

Black History Month the importance of role models

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Communications team, Acas

Acas staff and others talk about Black History Month and the importance of role models.

Interview with Talal Hassan, Diversity and Inclusion Business Partner, Acas

What does Black History Month mean to you?

BHM was launched in 1987 in the UK, so for me it is about celebrating the cultural transformation that our country has gone through over the past 30 years

Which black role model or mentor has influenced you in your work or study?

As a student of cricket, I would have to say Sir Viv Richards. This was a man who just oozed charisma and talent from every pore of his being. In a sport which was traditionally dominated by the old colonial powers, here was a man along with an incredibly strong and dominant West Indies team that changed the way the game was played

How did they influence you?

What he proved was that talent, hard work and self-belief is critical to success. That combination I believe will bring success to most people no matter what sphere they are working

Why do you feel it's important to have role models and mentors?

Inspiration that the glass ceiling can be shattered.

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self?

Have more confidence.

How could employers create more diverse workplaces?

They can do a lot of initiatives, however accurate data collection has to be the first step. Once you have an idea what the organisation looks like completely from a diversity data perspective, you can drive evidence-based actions to tackle any under-representation.

[Read Sir Viv Richards' profile on Wikipedia.](#)

Interview with Afifa Kiran, ECSO and Race Network Vice Chair, Acas

What does Black History Month mean to you?

To me, BHM is about reflection. It's this pinnacle time of the year whereby I get a chance to review whether as a society we've improved on previous years in respect of diversity, inclusion and equality.

Which black role model or mentor has influenced you in your work or study?

During school I joined a programme called the Windsor Fellowship, there was a volunteer, Elizabeth who oversaw the different programmes that were offered. I remember her taking me under her wing – she was always energetic and really passionate about life. Her guidance on life and career will always stay with me.

How did they influence you?

She was a realist. She gave me an insight into the world of work and the challenges she faced as a young black woman, what she did and how she overcame these

Why do you feel it's important to have role models and mentors?

They can offer so much! A mentor in particular is important for everyone. They can often see the bigger picture and remind you of your goals and aspirations, even when you forget.

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self?

Don't be afraid! Take each and every opportunity that comes your way and everything else will work out.

How could employers create more diverse workplaces?

I think Acas, and in particular the diversity and inclusion team, are doing a lot of fantastic work. I would like to see more employers opening up their advertising to cross-sections of the community as well as having a more diverse interviewing panel.

[Find out more about the Windsor Fellowship](#) and how they mentor young people in Britain.

Interview with Nike Siffre, Internal Communications Manager, Acas

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month reminds me of two things. To celebrate the success and beauty of my heritage. And to honour and be mindful of the challenges we still face.

Which black role model or mentor has influenced you in your work or study?

Maya Angelou – writer, poet, historian, civil rights activist – has been my life-long inspiration.

How did they influence you?

In my career, whenever I have felt pressured to be someone I'm not, I have thought about Maya Angelou's greatest strength. She was herself. 100%. Always.

Why do you feel it's important to have role models and mentors?

The best role models help us to see open doors where we have thought them to be shut. The best mentors help us to step through those doors onto the other side.

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self?

When it comes to race, colour-blindness is a myth. So remember to be proud of what people will see.

How could employers create more diverse workplaces?

By being prepared to get uncomfortable. Once employers are open to addressing the difficult questions within their organisation they will begin to understand how to address diversity in a meaningful and sustainable way.

[Read Maya Angelou's biography on biography.com.](#)

Interview with Julie Dennis, Diversity & Inclusion Head, Acas

What does Black History Month mean to you?

It's about celebrating the contributions so many minority ethnic women and men have made to society, be that in relation to science and technology, education, political advocacy, education, sport, and the arts. It about ensuring their work and sometimes struggle is not hidden or erased from history. It's also about us remembering what many have done to ensure we have some of the freedoms that we take for granted today.

What black role model or mentor has influenced you in your work or study?

My black role model is Dr Anita Franklin who was an African American academic and my lead tutor when I studied for a Womens Studies degree. I specialised in non-western feminism and she is one of the most inspirational women I have ever met and who I am now proud to call my friend.

How did they influence you?

She helped me understand the history we were not taught at school, especially around race, racism and anti-racism. She also enabled me to educate my daughter on her own history especially in relation to her Jamaican heritage. She enabled me to look at things through a different lens, and understand how racism impacts on individuals in a variety of ways. That has enabled me to examine how to tackle race discrimination in the workplace, and how to remove barriers and empower others to achieve their full potential.

Why do you feel it's important to have role models and mentors?

Role models are extremely important as they are often trail blazers in their chosen field. One of my mottos is to bring others along as you succeed, or lift as you climb. Therefore mentors can often help others to identify the right path or overcome obstacles. They can also be a great sounding board to share ideas and also guide you in how to avoid mistakes.

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self?

Oh wow – apart from make sure you go and see The Notorious BIG live in concert when he comes to London in 1995, I would say you will achieve your dreams even when you're told you will not achieve anything because you are a single mum with a mixed-race baby. Take risks and have faith in your abilities because it all turns out ok in the end.

How could employers create more diverse workplaces?

Create a workplace environment which celebrates difference and enables everyone to be themselves.

Video: interview with Magistrate Carl St Paul

Magistrate Carl St Paul is a founding member of the Black and Ethnic Minority Members (B&EMM) support group for UK fire services. As part of Black History Month at Acas, he visited our London office and spoke about his experiences as a firefighter. He also spoke about how he and his colleagues set up the Black and Ethnic Minority Members (B&EEM) support group for UK fire services.

We also asked him to give his thoughts on Black History Month, and how role models have helped him throughout his life.

[Watch Magistrate Carl St Paul talking about Black History Month and his role models on YouTube.](#)

(If you're someone with a visual impairment, you should know that this video does not currently have a full audio description.)

One of Carl's heroes is anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko. [Read Steve Biko's profile on Wikipedia.](#)