Letter from Vail Resorts CEO: We Are Part of the Problem

Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz sent the following email to employees on June 2.

I have been contemplating how to respond to the gravity of the events unfolding across the United States and the outrage and grief so many are feeling following not only the unjust death of George Floyd, but the continued presence of systemic racism facing the Black community. To the members of the Black community in our Vail Resorts family, we stand with you. We support you.

While our current focus as a Company has been on recovering from the challenging impacts of COVID-19, it's still essential to be aware and acknowledge what is happening around us. People of color have been hardest hit by this pandemic while continuing to struggle with the very real impacts of racism in their daily lives. This fact makes me reflect on what our Company should do about it. In some ways, these issues might feel removed from the ski industry – to some, it might not feel like our problem. But that is the problem.

Explicit and implicit racism, sexism or any kind of discrimination have absolutely no place at Vail Resorts. Personally and professionally, we need to continue to be vigilant in creating a culture of acceptance and inclusion, expand access for communities that face barriers to enjoying the mountains, and contribute to groups that are on the front lines of standing up for basic human rights, especially for those who have historically been marginalized. But we also need to realize this is not enough.

As much as I have been saddened seeing these acts of racism across our country, I am also confronted by the fact that our Company and our sport are overwhelmingly white, with incredibly low representation from people of color. Over the past few years, we have begun to raise this topic, both internally and externally – emphasizing that inclusion and diversity "must be true" at Vail Resorts, while also admitting that we have a long way to go.

Having been around our industry for close to 30 years and CEO of Vail Resorts for the past 14 years, I must also confront that I have not done enough to make progress. I see this as a personal failing. On something that is not only a moral and societal issue, but a business issue. We would be a stronger company and a better industry with more diverse viewpoints. Our sport would be more resilient with broader engagement. Even with that reality, we have not made progress. Why?

Candidly, I am not sure I fully know what the solution is. Our sport has a number of barriers, including cost, access to equipment and proximity to our resorts. But those are barriers for many people. And while we need to continue to address those barriers, we also need to dig deeper.

While I'm sure most everyone in our industry believes they are tolerant and welcoming, we need to acknowledge that there are parts of the culture of our sport that are clearly not inviting. Maybe the image we have created of the mountain lifestyle needs to be more varied. Maybe, as a fairly close-knit and passionate group of skiers and riders, our community carries a deep implicit bias. It would not be a stretch to call us a clique. Maybe it's our fear of change. While I would like to think that I have been an agent of change in this industry, a decade later I am still running a company that has very limited racial diversity.

If we genuinely want to address racial inequality, let's start by talking about what part we play in it – not just make statements about how others can do better. And let's begin by prioritizing dialogue that acknowledges we need to change. I welcome each of you to give some thought to this and encourage you to attend our next POWDER (employee only) event later this month, which will focus on both gender and racial diversity and how we can create a more inclusive culture. This is a conversation I intend to embrace with more urgency. Despite having a long way to go, this is an issue we have to make progress on. It's only then that we can begin to do our part for racial equality.

Rob Katz
Chief Executive Officer

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