

What's in a name?

Part 1:

Can everyone close their eyes? Take yourself back to the first day at your job or the first day at your very first job. How are you feeling, excited, nervous and anxious? What thoughts are racing through your mind? What will your job be like? What will colleagues be like? Will you fit in?

I want to share with you my story. Having just graduated from medical school during the pandemic, I was starting my first job as a doctor. I had been there 2/3 weeks and felt like I was finally settling in - I enjoyed my job and was working really well with my team. A colleague who I enjoyed working with, a few weeks in, asked for a reminder of my name. This wasn't an issue for me at all, junior doctors rotate jobs and teams every 4 months, so it wasn't unexpected for her to not remember my name. On top of that my name isn't a standard English name so I understand it's hard to remember.

She very politely asked me 'I'm so sorry what was your name again?' 'That's ok, it's not a common name at all, its Kudrat'. 'K? oh I'm not going to be able to remember that or pronounce that HAH' I showed her my work badge because I find it's easier for people to see it written down. It's easy if you split it into two, kud-rat. 'I won't be able to pronounce that, do you have a nickname?' I said no I'm not a fan of nicknames I said jokingly. 'Ok well I'll call you Kat, it'll be easier to remember'. Um.. Ok?

If this was you, how would you feel sad, angry, confused? Initially I felt confused. Then I felt embarrassed, embarrassed that I had potentially created an awkward situation with a colleague I wanted to get along with. Then I felt upset, upset that my name wasn't remembered. Was I not a valuable asset to my team? Did they respect me? I started questioning my relationship with them. Finally, disappointment, disappointment that a small amount of time couldn't be taken out to remember my name or to learn how to pronounce it properly. This wasn't an isolated experience; throughout my childhood, in school, university and at work I have had many names, could-rat, kudrad, kudra, keira, Karla. This was a first with a brand-new shiny nickname. If anyone knows me, they know I hate nicknames. But I had become used to it. I had accepted this microaggression as the norm. This experience really got me thinking. When did my name actually become could-rat from Kudrat? The first 7 years of my life I was in Norway, and there I was Kudrat, very similar. When I moved to the UK, I suddenly became could-rat. Why did that happen? Why did I accept the anglicised version of my name? Well, I was 7, starting halfway through the year into year 2 and the most important thing to me then was

making friends and fitting in. So, I became could-rat. And I stayed could-rat for a very long time.

Part 2:

Four centuries ago, Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet wrote 'What's in a name?'. He said that it is just a convention and therefore has no meaning behind it. But in fact, a person's name is everything. It's an expression of one's individuality, their identity, and their uniqueness. In a lot of cultures, in particular mine, names carry a deeper meaning and are rooted in social and cultural beliefs. My name means nature, and it was selected after my birth in a special naming ceremony and was especially picked by my dad. It was a special name given to me.

A person's name is the first thing you learn about them. It's the first line in every new conversation, a basic first step. It also sets the tone for that conversation and for your relationship with that person. It's a small factor but within a team, on a personal level this impacts the feeling of belonging, the feeling of being valued and the feeling of being respected. Something so simple and yet difficult as pronouncing a name. 1. Belonging. 2. Value. 3. Respect. You could even draw it down to as simple as it being a demonstration of caring and kindness.

Historically, many people have anglicized their names to 'fit in', to appear more mainstream within dominant Anglo-cultures. A study found that half of the surveyed Chinese students who attended American universities, adopted English names to make it easier for people to pronounce. More than half of Asian and black job applicants in America 'whitened' their CVs to avoid any racial cues. Those who did were twice as likely to be called for an interview. This is extremely problematic.

Part 3:

The NHS is currently facing the greatest workforce crisis in its 74-year history. There are major issues of staff burnout and workforce retention. We have all learnt from Natasha Zimmerman the importance of belonging. Belonging is what leads to having a community. A key cause of burnout is that disconnection from that feeling of belonging. That feeling of passion towards their team and their work, if people are kept connected, it reduces burnout. Now of course there are many different factors that go into this as well as that but making your team members feel like they belong, like they are valued and respected by knowing and pronouncing their name is a basic first step.

Communities and organisations, especially the NHS are becoming more and more diverse and the chance of coming across an unusual, difficult or different name is almost inevitable. A report by NHS England in February this year showed that the NHS is more diverse now than at any point in its history. Almost 1 in 3 of its staff are from a black and ethnic minority background. Realistically if you work with many people during a single day, that's 2-3 'difficult' names a day! And don't forget about the patients. Patients who deserve our full attention and respect. They have names too. Names that deserve to be pronounced correctly during some of their most difficult and vulnerable times of their lives.

Part 4

Let's fast forward a bit and I'm now in my second job as a doctor. I overheard one of my registrars, senior colleague, introducing himself as Daffydd to the nursing staff. Someone called him David and he very simply corrected them to call him Daffydd. I thought wow. I was pleasantly surprised that he had taken some time out to stand up for himself. He then asked me what my name was when I said Kudrat, his question back was 'Can you teach me?' In that moment I was shocked. No one had asked me that before, especially not a senior colleague. With just that singular question, it broke down that barrier or awkwardness for me, the barrier of 'here we go again', I suddenly felt empowered to want to teach it to him correctly. There was a sudden shift within that power dynamic and that moment suddenly became a very positive one. It's a very simple yet effective tool - 'Can you teach me'

In particular in an organisation like the NHS, which is very hierarchical, it empowers that person to be able to teach their rightful name. This simple tool will allow you to not make the mistake that that person did with me. In the end the mistake is not the mispronunciation or not remembering the name, it's what you do after this, it's the continued mispronunciation, or in an extreme baptising someone with a new name. In the end it's all about belonging, feeling valued and respected. It also speaks to other parts of us, this isn't just about a name. It's about how we treat each other, how we listen to one another, how we care and how that makes us better team members within our organisations.

My name isn't Koodrat, my name is not Karla, nor is it Kat. My name is Kudrat.

Thank you.