

PLACE FOR ALL

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

“ My journey in project management. ”

Janelle Raeburn, Project Manager



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Sharing personal stories and perspectives to foster inclusivity in the workplace

I'm Janelle Raeburn, a 'freelance' Senior Project Manager currently working at Islington Council and with Sports Logistics Agency Ki-Nitro Collective Ltd. I have had a wide range of different experiences and roles but in each, I have always strived to champion minorities and especially, but not exclusively, young black women. My passion as a leader is to bring people into a 'new space' or place of work that they previously didn't think could access.

My career pathway led me into Project Management, mostly in the events space (major sports events, award shows, fashion shows, to name a few). For me, confidence is important in all aspects of life including the professional arena. From my time as Miss Jamaica UK, before entering the corporate world, I gained confidence and networking skills which have stood me in good stead and set me up for onward success as a leader.

When I started working in a corporate environment, there seemed to be a bias against 'non-traditional' backgrounds that in all honesty I did not anticipate when I left university. My first full time role after graduating from was with London Underground as a management graduate trainee. After completing a 2-year programme of short-term placements around the business, my first main role was as a Duty Train Manager overseeing the day-to-day management of train

operators in a train depot. Within the management team there were 15 men and two women and, among the c.150 train operators, there was a 90% bias towards white men. Initially, it was challenging to be a young female graduate. In the 'I've been here man and boy' culture at the time; I felt I had to leave my femininity at the door, wear trousers and no make-up. I did this because I wanted the focus to be on the job and not on me and over time, I gained credibility and respect.

The management team I was part of were very supportive and being mentored helped me become a strong team player and manager. I felt it was important that I learned the technical elements of the role or else it would be difficult to tell experienced train operators what to do as their manager. At that time, 'micro-aggressions' were pervasive, especially against women of colour. I let some things go but I had to confront a particular train operator when he persistently refused to follow my instructions pertaining to his role; I held my nerve, stood up for myself and he didn't try to test my resolve ever again. I learned about keeping a calm head in a tough operational world!

I moved to a head office planning role but due to a culture of unconscious bias and again being a minority in my team, I felt very alone. My team was white male dominated and I was one of only two people of colour. Naively

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when I embarked on this role, I thought everything would be ok and I would be judged and rewarded on my merit, but I soon realised this was not the case. I was overlooked for promotion a few times despite my clear talent for delivering high quality work and when I was subjected to sexual harassment I once again felt so alone. Thankfully there was a female member of my team who advocated for and supported me. This made me realise I had a duty to advocate for others. It's not about one person, it's about all of us, so I started to get more involved with activist groups and talking to my peers.

When I saw there was no scope for progression in this role, despite my great work, I decided to leave the organisation and seek other opportunities elsewhere. One thing was for sure though I was confident in my capabilities, my value and my worth.

Coming to Islington, I started as a contractor, after being headhunted

to help drive a delayed project to completion. I performed well and haven't looked back. Staff are professional and the council is a great place to work but there can still be problems and more still needs to be done to make people feel comfortable and included. People need to be able to show up in the workplace as their true authentic selves; this is a key element of organisational productivity and success. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is not a tick box exercise it's an essential ingredient in this modern world that makes organisations, as well as their people, thrive!

Change starts with self. I have a duty to stand up and speak out if something is wrong. I want to leave a trail to make it easier for others to follow. No-one is an island and we each have a responsibility to be the change we want to see.

Janelle Raeburn
Project Manager, Ki-Nitro Collective

