

So – what’s this inclusion stuff all about then?

Last year, during National Inclusion Week 2015, Paul Deemer wrote the following scenario before NHS Employers hosted a conference entitled Working Better for Patients: Diversity and Inclusion in the NHS. With this conference, the NHS hoped to challenge people’s perceptions about inclusion and provoke debate amongst delegates.

In a light hearted moment (inspired by the likes of Alas Smith and Jones) here is one of the imagined conversations that two of our delegates might have over coffee about inclusion:

Jones: So – what’s this inclusion stuff all about then?

Smith: It’s an opportunity to promote the benefits of having an inclusive workplace, and how that increases productivity and raises staff morale.

Jones: What’s that got to do with me then?

Smith: Well – you presumably want to work in a place that values and respects you and that gives you opportunities to develop and grow?

Jones: Not particularly! I just want to go into work, do my job, get paid and go home! How does inclusion help me do that?

Smith: Well – when and where do you work?

Jones: I work in an office – 9 till 5.

Smith: Fair enough. And how do you travel to work? Jones: I get a 1 hour 15 minute train into London and then a 15 minute tube ride to the office. Smith: So – how about if you didn’t have to do that every day and sometimes you were able to work from home. How would you feel about that?

Jones: That would be nice. But how would that work for a nurse or a doctor – or a police officer?

Smith: Well it wouldn’t. But for them, some flexibility around their starting times might be more useful – so that they could perhaps start later and finish later. Jones: That’s quite inclusive! Actually – I wouldn’t mind that myself...

Smith: Exactly! So – how do you do your job? Jones: What do you mean? Smith: Well – what equipment and stuff do you use at work? Jones: Oh! Mainly a phone and computer really. Why? Smith: Well – inclusive employers also think about how people work – as well as where they work – because the two can often be interconnected. So if – for example – you had an iPad and a mobile phone you would be able to work anytime, anywhere, anyhow.

Jones: Sounds scary! When would I get a break?! Smith: I agree! That’s where you need to make sure that people properly understand the two sides of the deal – the power and the responsibility. Having the ability to work anytime, anywhere, anyhow is all fine – but they need to know how to put boundaries around that... Jones: Absolutely. But what’s this got to do with equality and all that stuff then? Smith: Well – on the flexible working front (which is what we are talking about here) – it gives people with caring responsibilities (who often tend to be women – although not completely of course!) more control over how they balance their lives. Jones: And more opportunities to skive off! “Oh sorry – I can’t do that today I’m afraid, I’ve got a meeting with my kid’s school.” I know the drill!

Smith: Quite the opposite actually! Research tells us that employers who introduce flexible (or agile) working often experience higher levels of productivity and reduced turnover of staff. Jones: Really?

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Smith: Yes – really! They also often attract a wider range of staff as well. Jones: What do you mean?
Smith: Well – if people hear that you are a good employer in terms of flexible / agile working, they are more likely to want to work for you. And for some people – including people with disabilities for example – this would be doubly attractive because they might encounter particular difficulties with travelling during rush hour for example. Jones: Hold on – why would I want to employ someone with a disability? Smith: Ironically, because (again) research shows that people with disabilities often have a lower sickness absence rate and tend to stay with the same employer for longer. Jones: But they can't do the job – can they? Smith: What do you mean? Jones: Well, they're disabled aren't they? Smith: Name me a famous scientist.... Jones: Stephen Hawking. Smith: Who's your favourite actor? Jones: Easy – Tom Cruise! Love those Mission Impossible films! Smith: Favourite comedian? Jones: Ruby Wax.

Smith: There you go then – all disabled....but they can't do their jobs? Jones: What do you mean? Stephen Hawking yeah – but the others?! Smith: Tom Cruise – dyslexia. Ruby Wax – depression. Jones: Hmm...I see your point. Anyway, who's on after the coffee break? Any good comic acts.....?