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Consulting agency Compass Collective aims to guide travel brands toward positive change

By Jill Menze (/Jill-Menze) | February 26, 2021

For many travel professionals, the year 2020 brought about significant changes in the way they and their brands conduct and think about business.

For luxury travel designer Courtnie Nichols, she used the downtime she suddenly had due to COVID-19 to both rethink her luxury business as well as how she could help the travel industry become more diverse and inclusive.

With weddings on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, Florida-based Nichols looked to expand beyond her destination-wedding planning agency **TravelBash** (<https://www.travel-bash.com/>), which she founded in 2017, and go after the affluent millennial market.

To that end she launched **TRVLB (<https://www.trvlclub.com/>)**, a luxury travel design studio that specializes in immersive, exclusive and bespoke experiences for its members.

She also began developing the **Compass Collective (<https://www.compass-collective.com/>)**, a consulting agency to help travel brands serve a more diverse group of travelers through their tourism marketing efforts and staff training.

Launched in mid-January, the Compass Collective provides team workshops and one-on-one consulting as well as keynotes, town halls and panel discussions. Areas of focus include tourism marketing campaign development, representation and organization audits and diverse travel and influencer marketing.

Nichols says the idea for an organization like the Compass Collective was percolating before the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 ignited calls for racial equality around the globe. But the momentum the Black Lives Matter movement gained last summer caused Nichols to put her ideas into action.

"I was at a point where I had all these things to say, and all these opinions, and didn't really know how to express them," Nichols says, noting that performative measures such as posting a **black square on Instagram (<https://www.phocuswire.com/black-travel-alliance-campaign-reveals-lack-of-diversity-in-travel-industry>)** weren't making a real impact.

Nichols, whose father was the first Black mayor of Jonesborough, Tennessee, and whose grandfather was the first Black alderman in the town, says her background helped instill in her a desire to make a change in the world. "I want to work with brands that want to do better, want to be better and not just put up the black squares but really advocate for a diverse marketplace," she says.

"If you're a travel brand and don't know how to attract [Black travelers and people of color], here are some strategies. Do you need to be paired with influencers of color? Here are some options," she says of some of the services the Compass Collective provides to clients.

"This is my way to give back. I'm not a politician, but in this space, I feel I'm better equipped than most because of my experience in the travel industry and me being a woman of color."

Year-round commitment

Nichols emphasizes that enacting positive change takes time – "it's a process" – and travel brands need to consider how deeply rooted inequalities might be within their organizations.

"Thinking, 'We'll just change the picture on this marketing campaign,' or, 'We'll just hire a Black person to do diversity and inclusion' ... it's not that simple. It's not that black or white," she says.

Companies should start by examining the makeup of the C-suite and board and consider working with consultants that specialize in diversity and inclusion.

They should also consider the makeup of the travelers they ultimately serve. While February is Black History Month in the United States - a month in which Black history should be celebrated, Nichols says – **[travel brands need to embrace the Black community in an authentic way all year long](https://www.phocuswire.com/travel-brands-need-recognize-black-travelers-all-year-long?ctxp=)** (<https://www.phocuswire.com/travel-brands-need-recognize-black-travelers-all-year-long?ctxp=>).

“[Black consumers] are big on authenticity and we can see through the phony. We know how to be phony because we’ve had to do it to survive.”

She adds that more and more people of all backgrounds are becoming choosier about how and where they spend their money.

“I want people to know that travel is changing, and if [brands] don’t change, I’m afraid they will not be able to keep up,” Nichols says.

“At the end of the day, I’m not going to get emotional and say, ‘It’s the right thing to do.’ It’s going to affect your bottom line.”

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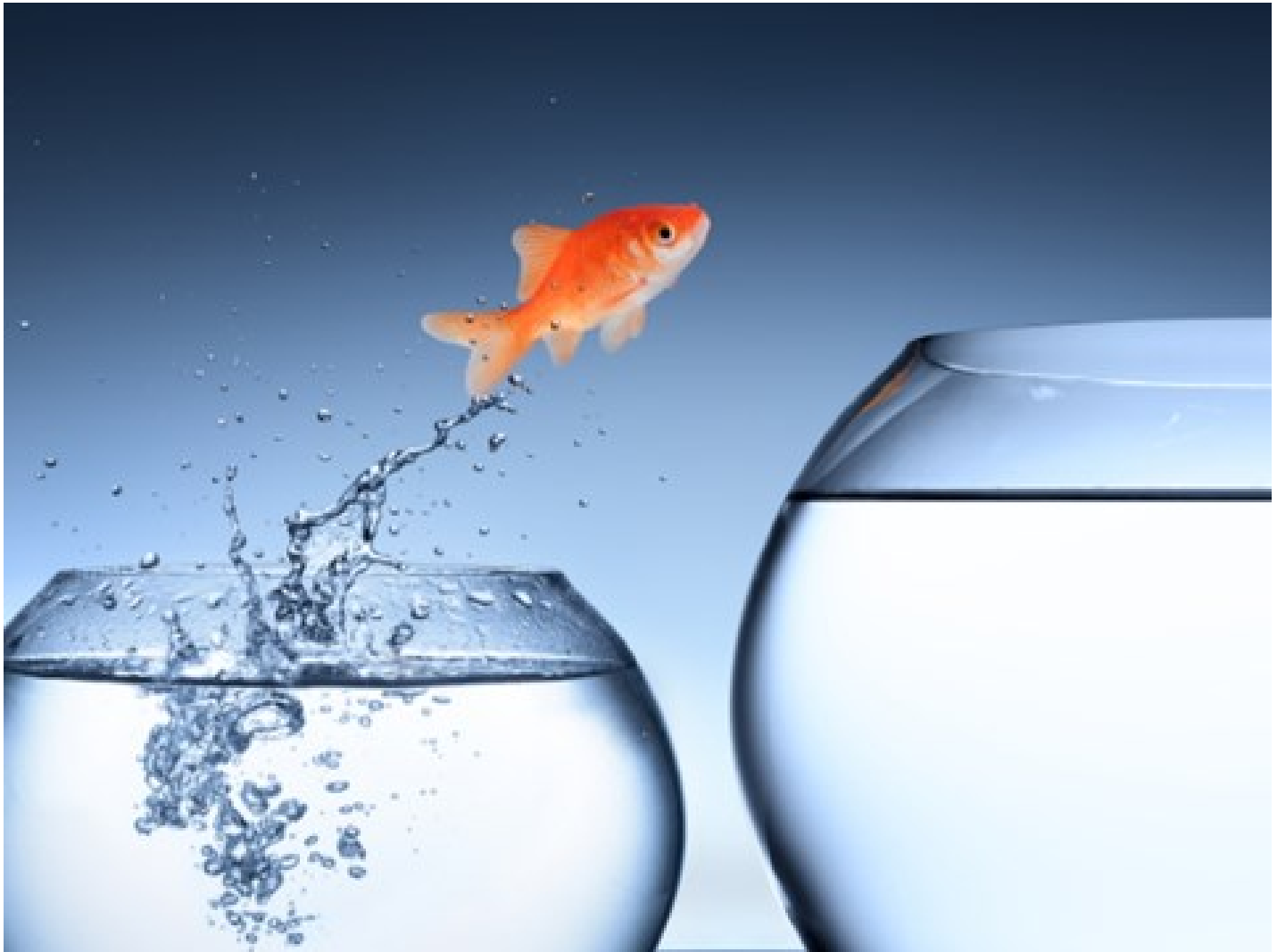
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