

Day 4

Code Switching / Masking

#RaceEqualityMatters

#EveryActionCounts



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| RACE EQUALITY WEEK 3-9 February 2025 | Powered by green park LLOYD'S |
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#EveryActionCounts

Day 4

Have you ever had to change the way you speak or act to fit in?

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Today's Eye Opener

15 seconds



How often do you find yourself changing the way you act and speak in the workplace to fit in

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always

What is code-switching?

Code-switching (also known as Masking and not being able to be your authentic self) is when people change how they speak, behave, or present themselves based on their social surroundings or audience. The aim is to fit in and not be seen as an outsider or someone who doesn't belong.

We all naturally adapt to different situations.

However, for many people, the need to change who they are can be significant, for some more than others. As a result, code-switching can have a profound impact on their interactions and identity, shaping them in meaningful ways.

People code-switch to fit in, avoid exclusion, and in some cases, to simply to survive.



75% of ethnically diverse women have changed their demeanour to appear more 'approachable and friendly' during a job interview, in an attempt to counteract negative stereotypes.

Video: 2.5 minutes

To code-switch or not to code-switch



Lucrece Grehoua explores why code-switching is used as a mechanism for many people of colour <https://youtu.be/jYvmNHfqjKI?si=bHDHSQ-YWf3rFumL>

Why do ethnically diverse individuals code-switch more, and how does this impact wellbeing?

People who are part of marginalised groups often encounter stereotypes that portray them negatively (e.g. a Black man may be stereotyped as dangerous).

These stereotypes lead to discrimination and create challenging environments where individuals feel the need to adapt their behaviour to fit in and succeed (e.g. a Black man might code-switch to a less assertive tone or a certain dressing style in certain environments to avoid the stereotype).



According to the Harvard Business Review, these are the three main reasons ethnically diverse colleagues code-switch in the work place:

1

To **increase their chances of being hired** by downplaying their association with groups that face discrimination so they appear more “professional”.

2

To **avoid negative stereotypes**: Black men, for instance, are often stereotyped as “**aggressive**” or “**intimidating**.” This leads many to adopt softer tones or overly polite behaviour to counteract these perceptions.

3

To **connect with those with powerful and influence** by expressing shared interests, which improves their chances of promotion since people tend to favour those they see as similar.

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Pooja Kothari,

the founder of Boundless Awareness, says that code-switching at work can impact employees’ mental health. However, those who don’t need to code-switch feel more comfortable as they can be themselves without the extra mental effort to fit in.



Action: 1 minute

It is important that we feel as though we can bring our authentic selves into work. How can you contribute to reducing the necessity for ethnically diverse colleagues to code-switch in the workplace? Ideas you could consider:

- Listen actively to colleagues from different backgrounds without interrupting or assuming stereotypes.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to participate in meetings, discussions, and social activities, no matter their cultural background.
- Share your stories about your culture in a safe space to build trust and authenticity, making it easier for people to learn and do the same.
- Respect and acknowledge cultural practices, holidays, and traditions.
- Be open to the idea of changing the way your team works to accept a different method or cultural norm.
- Challenge assumptions, stereotypes and biases to make sure everyone feels valued.
- Visit #ItNotMicro to learn more about microaggressions and how you can address them confidently and in a non-confrontational way.
- Model inclusive behaviours in your daily interactions:

Here is one action you can take as a senior leader:



Lead by example. Sign your organisation up to try one of Race Equality Matters' solutions as a way to create an inclusive environment, such as #MyNames. Lead by example, check how to pronounce a name you're not familiar with, create a safe space for colleagues to share the meaning and heritage behind their names and ensure colleagues are called the name that they want to be called, (not an anglicised or shortened version).

To find out more about membership
click here: raceequalitymatters.com/become-a-member/

Action/s I will take:

| Action/s I will take: | To be achieved by |
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If you are interested and would like to find out more:

Please see our additional resources:

[The Cost of Code Switching](#)

[Understanding code-switching:](#)

[How does code switching impact teams?](#)

[The Mental Health Costs of Code-switching:](#)

You can help us

If you found today's challenge helpful you can support us to create more solutions

Race Equality Matters provide many solutions resources and events for free, so:

1. Everyone can access them, regardless of budget.
2. The real barriers to race equality in the workplace are addressed.
3. The change we all want to see and feel, is accelerated.



(Donate via this QR Code)

91% say what we are doing will make an impact.

If you or your organisation can help, your donation will mean the world and help end racial inequality. Thank you

A special thank you to some of our key partners and collaborators



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