



PurpleSpace

Purple Stories

A guide to why, when and how to share your story of disability or ill health at work

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#purpletalk



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PurpleSpace

PurpleSpace is a unique professional development and networking hub for Disabled Employee Network / Resource Group leaders and their members as well as others who may have an interest in setting one up or supporting an employee network.

Membership is available to anyone working in any sector or trade, and across the UK. This includes private companies, government departments and agencies, police forces, NHS Trusts, colleges and universities, local authorities and charities.

Members join in order to increase the effectiveness of their employee networks, develop their skills and learn how to help their organisations' to become disability confident from the inside out. Membership gives access to all the tools and know-how to develop positive networks / resources groups and to help organisations to support their disabled employees to flourish at work.

Purple Stories is an open resource available at www.purplespace.org

Find the space to think networks.

PurpleSpace.



Why Purple Stories?

Equal Approach is a leading inclusive recruiter and diversity consultancy, supporting organisations to attract, recruit, recognise, retain and promote diverse talent, and make workplaces more inclusive. We are proud to do things differently, and make diversity and inclusion a commercially successful reality for our candidates and clients.

In 2013 the government launched its Disability Confident campaign, and changed the conversation around disability. They started to talk about the power of the purple pound; a bit like the use of the term 'grey pound' to denote the spending power of older consumers or the term 'pink pound' to denote the spending power of people from the LGBT community.

The following year, in 2014, Secrets & Big News¹ put the spotlight on the challenges people have in bringing their authentic selves to work. It set out to find out why it is difficult for people to share information about their disability at work. It opened up the question about how we all feel about the word 'disability'.

And in 2015 PurpleSpace was created. They started to talk about purple talent rather than disabled employees. And guess what? Both employers and disabled employees like it – and many networks and their leaders are starting to use it. They are creating a new movement because it avoids the need to force people to associate with a word that we don't always feel comfortable with – and it enables deeper, richer and more meaningful conversations between people who experience ill health or disability at work.

The growth of employee networks is one of the most important indicators in how UK employers are investing in their own purple talent. As a result, we are seeing a significant impact in the number of people sharing their own stories and supporting their organisations to do better in making workplace adjustments. Put simply, building networks helps to create disability confidence from the inside out.

PurpleSpace is driving a new conversation and creating a new landscape – a purple landscape. By changing the language we use to describe a human experience, they are making it easier for thousands of talented people to bring their authentic selves to work – to build the community of purple talent and help others who are looking for employment to notice that they aren't on their own.

Purple Stories is their latest publication to make it easier for employees to decide why, when and how to share their story of disability for business gain. We are proud to support their work.

Dawn Milman-Hurst
Chief Executive, Equal Approach



“When you share your story of disability, ill health or difference you share what it means to be human. Working while managing impairment is an experience that thousands of people successfully navigate – but you don't often hear about the economic contribution of purple talent. It's going to be the stories that build disability confidence from the inside out.”

Kate Nash OBE, Creator & CEO PurpleSpace



¹Secrets & Big News, Kate Nash OBE, 2014



Foreword

Practice makes perfect

Storytelling is part of the fabric of our daily lives. We all use stories to share our dreams, our hopes and our experience of the world, every day. Stories help humans share, learn and grow. They are not just for the big platform moment: they are also useful for those times at work when you need to share something personal, to help a team member understand how you work, and how they can work better with you; or when you need to ask your boss for an adjustment to you can contribute your best. Or when you're looking for support for a change, use your story to get people to buy in to your vision.

But it's really hard to know how to share your story of disability or ill health or 'difference'. And whether you describe yourself as someone with a disability, or not, it can be enormously difficult to work out whether to mention it at all in the context of work – whether your experience is obvious or hidden.

It can feel a bit like that familiar fairy story about Goldilocks and the Three Bears, working out how much is just right, not too much, not too little. What are the right things to share, and what should you leave out?

The benefits of weaving your own story of difference into the everyday exchanges at work can be life-changing. Sharing your story can help ease the way forward with simple team interactions to help you work better with colleagues. It can help nip potential 'awkward' moments in the bud, as you take control of your story. And, over time, and as you become more proficient in telling your story it can build your personal brand as a confident, capable and high-performing individual.

The one thing we know is that it gets easier, over time, to frame your story and practice makes perfect. Whether it's during the everyday encounters or on a stage with an audience of 300 plus.

The power of stories is something leaders have known about for a long time, whether in business or politics. Storytelling is an important skill for disabled leaders to master too, so they can reframe the narrative, to one where disabled employee's stories can be heard in their complexity, their truth and their authenticity, and drive change from the inside out.

We hope that this publication helps you to join the purple movement of storytelling.

Fiona Anderson²

Senior Story-Telling Consultant, PurpleSpace

² Purple Stories was written and edited by Fiona Anderson, a former BBC producer, who has years of experience in writing and storytelling, and a passion for helping people tell their stories in their own voice. She co-delivers the PurpleSpace Telling Stories workshops.



Sharing your story – why and when?

Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools we can use to change people's ideas and direction of travel – in politics and in cultural change. Storytelling is an essential part of the practice of leadership. Stories and straplines can change the world.

The art of expressing what having a disability is like and its relevance in the workplace can take many years to perfect. Most disabled employees or those who have experienced an accident or an injury or have another experience of 'difference', take years to finesse their stories, if they choose to share them at all.

Those who choose to share their story are constantly discovering new ways of describing the human experience of 'being different'. They are always thinking about their stories and how to shape them so they can help others to anticipate, accommodate and celebrate human difference at work.

At PurpleSpace we often hear how and when disabled employees share their stories with colleagues. We see, at firsthand, how those stories help change the dynamic in a room or at a conference or at a critical moment in an organisation's capacity to change.

Done well, it can transform an organisation's ability to accommodate and value its purple talent. Done badly and the effect can be devastating, for both the individual, and the business. Telling stories without practice can reinforce outdated perceptions of disability, and can create individual setbacks about how people feel about themselves. Telling your personal story of disability is not easy. The best, most well-known, storytellers spend a

lifetime finessing their message, tone and style. They are forever seeking out new ways of sharing their personal reflections, so they can change collective understanding about human difference, disability, ill health. These things are so often misunderstood. Perfecting your purple story in order to enhance a deeper understanding about disability, in a business context, could be one of the best investments you make in your personal and professional life.

So why tell your story? Who is it for?

It's for everyone, but above all for you to use to communicate more powerfully with:

- Yourself
- Colleagues
- Line managers
- Clients
- Customers
- And to help others in your network

When would you use stories?

- When you need to build or enhance a relationship at work.
- When things are a bit awkward and sharing something will improve relationships or ways of working.

1. Have something to say

There is no point in talking about your own story if it's just to get things off your chest. Most of us have to earn our crust of bread at work so make it worth people taking the time to listen to you, give them something of value that helps them learn – about you or human nature. You might offer them a fresh perspective or a new insight, whether it's about the lived experience of having a disability at work, or the barriers unthinkingly created by ourselves, or others. It can be an anecdote, or just one sentence, or a speech: having a memorable message matters more than its length.

Tip:

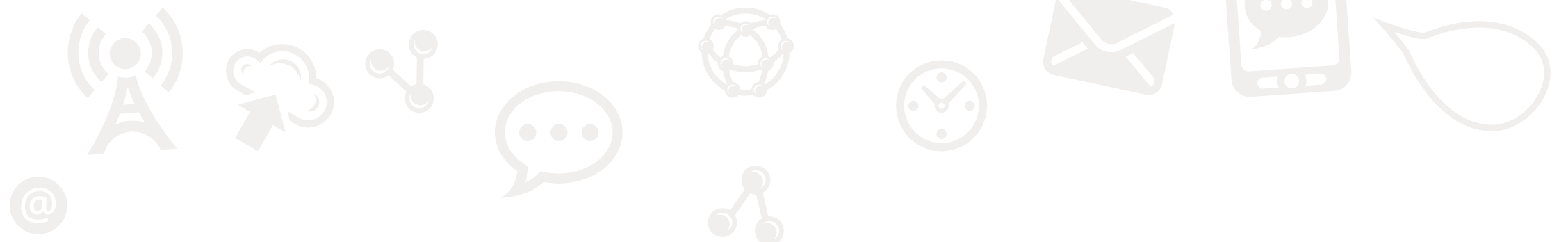
First, work out what your message is. Start by writing down a few thoughts about what it is you want to change in your interactions with colleagues, or your line manager, or in your network or as part of any cultural change. From that, you might find a story to illustrate why change might be important.

"With life's experiences come lessons that we can learn from, or ignore. So when I share stories I like to focus on how we learn from our experience of difference. I choose to learn and part of that personal development has been to accept and wholeheartedly embrace who I am. There is only one me for a reason, why would I choose therefore to be someone else? Our authentic selves are worthy and I encourage others to be true to themselves. It is part of my story – and it is part of my core message."

Sarah Simcoe, Fujitsu UK & Ireland & PurpleSpace Ambassador

"My experience of visual impairment has provided so many opportunities to help others understand the value of building diverse teams in many work settings. I see things differently, both literally and metaphorically – sharing my personal story has helped hundreds of others retain and enhance their confidence and ultimately help them keep their job. Ultimately you have to perfect your message – and your message has to be one that conveys the advantages of human experiences that do not de-rail you and help you build resilience, strength and perseverance. Most of my work is about conveying the fact that organisations benefit from the human gift of resilience built on the challenges we face."

Andy Garrett, PurpleSpace Ambassador



2. Be bold: speak up

Be prepared to talk about what matters. It might feel scary. That's why you need to talk about it. Dare you tell the story that's not being told in your organisation? The story that is not heard but needs your voice to bring it into the conversation and debate at work? There's little point being polite and papering over the cracks; if you want something to change, you have to gather your courage and your allies and speak out loudly!

Tip: Take a look at what other networks are doing when it comes to building the 'story-telling' campaigns. They often start with one person sharing their personal story. It can take a bit of courage. Try a blog first of all - check your draft message with your network members and champions. Have you nailed it, have you got an issue others can gather round and act on together with you? What is the message? Can you share what you have learnt in a way that supports the organisation to build a supportive culture?

"By learning how to tell my story, I felt excited and buoyed by the feeling that what I was doing was worthwhile. I wanted to tell my story and be able to inspire people to tell theirs. There is so much power in a personal story, especially if told in the right way."

Allyson Lilley, Driving & Vehicle Licensing Agency

"It was the rare chance to spend time with other disabled leaders in the workplace that helped me to perfect how I share my story of working with Parkinson's. Their insights and candid feedback inspired me and gave me renewed enthusiasm. This boosted my confidence and gave me new ideas to apply in my own work."

Alan Cameron, BT

"Many of us have experienced life-changing moments when our world tilts and we have a choice to retreat or go forward with courage, and succeed. One of the things we are so excited by with the Equal Approach / PurpleSpace Bursary Scheme is the opportunity for us to amplify the voice of network leaders and allies about what matters, and thereby the chance to support practical cultural change."

Janet Hill CBE, Cabinet Office



3. Be generous: you know how hard it is

Talk about the practical stuff, and how you've learned to navigate a world that may aspire to be disability confident, but often isn't. Be appreciative of those who are helping make change happen, even if it's slow. Share what you've learned about tolerance, patience and compassion; they are qualities every workplace needs more of.

Tip: Sharing an experience is a great way to inspire people to try what they might have thought impossible. Show them the steps you took, they might be exactly what they need to do next.

"Before I had had the opportunity to think about the power of story-telling I had never appreciated the positive and memorable impact that could be made by someone telling their story in the right way. It is something that I now think about in a whole new way."

Ben Iles, KPMG

"I choose to share stories about the complexity of reactions that we get about disability often from our nearest and dearest, as well as our colleagues. Understanding how the soft bigotry of low expectation operates is an important life lesson.

But we need to be prepared to be generous with our stories, to offer up the view that it is sometimes a lack of knowledge that invites an inappropriate comment, or policy, or procedure. Being generous and appreciative about those people who are creating change within the employers' community is important. You can still deliver the uncomfortable truth from time to time."

Kate Nash OBE, Creator & CEO, PurpleSpace



4. Be vulnerable: share your mistakes

Nobody's perfect, however hard we try. Share what got you here, including the slips and missteps along your way. Your hard-learned lessons can help others move more easily along the same path. Stories that are crunchy and chewy and have real substance will be remembered days and weeks afterwards. Contrary to common thinking, the greatest leaders are humble and offer stories about their own vulnerability to help others follow them.

Tip: Pick one or two incidents where you are comfortable sharing the wisdom of hindsight and craft them into short anecdotes. You may get some laughs, you may get some tears, you will certainly help others' learning.

"I often tell the story of my journey to become a Paralympian. I talk about the highs and the lows of training, the spirit-crushing experience of being diagnosed with bone cancer. Life-changing events require you to dig-deep and sometimes sharing that with an audience, your vulnerability as a human being, delivers a very powerful message."

Giles Long MBE, TV Presenter and Paralympic Gold Medallist

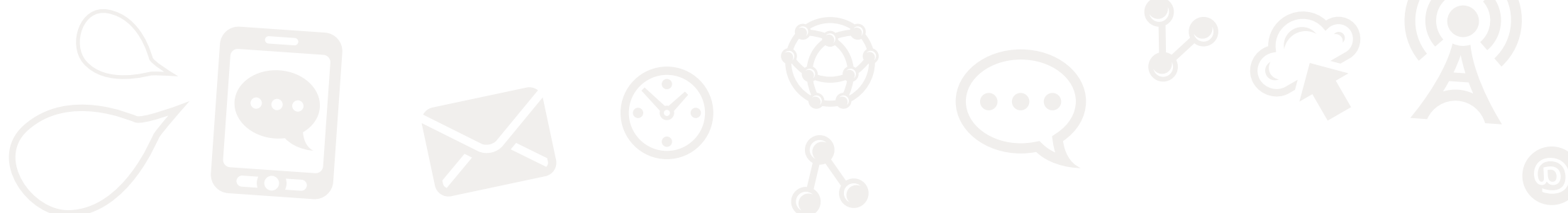
"Mistakes. People love anecdotes and especially hearing how you've got yourself into – and then out of – tricky situations. It's always nice to pay tribute to the people who've helped you out, like the BA pilot and co-pilot who personally carried me down the steps of their plane when ground handling failed to turn up at Heathrow."

Frank Gardner OBE, BBC

"I coach senior business leaders to deliver profitable businesses while building their responsible business practice. What I find breathtaking when I look across the PurpleSpace network of networks is the way in which business leaders are setting the bar high. By openly inviting better conversations about how to build a disability confident business they are making it easier for individuals to share their own stories about ambition and what they have learnt along the way – disabled employees are leaning into their careers. They are taking ownership.

These are the outcomes from imaginative business leaders who may not know all the answers but took the first steps by investing in their networks."

Kay Allen OBE, Diverse Advice



5. What's your unique story? Just yours?

If you speak from the head, people will think you're clever, but they won't get up and follow you. Speak from the heart and they'll climb mountains for you. Authenticity goes hand in hand with trust. If it is your own story, honestly and powerfully told, no one can knock it. Instead they'll buy it. Be open and honest, stick to your experience, how you felt at the time and how you feel now.

Tip: Capture your ideas, experiences and phrases when they come to you, in a notebook or on your phone, anyway you can, until you have time to craft them into a story.

"Speaking from the heart. It's not easy speaking without notes and can be quite scary but if you know your story well you'd be surprised how easily you can tell it off the cuff."

Frank Gardner OBE, BBC

"I will often tell an audience that I dream in a wheelchair to help people get a bearing on how normal living with a disability can be. I don't dream walking because I don't walk. I go on to suggest if I did dream 'walking' that would be a nightmare for me as it's so far outside my personal experience. This imagery seems to help non-disabled people get a fix on the ordinariness of disability."

Phil Friend OBE, Phil & Friends Ltd

"I coined the expression 'I was the first disabled person I ever met', aged 21 when I was studying medicine at the University of London. I loved rugby and during a training session for a Guy's Hospital team, two bodies landed on me on hard ground. It broke my neck. I knew exactly what had happened. I didn't lose consciousness, but I had a searing pain in my neck, and otherwise I could feel nothing. I knew I was the first disabled person I had ever met because I realized everything I had assumed before, was nonsense."

Stephen Duckworth OBE, Shaw Trust

"When I share my story my aim is not to inspire anyone, but to raise awareness that most of us have gone through a number of life defining moments and these shape the person that we are today. They may not all be as dramatic as being hit by a train going 65mph and losing a leg, we may not have the physical scars, but events mould us into who we are and this is why we are all unique."

Lucy Ruck, Business Disability Forum

6. Long story, short version

You don't need to share your whole story. Let's face it, much of it won't contain the golden nuggets. Tell people what you've learned from your experiences, not the ins and outs of your recovery from injury or the details of your medical condition. Who has time for that at work? Have a beginning, a middle and an end. Use facts to support your message, but don't drown your listeners with data. Try writing the headline or Twitter version (140 characters) first.

Tip: Watch TED Talks on You Tube to see how the masters tell their stories and try out their techniques. One of our favourites, comes from the late Stella Young ³.

"Have something to say. Because time is always short in broadcasting I try to get to the point fairly quickly without a huge preamble. Apply the 'so what?' test, meaning that what may be interesting and important to you may not necessarily be of interest to others! So, best to test it out on your friends first before sharing with a wider audience."

Frank Gardner OBE, BBC

"I will often tell an audience that I have 4 children. I then leave a long pause. Lets face it, as a wheelchair user people don't always assume you have a rich, full-on family life and that yes, you do have children! After creating a nice long pause, I then say 'yes, that means I've had sex at least four times.'

People invariably laugh, because I've caught them out. I'm 'calling out' their inner voice. But I'm doing it not to poke fun but to help them see what they often cannot; their own deep-seated view about the life of disabled people. It's a short sound-bite because sometimes you need to make a big point in a short space of time."

Phil Friend, Phil & Friends Ltd

"Never underestimate the power of your story. Even more powerful is lots of stories – the stories in our videos have had 1000s of views internally and started conversations throughout the business. Now others find it easier to be themselves and their colleagues have a better idea of how to support if needed."

Sarah Fennell, HSBC UK

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxrS7-L_sMQ

7. Use fresh language: avoid jargon and clichés

Every profession and organisation has its own jargon, acronyms and clichés. Find words that mean more and speak in your own voice. Write in plain English, with active verbs and simple language. Test your story on colleagues or on a blog or online forum, and notice what people respond to. You will repeat your story, so find ways to keep it fresh.

Tip: Great storytellers aren't weighed down by the facts and the data. By all means kick off with a killer fact or statistic e.g. In January 2016, the UK employment rate among working age disabled people was 46.5% (4.1 million), compared to 84%% of non-disabled people ⁴.

But then move on to something more personal, like your own story of finding a job and creating a career or about how you have built resilience and confidence.

"I like to use plain no-nonsense language. Our Access network, which supports disabled colleagues, has grown from 250 to 4,000 members in 6 years. That's partly because we have invested in all of our colleagues, including those with disabilities, and colleagues sharing their own stories about building their career at Lloyds Banking Group in an open way has been an important part of this.

I also think it is important to be open about your impairment to ensure that you get the adjustments and support that you need to be as effective in your career as possible. Whilst it is important that you get support from others, it is equally or more important that you are willing to ask."

John Turner, Lloyds Banking Group

"As Chair of two Disability Networks I'm aware of communicating to a diverse audience. Given the terminology that surrounds disability, medical conditions and use of acronyms, I try to use plain English. I apply my knowledge to strengthen working across the Civil Service to build cultural change."

Alex Freegard, Foreign & Commonwealth Office

"Saying 'only 17% of all disabled people are born with their disability' is a great statistic to lob into a conversation. You can then talk about the importance of making workplace adjustments and cite the stories of real people where this meant the difference between retaining valued employees or losing them."

Graeme K Whippy MBE, Business Disability Consultant

⁴ <http://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Disability%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202016.pdf>



8. Get on the megaphone

Don't be shy, share your story more widely using your disability network's social media accounts. Make sure your team know your story, get their support to you sharing it across the organisation. Take it to the top, if you can, get your bosses' buy-in. Your organisation may benefit from you telling your story to external audiences.

Tip:

Many companies are using the power of stories to show that they are inclusive workplaces: examples include the Shell's Be Yourself campaign, the Barclays' This is Me campaign and the Fujitsu #BeCompletelyYou campaign. The theme that runs through them all is that when you encourage people to be who they are, they will be more confident, comfortable and productive and if necessary, ask for the workplace adjustments they might need.

The "authentic" campaigns support the process by which people feel able to share information about their impairment in ways that makes it easier for them to contribute more fully to the workplace. They build a positive and more realistic picture about the breadth of purple talent across any organisation. And that too may help with the attraction of purple talent.

"Having just taken on the role of co-chair with the Barclays Reach Network it is clear that our This Is Me campaign and the workshops we run about developing your story-telling skills has made a huge impact on helping our people to bring their authentic selves to work – and the word gets out, in a good way - further enhancing our reputation as a confident business.

I want to build on this in my period as co-chair and have already made a great start: more colleagues (and their line managers) are telling their stories and we're launching our Reach champions campaign which aims to encourage all colleagues to talk about disability and make a pledge to champion an inclusive culture at Barclays."

Elizabeth Bailey, Barclays

"Lord Browne has spoken openly about the fact that when in charge of a major energy company, had anyone told him he would one day talk about his sexuality, he would have laughed. Homosexuality was the last thing he expected to talk about in public. Indeed he never spoke of it even in private. The former CEO spent half a century, in his words, 'in the closet', so terrified of letting his "secret" slip that he never talked about himself at all, confining his conversation instead to 'the news, and politics, and business'. In his words, 'that's what you'd talk about.'

But Lord Browne now actively promotes story-telling to drive corporate cultural change. He has said, 'I think one of the big things about getting something done in a company is to explain how it worked or how it didn't work in a real situation....and to tell a story about it. In his view it's very undervalued in corporate life.

That's why we are supporters of the work of PurpleSpace and their #purpletalk digital and story-telling campaign to get networks and disabled people to be who they are."

Brendan Roach, Business Disability Forum



9. Humour is good; it makes the hard stuff easier

Some disability experiences are plain hilarious, so share some of yours. It'll help lighten the mood and help people relax. Humour can ease the dread people have about saying the wrong thing; everybody has done it. It's not about telling jokes well. Let's face it, few of us can. Humour is about keeping the mood light enough so your audience is with you when you ask them to take action. Especially when the action is to challenge their own behavior.

Tip:

For some humour that really works, watch Scope's End the Awkward videos, they're all on YouTube ⁵.

"At an international event I attended I was asked if the 'unsightly people' in the UK were educated in separate schools. The question came from someone with a genuine interest in understanding ways of improving the education system for disabled people. I explained about mainstream and segregated education provision in the UK, and I also expressed the view that we preferred the language of "vision impaired". It later provided a huge amount of amusement among my friends."

Lara Green, Lloyd's

"I find humour helps people to overcome awkwardness around disability. I laugh at myself first. My condition causes my spine to curve, so it is becoming increasingly easy to tie my shoe laces, but harder to see on the high shelves where my wife hides the biscuits. Laughter leads to conversation."

John Spiers, Thomson Reuters



⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9zUEmatYBQ> v=y90fEid9akg&list=PLEJWI-99Hx3tGfpO3VtdPQG3DzCLxq06lc v=y90fEid9akg&list=PLEJWI99Hx3tGfpO3Vtd-PQG3DzCLxq06lc

10. Surprise me; delight me; get me on board

Forget about the "inspirational" disabled person's story. Share your own vision of what disability confident would mean for you and your colleagues in your everyday work. If you do get the platform, use it: offer your audience a bit of magic, an element of surprise in your storytelling, so they're sitting on the edge of their seats wondering what's coming next. Make sure there's a DO. Tell your audience what you want them to do now they've heard your story; how can they help you change things, what can they do differently?

Tip:

Put yourself in your audience's shoes: what is going to get their attention, what is going to make them think and act differently? Do this thinking even if it's only an audience of one that person could be the key to the changes you need.

"Just because a person cannot see, it doesn't mean they can't have a vision. Just because a person has a physical problem, it doesn't mean that they cannot carry a business through hard times, and just because a person has experienced difficulties with mental health, do not underestimate their ability to think differently. Ability is often overlooked because a person is often defined by their disability rather than the person that they are.

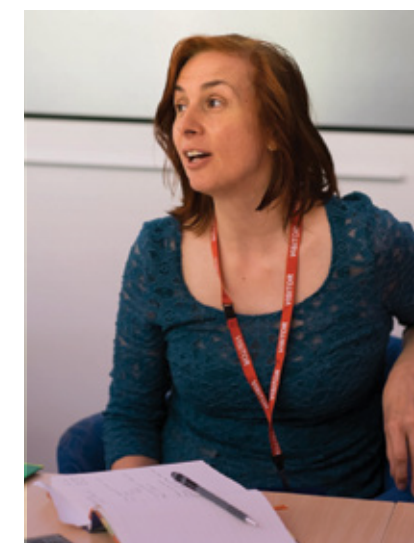
At Bouygues it is our vision to ensure that everyone is embraced for who they are, not how they are perceived because of their disability. In recently setting up the employee network at Bouygues we have made great strides towards achieving this vision. For us, it was important to ensure we harnessed the lived experience of our existing employees and are able to capture their stories as they offer great examples of how resilient you need to be in the face of ill health and disability. We now want to translate those stories into practical applications."

Greg Swaysland, Bouygues

"Having a disability and being told you are inspirational can be flattering but what does it mean? You've not actually done anything exceptional because managing an impairment or

health condition isn't really optional and as you'll find out, you're not the first to do so. In essence, I'm not keen on being called inspirational if all it is a warm platitude. However, if it inspires someone to do something, then it gets interesting. So the next time you share a story and you sense you're getting the inspirational vibe coming back from the audience, ask them what they can learn? Go further, ask what changes and improvements will they now make as a result of hearing your story?

Simon Minty, SMinty Ltd



Case studies

Case study

Department for Transport mental health campaign

One story can build a movement

What?

In 2014, the Department for Transport (DfT), signed the Time to Change pledge. The aim of the pledge was to end mental health discrimination. This was a commitment that the Department, individuals in the organisation and the Ability network were all committed to. This was our chance to make real change happen.

How?

We started with a 'kick off' session: a thought-provoking session with Melvyn Bragg, Ex-President of Mind; our Permanent Secretary, Philip Rutnam; and DfT's disability champion, Lucy Chadwick to formally sign the Time to Change pledge. The high-levels of attendance showed the passion amongst colleagues for this topic. But the question was: how to make the pledge come to life?

So we made it personal. Mike Alcock, Head of Aviation Safety Policy was the first brave person to make the essential first move. During the department's 'Wellbeing Week' in late 2014, he spoke at a session – openly and honestly - about his experiences of severe depression.

The event was well-attended and many new members joined the network to support the Time to Change work. But more was needed if we wanted to make it easier for people to bring their authentic selves to work and to end mental health discrimination.

The next stage, was to go online. Employee-led blogs were beginning to gain traction in the department and Mike candidly shared his experiences. He spoke about the contrast between a great year that he had in 2012 when he became a home-owner and 'the owner of the best dog in the world (Elvis)' with the challenge that arrived in January 2013 when he woke up and to him 'the world was different'. The insights shared – from the long time it took him to recognise it was depression and what worked and didn't work for him were frank, powerful and exciting. Exciting because of the reaction from staff. It led to an unprecedented reaction: the blog received over 1300 views (the highest ever number of views); numerous comments openly on our intranet; and many people directly contacting Mike to share their experiences or congratulate him on the great work he was doing in highlighting the subject of mental health.

Since this initial step many more colleagues at DfT have been encouraged by Mike's story to share their own stories as part of our awareness raising campaigns and to support activity of our Ability network and Time to Change group.

Lessons

You may have heard of the first follower theory? Take a look at Derek Sivers, 2010 TED talk on [How to Start a Movement](#).

We needed the first follower to create a movement. By sharing Mike's story in different forms – face-to-face, blogs and other electronic communications, and by reaching out to our 'silent' followers we managed to bring more people's voices out to share their own stories (our first followers).

Fast-forward to 2016, our success has been proven by the relative ease in which we have recruited volunteers to take part in our awareness raising campaigns (both online and staff panels at events). We recognise the changes that have occurred because of the first brave individual and the first inspirational followers - the many colleagues who have stepped forward. We have made good progress in helping our people to understand mental health in the minds of our managers, leaders and policy makers – and we are making it easier for people to feel inner confidence in their experience of difference.

Our recommendations for others would be:

1. Make it personal – find willing people to share their stories openly and honestly.
2. Keep repeating the messages across different channels to maximise your reach.
3. Don't underestimate the challenge it is for the first few people to share their story – make it easier for them to do so by offering support and positive feedback from others.
4. Find your first followers (and your second, and your third...). Create a powerful, energised movement.



Case study

Fujitsu UK and Ireland – encouraging people to bring their authentic self to work.

Having a core message

What?

Fujitsu believes in the power of difference, it's a commitment that is embedded in to the strategy of the organisation. To support the constant pursuit of innovation and strengthen Fujitsu's competitive advantage, Fujitsu are committed to bringing together diverse perspectives and talents in an inclusive environment where all of our people feel they can be completely themselves.

To promote this the SEED network created #BeCompletelyYou in 2015; a 'theme' and core component of the strategic plan for the Network and one that has now been adopted across the Diversity & Inclusion agenda within the UK and Ireland.

How?

#BeCompletelyYou theme was born out of stories from the SEED Network members sharing what it feels like to have a disability and the challenge of being open and honest with colleagues, peers and managers. It can be hard to share your story of disability, health condition, mental health condition or long-term injury and what we can do to evolve the culture of acceptance and enablement. It can be nerve wracking to be unsure of how colleagues will receive you and your story. It can be daunting for people and therefore the way forward has to be cleared in order to assist.

We took time to understand and reflect on feedback. We looked at ways in which we could influence the workplace environment to be one where our employees feel comfortable and confident in discussing their disability or condition and the adjustments they may require to do their job and to flourish at work.

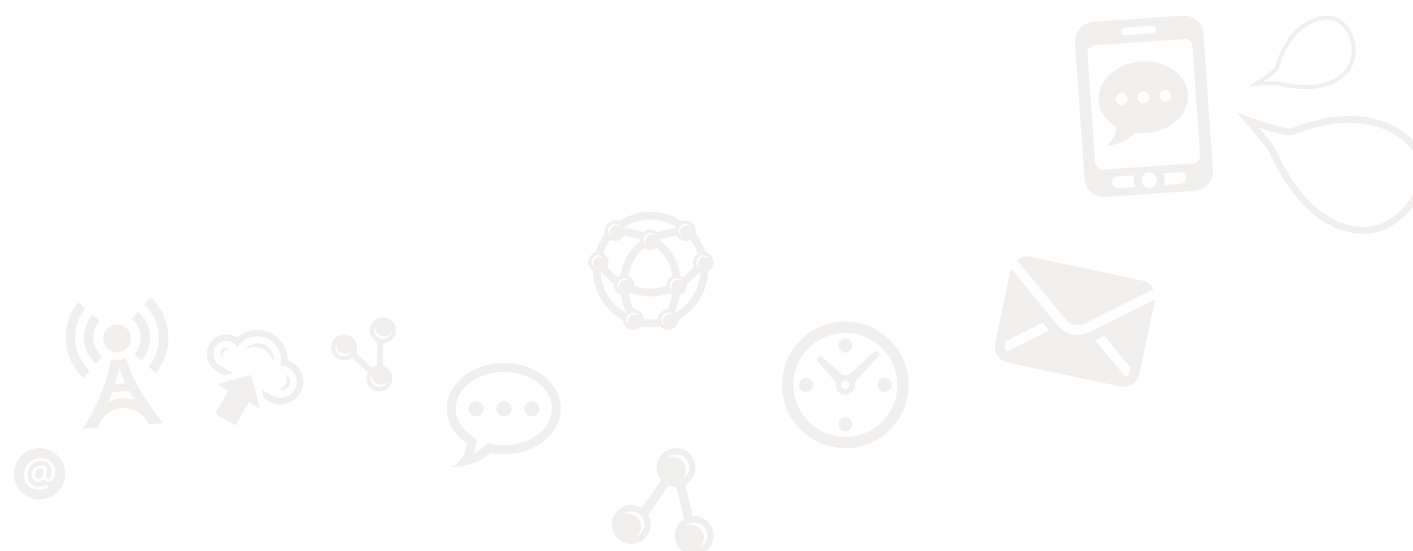
The outcome was the creation of #BeCompletelyYou which was kicked off with a conference in October 2015. The initial conference focused on delivering key messages: being an inclusive employer and what that means to the business and to the employee; how accessibility matters and what Fujitsu are doing to affect truly accessible ways of working; what people can do to help themselves in the form the support that is available; a working session around what it looks and feels like to be confident and comfortable and how #BeCompletelyYou as an approach can be embedded in to Fujitsu.

Lessons

#BeCompletelyYou has become part of our Network way of working and has been adopted by our Diversity & Inclusion agenda across the other Fujitsu UK and Ireland employee networks. It has enabled us to focus the conversation around our people, our greatest asset, and has been a vehicle for engaging across Fujitsu UK and Ireland and externally with other Networks and organisations.

We will continue to evolve #BeCompletelyYou and look at ways in which we can leverage the initiative to continue on with improving our organisation, and along the way we have learned some valuable lessons:

1. Listen to the stories that your employees tell you about their lived experience of disability
2. Examine the use of different methods by which you help deliver good stories e.g. conferences, webinars, social media, newsletters, sharepoint sites – leverage all the various ways of reaching out and connecting.
3. Be consistent in your story-telling messaging, stick to your theme and be clear on its purpose.
4. Senior sponsorship of initiatives such as #BeCompletelyYou is important to both the launch and the sustainability – nobody wants a dead duck in water.





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