

Embracing Difference: Perspectives from our Black colleagues

Speakers: **Monique Codjoe**, Deputy Chief Control Officer, Europe, GLCM, London, UK; **Kabelo Mokoena**, Regional Business Manager, GTRF, Dubai, UAE; **Quandrea Fester**, Assistant Vice President, Credit Manager, Portfolio Management, Chicago, US; **Sadiki McCalla**, Senior Corporate Relationship Manager, ISB, Chicago, US; **Ayisat Alimi**, Manager, Chief Control Office, GLCM, London, UK; **Greg Edwards**, Global Head Transactional FX, Markets, London, UK; **Mteto Mvusi**, Associate Director, Export and Asset Finance, Global Banking, London, UK; Vivian Cole, Global Banking Ambassador for Black Professionals, London, UK; **Gbemisola Akinola**, Head of Public Sector SSA, Global Banking, Johannesburg, South Africa

Quandrea: When 'Black lives matter' is spoken it is not to say all other lives do not matter. It is to say that this community of Black people is valued as well.

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Monique: I think you have to initially start with the acknowledgement that there is a problem, that there is inequality. People say that they 'don't see race' but it's there, right, and we have to acknowledge it.

Kabelo: When a group of people are complaining and crying out about injustices that are happening, I think what's really important for society to do, number one, for us to get to a solution, is for people to be open and understanding and seek to understand what minorities are complaining about.

Quandrea: Microaggressions come so often, it's sort of like living next to the train in that you hear it and have to just drown in out. Not that it's right.

Sadiki: I think that stigma that Black talent is not there is just a misconception because when I talk to these employees they tell me about their Masters degrees, they tell me about their doctorates and they're doing jobs that I think that they could perform in their sleep, I would say.

Monique: There's been situations where I think my chair has been kicked by someone to get my attention.

Ayisat: A colleague of mine thought that the darker your skin is the more your skin smells.

Monique: There's times where I worked on the executive floor and people thought that I worked in the kitchen.

Greg: It just continually reminds you that you are, in some respects, very exceptional. You work in a White world. You don't conform to the stereotypes that many people have of what Black people do and it's just a constant reminder in your day-to-day life that you are different.

Mteto: I am a Black male. I will be walking on the street. I'll be dressed in a specific way. So, the thought process in my mind is, 'Do I overtly look like a threat?'

Ayisat: I must say that I have become used to it almost and whilst I say it, I realise how sad that is.

Greg: The impact of George Floyd's murder I think was very shocking and I think many Black people took it very personally because many of us, and I think this is something that's really

important; it's not just because you are a Black person in the US that you will react to it. I think many Black people have had experiences around the world where they are treated as second-class citizens and I think this was just a very stark and extreme reminder of how bad it can be.

Ayisat: It was shocking and, yeah, so many emotions that came at the back of that, that yeah, I still struggle with, I must say.

Monique: And I remember people asking me, just normal banter, right, when you're speaking to somebody at work, "How you doing today?" And for once, I didn't want to lie. And I was like, "I'm not OK."

Mteto: I reached out to my mother to be completely frank, and I asked her a genuine question. It was, I genuinely do not understand how you guys have been able to handle all of this for all of these years.

Vivian: The touchpoint for me was when my nine-year-old son said to me, "Mommy, I'm scared. I don't want anyone to kneel on my neck." No nine-year-old boy, no Black boy should have to live in fear of their lives.

Kabelo: It's very difficult not to feel and wonder what people think when they look at you. Do they think that because I'm Black that I don't measure up to them as human beings? Does a person look at me and feel that my life is not as valuable as theirs? And if that's happening, then how do we change that?

Vivian: I was very distraught. You know, I was looking to my manager, people, team members to just check in and say, "Vivian, are you OK? Are you doing OK?" "I know there's a lot going on." "I just hope you're OK."

Quandrea: When Michael Roberts sent out his email of reflections to all of US employees, it was so... For that to be acknowledged by Michael Roberts, he will just never ever know what that meant to me.

Ayisat: We do have allies within the business and I would like for us to have more.

Monique: And I think we need to do a better job ensuring that talent that's out there is supported. By leadership, by sponsors and there's people who are sitting at the table who are able to speak their name and present them for opportunities.

Kabelo: There are a few things that we can get better at, one of which is representation. But I do think that having those conversations and talking about, ethnicity as one facet of Diversity and Inclusion overall, I think is a very positive thing we're doing.

Sadiki: Great leaders can really pick up on that empathy and really understand maybe we can tweak this part about our process to really improve. We do that for our clients all the time. You really have to empathise with the client. You really have to put your feet in their shoes and say, "Wow, OK. This product doesn't have the best experience." "How can we tweak it?" And I think if we have that same kind of touch when we work with our employees, I think we can enhance that experience.

Greg: It's about creating the right type of culture where all groups, all minority groups or all under-represented groups feel that they can contribute, they can bring their whole selves to work and that everyone moves forward together.

Gbemisola: Role-modelling is quite a powerful concept. As we advance in our careers everyone has to have a role model.

Vivian: Oftentimes, the Black story is marred in negativity, synonymous with lack or crime or whatever else that's negative. So, it's important to celebrate the stories and successes of Black individuals that have made a difference in our world.

Interviewer: And what would you say is your biggest achievement?

Quandrea: Everything that I've worked up to this point, with the education, with the relationships, with the knowledge that HSBC has given me. I think it's not one thing that is my greatest achievement. It's the mix of everything that is my greatest achievement, to be in this role.

Gbemisola: I think I've grown since I've joined HSBC. I started my career quite unconventionally at a switchboard, and I took an opportunity and I took a chance on myself and entered Core Banking and have been able to thrive as a relationship manager over the last 6 to 7 years.

Ayisat: I went on to college, went on to university, I went on to get a graduate degree in law. When I had the opportunity to give up I did not do so.

Greg: Myself and the team that I've assembled have done a really good job at growing the business and provide real solutions to our clients.

Monique: I went to law school while I was at the bank. I worked in Financial Crime Compliance for awhile and I was able to transfer into the line of business.

Kabelo: Fundamentally, my biggest achievement outside of work is still being able to study and being close to completing a Masters degree now.

Sadiki: My biggest achievement outside of work, I would say Iron Man races to 100-mile tour runs to backcountry camping and really pushing myself and achieving those goals. And it takes a lot of hard work to do that.

Mteto: Probably my biggest achievement is something that I hold very dearly and I'm very proud of is the work that we've done with an orphanage in South Africa, in Johannesburg.

Vivian: My biggest achievement, working at GBM at HSBC has got to be my appointment as the Global Banking Ambassador for Black professionals.

Hope and Optimism

Vivian: I hope to use my voice to make sure that other voices are heard.

Greg: I think at this moment in time we have a window in which we can really make a difference.

Monique: I'm hopeful in some of the initiatives that the bank is taking. And I have to be because I want this to be a great place for people to work. I want this to be, you know, an employee's choice of bank as well and I'm just optimistic. I think that we're going to do some amazing things.