

Implicit barriers to entry are the hardest to overcome

THERE are at least three important characteristics of nonracialism in our country. First, nonracialism represents the very best of what it means to be South African. Eastern Cape chiefs writing to the British in 1818 said this: "When our fathers and the fathers of the Boers first settled in the Zuurveld they dwelt together in peace. Their flocks grazed on the same hills, their herds-men smoked together out of the same pipes." The Freedom Charter, adopted by the congress movement in 1955, declared in the simplest of language that "SA belongs to all who live in it, black and white". Beyond this history ordinary South Africans know that our country can only fulfil its true destiny if it embraces the talent, energy and dreams of men and women of all races.

Second, nonracialism is hard. It has taken most of the first century of our history (from 1910 to 1994) to achieve a constitution that offers full citizenship to all. All South Africans have a lived experience shaped by race and racial stereotypes.

Third, nonracialism is possible. We have now all experienced what perhaps is best called "event" nonracialism. The nonracial exuberance of standing in the voting queue. The nonracial unity of a packed Soccer City singing the national anthem during the Soccer World Cup (or Tri-Nations rugby).

We have ample evidence of what we might call "situational" nonracialism.

In many of the former model C schools large groups of kids of different races have found common values, shared friendships and identical hopes for the future.

With this powerful goal of building a racially inclusive future, can we define a race transformation of a new and special kind?

Let me suggest some characteristics about a transformation process that seeks to create a nonracial SA.

Such a process will have to be fully inclusive. We must embrace the talent and

energy gene pool of 100% of our people. So the first task will be to take down barriers to entry at every level of our social reality. If the recruitment pool for engineers, doctors, members of Parliament, public servants, plumbers and electricians is not drawing candidates from black and white, men and women, then race- or gender-based barriers exist and should be removed.

The goal of nonracialism is to ensure that opportunity is open to all. This demands that people occupy real positions, and have the experience and skill and knowledge to operate in these positions effectively. Putting people without the necessary experience, skill or knowledge in place is destructive to the individual concerned and the part of society she or he is meant to serve.

As our society moves towards education and training that is inclusive in both race and gender terms, there is no need for such fraudulent appointments.

In changing the race and gender profiles of organisations we must also be changing the culture of these organisations. This will not happen automatically. Dominant cultures have the capacity and the inclination to admit others only on their own terms. As much as the new individuals need to learn and adapt to the organisations they join, so too do the organisations need to adapt to the different realities of new people.

Organisations that become both nonracial and gender-inclusive will need a new language, a new culture and a new set of rules about how things get done.

A nonracial organisation should see the society it operates within quite differently from its racially exclusive predecessor. If

employees, customers, government and regulators are not seen and understood in a different way then the inclusion is not real.

It is precisely this enriched, expanded and changed culture that is the very value of diversity in organisations.

A truly nonracial organisation will operate much more effectively within our diverse country. It will also be much more ready for life beyond SA's borders, as diversity will now be part of its DNA.

No significant process of social change is cost-free.

Changing the culture of the places where we work or play or pray will never be easy. Both the dominant culture and the newcomers will have to be ready to question their own assumptions, and be ready to reshape both the explicit and hidden "rules of the game". The dominant group will have to forgo their monopoly on access, and any expectation of privilege or preference. Newcomers will have to meet nonracially defined expectations of the jobs they fill. Unless everybody is at least somewhat uncomfortable the process of transformation cannot be real.

Some years ago the cartoonist Zapiro penned a cartoon of a university graduation function. The speaker was mouthing the clichés of the moment. "The world is your oyster. The future belongs to you. You must live your dreams." The cynic sitting next to him whispers: "But what about the whites?" Should whites (and other racial minorities) be fearful of their future? If the goal is a nonracial society, surely not. If we seek a society that offers each citizen an equal opportunity to pursue his or her dream, why should any individual fear for the future? An attempt to

replace one race caste system with another, this time with a different caste on top, is a clear betrayal of the nonracial goal embraced in our 1996 constitution.

The road to this nonracial future requires meaningful and effective measures to clear the very real explicit and the even more dangerous implicit barriers faced by both those South Africans who were not white as well as those who were not males. Black females of course faced and continue to face a double set of barriers. The easiest barriers to remove are those that are explicit: that exist in law or company policies. The most difficult (and often the most effective) are the implicit instruments of exclusion. In the end we will know that significant progress has been made only when the ability of black and female South Africans is demonstrated by their presence, in numbers, in all parts of society.

As we take down these barriers we must at the same time be at work to create a nonracial and therefore inclusive identity and culture. This will often require a difficult balancing act. Nonracial recruitment and training may often require organisations to give preference to black and female South Africans over their white and male compatriots. Complete exclusion of whites and males is likely to entrench racial and gender thinking rather than reduce it. And an Orwellian (or Verwoerdian) desire to see the exact national demography of our country reflected in every province, occupation and level of our society will replace one caste system with another.

And the day will finally dawn where black and white, men and women have found their place in every sector of our society.

When that day comes we can consign race and gender labels to the history books and each delight in the category that matters most: South African.

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