



## LET'S MIX IT UP

June Sarpong tells **Vikas Shah** that we need more honest conversations if we are to embrace diversity

to show us that the beautiful gamut of diversity in our society is simply not reflected in the institutions that make decisions for our society.

As TV broadcaster June Sarpong told me, "We've never really talked about diversity, not honestly, and that's why we've got these problems. We've always skirted around the issue, sort of tap danced around it and walked on egg shells when discussing it. Because of this, we've never really addressed it." And, unfortunately, she's right.

3 MINS

The genetic difference between you and me and the rest of the 7.6 billion humans on our planet is, at most, 0.1 per cent. That tiny fraction of a difference accounts for the beautiful diversity our species displays, yet instead of admitting that we are, indeed, one race (the human race) we separate ourselves into pseudo-homogeneity by crude and often arbitrary measures: our colour, our gender, our income, our faith. We don't just use these groupings to find comfort in the familiar, but rather as a citadel from which we hide from the other.

Our species is successful because of our diversity; we are adaptable, creative, innovative and resilient, and our ability to



combine the experiences and knowledge of each other forms the foundations on which our greatest ideas emerge.

### The diversity paradox

We know diversity matters, yet we are creatures of habit, pack animals. We tend to have friends like us, who do jobs like ours, earn similar amounts, and have similar hobbies. We tend to consume similar media, go on similar holidays,

and ultimately stay in the zone of comfort of the familiar. At an individual level, it may not feel dangerous, but the ultimate net effect of this kind of disregard for the unfamiliar means that our company boards, our governments and many other key structures in our society are microcosms representing a very small stratum of our world.

Let me be clear, there are exceptions, but it doesn't take peer-reviewed research

### Diversity matters

I have had the pleasure of working with hundreds of businesses over the years, and one thing I can say for certain is that the companies that flourish are the ones who embrace diversity, both inherent (gender, race) and acquired (skills, global experience, languages), and here are a few observations on why that happens.

THE LIST

#### MAIL SHOTS

Jo Ellen Grzyb has ten tips on how to write better and more effective emails

##### 1. CLARITY IS KEY

People will love you for being concise. But try not to be too concise – remember, you're not texting. Too short and you can come across as abrupt and rude, but at the same time you don't need to cram everything including the kitchen sink into one email. Pay attention to 'white space' in your layout to make it easier to read.

##### 2. GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

Your subject line could be intriguing, provocative or simply a clear indication of the

content of the message so that it gets read in the first place or so that it can be easily found in future. But bear in mind that it gets really annoying to receive breathless or catastrophising subject lines.

##### 3. GET INTO THEIR HEAD

Most of us send emails from our own point of view without too much focus on what might be going on for the other person. Imagine what the recipient's day might be like and what impact your email may have, and then write it from that perspective.

##### 4. WHAT DO YOU WANT THE RECIPIENT TO DO?

People waffle and often don't

get to the point. You need to make clear early on what action you'd like and by when.

##### 5. LESS IS MORE

Keep your message to one or two related points. If you try to cover too much in one email, you'll end up diluting the whole message and possibly confuse the recipient as to what's a priority.

##### 6. THE WHOLE WORLD DOESN'T NEED TO KNOW

Unless the whole world really does need to know, be ruthless about who you cc or bcc in. Too many people and you'll get a reputation as someone who's always trying to cover their back. Ask yourself who really

2 MINS



**Judge not**  
Broadcaster June Sarpong says she has learnt about diversity the hard way

view. That can't work for long. Introducing opposing, complementary and differing perspectives into decision-making and strategy structures of any business gives the organisation space to explore opportunities and to take better decisions.

**Get over it**

June Sarpong has spent much of her professional life on screen as a presenter and host,

people to talk about their concerns, voice their fears, and voice their pains and their hurt, but in a non-judgemental way that allows people to connect with each other as people.

"Until we start having those very difficult conversations (which always rear their ugly head at some point, the minute the economy falters, the minute something goes wrong in society) straight away we look for somebody to blame, and it's usually the 'other'... It's usually immigrants, it's usually people who are different. We need to change our hearts and minds, not just our behaviours."

Creating this AA style model for diversity starts with us. We have to get to know the *other* and invite them into our world and our lives. It may be something as simple as changing our media habits, or something as challenging as spending time with

a community or group we

harboured ill feelings about.

It may be something as proactive as making a commitment to a more diverse workplace, or something as subtle as encouraging ourselves and our team to volunteer at a charity and get a different perspective on life.

Diversity doesn't need to be about grand changes, but about subtle and constant pushes into the unknown to encourage us out of the pack, and into the wild. After all, that's where the real opportunities are! ■

**"We look for somebody to blame, and it's usually the 'other'"**

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**Creativity and innovation**

The variety of experiences we have directly informs the ideas we have. Our genius is not in isolation, but rather engineered serendipity. We all know stories of 'Aha!' moments in science, technology and business, but these didn't come as a result of convergent thinking, but rather from divergences – seeing things from a different perspective, having a different experience, or working with people with different skills. Firms with more diversity are more creative and more innovative, period.

**Decision-making and strategy**

I genuinely see that a diversity of perspectives yields better decisions. I remember doing some coaching with a company where the founding team were all alumni of one university (indeed, one course) and had very similar backgrounds. In truth, this constrained their thinking so that decisions and strategy were only seen through the blinkers of a single world

and through that has learnt about

diversity the hard way; but she has a pragmatic view on solutions. "I use the AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) programme as an example," she says. "I'm teetotal and always have been, but most of my friends are AA. (I always say I wonder what Jung would make of that. Or Freud.) When I lived in America I would hang out at AA meetings with my buddies. It was fun and fascinating.

"The wonderful thing about AA is that it's probably one of the only long-term successful change programmes, and there are three key reasons for this. Firstly, it's a judgement-free environment. Secondly, you're held to account by an individual sponsor. Thirdly, you have the community there who support you. We need our own version of AA for diversity, where we allow

needs to know and, if you're adding extra names, ask yourself why.

**7. ACT IN HASTE, REPENT AT LEISURE**

Never, ever send an important email without re-reading it more than once. And if you're still not sure, get a colleague to read it to not only ensure it makes sense but also make sure that the grammar is correct and that spelling errors haven't crept in. Bad grammar and spelling can be considered red flags by some people and will damage your credibility.

**8. SEE ATTACHED...**

Picture that awful moment when you realise you've sent an email without adding the attachment – and the even more awful moment when someone emails you back asking where the attachment is. When you rush, it's one of the things that can get missed. Getting into a routine will help: writing, re-reading, checking spelling and grammar and then adding attachments.

**9. COUNT TO TEN**

If you're cross or annoyed with someone or with

something that's happened, write your email and then save it as a draft. Take a walk, have a cup of tea, even sleep on it, but avoid pressing that send button until you are absolutely sure you mean what you've written and you are prepared for the consequences.

**10. BEWARE THE NEW DATA PROTECTION RULES**

With new, stricter rules about data protection coming into effect in May, you need to be fully up to speed on who can and cannot receive emails, especially marketing emails.

Avoid the common error of cc-ing a whole bunch of people without having received permission from each and every one of them. There's lots of advice out there on GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). Don't get caught out. ■

**Jo Ellen Grzyb is a founding partner of Impact Factory, a global leading training consultancy, and author of *The Nice Factor Book: The Art of Saying No and Family Heaven, Family Hell*. [impactfactory.com](http://impactfactory.com)**