Become an Anti-Racist? Personal Vision & Benefits – What’s Worth the Journey?**

*“What might be worth the effort, sacrifice, and risks required to even begin the journey to counter racism, let alone sustain it?”*

*“What might result for us, our families, our organizations, or our communities?”*

These are critical and very natural questions that demand answers if we are to truly commit and persevere in countering racism. One of the greatest gaps in countering racism is the failure to ask and answer these questions.

### **I**

## **Why a Personal Vision is Critical Game Over Before We Start?**

**The Problem.** The problem is that there are significant natural barriers to committing to countering racism. Without a clear and compelling vision of the desired state that we are pursuing and the benefits of that vision - we will simply not have enough sustainable energy to overcome the natural resistance we encounter.

Fortunately, there are practical ways to get past these barriers. The most powerful is to create a clear and compelling personal vision of the possible benefits.

Countering racism will take us out of our known world – out of our comfort zone. It will require effort, risk, and sacrifice. Sacrifice is giving up something for something of greater value. We will have to give up something to effectively counter racism.

So, the question is, “What will be of greater value than what might be asked of us and what we might give up (real and imagined)?” Without that vision of “what might be” it’s really “game over” – before we get very far down the path. That vision can be personal, organizational or community in scope. The focus here is on personal vision

## **Creating a Clear and Compelling Vision of What Might Be**

**The Critical Missing Piece.** In too many cases of significant change a vision of what might be achieved is missing, incomplete or just weak and not compelling. That is true for individual or organizational change. That is particularly true for White people accepting the challenge to counter racism. That not only fails to motivate people in the beginning of countering racism. It also ensures that the effort will bog down and become another well-meaning effort that came up short. This is true whether the racism challenge is personal, organizational, or community in nature.

We need a clear and compelling vision of what’s possible – the benefits that might be created that are worth the potential risk, effort, and sacrifice. That vision can include elements of who we would be, what our family would be, what our organizations might be or what our communities (from local to national) might look like.

*“A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.”*

Rosabeth Moss Kanter

## II

### Our Vision - Possible Benefits

#### The Guiding Questions

The following sections describe some of the natural benefits that might be found in committing to counter racism. They can create a compelling vision that is clearly worth the effort, risk and sacrifice that might be required on the journey.

The guiding questions are common, but the answers will vary widely from person to person. But most people should be able to find a surprising number of benefits to fit into their personal vision. The same will be true on the organizational or community level.

Each of the four areas of possible benefits (individual, interpersonal, organizational and community) includes a set of “questions for contemplation.” Because of the amount of unknown on the path and the variability among people, the answers may change over time and with experience, but asking the questions and identifying the initial answers is critical.

The range of potential benefits is surprising, and it really can be quite compelling. There is a stunning number of potential benefits. We just need to identify them.

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The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.

—  
MICHELANGELO

## Possible Individual Benefits

### Guiding Questions

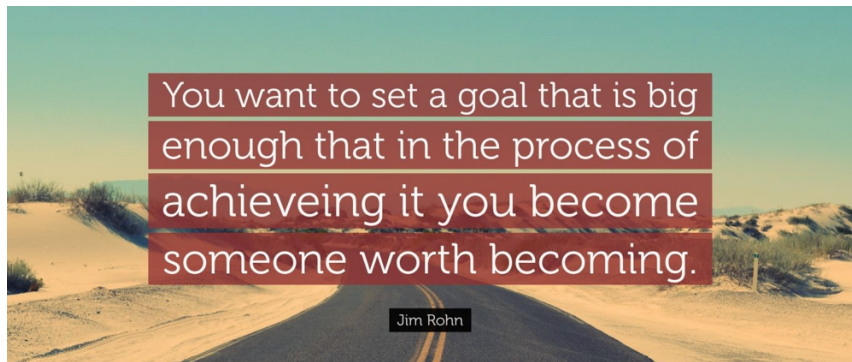
**Fast Track to Personal Growth.** The obvious benefit of going forth to counter racism is being true to our values - deepening our integrity. However, there is an impressive range of other possible benefits.

As individuals we can find personal growth, increased maturity, and completeness, understanding and wisdom, faithfulness to values and beliefs, and the opportunity to exercise courage and risk taking. We come to know ourselves and define ourselves in engaging the challenges that life presents us and the challenges of racism hold tremendous opportunities for growth and an enriched life.

We may also deepen our understanding of the nature of the world and humankind and discover the gifts we have to offer. Being tested by racism – our own and systemic - can be a fast track toward these individual benefits.

- ? When I truly engage in countering racism, what opportunities for personal growth, stretching, completeness, new understandings and capabilities might I find?
- ? How might I better live up to my values and beliefs?
- ? What can I do to take advantage of the opportunities to be of significance and make a difference?
- ? If I take some risks, open myself, sacrifice some comfort, and confront some of the unknown regarding racism, how might that help me do the same in other areas of my life and what might I gain?
- ? What might I discover about my own nature and human nature in general?

- ? How might my understanding of local, national, and world events be increased by understanding issues of racism better, thus increasing my competence and confidence as a citizen?
- ? How might this journey increase my ability to teach my children - or others - about life?
- ? What might I role model for others, particularly my family?



## Possible Interpersonal Benefits

### Guiding Questions

**Enhanced Interpersonal Competence, Richness, and Enjoyment.** There are many losses and missed opportunities in a life that is short on diversity in relationships. We are easily shut off from too many people. We can also limit the depth and richness of relationships with others. And we can also miss the ability to collaborate effectively with people to achieve desired outcomes in our organizations and communities.

- ? How might I come to feel more comfortable with individuals or groups in my community or organizations?
- ? How many relationships might become possible if I become more comfortable, confident, and competent in issues of diversity?
- ? How many current relationships might be enriched in my life?
- ? How might my effectiveness in my organizations or communities be increased?
- ? What relationship skills will be called upon, how might I strengthen them, and how might that help in all of my relationships?
- ? How might I be able to teach and coach my children about these issues, which will be so critical in their lives?

*"Connection is why we are here. We are hardwired to connect with others.*

*It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it  
there is suffering."*

Brene Brown

## **Possible Organizational Benefits**

### **Guiding Questions**

**The "Business Case."** There is a "moral case" for organizations to counter racism, just as there is for individuals and communities. There is also a "business case." Significantly increased organizational capabilities and performance are definitely possible. The moral and business cases reinforce each other in providing benefits.

The benefits of the business case can range from market opportunities and more robust human resources to higher levels of creativity and operational performance. They can include individual, group and systemic benefits.

For example, performance issues might include freeing the abilities of individuals and groups that have been withheld due to fear or anger at exclusion, a lack of a sense of ownership, or a diminished sense of relevance or value. The ability of White managers to effectively challenge and support people of color in achieving high performance can also drive organizational performance.

Along with enhancing individual performance the ability to creatively and effectively collaborate – within a group or across boundaries – can be dramatically enhanced if the distancing and separating consequences of racism can be countered. Organizational boundaries are tough enough to get past in collaborating, but they occur naturally. Racist boundaries are built in, but are not natural to organizations, and can be taken out of play. In doing so, other boundaries can lose their power to interfere with performance.

**Note.** The process of countering racism can naturally enhance the organization’s ability to gain the benefits of diverse inclusion in general – from style and culture to gender, religion, and sexual identity.

- ? How can we get past the fear of altering the status quo through the full inclusion of others and fully realizing the gifts they can bring? What might the organization be like if that energy were freed? What might we accomplish?
- ? How can we use our commitment and skill development in countering racism to unlock the potential in other areas of diversity (for the individuals and the organization)?
- ? What would it feel like to be part of an inclusive organization where everyone’s talents were fully engaged?
- ? Where might our performance be enhanced by effectively countering racism? Recruitment of the best and brightest retention, individual and group performance, innovation, etc.
- ? How might my life be enriched by colleagues of color being fully included and engaged?

- ? If we develop capabilities to counter racism within the organization, how might those capabilities be applied to performance in other areas?

## **Possible Community Benefits**

### **Guiding Questions**

**Specific Outcomes Along With Sustainable Development.** Communities can achieve specific outcomes in countering racism and, at the same time, develop as communities. Community building to counter racism can effectively build on diversity vs. being separated by it. It can increase the community’s ability to reach out; bridge boundaries; understand and accommodate different interests and styles; and establish the understanding and trust required for people to sacrifice for one another and the community.

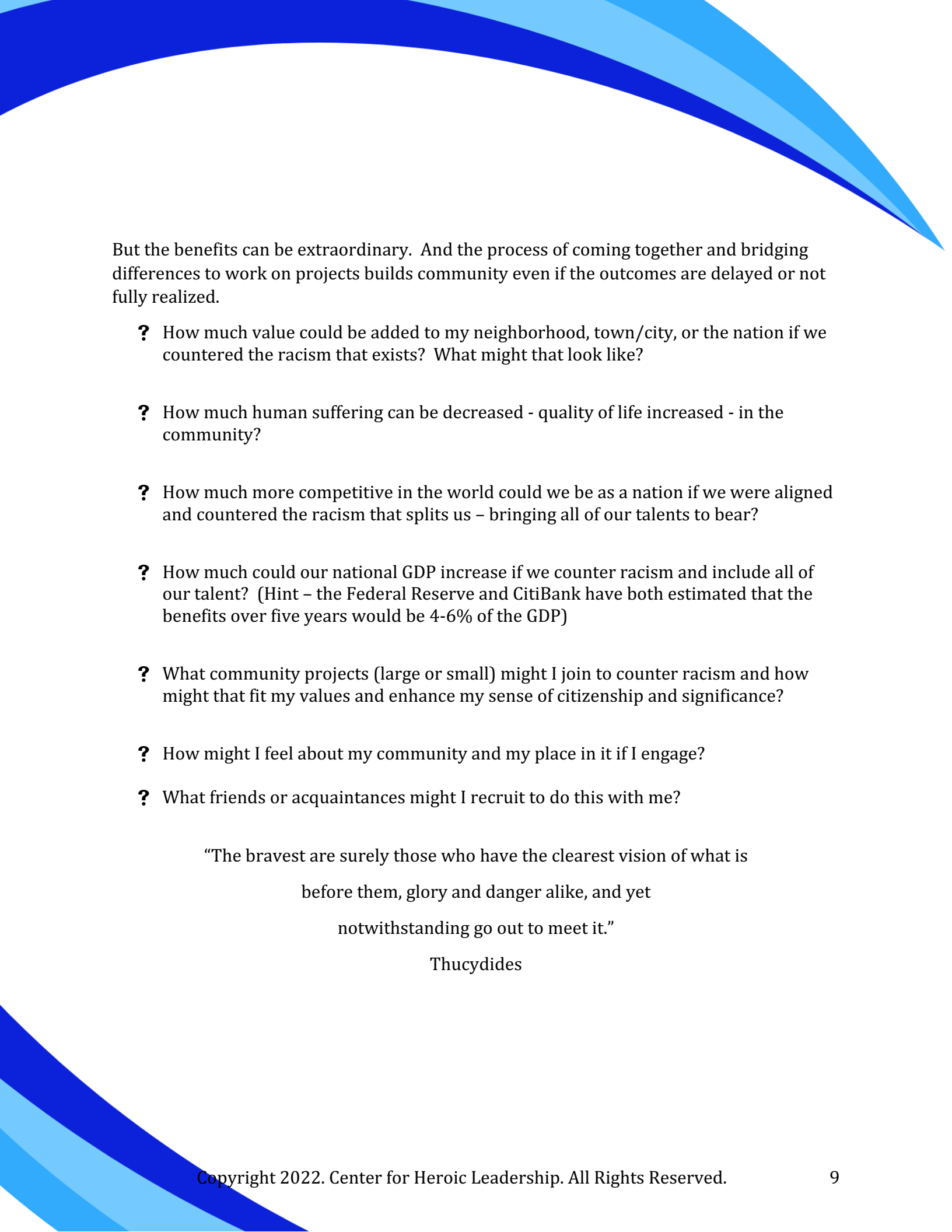
This is true whether “community” is a neighborhood, city, or nation. Critically, it means assuming that we are not dealing with a “closed pie” or “zero sum game”, a mindset that has undermined efforts to counter racism for centuries – as well as undermining community development in general.

It can also deepen, a community’s ability to assume a posture of openness and the pursuit of opportunities vs. being closed and defending against threats. And it can result in expanding and sharing power that has been locked into systems and norms

Even small-scale projects like block watches, street parties, and lobbying for specific services require a sense of inclusion and group power. Equally important are informal activities such as watching out for each others’ kids, caring for people when they are sick or injured, etc.

Larger projects can be many and varied, for instance rebuilding school systems or forms of government, protecting the environment, building equitable economic capability and wealth, or partnering to strengthen systems of protection and justice. The larger the project, the more boundaries and differences must be bridged and the more the ability to deal creatively with differences comes into play.





But the benefits can be extraordinary. And the process of coming together and bridging differences to work on projects builds community even if the outcomes are delayed or not fully realized.

- ? How much value could be added to my neighborhood, town/city, or the nation if we countered the racism that exists? What might that look like?
- ? How much human suffering can be decreased - quality of life increased - in the community?
- ? How much more competitive in the world could we be as a nation if we were aligned and countered the racism that splits us – bringing all of our talents to bear?
- ? How much could our national GDP increase if we counter racism and include all of our talent? (Hint – the Federal Reserve and CitiBank have both estimated that the benefits over five years would be 4-6% of the GDP)
- ? What community projects (large or small) might I join to counter racism and how might that fit my values and enhance my sense of citizenship and significance?
- ? How might I feel about my community and my place in it if I engage?
- ? What friends or acquaintances might I recruit to do this with me?

“The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is  
before them, glory and danger alike, and yet  
notwithstanding go out to meet it.”

Thucydides

## Two Steps for Getting to Action

*“The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps we must step up the stairs.”*

Vance Havner

Getting to action is not complicated. There are only two steps, but nothing happens without these two steps.

### **Step #1 Answer the Guiding Questions**

This is not a test, so just answer the questions that seem relevant to you – the ones you respond to strongly. In the process you will create a large part of your vision of what might be and what’s worth the journey.

### **Step #2 Choose Your Initial Actions and Act**

Just begin. Start small if desired. Start larger if ready and the opportunities are there.

*“We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee”.*

Marian Wright Edelman

## Three Steps for Staying in Action - Persevering

Staying in action can be more difficult because countering racism is a tough journey with lots of unknown, demands on energy, and frustrations – along with the large and small successes. There are three critical steps for staying in action.

### **#1 Focus on Growing and Developing**

See what happens when you act. Develop whatever skills and knowledge are required for success. Assume that you are starting with 70-90% of what you need and can develop whatever is missing as you go.

Much of the value of a heroic journey (which countering racism is) is developing as a person - becoming more whole and complete. Keeping a focus on that development helps maintain a commitment, generate energy, and maintain the ability to keep drawing on your best (and find new “bests” in the process).

### **#2 Connect with Others – Individuals, Groups and Organizations**

Countering racism can be a solo effort, it is better to connect with others. Connecting with others is important for inspiration and support, which matter short-term and long-term. It is also critical in countering racism because there is power in groups and power is required for countering racism, particularly in the case of structural or systemic racism (policies, processes, laws, cultural norms, etc.).

### **#3 “Hold the Course”**

Countering racism is not a project. Nor is it a sprint. It will take time. It will take perseverance and resilience to deal with the inevitable frustrations and setbacks encountered. It will also require ongoing learning and the ability to renew energy and commitment.

*“Life is not so much about beginnings and endings as it is about going on and on and on. It is about muddling through the middle.”*

Anna Quindlen

## **It’s About Vision and Action**

Vision and action must combine for success. Successfully countering racism requires targeted sustained action. Targeted sustained action requires a vision that is worth the possible effort, risk, and loss or sacrifice of taking significant action.



**VISION WITHOUT  
ACTION IS  
MERELY A  
DREAM. ACTION  
WITHOUT VISION  
JUST PASSES THE  
TIME. VISION  
WITH ACTION  
CAN CHANGE THE  
WORLD.**

**JOEL A. BARKER**