



If You Want More Black Teachers, Stop Picking Lower Quality Teachers Over Them

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I love the term Black Excellence because it highlights the fact that Black people can also achieve at high levels. We know this, but Black adults know that Black children need these reminders and some of our non-Black counterparts need to be reminded as well.

However, Black Excellence can become a double-edged sword and put us on a path of perfectionism. Many times, we have to be perfect to be accepted, get a job, or an opportunity.

Basketball Coach John Thompson, Jr. was the first African American coach to lead a college team to a major college championship. He once said, "You ask why don't you have more Black professors? I will take a Black if he is competent. Hell, there are a hell of a lot of whites failing. All we want is an opportunity to get out there and to try and a right to fail ... I'm sick of us having to be perfect to get the job."

I have sat on many interview committees as an educator. I have been an interview committee member, and I have led interview committees. I have seen Black candidates get picked apart during the interview and after the interview during the debrief. All the committees I have been on went with a majority rules motto. Even if I pointed out flaws in other candidates, I have found myself outvoted. If you ever become an administrator, as I have been, you will learn that leading the interview committee means nothing when there are people above you that can veto your recommendations.

Furthermore, I have been part of interview committees where a less qualified white candidate is chosen ... and months into the school year the teacher quits. Of course, it makes me wonder if we should have gone with the more qualified Black candidate. Before someone pops off about what I'm saying, I'm not saying a Black person should be picked because they are Black. I'm saying they should not be eliminated because they are Black or not picked because they are not perfect.

Not everyone wants to have this conversation. If you go with the less qualified candidates, don't you at some point need to acknowledge race and bias as an issue? Wait! I know what it is. The Black candidate was not a good fit for the school culture. Excuse me as I recenter my eyes from that eye roll. This seems to be a common reason listed when a less qualified non-Black candidate is chosen over a Black candidate.

When we show up as our full and glorious selves, sometimes we are too much for some small-minded educators to handle. Listen, we are going to continue to walk into these interviews with confidence while being our fully-qualified selves. If schools continue to pass us over, it is their loss. It is the students' loss.

Recruitment of Black teachers means checking biases that will eliminate them from being selected. It also means making it clear to non-white staff that the Black educators, if they are actually selected, were hired because they were competent and not only because they are Black.

I once was offered a job by a local high school principal who called me weird during the interview because he deemed my accomplishments as abnormally high. I declined the offer for two reasons. One, dude called me weird ... that's so inappropriate. Second, I did not want to be picked because I was deemed as abnormally perfect because perfection will be the bar. As a person with anxiety, I could not work in a school where I would fear making mistakes and not reaching the level of perfection at all times.

Black educators should be competent. However, we should not have to be perfect to get or keep our jobs.