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## Treat others how you want to be treated

I am Crystal Robinson, a 25-year-old Black woman living and working in Manchester.

Since the murder of George Floyd on 25<sup>th</sup> May, the heartbreak that I, like so many others, have experienced, left me both emotionally and physically exhausted.

Yet while I felt the overwhelming urge to step away, pause and take a breath to try and come to terms with what has and continues to be the heart wrenching reality of the world we live in, it's impossible to not want or more so need to stay present and connected with exactly what is going on all

around us.

I am not someone who tends to struggle with my mental health, as a lot of my close friends know, a plate of good food usually cheers me up. However, the week of and after George Floyd's murder saw a huge decline in my mental wellbeing. I found it hard to focus, I couldn't sleep, and I was exhausted and emotionally drained. When I saw that video of that police officer kneeling on his neck, I felt like I was watching something happen to my Dad, my brother or my boyfriend.

I am a real person affected by these very real issues, and I believe it is our duty as human beings to come together and talk about what we should be doing to create a better future. Not just for me or my children or my grandchildren, but also for every Black man, woman and child who has passed, is present and yet to come.

Growing up a Black child was tough, growing up as a Black female for me was even tougher. I spent my childhood in what could be considered a diverse neighbourhood, my primary school was predominantly White, with the odd Black or Asian child. It was at this age that I had my first encounter with a racist. Although I was young, I knew exactly what the word I'd been called meant and felt great difficulty being in and able to deal with that situation.

I come from a loving biracial family, so you could say because the White people in my family treated me no differently, naively I expected others to be the same. My Dad's side of the family is from Jamaica and my Mom's side from England and St. Kitts and Nevis, which is a small Caribbean island in the West Indies. My Nan is White, and when I was young, people could not fathom why she was with a young Black girl and vice versa, assuming I was adopted. Which is crazy really, as considering I was born in the 90's you would expect this to be more 'normal'.

Like most teenagers, I would go shopping with friends on the weekends. My best friend was also Black and our favourite shop was Miss Selfridge. Whenever we went into that shop, the security guard would follow us around assuming we couldn't afford any of the products, despite the fact we would purchase something nearly every time. This was so frustrating! I felt that no matter how well behaved or educated I may be, the colour of my skin was always something I would be judged on. I remember going home and telling my Mom what had happened, when we next went shopping, she forced me

into the shop and spoke to the security guard – I was never followed again. That shouldn't have had to happen, a Mother shouldn't have to explain to someone that her daughter can shop where she likes regardless of the colour of her skin.

The stories are endless. Life as a Black woman is having to learn and love the way your hair grows, learning to love your skin tone after you've been in the sun and people 'can't believe how dark you are!' It's struggling to find a foundation in your colour because the brand only caters for lighter shades, being teased for having big lips in school, which is quite ironic considering most girls nowadays are pumping their lips with fillers. There are countless times I've been told 'you're pretty for a Black girl' or 'you have great eyelashes for a Black girl', what does that even mean? Yet, if I call it out, I'm being rude or overreacting and I'm told to just 'accept the compliment'. It's not wanting to get your hair out whenever someone asks because an afro is hard to maintain. It's explaining to people that yes, my Dad is around as they've assumed I'm from a broken home; yes my Mom and Dad are still together, yes they are married, no my Dad doesn't have a second family, and yes, they are both loving, supportive and protective and have been since the day I was born.

In the days and weeks following George Floyd's murder, I found it really hard to open up at first, I'm a very sociable person and those who know me, know if something's wrong, I'm going to speak up. But for the first time ever at NCC Group, I felt like I didn't know who to talk to. I felt like no one would understand what I was going through or be able to relate because there isn't a lot of people at NCC Group who look like me, and in the end the only reason I did open up is because I felt like it was affecting my work. My manager Claire and colleague Jo have been absolutely amazing. They supported me, empathised with me and most importantly listened to me. I am fortunate enough to have a very close-knit team, but I know this isn't always the case for everyone.

Previously, when I've completed job applications, I'd get anxious when I saw the drop down question for 'ethnicity'. Why do companies ask this? Ethnicity should not be a determining factor of whether or not someone is offered a job, as long as that person has the relevant skill set and experience required, why does it matter if you're Black, Black Caribbean, Asian, White or Other? It doesn't. I don't want to be just another statistic to say a Black female made it to interview stage.

I want us to be responsible for support, education and encouragement. We need to celebrate all cultures, we can't pick and choose – it should be all or none! Diversity does not exist without inclusion and inclusion should not be a 'tick box' exercise to show it's been done, but instead a sense of belonging, which can drive positive change and encourage collaborative teams.

I am speaking up because I would never want anyone to feel how I felt - alone and isolated. Not speaking can really send you to a dark place. Education is key and we need to have these discussions collaboratively and ensure people feel comfortable to do so. We all have a part to play in the destruction of oppression. Some people maybe feel scared they'll get it wrong and not get involved - when honestly, saying nothing is ten times worse.

Black people have been fighting for basic human rights their whole lives. We don't have an option on whether we get involved or not. In this day and age, there is no excuse for ignorance. We have the internet, social media, books, films, documentaries and podcasts, so please don't just ask Black people what you should be doing, instead tell them about what you've done to make a difference. Learn the history of systematic, structural racism and understand that Black people are literally fighting the right to exist. Can you imagine having to explain to someone that your life is valuable despite the colour of your skin? I want people to challenge biased views, look out for discrimination and call out racist behaviours. Please turn these actions into habits because this is not a trend, Black lives matter.

Have conversations. It really is only awkward if you make it awkward and the only reason you might think this is because it's not normalised and people don't have these conversations on a regular basis. It's the same with anything, the more you talk/do something, the more comfortable you feel. If you have Black friends, they will appreciate you calling up or dropping them a message and saying 'hey, I've seen the news and it's awful what is happening, I just want you to know if you ever want to speak I'm here for you'. You are not pressuring them to speak out, but you've also acknowledged what's going on is wrong and you want to help. Your Black friend is going to be a lot more appreciative that you've reached out, rather than saying nothing at all because you feel awkward. Imagine how they must be feeling. As I've said to a lot of people, ignorance and silence really is being complicit.

I hope that by me writing this piece, I help bring some level of awareness and begin to initiate even the smallest change, especially within the workplace.

The Black Lives Matter movement is not a political issue. These are peoples' lives we are talking about, who are at the hands of racism, oppression and police brutality because of the colour of their skin. It is important people feel comfortable being vocally anti-racist, without the fear of backlash or losing their job.

I was initially quite nervous about writing this piece, I still am. I'm not just talking to my close friends and family anymore; I feel like I'm opening up my heart to the company. I want to help bring us all together, to create a diverse and cultural workspace. I don't want my nieces, nephew, or my future children to have to experience today's society. My parents always taught me to 'treat others how you'd like to be treated back', and that saying has stuck with me ever since. If you wouldn't want something done to you, then don't do it to other people, it really is that simple.

**This month, as part of NCC Conversations, we're focusing on Race and Ethnicity, where we'll be taking Crystal's advice and publishing a series of content including two workshops. The first, 'Engaging with the issue of race and ethnicity in the workplace' will be led by UK based Organisational Psychologist and DEI Consultant, Margaret Ochieng, and the second 'Cultural Intelligence' from US based Professor and DEI Consultant Crystal Lynese Walker.**

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## About NCC Group

NCC Group exists to make the world safer and more secure.

As global experts in cyber security and risk mitigation, NCC Group is trusted by over 14,000 customers to protect their most critical assets from the ever-changing threat landscape.

With the company's knowledge, experience, and investment in research and innovation, it is best placed to help organisations assess, develop and manage their cyber resilience posture.

With circa 2,000 colleagues in 12 countries, NCC Group has a significant market presence in North America, Europe and the UK, and a rapidly growing footprint in Asia Pacific with offices in Australia, Japan and Singapore.

## Contacts



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