

Ottawa Public Library Auditorium  
August 30, 2018

The following presentation was prepared for the Federal Black Employee Caucus meeting that was held on August 30, 2018, at the Ottawa Public Library's auditorium and was delivered by. Prepared by Liza Daniel.

We put a call out to you on Tuesday afternoon, looking for your personal experiences, your stories of racism and discrimination in the workplace. We didn't give you much time to respond but you did in large numbers, which was bitter sweet.

Some of the stories came from colleagues who can't be with us this evening and although they are absent, I thank them for sharing their heart ache, putting pen to paper (finger to keyboard) and reliving moments that I'm sure they'd like to be able to forget. I also thank YOU for being able to make it here tonight.

I've tried to capture the essence of the stories and pull at the threads that are familiar to most of us here by drafting some simple statements that speak to our common experiences.

We don't have much time, so we'll begin:

*Our numbers are small, but our faces spread the breath of the public service.*

*I design and construct your buildings and bridges, I protect our nation's borders, I develop new cures for disease, I am a knowledge worker, I am an administrative assistant, I am a soldier, I protect your rights, I keep the IT systems running, I make sure the food you eat and the water you drink are safe, I represent you abroad, I give you confidence in the car you drive and trains and planes your board, I'm behind the scenes. I provide services to the public, and along with you I am a public servant.*

*I am in all these places and many more, but my numbers dwindle when I glaze up the managerial ladder. I don't see faces that look like mine when I peek through the doors of that boardroom on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor.*

*Je suis sur-éduqué pour mon rôle au travail. Je sens que mon éducation est un déterrent à mon succès. J'ai une maîtrise mais ça ne m'aide pas à avancer.*

*J'ai accepté une position en dessous de mon niveau de compétences et expérience juste pour survivre.*

*Mon gestionnaire m'a rabaissé publiquement et humilié en présence de mes collègues.*

*Je suis à la table de gestion mais on ne me traite pas en tant qu'égal. Je suis l'exception à ce niveau. Ils ne veulent pas entendre ce que j'ai à dire. Ils pensent que je devrais être contenté d'être où je suis.*

*I speak 2 or more languages (including the official ones) yet "moving on up" doesn't seem like a reality for me.*

*They keep asking me where I was born. They don't like it when I tell them England. That's not a black country. I must be from Jamaica, right?*

*I'm asked racist questions regarding my body and my ancestry. Can they be that oblivious?*

*They warn me not to use words like, discrimination, or racism; I use them anyway and then the retaliation begins.*

*I've been called a nigger to my face. Is this 1972? Is this the American south?*

*Je me suis plainte sur l'intimidation et j'ai reçu une évaluation de mauvaise performance.*

*On a demandé à d'autres gestionnaires et collègues de surveiller mes courriels aux fins de fournir des preuves de ma mauvaise performance.*

*Les collègues de race blanche ont des opportunités de développement Professionnel. Ils ont des parrains et mentors, je suis seule.*

*Mes collègues de race blanche ont des affectations, mais on me dit que je ne peux aller à cause de raisons opérationnelles, malgré qu'on ne m'assigne pas de tâches.*

*Mon superviseur applique seul ses pouvoirs discrétionnaires; mes collègues sont autorisés à partir en congé avec revenue moyen, mais on me les nie.*

*Mes idées sont ignorées jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient livrées par la bonne personne (blanche).*

*I ATIP'd my HR files, only to find references to my race in emails originating from my supervisor. No disciplinary action was taken.*

*My work products have been sabotaged to be used as evidence of my alleged incompetence.*

*Our department's discrimination and harassment policies, tools and resources are just for show; they're not taken seriously by managers. Supervisors are ambivalent and ignore the workplace discrimination although the party line seems to be "Diversity is great, don't discriminate."*

*I am labelled an "angry black man" if I speak loudly while my paler colleagues are called enthusiastic and dynamic.*

*They create a false narrative about me and criminalize me if I speak out. A picture of me has been distributed to the commissionaires, alerting them to stop me if I try to enter my workplace and to call 911 if I exhibit violent behaviour*

*Je suis géré par un gestionnaire micro, au point d'harcèlement.*

*Le travail qui échu dans mon unité sous ma responsabilité est donné à mes collègues de race blanche sans explication.*

*Ils mentent sans scrupule sur mes actions et je suis laissé à convaincre les autres sur la vérité. Ils montent leur cas contre moi pièce par pièce, mensonge sur mensonge.*

*Je forme les nouveaux employés juniors de race blanche seulement pour devenir leur employé.*

*Mon gestionnaire raciste a été promis en guise d'être discipliné.*

*Mon superviseur en privé glorifie mon travail mais j'ai reçu une mauvaise performance.*

*J'ai reçu de très bonnes évaluations de performance mais je n'ai jamais reçu d'opportunité d'affectation.*

*Mon syndical ne comprends pas les problèmes des employés noirs.*

*Les politiques des ressources humaines permettent les promotions sans compétition mais mon gestionnaire donne des promotions seulement aux blancs.*

*I don't know if it's possible to speak up against the white boys (and girls) club in the workplace*

*I'm not given acting opportunities while my colleagues seem to rarely occupy their substantive positions.*

*My boss invites my white colleagues for coffee. I remain in the office.*

*Although I compete and do well, I'm left sitting in a pool (of qualified candidates) because I wasn't "the best fit". What does that even mean? They can't really tell me.*

*Who do I have to know to get out of the pool before it expires? I guess I'm not having coffee with the right (white) people.*

*I'm not the only visible minority in the office but sometimes it seems like I (as a black woman, as a black man) am the least of the VMs.*

Our stories sometimes seem unbelievable; however those who practice discrimination and the systems and policies that support the systemic racism can wreak havoc with our minds and souls, with our mental and physical health, with our livelihoods and with our dignity.

When we speak out, we are told we've exaggerated or we don't understand the process, or we misunderstood the comment or they weren't aware, or, or, or If they fail at convincing us then WE become the problem, the aggressor, the incompetent employee, whose cultural differences are getting in the way.

I've given you a sampling of experiences we have faced in the workplace not dissimilar to the ones we face outside of the workplace; however simple stories don't seem to be enough to effect change from within the bureaucracy. Stories are not enough and can easily be dismissed as individual cases rather than evidence of a systemic problem. That's why we need data, data that is about US!