

Race and Equality

The need for more awareness of race

Tessy Mbofung and Joan Simons:

JOAN SIMONS: Another aspect we mentioned previously was the issue of the unfair treatment of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic people. And feeling undervalued. Would you be able to explain a little bit more about that?

TESSY MBOFUNG: So now in what I've experienced in the corporate world-- so I'll bring this to the corporate world. And not just the open university, but I'll bring it to the corporate world. Black and Asian minority people sometimes feel-- not feel. They are sometimes treated unfairly and undervalued. Consciously or unconsciously, it happens. It does happen, and I've experienced it myself.

So, I think it can happen in many ways. Well, I'll just give realistic examples. You can have a line manager who, I mean, has a Black or brown-skinned or an Asian in their team. And some of them, because they are not aware and perhaps not knowing how to relate with people, they feel more comfortable, they talk freely, they laugh more openly with white colleagues. And the Black colleagues, perhaps, are being left-- or they are more careful when they deal with them.

That already makes the Black colleague feel left out. So, there's a lot to do on awareness. And I think that's the reason, one thing which, when we had the Black History celebration a couple of weeks ago and were talking about making sure that we need to build a culture where people will have to feel free to talk about racism, I was faced with that. Because that's the only way we'll be able to eradicate all of these.

A manager should not feel that they cannot interact freely with somebody who comes from a different race, a different background because they are not from that same background-- because they don't know how it's going to be taken. If you do a little bit of assignment to understand the diversity, to understand the race, and to talk freely about this race matters, then you'll be able to interact freely with people.

And so that is-- what I'm trying to say is that that's one of the things that brings some of these inequalities. Then you have the obvious ones sometimes where-- you have the obvious ones where you walk into a room of maybe senior managers or a room of people in the leadership team, and you don't have one single Black or brown-skinned person. You don't have a single person with obvious disability. Sometimes people have disabilities that you cannot see. But sometimes it can be very-- it's very prominent. It shows.

You walk into a room-- the same kind of people. But going back to Black and Asian minority, they do suffer those inequalities. Sometimes they need to push, fight harder, push themselves forward before they get to certain levels. And it just shouldn't be like that. The world is a very good place to live in. And we just need to be nice and kind to each other. Reward people promote people for their capabilities, their abilities, and not because of their skin colour.

JOAN SIMONS: I totally agree. Thank you, Tessy.