

Pronouncing Other People's Names Correctly Does Matter

Especially if you value dignity, respect and inclusion.

"A person's name is the greatest connection to their own identity and individuality. Some might say it is the most important word in the world to that person... It is a sign of courtesy...

When someone remembers our name after meeting us, we feel respected and more important."

Those are the words of Joyce E. A. Russell an Organisational psychologist and leadership expert

What's in a name?

The names we are given, agonised over by our parents afraid of how it will affect us for the rest of our lives, are part of our identities.

It's who we are as individuals.

It is also a connection to family, culture, heritage and history.

It's too difficult!

We must learn the importance of learning and seeing names we might find difficult at first. We learn the names of our favourite sports stars, not to mention Tchaikovsky, Michelangelo and Dostoevsky. Being respectful is always worth the effort.

But what about...

Thandiwe Newton.

Sade

Ama Afrifa-Tchie

Ngoc Nguyen

Getting it wrong!

We can often get it wrong, sometimes innocently or often being lazy. It can also be considered a microaggression. Sending a message that "you are minimal", "You are not important in this environment, so why should I take time and my effort to learn your name?"

Why getting someone's name is important?

By getting it right you make someone feel accepted and comfortable, included and that they belong. It is an important part of mental and physical well being. Allowing them to flourish with a strong sense of self.

'There is nothing wrong with someone, getting the pronunciation or spelling wrong if they're unfamiliar with your name. However, if they refuse to try to say it correctly or they call you by something else entirely, that is a bigoted choice.'

Uju Asika, Bringing Up Race.

E.g.

Efemena is called Effy

Nanno is called Nando's

Abdullah is called Jeff

Bharrat is called Bob

By naming someone wrongly, repeatedly, you are denying them the respect we are all entitled to as equals.

The Solution

A simple solution could be to normalise adding phonetic spelling to your email signature. Here are 3 ways to add it, how it sounds to you, example words or the international phonetic alphabet. E.g.

Thandiwe Newton [tan-DEE-way]

/tan-di:-wæ/

Bijal Patel [Be-Jul-pat-ell 'as in well']

/bə-ʒəl/ /pat-ɛl/

Ama Afrifa-Tchie [Ah-ma Ah-free-fah-Chee]

/a-ma/ /a-fi:-fa-chi:/

Ngoc Nguyen [nock] "WIN]

/nʌk/ /win/



"The thing I'm most grateful for in our business right now is being in the company of others who truly see me. And to not be complicit in the objectification of black people as 'others', which is what happens when you're the only one," she said.

"That's my name. It's always been my name. I'm taking back what's mine," Newton told British Vogue.

Take Action

#ActionNotWords for Black History Month

1. We all encourage our colleagues, employees and networks to put our names in phonetics?
2. If you are unsure how to pronounce a name, check or ask to be corrected.
3. Add phonetic options in meetings and registrations, name badges and emails

7 simple tips to get it right

- 1. Ask the person to pronounce it - and actively listen.** Rather than try to say a name you are unfamiliar with, ask the person how to pronounce it.
- 2. Don't make it a big deal.** Once you have heard the correct pronunciation, thank them and move on. Don't focus on how unfamiliar you are with their name.
- 3. Observe and practise.** Make an effort to hear how someone pronounces their name to other people, even if you heard it before. Check if you are introducing them in a public forum and practise.
- 4. Clarify again.** If you meet someone again after a while it's fine to check how you should pronounce their name.
- 5. Do something when you realize you've been mispronouncing it.** Apologize when you get it wrong, as soon as you realise.
- 6. Be an ally.** If you hear someone mispronouncing a colleague's name, when they are not around, step in and correct them gently.
- 7. Don't be arrogant or flippant.** Don't say "I'll never get it right." or not listen when you are corrected.

Appendix

Examples and options for phonetics

There are a few ways of writing your name phonetically. Find the one that works for you. Here are our original examples plus the first attempts from our test event. Write what you think and then get someone (or multiple people) to say it back to you. It's not about being perfect it's about taking action.

#mynameis #ActionNotWords

Thandiwe Newton [tan-DEE-way]	/tan-dɪ:-wæ/
Sade [Sha-day]	/ʃɑ-dæ/
Bijal Patel [Be-Jul-pat-ell 'as in well']	/bə-ʒʌl/ /pat-ɛl/
Ama Afrifa-Tchie [Ah-ma Ah-free-fah-Chee]	/ɑ-mɑ/ /ɑ-fɪ:-fɑ-chɪ:/
Ngoc Nguyen [nock] "WIN"	/nʌk/ /wɪn/
Nicola : Nik-o-la	
Vicki: vi-key	
Lilianna: Lili-Arna	
Diandra Shortte: Dee-an-drah Short	
Justine: Jus TEEN	
Rajdeep: Raj—Deep	
Isobel : IZ - O -Bell	
Paul Diton: Paul Die - Ton	
Lorraine: law-rain	
Judeline: Jewde line	
Mercy: Mer See	
Louise: Loo - eez	
Jusna: Joos-na	
Hilda Mulrooney : Hil-dah Mul-roon-nee	
Qamar: Comer	
Yvonne: Ev-on ALSO E-von	
Fayola: Fay-oh-lah (Fay rhymes with May)	
Janine: Jah neen	
Sushila Amar: Sooshilla Umer	
Sandra: san dra	
Marcelle: mar sell	
Denise: Den-eeese	
Kamleish: Written Kamleish pronounced Khmlehsh	
Nagy: Nah-jee	
Adebajo: Add-Dee-Bar-Joe	
Makayla : Ma - Kay -La	

The International Phonetic Alphabet symbols can be found at ipa.typeit.org