Supporting Black entrepreneurs in Canada: A Q&A with Groupe 3737's Louis-Edgar Jean-François

February 27, 2025

Louis-Edgar Jean-François, CEO of national non-profit Groupe 3737, joined Ravi Latour, BLG partner and co-chair of the firm's Race Action Committee, for a conversation in honour of Black History Month 2025. The discussion touched on how Groupe 3737 is fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Black communities in Canada and how organizations can best support Black talent. BLG has been a proud supporter of Groupe 3737's initiatives since 2022 and was honoured to welcome Louis-Edgar to the firm for this conversation.

Strength in numbers

To kick off the discussion, Louis-Edgar looked back on his professional journey and shared some lessons learned early in his career.

Soon after being hired as a CPA at a large professional services firm, Louis-Edgar noticed that he was one of only three Black employees in the office, with the other two working in the mail room and copy room. This didn't prevent Louis-Edgar from finding success within the organization, but he realized his differences came with extra pressures that his white colleagues didn't face. These experiences helped inspire his mission to support Black Canadians with the tools and guidance he would have found valuable in his early career.

Recognizing systemic barriers

"Being an entrepreneur is difficult, and being a Black entrepreneur makes it harder."

- Louis-Edgar Jean-François, CEO, Groupe 3737

Louis-Edgar identified three main systemic barriers that Black entrepreneurs experience when trying to establish their businesses: lack of capital, lack of resources and lack of network.

These barriers can show themselves in various ways. A Black entrepreneur may not be included in networking events involving sports such as golf or skiing, or may not have mentors who are able to provide advice on how to manage the challenges that Black entrepreneurs face, because the mentors haven't experienced these challenges themselves.

Louis-Edgar gave the example of a Black entrepreneur whose business loan application was denied, while a white colleague with the same qualifications had their loan from the same bank approved. Groupe 3737 was able to assist the entrepreneur through an appeal, but it was a stark reminder that there isn't an even playing field when it comes to obtaining capital to create a business.

Prioritizing mental health for Black professionals

Groupe 3737 makes it a priority to acknowledge and address the mental health concerns of Black professionals, which can be different from those of their white colleagues because of the systemic and societal barriers that Black Canadians face. These barriers can add additional strain to a Black professional's mental health, which can lead to burnout or other serious mental health concerns. As a result, Groupe 3737 provides mental health workshops for the entrepreneurs they support and encourages other organizations to do the same.

Hiring and retaining diverse talent

The Black community makes up 5 per cent of the Canadian population, yet only half a per cent of decision makers in organizations are Black.

While improvements are being seen in the representation of Black professionals at all levels in Canadian organizations, it's important to recognize that Black talent still needs support, starting with having diverse representation in the hiring process.

As EDI structures are being eliminated at many organizations in the U.S., Louis-Edgar emphasized how important it is that Canadian organizations do not follow suit. Maintaining a commitment to diversity and inclusion for all employees will help to keep them from leaving and taking their knowledge and skills to another organization. Nurturing talent from the early stages can encourage Black talent to remain at an organization, climbing the ranks until they are in senior decision-making roles.

Groupe 3737 is a national non-profit founded in 2012 and based in Montréal, with 12 offices across Canada. Its mission is to create and develop more businesses, organizations, jobs and wealth in Canada through the projects of ethnoculturally diverse individuals, by pooling our professional expertise, that of our partners and our networks to achieve a significant economic and social impact. To learn more about Groupe 3737 and support its work, visit the Groupe 3737 website.

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