

Social Firms UK Annual Conference
Shaping The Future: Supportive Employment, Successful Businesses
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WORKSHOP ii: Strengthening Business Through Diversity

Facilitated by Rhiannon Suter

Notes by: Carol Taylor

Background:

The Employers Forum on Disability presents its work, discusses the link to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and invites debate on how more can be done in the private sector to employ disabled people.

Key Points:

Today is about:

- how the Disability Forum works
- more on the debate about employing disabled people
- what can be done to help the private sector employ disabled people?

The Forum was established 15 years ago, has 400 members, and 36 gold members who fund the Forum.

John Varley, CEO of Barclays, is President and leading a drive to increase the number of disabled employees. Employers are still saying that they can't recruit disabled people. The Forum is to help them find disabled candidates.

Working to increase the expectations of employers and agencies.

Question: Can you give an example of how an employer interfaces the employing of disabled people and the policy.

Answer: Sharing best practise across departments in BT so that line managers are encouraged to employ disabled people and talk directly to the disabled person.

The Forum is not here to promote the benefit for business. It is about reasonableness to promote the benefit of the disabled person and the economy. It is about benefiting the whole stakeholder network.

There has to be more than this barrier for employers as it is so difficult to get employers to take on disabled people. There is still a lot of prejudice amongst recruitment agencies. There are wonderful policies but things are not happening on the ground.

Question: How do we enforce the laws we have with employers?

Answer: That's the job of the Disability Rights Commission. It is incredibly difficult to prove discrimination and we need to be careful about not ending up like the USA where employers are not taking on disabled people because

they are frightened of litigation. Larger companies are more likely to be responsive to corporate social responsibility than SMEs. Large companies do not move quickly but when they decide to change it does make a difference.

The Forum has a lot of networking events. Facilitate partnerships between employers and disability agencies.

What is the business case for employing disabled people?

- More reliable
- More committed
- Untapped pool of labour
- Supports the community
- Average cost of adoption is £200 and can be met by Access To Work
- Inclined to be more hard working
- More quality orientated
- Can get industry specialist
- Good at focusing
- People who can do the job

Tackling prejudice is what should be done. There is a legal requirement to make public places accessible. Why don't we make employers be legally bound to do the same.

Talk a lot about doing things differently but employers can't cope with people who do things differently.

There are six types of building blocks: strategic, commercial, societal, legal, ethical and professional.

If employers think about people as individuals and from a disability perspective, it would help them a lot to do that. Capitalise on individualisation. Encouraging employers to be 'really' fair employers.

What do employers need to do differently?

- Promote diversity within at all levels.
- Incentive scheme for managers
- E-newsletter stories

What does the government do differently?

- Less complex benefit system
- Long term education of in schools
- Short term education for employers
- Overhaul day care services
- Reverse stereotype advertising
- Do something
- Better strategic planning

What do intermediaries (support)

- Shift in culture – understand work ethic
- Real business placements and recruitment

- Clear standards and objectives
- Monitoring
- Development plans
- Better communication with the individual and the employer
- Information carers and dp.