

## **Race and Equality**

*'People are different'*

### **Tessy Mbofung and Joan Simons:**

TESSY MBOFUNG: One of my colleagues during Black History Month sent me a message which touched me deeply. So, I shared the Black History Month calendar or the events. The events on that day, I shared it and she wrote a long message explaining about how. So, you could see genuine interest, really genuine interest in understanding diversity. And I was so touched.

And it's a colleague that I already have a lot of respect for, but that even shot it to the top because this is somebody that I obviously accommodate. Not accommodate because that could be taken wrongly. I have a lot of respect for. And I obviously have respect for everyone. But just to know that she wants to understand my race, my background, where I come from, it means a lot to me. So that's one of them.

Another thing which I'm going to mention and stop talking for a minute is language barrier. Language barrier is one of the challenges that some of us, not everybody, some of us encounter. So, I did mention earlier that I come from Cameroon, which is French and English, 80% French, 20% English.

So, I do face challenge. I'm sure some other people face these challenges as well, where sometimes you think in a different language. You're thinking of something that you have to translate it. You need to think of how you communicate it, how you articulate it. And I saw that even in school when I was studying human resources in the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen and that's where I graduated with the master's back in 2007.

And I was still fresh in the country. It was a challenge to me because even in class when you have presentations, people speak differently, and you just have to make sure that you're talking in a way. Not that I was frightened or anything, you just need to make sure that you articulate your message in a way that people understand you.

I'm sure there are some people here listening to me who would be thinking, she speaks very fast. And that's true, I speak very fast. My accent is different. But those are the things we need to understand about people. We need to understand that these people are different and not judge them, not laugh at them or mimic them for whatever because it just doesn't really help in working relationship.

And I see that happening at the OU. It happens and it's not just the OU. It happens in other places. But Tessy is a very confident girl. Things like that don't put me down, but the reason why I'm mentioning this is because other people might be struggling with it.

English is not a language that you're born and just you start speaking. There's a lot we have to do in trying to make sure that we come across in the right way. I don't know if I've said enough there. But if I have to talk about things like this, I'll talk forever.

JOAN SIMONS: Tessy, thank you. I just wanted to go back to what you described as the burden that your people from your country are often living with. And that's a very, very profound burden. And all I can say is I'm sorry that there's a lack of appreciation of the burden that you're carrying, and I think discussions like today are really helpful to enlighten colleagues, myself, other people so that we are more understanding.

And I think it goes back to your earlier point about the real need for increased awareness, and in light of increased awareness, increased respect. And you're right, there are differences. But I think if we respected our differences and understood the different burdens that people have, we probably could push forward more quickly towards equality.

Thank you for your time today, Tessy. That's been incredibly helpful. I very much respect you sharing with us today because it is enlightening, and it will help move things forward. Thank you.

TESSY MBOFUNG: Thank you very much. Thank you, Joan.