



# Through a lens of fascination

*Who are you to speak on topics like racial harassment or valuing diversity? You're a white, able-bodied, middle-class woman... what can you know of the minority experience?*

This is the voice of one of my gremlins. He's a mean-faced little troll who perches on my shoulder whispering harsh messages of self-doubt in my ear, especially when I am talking to an audience of African-American HR practitioners. What right do I have indeed?

My gremlin keeps me on my toes. He reminds me to begin such presentations by sharing that my husband is of Indian decent, born in Trinidad, and that he and I aspire to give our children a strong awareness of their rich racial and cultural heritage. I mention

that my son self-identifies as white and my daughter sees herself as brown (although they are almost identical in colouring).

Then, I usually get a tension-relieving laugh in

telling the story of my family's discussion of race and gender when my daughter, Kimberly, was about four years old and she firmly declared Mommy to be purple. I didn't know whether to be flattered to be a distant relative of Barney the Purple Dinosaur (thus making me particularly special in her eyes) or to rush out to get varicose-vein treatments!

My gremlin has me do a lot of explaining, as if these intimate connections to racial diversity somehow buy me credibility.

Recently I was speaking with a client of mine – a young, savvy South Asian woman. I shared with her my desire to link up a number of women leaders of South Asian decent for the purposes of dialogue, connection and mutual support. I could envision myself facilitating their conversations and helping them to find the “gold” that their heritage brings to each of them uniquely. But I had been stalling. My gremlin was winning.

My client protested, “Of course >



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you can do this! When you bring us together from a place of fascination, it makes every sense! You will help us discover different things about ourselves because of your perspective.”

Her words resonated as truth. When people are entering new industries and new organizational cultures, I often reassure them that: “It’s not so much what you know that will determine your success as what you are curious to discover.”

When we bring too many assumptions of “knowing” about differences, it can get in the way of true discovery about each other. Wikipedia defines a stereotype as “a pre-conceived and over-simplified notion of characteristics typical of a person or group.”

It’s this lens of fascination and “not knowing” that can bring richness to diverse workplaces and communities. Righteous knowing only shuts conversations down and is a deterrent to authentic relationship-building.

So I encourage you, in your workplaces, in your communities and in your intimate circles... to see how donning the “lens of fascination” can strengthen your relationships and reveal more creativity, power and innovation. •

*Sue Edwards is president of Development by Design, a leadership coaching firm. She has recently launched a LinkedIn Group called South Asian Salon. Sue coaches emerging minority leaders through her program, Set Up to Soar!<sup>TM</sup> [www.clearingthe90dayhurdle/setuptosoar.shtml](http://www.clearingthe90dayhurdle/setuptosoar.shtml)*

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