

Teddy Dianah Kemirembe's Q&As

1. What challenges have you overcome, or obstacles have you seen others face in striving for inclusion?

This is a great question! I would say everyday I face challenges I have become aware that I have an accent. I love my accent and I think I will never code-switch it just to fit in. So, Often times I start in my introductions saying "I am originally from Uganda -East Africa this is where my beautiful accent is from." I make it time for those listening to me have home work: I ask do you know about Uganda? Then I say please google it and learn more.

Being an immigrant is already hard. Speaking several languages is great but sometimes it's a challenge because I try to interpret what is being said to be in several languages .

I have seen many other immigrants like be really try to fit in so code-switching is real . Im reading this book called : Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at work" by Ruchika Tulshyan

Great book I would recommend it for all of us to read.

But in the book it defines code-switching as a technique used by people of color especially women of color to adjust their appearance , speech, behavior in ways that help white people feel comfortable .

In otherwards this helps us to distance ourselves from negative stereotypes of our racial identity.

Let me tell you, its exhausting ! I know most of you have had the word professional dressing etc, and actually for me it has been hair until when I did chemo and lost my hair – I know just wrap my head. But hair has been a big thing .

So the challenges are still exist in how I speak, and sometimes misunderstood by my tone. For example, I tend to be more loud when I'm excited sometimes this is taken in wrong concept as in my angry.

By the way if I am speaking in low tone – I'm really angry so its really a matter of staying curious and asking for clarifications all the time so that we are not assuming for others.

2. Can you think of a time when someone went out of their way to include you? How did this make you feel and did being included or excluded change how you chose to include others going forward?

Wooh!

I have many stories to share on this. But I will share the most recent one . I was in a big meeting with very high authority leaders. I gave an idea no one even acknowledged it. Then my same idea was repeated by another person in the room of course white with a big title behind their name.

As I was about to say something, another person interrupted and said “ Teddy just suggested that idea?” Teddy , can you elaborate more on your idea?

I lost words at first. I started by thanking this person for including me and for making me feel that I belonged there in that meeting.

Most times I feel it has more to do with my accent- moving forward I amplify people’s voices and let them know that they have a voice and they should raise it.

3.How would you navigate the challenge of creating engagement and buy in for inclusion without required participation or pushing others to far out of their comfort zone? How would you engage those who believe the work around inclusion to be completed already or unnecessary?

I don’t know who came up with these amazing questions!

First of all, lets atleast agree that we should all practice inclusion intentionally. I love how we started by defining this word. For me I live it daily I have it in my mindset and cultivate it daily . Even as I speak when I entered the room the first question that came to my mind was : who is not here with us? Did we miss including everyone ? This needs to be everyone’s responsibility . We should not wait to hear from Teddy or Jasmine or those doing this work . Infact for me I advocate for not using like mandated training when it comes to DEIB work which means let those who really want to engage in this make a choose.

Sometimes we need to reflect on our lives .Think of a time you felt excluded this time it can even be outside work. How did it feel for you? That is when you pick yourself up and say I will be an ally for those who are excluded .

I will give you an example outside of work: I have a 9 year old daughter diagnosed with Rett Syndrome she makes really loud sounds and it bothers people who don’t know her around. In church at one point I felt the congregation was always turning around you know with weird faces “ like why are you here? You can feel the look like get out hahah

They would not ask after mass what is wrong blablala

So I took it upon myself and created a personalized card with Sabella's picture saying Hi my name is Sabella I have Rett Syndrome. These are some of the symptoms I have . Then the card goes beyond and provides to read more about Rett Syndrome visit this website and donate for kids like me. Period. I would stand outside the church after mass and hand these cards out.

This made an impact I even started a nonprofit out of it. And yes she does still make those loud sounds but few head turns towards us.

4. How do you show up authentically and support the inclusion of others, so you are creating a space of belonging rather than one of tokenism or political correctness?

Amazing question!

Look at me now! I have wrapped up my hair, Im speaking freely to you and giving you real lived experience of my life. This is authentic. WIN is creating this space for immigrants and it should not be WIN only but in all our workspace and in our communities. Our Mission : Expand opportunities for immigrants who are current and future employees within the Washington state government. Serve as a resource for all immigrants who are state employees to connect, share, and educate each other and Washington state agencies on the skills, expertise, and cultural value of a diverse workforce.

We have subcommittees

1. **The Membership Outreach Subcommittee** oversees and manages WIN BRG outreach efforts through various agencies and communities. The team is responsible for coordinating outreach events and oversees all immigrant and allies' membership outreach and retention.
2. **The Career Development Subcommittee:**
This subcommittee also provides tools and resources for WIN BRG members to grow professionally through training, webinars, conferences, books, and articles. The Professional Development Subcommittee strives to serve WIN's members through accessible conference programming to help them grow.
3. **The Advocacy Subcommittee** is to advocate for Washington Immigrant Network members. WIN BRG is committed to participating in progressive conversations about immigrant communities and their importance to the state. The team advocates for policies, laws, and engage with legislators and other leaders on immigrant issues.
4. **Special Project:** This subcommittee is focused on special projects to help immigrant members and communities. This subcommittee also supports WIN's goal to serve as a resource for state agencies in creating and sustaining a diverse and inclusive workforce. We are seeking members to help us with this effort.

In my current role at DDA I strive to bring voices of all DDA employees through the raise every voice tours , Brave conversations , and among major duties

- Policy development
- Organizational development and interventions
- Administration-wide culture shift
- Communications
- Stronger relationships with diverse communities at the contract and service delivery level