

Affirmative Action Culprits and Instigators

By Mzamo Masito

The apartheid policy was RACE driven. Here in Cape Town when I use the word disadvantage, it's synonymous with BLACK (African, coloured, Indian), who happen to make up the majority of the population. Which ever way you define disadvantaged, race will always be a variable that stand out most, given our country's history.

With regards to AA debate we should be able to separate Design/Formulation of Policy and Implementation of that policy. The intentions behind AA to me are noble (I must be careful just in case I am seen to be saying this because I am black ,how then do you make raceless statements in a country that has a young democracy and still has a lot of race baggage?). Where AA fails to me is in implementation. Land redistribution or restitution as a policy it is sound and makes sense, But how Mugabe implemented the policy vs. SA he deserves to be struck by lightning. If some of the missionaries sent by the queen and pope used Christianity to conquer Africa does that make the essence of Christianity bad or that in any system there are those who will exploit it and the unintended negative consequences are achieved.

In SA I have observed three culprits/instigators that give AA a bad name: the recruiter/mentor/decision maker mostly white, sympathiser HR person mostly black, black graduate or black job seeker.

POWER: Recruiter /Selection Committee/Mentor/Decision Maker

Most companies have given their managers targets to transform the company so that it reflects the demographics of the population. Some of these white managers are driven by fear, resentment, ignorance, hurts, holding on to privilege (not always fairly gained), racism and do not agree with AA but pay a lip service in public so as not to be judged or labelled as racist or members of the AWB. They go out of their way and deliberately hire a black person who is not ready/does not fit the position , knowing and hoping that he (black dude) fails so as to be able to entrench the dumb belief that blacks are incompetent and AA is a failure. Some of the white managers are given responsibilities to mentor black graduates so that one day they can take over their jobs and the mentor will sabotage the mentee. The mentee will be told to take it easy and task that should have taken a week to learn will be dragged to 3 months.

SOME POWER: Sympathiser, HR, Blacks

There are black people who are in positions of power/decision making, who allow emotions to cloud judgement. When they assess a black person they become inconsistent and start letting race, apartheid's pains be the recruitment criteria. It is important as black people we do not allow past pains to overshadow reason and create policies based on bleeding hearts and not assess the negative consequences of such policies. There are also black people who love being the 1st darkie to become a board member, 1st black Manager etc and they will do everything in their power to maintain this prestigious position accorded to them by white people. Black people who suffer from inferiority complex, pull them down syndrome, who will not help another black person climatise easily in an environment where they are a minority. Black people

who allow white people to tell them that they are different (special breed of black people) than other blacks who are incompetent. Black people who allow divide and rule to be practised in the corporate as was done by the NATS.

POWERLESS: Black JOB seeker

There are black people who want to sleep and wake up rich, sleep and wake up CEO's of companies they know nothing about, have very little skill and competency to run such businesses. Who allow white people to use them as window dressers? Who are the biggest drivers of fronting, behind them supported by owners of capital? Black people, who put money before excellence, are a disgrace to their own race and do not realise that they have done a dis-service to the next generation. They have only thought young people a culture of entitlement and easy money. AA is about transfer of skills, intellectual capital and without these black people will always be servants, suffer from a dependency syndrome, create no business empires.

MYTHS

If I am recruited in a position, and there are people who believe that it is because I am black. This then assumes that all white people in SA are competent, intelligent, and wise and set the standard on excellence. What is excellence? Whose excellence are we talking about? White people do not necessary have a monopoly over standards, merit, and excellence. When I am studying at UCT and being thought by lecturers and textbooks that are insensitive to my background (culture, language), examples used that I cannot relate to nor understand. Then I get 50% or fail and a white students gets 60% or 1+, whose standard are we talking about, and who are these standards designed for?. In a place where sometimes we attached intelligence to language (English proficiency), I ask again whose standards are we talking about?

Incompetence does not equal Black. Why is it that black people have to prove to whites (leaders, decision makers) that they are competent, in an environment where there are unwritten rules, codes, golf sessions, safaris, canoeing and scuba-diving , of which most black people do not attend nor want to be part of.

Excellence should come before race. This then assumes that all white people have been promoted on the basis of a fair merit system, competency, and deliver excellent results. There are enough cases where white people have not been promoted only on excellence but on potential, then given mentoring and coaching to ensure that they succeed.

It is hard to find a job as a white person, is it? Which industry and profession are you talking about first? There are certain industries/or disciplines were white people are going to start finding it hard to find jobs because of increased competition and more people competing for the same job. If you are in marketing, sales etc if you are white you will have to compete with black people who might have a better understanding of the market, since most FMCG manufacturers make their money form the black consumer. A has given all white people who are not getting jobs an excuse, even white people who are incompetent, not smart etc can now hide behind AA. White people who were never going to be CEO or appointed to senior positions now can hide behind AA. We should all learn to look within and not always blame external

factors. When I started working when I was treated badly I immediately concluded it was because I am black and soon realised that some of the criticism were genuine and come from good hearts and people who want to see me grow.

All policies and systems have flaws; it would be hard to come up with a system that will make everyone happy.

We need to be able to measure success. For those who do not want race to be used what then is the alternative in SA given our history?

Asking people to volunteer to change is like turning a university or corporate into a church or NGO. Asking people to volunteer to change and attend diversity initiatives at their will helps ensure that transformation only happens in 2090, of which most of us will be dead by then. Some strong push is needed, to get the flywheel in motion.

The institution or system must define what it wants to be and all breathing species must adapt or die or live.

Peace and Love
MM.