

Talking Inclusion With...

Series 1 – Podcast 7: Anti-Racism in the UK

Talking Inclusion With... Steven Copsey

Steven Hello and welcome to Inclusive Employers podcast 'Talking Inclusion with'.

I'm Steven Copsey, and today we're going to be talking about Anti-Racism.

Why employers need to act and how they can do it successfully and meaningfully.

Before I introduce our guests, in case you don't know us, we're Inclusive Employers, and we support employers to make inclusion an everyday reality. Our mission is to make every workplace an inclusive employer, where every colleague values differences, and can contribute their skills and experiences fully to their organisation. These podcasts are for anyone and everyone who has an interest in inclusion and diversity. In our podcast, we share life stories and experiences, learn about best practice, and hear practical advice from our guests, as well as Inclusive Employers own inclusion and diversity experts.

Today I'm joined by two brilliant guests, Baron Anyangwe, who is head of finance for Marks and Spencer – Hi Baron

Baron Hi, Good morning.

Steven And Sandy Sohal, Director of Homeowner Services at the Guinness Partnership, and who is also currently working with Inclusive Employers on a project on anti-racism. Hi, Sandy.

Sandy Hi, Steven.

Steven So both of my guests today are going to share their own experiences, we're going to look at how much anti-racism progress has been made, and why we still need to talk about racism, and anti-racism.

Of course, we're going to hear real practical advice for employers, how to build an anti-racist culture in your organisation. And think about where we've seen best practice and our Inclusive Employers top tips.

So we're going to start by talking about how it feels to be professional from an ethnic minority group in the UK today. And why we are still talking about this in 2021.

So Baron, let's start with you. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your own experiences? As a black man, have you experienced racism in the UK?

Baron Y'know it's really interesting, Steven, the industries I've worked in, I've often either been one of like, the very few black people, or at least someone from a diverse background in the office, or the only one. And I've worked in, you know, large accounting firms to investment trading companies, to public sector companies.

And the one thing I've always wondered is, you know, in my course, I went to University of Surrey, I did mechanical engineering and business management in my course, there were multiple people from diverse

backgrounds. One thing I keep coming back to is in the industries that I've worked in, I've just always been surprised at how few they've been, and there's been, you know, talks of whether it's, we don't have enough people coming through the talent pool from university interested in the subjects. But I'm not sure that that's the case.

So, you know, partly, I do wonder, when when we look at employees, I wonder about recruitment, and wonder about, you know, discussions on culture fits and those practices that often discriminates, intentionally or unintentionally against a certain group of people. And then I look at other industries that you look at the tech industry, and you see actually, it more often, that's a lot more diverse than other industries. So you've got people from Western Asian backgrounds, you've got folks from you know, Africa, you've got folks from the west. And and I'm just, I'm always curious and wise, at least from my experience, and in the industries have been in the UK, why they've been so few people from diverse backgrounds.

Sonia

I think that's a really interesting point Baron. So going back to what you were saying about, particularly agents working in tech, I wonder if that's partly because of a stereotype. I think you tend to find fewer Asian people in other industry sectors. And I think those people probably find it harder to break through in those sectors, for example, I guess, the arts, and I think it's more complex than that. I think there is some cultural stuff going on also around you must get a job that pays you well, and all that sort of thing. What do you think about that?

Baron

It's true. And often it's a whole range of factors from the communities in which people are brought up where, you know, growing up, everyone's like, well, you're either a doctor or a lawyer, or you're an engineer. And I know certainly in the Asian community, that is a huge push towards that. I mean, interesting, you look at the healthcare sector, and again, very diverse in terms of the number of nurses from diverse background, but

then when you start going up senior leadership, you know, you start to see only, you know, very few, limited diversity and as you as you opt in your leadership, we see that in retail as well. Lots of store assistants, You know, shelf stackers are from diverse backgrounds, you go up the chain to store managers to, head office directors, and all of that diversity seems to evaporate. So, partly, you wonder to what extent so, you know, some industries can't say we don't have a problem with diversity. But then actually, when you measure that across well, are you equally as diverse and inclusive across your organization's hierarchy? You see, you tend to see less of that the higher up you go.

Sandy I agree. And I think you see that in every industry sector, pretty much certainly in this country, and probably internationally to an extent. And it's something I've seen in every industry I've worked in also.

Steven Sandy - Speaking about racism, speaking about industry, from a personal perspective, is this something that you've had to deal with? Whether that's in the workplace, whether that is, in your personal life? Have you experienced any racism from a personal perspective?

Sandy So it's a it's an interesting question, and one that I've been reflecting on quite a lot this week, I don't think I have experienced a massive amount of overt racism, so name calling and violence and stuff like that, and I think if I'm honest, a large chunk of that is because of my social class background. Which kind of has meant that the circles I've mixed in have been less kind of overtly racist.

But then I was reflecting back to some of the experiences kind of growing up that I've had, and, and stuff like I was talking to my dad about this morning, actually, how he'd had to sit us down when we were really young and have conversations about what to do if people called us names at school. You know, and I had a conversation with a friend of mine recently

around feeling uncomfortable that her child was being taught about racism, and I was like, but if the children had been when I was young, then I wouldn't have had to have that conversation with my dad that I did not understand at all, you know, I had no concept at the age of seven or eight of what he was talking about, you know, and the microaggressions, as well, both in my personal life and in the workplace.

Also, I think particularly Baron knows me really well. I am not what you would consider to be a stereotypical Indian girl, and people I've noticed really kind of do a bit of a double take when they realised that I'm not somebody who's just going to do what I'm told. And I do have things to say, and I will say them, and I think that's been quite a bit of an awakening for quite a lot of people, both personally, and in my work life.

Baron

Yeah, I often tend to notice that you, depending on the industry working, you see less overt racism in some, but certainly a lot more micro aggression. You know, when I when I worked as a trader, everything was quite in your face. So you know, racism could well be right in your face. And, and that was always the accepted norm, because everyone was almost straight up about how they felt about everything.

Whilst in other industries, folks have been a bit more coy and not as forthcoming on their true thoughts, but you tend to get that in through microaggression. So either in terms of feedback you might get on, you know, you don't particularly react well to criticism, and, and it could well be that actually, that the way, you know, I've been particularly criticised in the past comes across as quite patronising compared to how my colleagues are given feedback, or you're, deemed to be loud and aggressive. And then when you're not loud and aggressive, you're deemed to be not contributing enough.

Or, you know, you get lots of comments on, you know, from where you're from, or your background. And, and it's fine for me, because, you know, I'm originally from Cameroon, I spent the first half of my life, predominantly in Africa. So interestingly I am, racism is something I only felt coming to the UK because where I grew up, I mean, the Blacks are the majority, if anything, and there was a lot more racism towards non Blacks, Asians, particularly when I went to high school in Kenya, there was quite a lot of racism towards Indians. But I never felt racism until coming to the UK.

And that's when you start to think, you know, in my head, I'll say, well, everything's, and I'd grown up thinking, any career, any job, any opportunity was possible. And it's only when you come here, then you start to realise, well, actually, I mean, it's not just about race, there's also a lot of issues about class. You know, certain privileges, and you tend to find a very different playing field here, more around who you know, what connections you have, what university you may have gone to, the education you have, and so you tend to find you're either accepted in certain circles based on that background, or you tend to get the the microaggression in terms of why you may not understand this because you're not from here.

Steven

In our recent survey, we found that race and ethnicity was on the inclusion and diversity agenda for 85% of respondents.

Sandy, you're currently working with Inclusive Employers on a specific anti racism project. So can you give us a few of your thoughts on why you think this topic is still such an important one? And tell us a bit about the project itself?

Sandy

Sure. So starting with Why think anti racism is still such an important topic? I'm going to be quite blunt, I think and say, because we're still a pretty racist country. And I think that we in the UK, I wrote about this quite

recently in a blog post, actually, I think that we haven't yet had a proper reckoning with ourselves as a society.

I think every conversation I've heard in the last year has started off with following the murder of George Floyd, usually something a bit more palatable, shall we say? Which sub-consciously, or consciously gives us the opportunity to point the finger elsewhere, shall we say, and I don't see how you can honestly say that we're reckoning with racism, if we're always talking about something that happens over there in America, the evidence is there, isn't it, we are not seeing representation at senior levels in any of our industry sectors in this country, we are not seeing levels of attainment where they could be or should be.

There's been a lot of talk about social class. And I do think social classes very closely and intertwined here, particularly more than anywhere else, probably. But equally, if you look into the numbers, the demographics that are failing at school are actually not the white kids that are doing the worse, there is a couple of demographics right at the bottom of that table, that are really doing poorly, and that there are things that we need to look at in terms of education.

But I also think there's something out there about opportunity. And going back to what Baron said, right, the beginning of this conversation around hiring for culture, add rather than for culture fit, you know, removing bias from processes.

You know, we've seen so many studies now where CVs are going into employers, and based on names, people are not getting interviews, is that really changing? You know, even down to conversations about coaching, I've had people say to me, Well, this is how I deal with this issue. This is how I behave when this happens in the workplace. And I say, if I behaved how you behave as a straight white male, I would nowhere near get the

same reaction that you get when you behave in that way. So that advice to me is really not helpful.

So I think there's a lot of work that we still need to do, and I think there's a lot of reckoning that we still need to do, and, and kind of introspection in some ways. And the reality is it takes work, I think it's the sort of work that people can very easily pretend they've done if they haven't done it, and because, you know, nobody's marking your homework, and, you know, you haven't physically produced something for people to look at. You know, and it's a complex issue, isn't it?

I think there is a view in this country, probably with a minority as well, that anti racism is a deficit model. So by giving other people opportunities, I'm taking away something from myself than people who look like me, which is evidently not true. I think in any organisation, if you want to do well, and succeed and perform really highly, you need to be looking at a full talent pool, not recruiting from a homogenous talent pool, because actually, then you are just the best of this small group, you're not the best of everybody.

And in terms of the work I'm doing with Inclusive Employers, I'm actually building an anti racism toolkit. And the purpose of that is to help organisations to embed anti racist cultures into their businesses, which is, you know, very much easier said than done. But one of the things I've noticed was the there is a wheel out there, lots of organisations really want to do this and do it properly. And there's a lot of information out there, but actually, there's not that much that's really practical.

So what can I do? And how can I do it in my organisation? How can I get people on board? How do we start having this conversation? Because actually, I think the reason anti racism as a subject matter is so taboo is because we don't talk about it enough. And if we don't talk about it, everyone's very uncomfortable. But the more that we talk about it, the

more comfortable we get. It's like anything. And it's a real shame. I think that we're so comfortable, and I'm very much generalising so comfortable talking about gender, or sexuality, or whatever that might be, but we're certainly more comfortable talking about those subjects in our organisations compared to race and racism.

Baron

I'm just quite, I'm quite excited by your projects. And it's you know, what, it's quite interesting, because I wonder for the 15% that you mentioned that don't have the agenda. I'm wondering if it's from not knowing what they should be doing, in which case, you know, there's something like this to get help that 15%, does it also help the 85% know they're on the right track?

So I think that's quite an exciting project, and it's something tangible for people to use and to comment on and to say, well, you know, this worked for us, that didn't work. Same things happened, it's interesting, you talk about saving, it's, you know, what, why are we still talking about this now, and actually, if you want to be cynical about this, you could say, interestingly, now, the economics actually stack up. So you know, when you look at the the actions of millennials, Gen Z, who are voting with their feet, and going, 'we have certain values that we want to see reflected in, in the companies that we engage with, that we purchase from, and if they don't, then we will move', you're now starting to see companies taking that customer pool very seriously going, Well, we actually have to do something because economically, we can't, our competitors are and we can't afford not to.

So the economic stackup, the same as you know that the issues on on mental health being on the agenda were non existent for a long while, until the economics stacked up, but I don't think you'll find a company now that says, give me the business case for having a mental health programme, because that would just be so, so naive and blind to the actual reality. So

the economics are stacking up. So folks know they have to do something. The debate is to what extent and when you have things like the latest race report saying we don't really have a problem, that then starts to solidify in people's minds? Well, actually, what are we trying to solve? Because the government itself doesn't think there's a problem. Personally, I mean, I think there's a problem, do we have to do so much? Oh, we have to do, can we just do a small token amount to make sure that our customers are happy?

So you have these conflicting reports, conflicting insights, that mean, IT companies are quite torn between 'What are we really doing and why' . And I think you'll find the 85% doing something, that the scale of what they're doing probably varies significantly, some are much more activist about it, some are less so, some are engaging external consultants, some are relying on their own employees to provide everything, and some are stuck with wanting to do something, but not sure what to do. In which case, things like the toolkit would help.

So there's such a huge range of organisations, and where they are that journey. But, you know, should we still be talking about race now, I mean, it's only 60 years, since, you know, we, the UK got rid of its colonies, or the colonies got independence. So colonialism was only stopped a short while ago, I mean, my parents still vividly remember growing up in the colonial nation, and you know, when you look at all the other strides that have been made, it's not a long time. And I know, we feel impatient now that change hasn't come. But realistically, it's not been a long time, the folks who lived in a time, which was heavily segregated, heavily discriminatory, are still around. And they're thinking and then the environment that they've been in their way of what they've passed on to the generation after them, that's still prevailing.

So to first expect change to have come, or to come so rapidly, we're kidding ourselves. Because actually, that there's such a huge behavioural shift that is required, it's probably going to take another couple of generations. But that will only happen as much as well, as long as we are pushing the boundaries and trying to get that change happening quicker. Otherwise, this will take another 60 years, and we'll still be talking about it.

And whilst when you look at way back in the 60s with Kennedy's, you know, we choose the moon. And if, you know, we now have a situation where we will have the first tourist in space this July, and yet we haven't solved issues on inclusion, and discriminant discrimination. It's surprising where when we put our focus on certain elements, change happens and solutions are found. It just so happens, not everyone believes there's an issue. Not everyone believes it's their duty to find a solution. And not everyone believes that solving it would benefit them.

And so you end up having some people pushing for change really hard. Others, you know, meeting barriers, and therefore change is slow. And until we are all aligned on this being an issue, an issue that needs to be solved. But an issue that if solved, actually benefits everyone, then we will be in it'll take another 60 years, and we'll probably still be talking about anti discriminatory practices in businesses.

Steven

So we've talked about your own experiences and why we're talking about racism.

And we're now going to talk about progress. We've mentioned George Floyd's murder, there's the Oprah interview with Harry and Megan, the recent report from the Commission on race and ethnic disparities, which have all been catalysts for these conversations about anti racism. But how much actual progress has there been?

Sandy, how do you feel these events have had an impact on workplace inclusion? Do we think bringing anti racism into our conversations has meant that we've started to see more progress in workplaces, and in that wider societal perspective,

Sandy

I think for me, if I'm honest, I think it wasn't just about George Floyd's murder, I think there was quite a few things that happened at the same time that collectively kind of got everybody's attention.

So I think there was, you know, the murder of Breonna Taylor, there was Amy Cooper, in Central Park, and, you know, various other incidents that had happened. But I also think, that all of us were sitting at home with nothing to do, but look at this, and listen about this, you know, because we were in a pandemic, you know, the world was, I think, pretty much the whole world was in lockdown. And so we weren't going about our usual business, we had the time to see what was going on, and to really start thinking about it. I think if we hadn't been in a pandemic, I'm not sure we'd be in the place we are now. if I'm completely honest, in terms of the conversations that happened last year, and all of that, but we are finally having open conversations,

I cannot, you know, I am nearly 40, and I cannot think of a moment in my lifetime, where conversations happened that didn't only include black and brown people. You know, for me, last year was the first time, white people came to the table and genuinely wanted to understand, felt the injustice that we all feel every day, and wanted to fix it. For me, I felt quite hopeful about that. I don't know what you think, Baron. But honestly, I cannot remember another time in my life where that has been the case.

Baron

I have a slightly different take. I mean, I know the pandemic helped in bringing out of people just that the immense frustration they've been feeling.

I actually think that change has happened, because it's now starting to be televised, you know, the same things that we've seen with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, that has been happening for decades. It just so happens, it's the police's word against any witness if they've if they've ever been any. Now, what we're seeing is, everyone is a journalist with their mobile phone, and we ended up in a situation where we watched for eight minutes and 46 seconds, someone slowly dying in front of our eyes, the sense of helplessness that everyone would have felt, watching that, including the person videoing that, I think has moved people to a point where, you know, it's people have heard about, you know, police brutality and the rest, but haven't really felt it. watching that video, and then others like it has really been has made it real.

Sandy

I think the media and the pandemic are definitely things that have kind of coincided to create the attention. What I found quite interesting, is that the attention is invariably on America. So we hear a lot of what's happening in America, we hear a lot about those things, but you know, around the same time that we saw the video coming out about George Floyd's murder there was that there was a video in Lewisham, which is very close to where I live, of a couple of people being dragged out of a car by police, you know, and that didn't really get any mainstream traction in the media, to be honest. And I watched it, and it was pretty distressing, and these are not one offs, these things happen here. Relatively regularly. I honestly think the only difference is that our police are generally not armed. You know, and so, but that goes back to the point it circles back to the point I was making earlier about, have we still had a reckoning in this country, because everything we talk about is America based, and we all clutch our pearls over what's happening in America without really putting the focus on things that have happened here.

So I read a newspaper article about an Asian police officer who'd gone home to find a swastika painted on his house, that was done by a police officer, it's done by one of his colleagues.

You know, there is the incident of the young black man who died in police custody in Cardiff.

Not so long ago, there was the two young black sisters who were found murdered last year, and did not receive the same attention as there ever are, actually. And in fact, the police didn't do a search it was in fact, I think one of their boyfriends that found them. But actually, now there's an investigation or there has been an investigation because those officers apparently took selfies with the bodies and shared them with civilians.

So there are so many incidents that happen in this country that we completely gloss over for our own comfort in my opinion, and actually, I find it quite difficult though we're not having those conversations here about ourselves.]

Steven

Yeah, I think you're right. I mean, you look at the Stephen Lawrence family who've been campaigning for, for decades on changes, and you just look at, you know, every other family who's gone through, either whether it's police brutality or some strife, and are not getting the level of, of attention or the level of justice that they need.

It's disheartening, it's particularly disheartening, when they remind someone saying that we have an issue, we're just trying to figure out how we solve it. And what we do is disheartening, when you then get a reach report saying we don't have an issue, and you go, Well, how are these instances all going? You know, how do we explain all of these instances, and I think we can ourselves think, the problem isn't surveillance in the UK, because it's worse elsewhere.

It's also we're comparing, we go look at France, they've got the agreement, they're quite overtly racist to North Africans, and the rest are, you know, look at the US they shoot everyone, we don't have it so bad in the UK, you should be happy. But that is minimising the pain felt by the groups of people who are experiencing this, and who are worried for the safety, or worried that they won't get the justice they need. And every time we say there isn't much of an issue, it's almost it's this constant word back of, you know, what you're saying isn't true. And what you're experiencing isn't true, because we didn't have much of an issue. So we don't know why you're complaining. And I find that quite disheartening.

You know, no one would do that to their child, if your child came and said, I've got a particular problem, you try and understand, you wouldn't just shut them down. And it looks like for a specific group of people, we're quite happy to say 'prove that there is an issue'. You know, the onus is on them to prove there's an issue, because you're not experiencing it, and that is, that is really painful. It's painful for the person having to validate that the fear that they're experiencing is real, and they may not even understand why they have that fear, I can walk down the street, and still feel slightly nervous if a police officer walks by us, and I remember mentioning this to a colleague of mine, who was who was part of his neighbourhood watch, and he said, 'Well, actually you shouldn't be worried, if you've done nothing, and you're not guilty of anything, you should never be worried', and again, just almost quite surprising for someone who was very senior, it was just mind boggling and baffling that you understand so little of what others are going through. For you to feel that you can say you shouldn't be worried if you're not guilty of anything, you shouldn't be nervous.

When we have generations of people who've, for one reason or another been agressed by the police. I lived near someone, where we lived near Canary Wharf, he's from a Pakistani background, every time he walked to

the train, this is after 2008, every time he walked to the tube station, this is right after we'd had September 11, those heightened security worries everywhere. Every time he walked in the tube station, he got stopped by a police officer to say 'Oh, it's part of the enhanced random stop and search act' before the act. We're just stopping and searching you, and that happened once, that happened twice. On another day, the third time he went to the police, he said to his friend about this police officer is going to stop me again and see a random stop and search. And the police lady did the random stop and search and he said 'you know you've been stopping me for the last two weeks, right? It's me and you're insulting me'. And she continued with the search. And afterwards she said, 'I guess we'll see you next week'. And again, almost like quite playfully, was fine. Maybe she meant it as a joke. But that is the experience of someone who through no fault of his own, has been technically harassed, on the on the legal powers that the police have been given, technically discriminated on compared to others, in a way that he now feels uncomfortable walking in public with a police officer, for them for us to then say 'well actually, you shouldn't feel worried if you do nothing, if you're not guilty of anything'.

And I think, you know, this minimising of the experiences of people of colour or those who have had some injustice is really the greatest pain, because there's one thing you know, there's one thing going through there's another thing being told that what you're going through isn't real and is imagined.

Sandy

Totally agree. It's interesting, isn't it? Because you just reminded me, after we had 7/7, and it was quite hot that summer, and I remember directly after 7/7, nobody would sit next to me on the tube for about a week, which I'm not going to moan about because I used to get the bank branch of the Northern line, which was disgustingly busy all the time. So I was like, I'm cool. But interestingly, there was one of the mornings because they were

obviously doing random in inverted commas searches of people as they got off the train and went down to the tube.

And, there was one morning and I don't know what was what I was doing, but for some reason, in the height of summer, I had a coat on, & a weekend back, I must have been going somewhere. But it was very warm that day. And there was an Asian chap in front of me who was wearing a very thin linen shirt, and he was stopped and I wasn't and I was like, there's clearly no way that this man in front of me has got anything on him that you cannot see. But here I am, with my bag and my coat looking particularly suspicious because it's so bloomin hot outside, but I am just waved through. And the contrast is so stark.

And it's little things, isn't it? Like, I remember my dad coming down to visit and we'd gone out for dinner because he used to come down for conferences every so often. And we'd go out for dinner and, and he was going for the last train out of Kings Cross. And my dad has a turban and a big beard because we are Sikh, and he also had his little rucksack on. And he started running for the train, and I remember the fear I felt and I was like, 'can you just stop running, please, I don't care if you miss your train, and you have to stay over here - I just can't have you running with these twenty Police over here that, you know, were heavily armed because we're in a railway station, and I'm not sure that that many people who are not of colour have experienced that fear.

Steven

Thinking about that wider societal discussion, the thinking about the real, real life everyday experiences is something that, you know, these workplace initiatives aren't necessarily focused on, but we are seeing some great things within different businesses. But is that just to focus on very specific issues in their workplace? Is it encouraging conversation about those wider societal issues? Is it encouraging awareness of some of

those everyday things that white people will take for granted? They won't have to think about maybe ever in their lives from a personal perspective.

If we bring this to the workplace for a second, Baron, have you seen at your workplace, particularly any sort of acceleration of talking about the anti racism topic, and what does that look like?

Baron

We've seen lots of companies including M&S admits there's a problem, and I think that's the start of, of anything is like, actually, this isn't imagined it isn't just experienced from one one side of one particular race, this is a problem.

And I think that the start of that admittance is at least a company acknowledging that, well, you know there's a problem in business, you know, something's got to be done about it. No business admits there's a problem and then doesn't do anything on other problems.

So if you're admitting there's a problem with racism, inclusion and the rest, then that's a start, but it then means taking action. And what we're then seeing companies do, M & S has done it, as well is get help to fixing the problem so that it could be through listening groups, understand the scale of the problem, it could be through at M & S, we employed a new head of Inclusion and Diversity, and put a team under her. It could be through bringing in external consultants, and we've had that in the governor of London Metropolitan University.

We've, we've had a few external consultants come and speak about inclusion and diversity in universities, and so there's getting up to fix the problem. So there's admitting there's a problem is getting help to fix the problem. And then there's really trying to involve employees on, how you can apply solutions that are fit for that particular business. So whether that's through understand their lived experience in the organisation, and

what changes they could make in the organisation, or whether that's through seeing to what extent some of those employees could add a bit more colour and insight to the feasibility or the extent to which any solution is actually going to make a tangible difference.

So some of the things we've had in M&S through engagement with employees are one of our products in women's lingerie, we've re-changed the naming of tights, you know. Initially we had new types, and the implication that new tights, the nude was nude for white skin, and we there was one particular instance we had, we had a model, we had a black model with new tights for white skin, which again, I think, though, like what we need to have diversity in the models that we use, someone just clearly hadn't looked at the link between having the same new tights, but the new and not being nude for their skin colour. So anyway, that we've had a review of the naming of those type of products, so you no longer have nude, called specific items that suit different skin tones.

So that's something that, again, through engaging with the employees and looking internally, has been an action they could take that naturally benefits their customers. But other things, you know, we've got, you know, we've got Safe Space sessions to try and make the idea of people listening to lived experiences and understanding what others are going through a norm. And in creating an environment of psychological safety for different views to be shared, views of people who agree with you disagree with you didn't think there was an issue. We're hoping that through this environment of psychological safety, and the more people are speaking, and the more people are comfortable about sharing their own lived experience or their own experiences in non judgmental environments, we can start to see the opening up between colleagues on things that are non work issues with the hope that that then encourages a bit more vulnerability, a bit more thinking of things from a different perspective, and understanding what others going through with the view that then helps

people either understand any unconscious or conscious bias that they have, and what they could do to address it.

So those are some of the steps we've taken. I mean, I think, you know, like anything, it's a long journey. For those who are feeling it, it's way too long. And things aren't moving fast enough. For those who are on the other side, they're like, Well, we've already made all these changes, like, you know, that you see you've done something and, you know, I'm a member of an accounting Institute, and that was the sort of the approach they taken initially to say, 'well, we look at all the stuff that we've done and you know, it took some pointing out that that is a tiny drop in the ocean of the change that is needed.

And everyone who might be feeling embarrassed about the privilege that through no fault of their own, just by being lied to they have everyone who feels embarrassed or feels like, you know, they have to apologise for the sins of others, or really, it feels like they want some sort of confidence like 'you're doing well. You know, you're making progress', you know, they they sort of want this reassurance, when actually it isn't the duty of laws of experiencing discrimination to reassure, I think everyone's so scared of getting it wrong, or wants reassurance that they're doing it right? That it really minimises the pain that those experiencing the discrimination are feeling because you're moving the focus from them and what you can do to improve this situation to to you to make yourself feel better for the wonderful things that you're doing.

So I try and think of how do we move away from organisations, needing a pat on the back what they've done, and get them more to focus on? Guess you've made some tiny progress, but the journey is so much longer. So let's just get on with him.

Steven Sandy, do you think some of the progress there that Baron has mentioned, has that been quick enough? And how can we propel that progress forward at a much faster rate?

Sandy I think everybody who knows me knows the answer that I'm going to give, which is of course I don't think that we're going fast enough, but that's because I'm impatient and pretty angry in general. But sometimes I have to pull myself back because I think I agree with with everything Baron just said actually, but I also come at it from a kind of of work perspective and think, Well, culture change takes a long time it takes years to achieve. And not just specific to anti racism, but in any type of culture change you're trying to achieve in an organisation it takes years. We know this, there's a lot of writing out there, business writing about how long it takes to to to to create an embed a culture change.

So sometimes I have to pull myself back and say, 'Okay, you're expecting a lot too soon because a little bit of progress doesn't mean, the change has happened'. And it certainly hasn't, and I think we are a long way away from achieving proper equity, to be honest, not just in society, but in workplaces also.

But I also think there are things we can be doing right now, to make the change, I think that ultimately, you need a really clear strategy, and you need an action plan, and it needs to be really, really considered unintentional. You need to understand what you're trying to get out of it, and the change that you're trying to make, you know, and it's like any business metric, you know.

Are the KPIs you're putting at the forefront of what you're trying to achieve actually creating the behaviours that you want to see in your business, or are they actually hindering the progress for what you're actually trying to achieve by measuring that specific KPI?

So there are different things to be looking at, and it is a complex area. And like Baron said, people do get things wrong, of course they do. That's life. Really, the measure of it is, how do you address it when you've made a mistake? And do you pick it up and get on with it? And I think there's also something for me, definitely, there's something around being transparent and open in your organisation about where you are. I think, you know, if you're not talking to your people, and they don't know where you're going, and they don't know, where you're starting from, and they're not getting regular progress updates, then, what are you really achieving, because part of this is about building trust. And if you're saying something and doing the other thing, then you're not, you're doing the opposite of building trust, aren't you, you're breaking it. And at this point, I'm not sure that that is acceptable anymore.

Actually, I think, you know, for years and years and years, you've broke my trust every time, but I'm used to it. So that's okay. But now you physically and very publicly said, 'I'm going to fix this as an organisation', And then you don't. That's, that's worse in many ways for me personally.

So it's really, really important to me. And I think also going back to what Barom was saying about listening to people, you know, listening to people from from ethnic minority backgrounds, about their experiences, I think that's really important. But I think it's not just about listening, it's hearing what we're saying, really hearing what we're telling you, and really making the effort to make the changes that you can make.

But I also think there's something here around burden. You know, what, to somebody I know, likens it to, you know, I'm not an animal at the zoo, you can't just wheel me out, when you need me to talk to you about my experiences, it's not nice. And in many cases, it's really traumatic, you know, so if you are going to ask me to do that, usually for free, and usually

on top of my day job, then you need to really make it worthwhile, because it's not a nice experience, even just talking about these things, but thinking about them is not a nice experience. I suspect that a lot of the things that Baron and I and everybody else has experienced we've completely blocked out of our brains for survival, cos you have to, so if you're going to be talking about this all the time, you need to really be doing something.

Baron

I would agree. Interestingly, behaviour change and cultural change takes a while.

But I reckon, if you have a business that turns on tomorrow and says 'For every instance of discrimination, you get sacked on the spot', I suspect you will see a huge change in behaviour overnight. I think that Yes, that is ruling by fear as opposed to willing people to do the right thing.

But I think there are some measures organisations can take to be very clear on what they stand for and what they don't stand for. I think at the moment, we've got this sort of mixed blur of sometimes we stand for this, sometimes we don't the answers is that, you know, there's a grey in between. So it's not so clear cut.

I generally think if you've got an organisation that is like 'these are the rules, you break them, you get fired overnight', you'll get a change of either people go out, I'm not gonna work in this organisation and live and spend my time here, or they go, 'Well, those are the new rules that I'm going to abide by them'.

And I think we often we were trying to take everyone on a journey, but there's also the realisation that by trying to take everyone on a journey, everyone's going at a different pace and because everyone accepts to some extent, what the issue is, and the varying levels of which people accept that there's an issue shows their willingness to be part of the

solution. And I think you do need a point. Oh, you do need along with that, along with taking People on the journey you do need some clear stake in the ground of this is what we stand for, and this is what we don't, and these are the repercussions of not following that. And I think without that, then the journey is going to be much, much longer because everyone's you know, by the time it takes, you know, someone's realise that there's an issue that they're own personal journey is going to hamper the progress of the organisation as a whole.

There are laws on discrimination, so legally, there's a framework for which you can, you can pursue someone for not following those laws. But actually, we know that for the things to do with race and inclusion, there's a lot more people need to understand as opposed to just what the what the law says. So that I understand that that does take time. It requires a change in mindset that will take some ambassadors or take some, you know, some barriers been put to prevent people from some doing otherwise. And that culture change will take some while. But we do need organisations to be quite clear on what they stand for, what they don't stand for, and the repercussions for those who don't follow that..

Sandy ...and following through on those repercussions, I think, because that one thing I think a lot of organisations don't do.

Steven So we're going to finish this session off with a look and think about some of the positives - Some of the best practice, what have we seen out there? Baron, can you give us any examples where we've seen employers are doing the right things to build anti racist cultures, that have had a real impact?

Baron The only example I can think of off head at the moment, and they're very well known for what they do in the space, because they're very activist is Ben and Jerry's.

And it may just well be that actually, some organisations that just getting on with it and doing it, that I hope that's the case. What I really want to encourage your listeners in those spaces is for more examples to be shared.

I think there's a lot more that can be done to showcase just what different organisations are doing, not to say we're great. And you know, look at us, but more is more to encourage other organisations on what is possible. And I think at the moment in the UK, we're quite worried about if we make a statement, it's going to be absolutely right, we've got to be absolutely perfect. And what that then does is because no one's making a statement, everyone goes, well, we can't make a statement, even though what we think we're doing is good. You know, we don't want to be criticised. And I think we're more worried about criticism than actually going well, this is the journey that we're on. And it may be great this year and bad next year. But we still want to take you on that journey with us.

And I think, you know, the encouragement for lots more people to share the small things or big things that are happening just for us all to be encouraged on this progress that the prime minister talks about, that we have in the UK, I'd like to see more examples. And maybe that means I may feel a bit more hopeful.

Steven Thanks Baron - Sandy, how about you? Same question. Have you seen any really great examples of employers doing things to build these anti racist cultures?

Sandy So I agree with Baron actually, I think I don't actually know of any companies that have got this completely right yet.

I think there are pockets of brilliance out there on specific issues and specific things. So recently, I was having a look at the John Lewis website, and their pay gap report is excellent, and it looks at everything in lots of detail, and they talk about what they're doing. But y'know, they got a new chair a couple years ago, who is fantastic by all accounts, and this is a subject that really matters to her. So, you know, evidently, there's been a lot of work going on in John Lewis, I wouldn't pretend that I know exactly what it is. I don't work there, but just looking at that one report it's the best example I've seen.

You know, there are other organisations out there that are looking at, you know, how in their organisation, do they deal with reports of microaggressions because, you know, these are notoriously difficult to prove, you know, if somebody's experiencing that everyday, what do you do about it as an organisation that and actually, you know, talking to them, they've been absolutely fantastic because they're saying to me, 'Okay, yeah, we've done our policy, but we need to work out how to build trust with our people, so that they want to use it', you know, and so for me, that's kind of looking at it very holistically and very sincerely actually, because they want people to use it because they do want to get rid of microaggressions. It's not just a bit of window dressing.

They're being very intentional about what they're working on. There are other organisations that are out there who are kind of setting really clear goals and targets, you know, they're they're comparing their workforce to their local area or the community they serve or their customer base, and they're working out, you know, whether they're representative, because, you know, they've, started to understand the business imperative of having an organisation that has got, y'know, access to the perspectives of the people that you serve, you know, whether that be commercially or kind of more public sector work.

And also, I think there are organisations out there that are kind of doing some really interesting work that I think will start to shape other organisations sectors.

So, the work that Legal and General have done on how your board should be made up for them to put money with you, for example, and, you know, NASDAQ did that last year as well, the Church of England did it quite recently.

None of these organisations are perfect, but you can see that some of the things that they're putting in place, will effect some real change, because I also think, as well as carrots, there needs to be sticks. But I also think the reason that we haven't made the progress that we've made elsewhere on race is because there has been no penalties for not doing this well, and there hasn't been anybody saying 'Actually, I'm not going to do business with you now', and that is changing.

Steven

Sandy, you've been working alongside us at Inclusive Employers now for quite a good length of time, a good few months.

What are your top tips for employers to build environments where everyone can feel included?

Sandy

I think I've said this a few times now in different forms, but I think, number one has got to be you must be intentional. You must know what you're aiming for, and build a plan to get there.

I think one of the biggest surprises I've had is when I've asked people, what they think their business will look like when it's truly anti racist, and everyone's kind of gone 'Well, that's a good question'?

And so for me, intentionality and vision has got to be number one, and like any business strategy, you will have an action plan underneath it, and you should be reporting on it, whether internally or externally, and you should be, you know, really transparent about where you've made progress, celebrate progress with any project, if you don't celebrate progress, you know, you're missing something. But also you need to be honest about where you've got it wrong, and how you're going to fix that.

I think there is an absolute imperative for leaders to be inclusive and to show their inclusivity. I think, particularly going back to what we were talking about earlier, is you know, if you want to have any hope of attracting the best talent, particularly in a country that I think will probably have less talent to pick from going forward, you really need to show your credentials on inclusion, and live them. So that I think is really important. And I think also, if you say you're going to do something, you have to do it.

Steven A huge thank you to both of my guests today. Thank you, Baron.

Baron Thanks, Steven.

Steven And thank you, Sandy.

Sandy Thank you, Steven for having me.

Steven To find out more about how Inclusive Employers can support anti racism in your organisation, visit inclusiveemployers.co.uk, that inclusiveemployers.co.uk.

For Inclusive Employers members, we have many resources and plenty of advice on anti racism on the members area of our website, or you can speak to your account manager.

On the next podcast, we're going to focus on parents and carers in the UK. 7 million people in the UK are parents and carers. What does this mean for your organisation? Do you understand the challenges that parents and carers are facing, and do we know how we can support them better?

We're going to cover all that and more and we're also going to hear some stories from our guests next month.

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