

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: How little things can make a big difference

By Nisha Rajamani

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Feeling safe, welcome and free to be yourself is something everyone in the workplace deserves. And even simple things, such as learning how to pronounce someone's name correctly, can have a big impact.

Reena Gupta (SBS) wrote recently about the pressures on a new generation of Indian parents who are influenced by an "impulse to soften ethnic names to make them palatable" to the anglo-saxon majority. This is likely applicable across many cultural backgrounds.

I was one of only two Indian kids at my primary school in Adelaide and experienced racism as many did and continue to. And as an adult, I have constantly modified my individuality in order to assimilate. It takes significant emotional effort to avoid defaulting to 'fit in' mode, even in a work context. In my early 20s when I started in media, I modelled my accent on Julia Gillard as I thought this was the best representation of 'true blue'. As I rolled this out to old school media reps, I often felt that I had won by tricking them into thinking I was the same as them.

It only dawned on me many years later that I had also slowly tricked myself out of my cultural heritage.

A desire to see everyone in our industry being able to bring their true selves to work, regardless of age, parental status, cultural background, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, is what motivates me to advocate for equality and inclusion. I never want anyone to feel as though their identity compromises their chances of being seen or having their output respected.



As an industry, our primary work is in connecting consumers and brands. If WE are not diverse, respectful and inclusive, our output cannot sufficiently recognise these elements in consumers.

When a company really listens and chooses to take an inclusive and flexible approach to an individual's background and personal circumstances, everyone wins – something I have experienced personally. The flexible working arrangement facilitated for me by my manager, team and dentsu is an example of a problem shared and solved together – to support a part-time working parent with an equitable and inclusive solution.

My part-time, three-day-a-week contract was based on the traditional 9am-5.30pm model. With two young children, I was dependent on a nanny to manage after-school pickups and evening routines. However, when my nanny regularly cancelled, my home routines fell apart – as did my work week.

The stress of cancelling meetings at the last minute to pick up children and then working into the night was carried not just by me, but was a shared burden across our close-knit team. So, we redefined my flexible working week by stretching three long days, across four shorter days 9am-3pm so I could prioritise my family. It was not just the flexibility to modify my working hours, but other aspects that made it clear that the organisation was behind me. The message came from the immediacy and openness in how this was implemented by both Carat and dentsu, the non-apologetic comms to clients and the clear and respectful access boundaries, all of which demonstrated that I was a valued team member.



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