

Talking purple

Getting purple talent back to work

Sarah Simcoe

You may have heard that the Government plans to reform the 'Work Capability Assessment', on how to support disabled people getting back to work. Its aim is to encourage employers to tap into the purple talent pool of potential employees who can fully contribute and flourish in the workplace. The Green Paper published at the end of October 2016, 'Improving Lives', sets out a mixture of announcements and questions on what policy interventions will be required to support disabled people to obtain and stay in work.

This is a subject close to my heart. Twelve years ago, I was diagnosed with a chronic pain condition, endometriosis. Now, as I sit typing in my 40s, my condition worsens, pain is increasing and the impact widens. When we talk about disability, it includes physical and mental health conditions and long-term injuries. Of course, these are often intertwined – my own condition has often affected my mental health. Combined with nerve damage in my leg and a fibroid growth condition, I face challenges around managing pain, staying on my feet or driving for long periods of time; and more importantly, challenges to how long I can throw down some of my legendary dance moves!

Off the dance floor, I'm Head of Business Enablement and Chair of SEED (support and engage employees with a disability) at Fujitsu UK and Ireland, and I play a key role in influencing how we recruit, enable and retain purple talent in our workplace. In this capacity, I recently met with the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and was introduced to CamdenAbility, a project that aims to increase the jobs market for disabled candidates and that looks to create a network of disability-smart employers in the Borough of Camden. Initiatives like this enable employers to come together, to share information, learning and advice around becoming disability confident and disability smart. They allow space to discuss how building a diverse workforce positions an organisation as employer of choice and as a business that recognises the power of

diversity to bring innovation. Hearing about this initiative, and knowing what we are doing to improve diversity in our recruitment process at Fujitsu, I ask myself, are we **all** doing enough to help disabled people back into work?

I know there are many talented purple people hoping to get back into work. These are my thoughts on how to help future employees and employers embrace a more diverse approach to supporting purple talent at work:

Just like shopping, grab the freebie!

The Government's 'Access to Work' scheme is an example of the support available for helping candidates to get back into work. It's a grant that can pay for practical support if you have a disability, mental health condition or long-term injury, and aims to help you to start working, to stay in work, self-employment or with a start-up business.

The support includes help with fares to work, adaptations to any equipment you use or to provide a communicator at a job interview. To find out more, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Don't assume... ask

For individuals with long-term medical conditions, long-term injuries and mental health conditions, research shows that getting back to work is far more conducive to aiding recovery than not doing so. Don't assume that what such individuals need is more time away from work.

Recruiting purple talent

A successful organisation is one that reflects its customers and its employees, and that means a successful organisation is a diverse one. At Fujitsu, when recruiting, we turn to inclusive recruitment sites and agencies, allowing us to cast the net wider into the diverse talent pool. Recently, a pilot scheme at Fujitsu has seen the advertising of roles via Evenbreak – a not-for-profit social enterprise aimed at helping inclusive employers attract more talented disabled people, to help disabled job seekers find work and to promote the business benefits of employing disabled people. Evenbreak also gives the assurance to disabled job seekers that employers

advertising via its website are serious about recruiting purple talent.

One size does not fit all

Each of us is entitled to workplace adjustments, or reasonable adjustments, as it is also known. An employer has a legal obligation to make those adjustments to enable employees to do their job and to fulfil their potential. The retention of our employees currently absent from work due to long-term health conditions, or the recruitment of new purple recruits, is often affected by adjustments in the workplace. This can be as simple as providing extra time to someone with dyslexia when completing a written exercise, or making physical adjustments such as hearing loops or wheelchair ramps.

You really do get back what you put out there – the Government's Green Paper is focused on getting disabled people back to work. To enable that, organisations must be committed to, and demonstrate, a workplace environment based on respect, diversity and inclusion. These organisations will attract the full talent pool in all of their glorious colours, resulting in a higher-quality workforce.

References

- 1 <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2016/november/we-want-your-views-supporting-disabled-people-work-consultation> (accessed 16 November 2016).



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