

[Music]

Lisa Sisk: “So, hi everybody thank you for coming to the final farewell lunch of Woollinn 2019. We really appreciate you hanging out with us today and we want to say, just thank you to all of our amazing team our volunteers and vendors or visitor's you've just been spectacular it's been the warmest and most lovely atmosphere and we're just so so grateful for you all of your support. Particularly we want to give a shout out to our sponsors, oh Aishling give me all the names please, 100% for Stephen & Penelope for supporting this talk we are really very grateful.”

[Clapping]

“To KnittingTours.com, to Cross & Woods, to Hide & Hammer, to Studio Donegal, Knit Pro and Emily Foulds and the Fibe Co. Thank you so much. I am absolutely delighted to introduce you all to Adaku Ezeudo, she is just a light and such a positive and warm and passionate person - she has an amazing story and she's she's just born to do what she does - and I think we're all going to get some really interesting insights from her talk today so without any further ado I will hand you over to Adaku.”

[Clapping]

Adaku Ezeudo:

"Hi everyone."

Crowd:

"Hi"

Adaku Ezeudo:

"Good afternoon."

Crowd:

Good Afternoon

Adaku Ezeudo:

"I can see so you guys have had some lovely lunch. I hope you enjoyed it."

Crowd:

Nods "Yes"

Adaku Ezeudo:

“Great stuff. I’m really, so happy to be here today and I’m delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you. I can see hands knitting. That’s amazing. How do you guys do that? I am so impressed!”

“So, first of all I would like to say a big well done to the organizers of the Woollinn festival and thank you for asking me to come here to share my story, to share myself with all of you I really do appreciate it and yeah, I think they deserve a round of applause for an event like this.

[Applause]

“Well done, well done.”

“So while I have the podium, I would like to take a few minutes to tell you a little bit about myself and why I am passionate about furthering diversity and inclusion throughout Ireland. I will also talk a bit about Phoenix Rise Consulting, that’s my diversity and inclusion company, and again share a few ideas on how small businesses like yours can begin to make a journey to inclusion.”

“So, I’m originally from Nigeria and I’m living in Ireland for about 18 years and I do feel at home here now. I was traveling to a place where I knew very little about and I didn’t really think of what life and the practicalities would be at the other end of that flight. And when I look back now, I think I came here on a wing and a prayer.

“This is the reality for many people that have made similar journeys to find a better life. So although English is my first language in Nigeria, I found out that in Ireland we use the same language differently. For example when an Irish person says yes, sometimes they mean no.”

Crowd:

Laughter

Adaku Ezeudo:

“Or when they tell you “we must meet up for a cup of tea!” It does not mean that you show up the next day in their house expecting the cup of tea. It's just their polite culture, They are just polite and they just don't know how to say no.”

“So that was some of the challenges I faced coming to Ireland because that confused me. Like what do you mean? You know. What are you saying ?

So apart from the language barriers, I discovered that my, the qualifications that I had achieved in Nigeria and I brought to Ireland were not recognized. I was either told that I was overqualified or I didn't have enough Irish experience. So I had to take a few steps backwards to be able to get my you know, to be able to get my foot in the door.

So I went back to a course in insurance that I didn't need but because the course had work experience attached to it I just said I would do it because I wanted to get a job. So after we finished the insurance

course and it took me nine months to do the course. So you can imagine how much time I had to invest but after we finished the course, we were about maybe 21 people there. We had two Nigerians and the rest were Irish. Every Irish person got work placement opportunities but I and the other guy from Nigeria did not get anything. So we were just like devastated.

We are shocked like why us?

But why? We had the best results?

So that was quite, like, it's unfair but I didn't understand what was going on.

So the course director, I remember, told us "You need to show that you are confident and you know what you are doing. Go out there and you know, make the phone calls yourself"

And we tried and tried... Nothing. And so he picked up the phone himself and talked to a few companies and within two days we are accepted. But that taught me something.

It taught me that having the best results, having a distinction did not matter I did not get your foot in the door. What worked was contacts. Who did you know? But again, that left me a bit confused about the Irish system.

Anyway so I linked in with other Nigerians in the system in Ireland and who are also in the same boat as me. Trying to find out "What's the story?" "What's your experience like?" and I realized that we all

had the same issues. We're not going anywhere. We are going round in circles. We're not, you know getting jobs, or we are offered a job as cleaners in a hotel.

So I was like no. I can not. I have an accounting background. I can't do cleaning job, that's gonna kill me, you know. So, I said no but some people said "oh well that's it. That's what I can get. Fine, so I'll do it."

But I said no. So I later found work in the corporate sector, many years later and I was able to provide for myself but again you now talk I began to wonder after all this fight to get into this corporate or more like, I was horrified. Now I was like "I don't want to be here. I want to leave this place, it's not me."

It wasn't in my job. I found out that I really I love to work with people. I like to do work that aligned with my values. I realized that I wasn't behind-the-desk kind of person, a 9:00 to 5:00...no. I know that's not for me. I was more into, you know, work that allowed me to make a difference.

So I went back again, you know, I wasn't sure how do I leave this corporate world and do this? This really confused me. So I got another Master's degree in Kimmage and after that I hit a brick wall again because I didn't get a job I wanted. I wanted to move from the corporate world to the community sector but no charity would accept me. They said I didn't have charity experience, I was more financial. Like, what you guys want? I mean I have experience, come on, but that didn't work. so with time I was able to overcome all these issues, you know, because of my dedication to persevere, to network, and my willingness to learn.

So this has allowed me to navigate life here in Ireland.

So I'm aware that not everybody has these skills, to get up each time they get knocked down. It's not easy. Some people get disenfranchised. They're like, "I can't do it anymore" but because of my nature, I could do it. I could keep going, I keep believing, you know. I am able to get to where I am.

So I remember then my Irish colleagues would tell me "oh why don't they see a lot of ethnic communities in mainstream events? I know that Ireland has become so diverse, so why is, you know, so why are there people from ethnic minority groups not in, you know, in events.

So I said "Okay, that's something I hope I can influence through my work"

And I know that really and it can be daunting even for the Irish people as well in terms of networking, you know, you have to stand-up and present yourself and not everybody is confident and comfortable talking in public.

Anyway but can you imagine how difficult it is for somebody that English is not their first language or for someone who has a strong accent or even for people like me who have a stammer or people that come from a different culture where networking is not, yeah, it's not, it's not the norm.

So even if I had in my own head I thought I have achieved my goals. I worked in the corporate sector, you know being able to overcome my challenges. But I knew the type that gets used to my new life and I'm moving on from that. I still think of how tough things were when I was trying to settle down in Ireland. And I was coming with an education, as an accountant from home, and so how much more

difficult is it for those that are, that had, you know, a nasty experience, a trauma before coming to Ireland.

So this was the driver behind my setting up of Phoenix Rise Consulting because like a Phoenix I rose from the challenges of discrimination, from microaggression from bias and I believe that I could help other people too. So now I help migrants like myself, to develop cultural awareness and skills and that positive mindset so that they can participate in Irish society as equals and are valued as equal contributors to the Irish society.

I also work with organizations helping them to understand the significance of diversity and inclusion and also help them to improve their cultural competence so that they can reap the incredible benefits of diversity and inclusion. I also provide coaching one-on-one coaching for businesses who are looking to take the first step, who don't know how to begin to navigate this journey.

You know, that's part of some things that I do but again if you look at it I'm just one person. I can only do so much and in order for us to enjoy the wider benefit for, you know, to Ireland's economy as a whole, we all need to play a part. Whether you're a small shop owner, a designer, a publisher, or an event organiser, we all have a role to play.

To achieve in diversity and inclusion it sometimes takes time and effort. It's not something that you say "Oh, the manager will take care of it" or "The CEO will take care of it." It's something that requires small everyday actions of every one of us so that we can all, you can, we can make a profound impact.

A good quote which I use to challenge myself is "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

So as business leaders we have a responsibility to ask that question of ourselves on a regular basis. Leadership is both a privilege and a responsibility. So whether we take that privilege without living up to that responsibility, is up to us. And that is why I am here, to make it clear to you that diversity and inclusion makes business sense and it does pay very generous dividends over the long term.

According to, I have some figures here and I hope not to bore you but it's so important. According to McKinsey, companies in the top quarter for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have returns above national industry medians. According to Gardner, highly inclusive organizations generate 2.3 times more cash flow per employee, 1.4 times more revenue and are 120% more capable of meeting financial targets.

However when we look at the figures in Ireland, there is an over representation of migrants in unpaid employment. Migrants from Spain for example, 16% of them are in unpaid employment, migrants from Poland, 25% and from Nigeria, 49%.

In 2016 the unemployment rate of migrants to that 15.4% against the Irish natives at 12.6%.

So when we look at the figures by race and nationality it represents a very sharp divide with the whites at the top and the blacks at the bottom of the economic ladder. For example, Western Europeans recorded the lowest unemployment rate, the French 7%, the Germans 8%, Italians 9% followed by the Eastern Europeans, the Polish 13%, the Latvians 17%, then the Africans recorded the highest unemployment for maintenance...43% and for Congolese 63%.

So my question to you is, what small step, can you take as an individual or even a business to begin to bridge this gap? How can we begin to create a culture of inclusion?

So that's really why I'm here. So I told you this story, my story, to kind of see, that's just a bit of my story. My story is much bigger than that, but to tell you that the challenges that I faced 18 years ago and the statistics are still saying, not much has changed particularly around the migrants end of things. So as a business, what really can you do, to create a culture of inclusion?

So these are all ideas so that it's something, that if it's one thing that you can take away from here and say I'm gonna do something. That will make my day.

Even though I may have 10 or 15 points but if there is one thing that makes you say "This works for me. This is an easy step." Please do that. I really, I will appreciate it.

So the first difference, as a business you need to commit to inclusion. And by that I mean without commitment you cannot start anything even if you're planning a wedding tomorrow, you're getting married, I believe you want to get commitment from your partner. Right? You just don't get married by faith. So ask yourself "Does your business have a diversity and inclusion policy? Do employees understand the policy and what it means in their roles? And there should be an emphasis on 'This is not just a nice-to-have'.

You know sometimes we have this shiny policy that looks good, that yeah, we have adopted "We are good." But it's not. We don't want, you know it's not about having a nice-to-have policy, it's about saying

“This is the way we do business here. We are inclusive. We embrace people from, you know.” And again diversity is beyond race and ethnicity or gender. Now let's you know it's very, you know it's about age, you know, you all know the differences here.

But my specialty is race, ethnicity and culture but it's about, it's much bigger than that so you could choose an area of diversity that works for you. And you connect with it and begin from there. So you need to create an honest to zero tolerance policy that is respectful and focuses on inclusive behavior and to continue to reinvent yourself as a business because the future is inclusive.

You also need to create inclusive products. I see your hands and I'm so positive that I know someone had to teach me this [knitting] now. I really love the way I'm quite impressed.

So by creating inclusive products it's about designing products with different facets of diversity in mind. Gender, are you thinking, I know it's weird, you know, if we're thinking, gender, age, ethnicity, I know, but that's what I want you to think of “Who are you? Who is this for? Who is your audience? Does it just suit one kind of, you know, people? How can more people access and appreciate what you do?”

So the first step towards inclusive designs, I'll call it, is to begin to read and to recognize exclusion. Start observing. Start asking questions and listening to learn from human diversity. Every decision that we make can raise or lower barriers to participation. It's our collective responsibility to know what these barriers to inclusive products/inclusive services and experiences.

Another point I would make for the SMEs is to use inclusive at advertising and marketing. Every business that uses inclusive marketing have often experienced increased sales and revenue. I would like you to begin by re-evaluating your marketing and thoughts and strategies.

Some important questions to ask your service “Who is represented in my ad? How do you advertise? Where do you advertise? What platforms do you use and are they the same tools for the same people you've known that you're used to over the years or could you do something differently this year or next year?

So, okay maybe there's some people I want to work with people, with older people, people with a disability or ethnic minorities. You need to know.

But how do you...what do you do?

Start to focus and think about the group you want to support. It helps you to think. Exactly how can I reach them? Even though that may be a problem, at least you know what you are looking for so that you can talk to somebody. How can I reach this group of people I want to see? How can I learn to improve on my designs on my thinking so I can cater for them?

So the next point is to create strategic partnerships. This is one where you have an opportunity to level the playing field. You may consider, for example, to partner with a minority-owned business to host an

event. It's amazing the kind of information and knowledge or ideas that could come out from, you know, come when you have somebody from a different background adding value to what you do.

It's amazing the kind of contacts or the networks that you, that your business could expand to what once you're able to think who else, who am I excluding? How can I bring some somebody that's different in?

So for individuals, I have some ideas for you as well.

Have an inclusive mindset. Everything always starts with the head. It starts with the mind.

There's a famous quote by Henry Ford's that says "If you think you can or if you think you can't, you are right."

And that means that we have the, you know, there's power in our thoughts. Our thoughts can empower us or defy us. It's up to you. If you think "Yes. I know I can do this." It's just the first step.

I know I believe in diversity. I know that you know Ireland has become so diverse and I believe that I can do something, one thing, and you'd be surprised. How does having that positive thought and attitude can lead to, you know, ways that things are or ideas that can make it happen. So acknowledge.

And another point is also acknowledge your bias. We all have biases. I'm biased. Everybody is but the important thing to know is about it. Be aware of it and be aware of when it's going to come in the way of making decisions that could make or break. That's why it's important for the likes of a HR to always

have, I know some of you don't have a HR department, I know but I'm just talking in general that for HR, it is important that you know that in terms of recruiting you are you making sure that you are, you've gone through a diverse pool to select the best candidate. How in terms of... I don't know maybe some of you have a magazine you want to promote and it'll engage a model to you know for your magazines. How do you go out of your common pool that you're used to? How do you do that? How else can you include those that are you've never used before?

So host unconscious bias trainings and workshops. Invite speakers from diverse backgrounds and cultures to speak at your events. Again recognize your privilege and when I say, privilege, like it doesn't mean that you have ten million in your bank account. No it's not about wealth or money. It's about those things that come naturally to you that may not be natural for me.

For example as an African I remember when I was preparing for this speech and I was trying to talk. I'm free to practice in front of my kids, I have three daughters and they were all born here so that is a privilege for me, having kids that are born here even though I'm part of a much marginalized group or a minority group. I still recognize that I still have some privileges.

And I remember my daughter telling me “oh you don't pronounce it that way. You need to say.. learn” Like I was saying ...I don't know how I pronounce ‘learn.’ Come on, yeah. Then I said, yeah, because you're Irish. I'm not, you know, I stopped. So yeah so that's her privilege. It comes to her naturally, I couldn't talk like that and I don't want to be acting fake here.

Can you imagine me coming here saying “Recognise your privilege.” [Here Adaku is attempting an Irish accent]

[laughter]

Is so silly. I never I will be like that... That's not me. So that's..[laughter].. why, it's a you know it's a privilege. Having an Irish accent is a privilege. You may think it's not it but it is, you know, and use that privilege to your advantage, to open doors for those that do not have the same privilege as you.

Again, become an ally. An ally is one that says I want to stand up for marginalised communities. That is going to stand up and say, you know, in a true personal commitment saying "I want to support them. I want to be their champion. I want to be their voice. "

There's some things today if I want to do or achieve that I know might work better when I have an Irish person being beside me. That's just the facts, it's just so I recognize that. So I'm better off.

Again I always talk about empathy. It's not fair on me also to expect the opposite. I'm going to make, I don't know... a perfect example:

I haven't met you before when I come in from nowhere and I thought making demands and you would be like "Who's this? Girl's crazy!" But if I came with somebody that you know or another person that you relate with, that can speak on my behalf or try to connect us, it's easier for you. So we have to kind of you know, so that's kind of what an ally is.

So become an ally and stand up for people that are marginalized. Again - love out loud. How do I mean, "love out loud"? You know, if you really want to, if you can say that you an ally or you support diversity or inclusion. It doesn't matter. This group that you are trying to work with, the key thing is that

you've identified, you know maybe an ethnic group, or a disability group, an LGBT group that you want to support. It's not enough to support them behind closed doors. And I'm saying "oh yes we bow down" but if they have a post on social media, go and hear that post. Connect with them on social media so that they feel, you know, like you. That they belong. If your circle sees that you are comfortable with this kind of group it helps.

As well, help with the visibility of ethnic minority businesses. For example by sharing their business card. I actually took this idea from Lisa. She was so kind we had a meeting some day and she invited me for an event and I couldn't go because I had another thing coming up and she said okay if you cannot go I don't mind I could take your card and share it in the event. And I thought "Oh my god I've never been asked that." That was different and I really appreciated that. So thank you, thank you Lisa that little thing you did made a big difference. But I really believe that was really good so little things like that, call out lack of diversity whenever you are in a room that is not reflective of what Ireland is today and by that I mean, because I know I gave this idea to someone and they said oh I couldn't say that "oh my boss. I would lose my job."

I know people got so scared but that it's not about that. I thought, it depends on how you say it. It should be, you know, in a meeting or events that bring teams together where we can have a conversation. It's about, you know, I'm thinking I would like to suggest, you know, where you could say things.

It's not really about you saying "I think this is wrong, this company is not doing well, you are not diverse." And, you know, it's not about pointing fingers. It's about making a suggestion and or maybe pointing it out in a nice way.

Then again examine your network. Who is in it and who is not. Don't unintentionally exclude people who aren't like you. Open the door. Invite others with the different experience and perspectives in. Don't shy away from talking about uncomfortable or difficult conversations. When minority groups talk about white privilege or racism or micro-aggression, don't take it personally it is not an attack on you or an opportunity for you to get a defensive.

How about, I think it's a time to ask yourself how can I make a difference? What small role can I play? See it as a moment of learning.

Then a few more points:

Don't remain silent when you see inappropriate things that are said about minorities. Your silence makes you complicit. Remember to cut yourself when you stray in your messaging or your language or you revert to making assumptions and stereotyping. Ask yourself in that conversation what is this saying about this group? This will help you to know when to censor and self-regulate.

So in conclusion when you actively create a culture of inclusion you foster innovation. You enhance business reputation and you are able to connect with cultures and improve employee experience for all. No man is an island. We all need and depend. We need and depend on each other and all our unique experiences and capabilities, to innovate, to push forward and to push outside of our own comfort zone and to become the better as businesses and as people. So progressive businesses like yours do not stand still. They evolve. There are plenty of ways that we can choose to evolve but one way to have

seen that makes biggest impact is through diversity and inclusion. Because it impacts in our lives and it's key to how we operate day in day out.

Thank you for your attention.

[Loud Applause and whistling]

[Music]