

Work

As a client was settling in at my desk, he remarked that Michelle Obama just doesn't look like a First Lady. I just looked at him and said I thought she was a great First Lady. I wish I had other ideas about how to deal with this.

At a work function recently, I saw Monica, the receptionist at a remote office. Monica (who is black) greeted me warmly, but I did not recognize her and confessed as much, and was embarrassed and chagrined when I realized who she was. Shortly thereafter she abruptly ditched me to go talk to our CEO (who is also black). I totally deserved it.

In a meeting at work last week, discussion turned to the lack of diversity in my work place. I listened to people on this committee describe their experiences, and commented to the HR representative present that I too could see us moving backwards. It was scary, but the world didn't stop spinning.

Today at work, I called Lucy "Yuki" because they are both Asian and I haven't worked their long yet. I was embarrassed.

I have at times in my community-work recognized that elites with money are needed for success, even if they are racist or bigots. I have participated in hopes the good intention of the program will still help.

A black man has been employed at a local Champaign elementary school for a few years. He is always upbeat and alert to helping students whom he assists. I see many other white adults "not see" him in the halls when they pass, but they greet all white colleagues. I acknowledge and talk with him in every encounter – often with a hug.