

Keeping Sane as an African Canadian Working in White Institutions: Tips for Surviving in Hostile Environments

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Presentation and Conversation

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What is a Hostile Environment

A hostile work environment exists when:

- Discriminatory behaviour against a protected class exists in the environment
- The behaviour constitutes a persistent pattern
- The behaviour must be severe enough to disrupt the work of the targeted employee(s)
- It is expected that the behaviour will continue if uninterrupted.

Hostile Environment: Another Consideration

A hostile environment may also be created structurally when a position exists within an institution that has an antagonistic role within the organization. Consider:

- A quality control officer working in a mine
- An SEC officer working within a security firm
- A officer in an institution responsible for investigating claims of harassment or discrimination

Is the Schulich School of Law a Hostile Environment?

The Marshall Enquiry establishes that racism is at work within the criminal justice system in Nova Scotia and that it excludes IBM persons

Given this systemic exclusion it stands to reason that as agents of systemic change (by their very presence), IBM persons are in a structural conflict with the very institutions in which they study and work

How do you Stay Sane in a Hostile Environment?

I have developed a 6 point plan for my personal sanity preservation (you can be the judge of my success):

- Identity: Develop and maintain a strong sense of Identity.
- Competence/Excellence: Work to be Competent
- Analysis: Work within a theoretical Analysis of the larger, structural issues - depersonalize conflict
- Independence: It is critical to live with a strong sense of independence. Feeling trapped undermines your wellness
- Process: Staying sane and healthy is a work in progress. Some people need help with this. Sometimes counselling is helpful.
- Action: Remain connected to those activities and engagements that support and preserve your identity, even when those activities are antagonistic to the work or learning environment

Conclusion

Those are the six points. I hope that this brief introduction to the topic allows for spirited and productive conversation.