

The Diversity dilemma

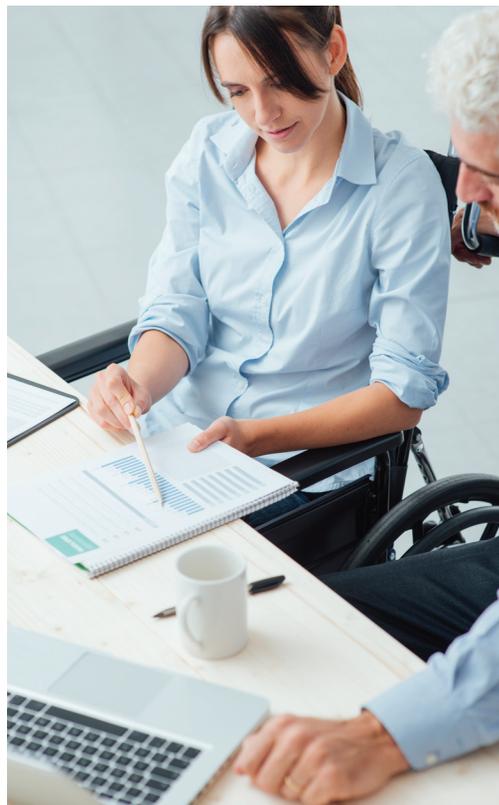
Catherine Johnson discusses whether people with disabilities are still disadvantaged in the workplace

It's that celebratory time of year again, and I find myself writing about that most festive of topics – Diversity. Not the easiest topic to link to the holiday season but my starting point is a recent Christmas Carol concert by a charity Crone Corkill supports: Whizz-Kidz. They aim to transform the lives of disabled children, supporting them to become confident and independent adults. It makes absolute sense for Crone Corkill to be working with them and making these young people part of future workforces is something we champion, from sponsoring the Executive PA Up and Coming PA of the Year Award, to partnering with Quest Professional (business and secretarial college) and of course, supporting Whizz-Kidz.

We live in an age where Diversity is a hot topic and most employers will have an official Diversity policy. With the US elections recently, talk of glass ceilings, gender and race equality have reached fever-pitch and organisations such as 2020 Women on Boards will undoubtedly be working even harder to increase the percentage of women on boards. We must not forget Stonewall doing groundbreaking work to support the LGBT community – working to promote workplace guides for how to tackle sexual orientation and gender equality in the workplace.

Every effort towards diversity is important not only because studies show that a diverse organisation is more effective but because it is important to challenge the status-quo in the business world. Yet in the maelstrom of Diversity politics, is Disability getting left behind?

In the UK, we have seven million people registered disabled, that's 19% of the working population, yet with 42% of those currently unemployed we need to be doing more to get disabled people into or back in to work. *The Department for Work*



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and Pensions 2014 Report on Disability claims that disabled people are significantly more likely to experience unfair treatment at work than non disabled people – so what can we as employers and recruiters be doing?

According to Rachel Hubbard, Founder and CEO of Deaf Umbrella an organisation who are working towards empowering and promoting opportunities for Deaf people within education and employment – “The Government scheme

“Disability Confident” is a great place to start, providing guidance about employing disabled people whilst challenging attitudes towards disability and increasing understanding”.

Gareth Evans, Head of Employer Engagement & Work Experience at Whizz-Kidz states: “Historically, business has always been open to non-disabled people; the only obstacle being their suitability for a role. In contrast, disabled people have long been considered too difficult to employ. Employers can make their businesses more appealing to candidates – regardless of disability – by ensuring that the business is employee-centred and inclusive. Disabled people in particular shouldn't be seen as a risk to be taken on; they are aware of their own needs and their own conditions, and simply want to participate and contribute like anyone else.”

Interviewing a disabled person could be an uncomfortable experience for some, especially if the interviewer has not had previous experience with disability. Scope have a great campaign called “End the Awkward” addressing the fact that people often don't know what to do or say around disability, or worse – avoid situations altogether for fear of doing the wrong thing.

According to Purple, almost half of UK businesses are apprehensive about hiring someone with a disability because of a variety of concerns including “making inappropriate comments or actions”. Interestingly, Rachel points out that the purple pound (spending power of disabled people) is worth an estimated £212 billion in the UK alone – so this is a community not to be ignored.

So why not talk to your organisation about the “Disability Confident” employer scheme or look to champion a disability charity for your company. [Catherine Johnson](mailto:CatherineJohnson@CroneCorkill.co.uk)

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