



RESPECT IN A NAME: Pronunciation and Names

More Than Just a Common Courtesy

We should all take the time to learn the names of our colleagues. Name pronunciation is simply being able to pronounce a person's first and last name, as it is intended to be pronounced. This means without deviating or shortening names for ease. Correct name pronunciation is incredibly important; when someone gets it wrong, it can be more harmful than many realize. A person's name is a connection to their identity, an extension of who they are.

Why Does Learning Names Matter?

Addressing a person by their correct name at work is a sign of respect as it demonstrates a genuine interest in acknowledging their individual identity. It fosters a sense of inclusivity and appreciation, affirming their value within the company. If you make a mistake and call someone by the wrong name, please correct yourself and be gracious when corrected.

Why Does Name Pronunciation Matter?

Many people have had to shorten their names, solely for the ease of others.

Not taking the time to learn how to pronounce the name of your peers and colleagues is not only disrespectful but plays into longstanding oppressive systems of white supremacy. The racist practice of mispronouncing names has evolved from a history of changing people of color's names to strip them of their dignity and humanity. This has longstanding historical context within the American slave trade, American Indigenous and Latinx boarding schools, and subjugation and oppression of the Asian American communities during the building of the transcontinental railroad.

Names are our identities. Often, they are deeply rooted in our social and cultural beliefs. Yet historically, many people have anglicized their names to "fit in," appear more mainstream, or gain social and cultural advantages in countries with dominant Anglo cultures. Casually anglicizing names is not only disrespectful of people's cultural heritage and traditions — it is also disrespectful of them.

For the pronouncer, it means taking a few seconds out of your day to learn about your colleagues. For the person with that name, it's the difference between career advancement, professional and personal recognition and feeling seen and included in the workplace. According to Psychology Today, mispronouncing someone's name, assigning an unwanted nickname to someone, and making fun of someone's name are all examples of name-based **microaggressions**.

Helpful Tips on Pronouncing Names Correctly

- **When you don't know, just ask!** When people see that you're committed to getting the pronunciation right — even if doing so might take multiple attempts. Don't be afraid to ask the person to pronounce it again if necessary. Name pronunciation help is normal, and many people are happy to help.

- **Allow people to introduce themselves** and listen attentively to their pronunciation. Repeat the name out loud to show your intention of getting it right.
- **Do your research.** Sites like [pronouncenames.com](https://www.pronouncenames.com) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) often have guides and videos on how to pronounce names phonetically. But remember, this is just a starting point—don't assume this is the end-all-be-all correct pronunciation.
- **Mistakes are ok!** If you meet someone for the second time after some time, it's ok to say, "apologies, please remind me how to pronounce your name again."
- **Practice, Practice, Practice.** After you hear someone pronounce their name, write it down phonetically and take the time to learn it and practice. Commit the correct pronunciation to memory.
- **Be an ally.**
 - Add the phonetic spelling of your name to your email signature to help others understand the correct pronunciation of your name. Even if the pronunciation of your name is obvious, adding this may alleviate the hesitation others feel.
 - If at some point you overhear someone else mispronouncing another colleague's name when that colleague is not present, step in and then correct that person, "I believe it's pronounced this way."
- **Be gracious.** remember that often people with non-anglicized names are in a vulnerable position. If someone corrects you for mispronouncing, for example, don't respond with "I'm so sorry!" Do say, "Thank you for correcting me."
- **Don't rely on an easier nickname.** Especially if the person has not given you permission.

Some Examples:

1. I am so glad to meet you! I want to make sure I'm pronouncing your name correctly—can you please pronounce it for me so I can learn the proper way?"
2. Hello! We've met before, I am a huge fan of your work! Would you mind pronouncing your name for me? I want to make sure I get it right.

If Someone Continuously Gets Your Name Wrong

- If someone continuously gets your name wrong, or assigns you an easier, anglicized nickname without asking, this is a microaggression and a perfectly good reason to contact us at K + K (hr@kkreset.com), and we can have a conversation with that person.
- However, we know suppressing the urge to correct the pronunciation of your name can be a survival strategy and coping mechanism for BIPOC employees. You might feel compelled to compromise your name to safeguard your psychological well-being and conform to the workplace environment. Such circumstances should not exist, and it is crucial that we work towards creating an atmosphere where this does not happen.
- Some corrections could be:
 - "My name is actually pronounced like this: _____. Thanks!"
 - "I'd prefer it if you called me _____." This allows you to request the correct pronunciation of your name without explicitly calling out their previous errors.

Learning to pronounce names correctly can be a positive experience!



We have the power to foster a culture that is diverse, inclusive, and accepting. More than anything, out of respect, let's say names correctly.