Steps to Change Podcast: Beth Episode

Allen: Hello and welcome to this episode of Steps To Change, the podcast where we explore learning and development topics, organisational behaviour change, and practical ways to inspire people to act differently through the lens of our Steps to Change model: see it, own it, change it, and live it.

On this episode, we're exploring what makes effective disability inclusion programming, and how we utilise our approach to support raising awareness about disability, and creating a culture of inclusion for disabled employees in the workplace. We'll start by exploring what we mean by disability inclusion, and then take a deeper dive into how we use our Steps To Change methodology and partnership with clients to design and deliver work in this subject matter. I am your host, Allen Liedkie, and I'm joined on this episode by Beth Partington. Welcome, Beth, how are you?

Beth: I'm good. Thank you. Thanks so much for having me on.

Allen: It's my pleasure. And thanks for joining us this episode. So Beth, for those who might not know you, the listeners out there who haven't been introduced to you yet, tell us a little bit about yourselves what you do, what Steps and your insight and experience on the subject matter today.

Beth: So, my role at Steps is a project and design partner, so that's basically supporting a number of projects from end-to-end delivery. I've also led on the accessibility planning group at Steps, it's a group of global colleagues, and we are looking at how to make the internal and external facing work that we do accessible as possible to disabled colleagues. And alongside that I've supported in designing and delivering content on disability as well.

Allen: And I have to say, I really appreciate all the energy and effort you've put into really elevating us at Steps internally in terms of that certification, and really kind of being a big driver for raising awareness around disability in the workplace, and also the content that you've designed and delivered in this space. So I'm really excited to get into this conversation with you today. So Beth, what I want to do is just spent a little bit of time up front just talking about what do we mean by disability inclusion? What does it actually meant when we say those words in terms of our programming?

Beth: The term disability, it's kind of treated differently in different regions. But in the US, people often refer to people with disabilities, and in the UK, they might refer to people as being disabled. And in the UK, when we say someone is disabled, we're using the social model of disability. So what that means is people are disabled not by their own impairment, but perhaps by barriers that are external to them. There might be physical actual barriers or attitude and all: but that way, we focus on removing barriers that disabled someone.

And an example of that might be if someone's blind or visually impaired, what disables them might be some inaccessible communication, rather than the sight loss itself. And examples of disabilities you might have, they can be hidden or visible. So it could include people with physical impairments, sight loss, hearing loss, mental health conditions, or it could be neurodiversity, or learning difficulties. So there's a huge range of things that are classed as a disability and might be diagnosed or undiagnosed.

Allen: It definitely seems from my perspective, that disability awareness is growing, not only in the zeitgeist but in television programming on commercials that you see on TV. So there really is this swell happening in society about bringing disability to the forefront of people's minds. Is that the case, Beth? Is that what we're seeing from clients as well from the organisations that we partner with?

Beth: So firstly, there's definitely growth in the DEI space on raising awareness around disability; sometimes it's something that is kind of the last thing that people might come to or it's sometimes forgotten. So there's more visibility of disability is an important part of DEI. And then also people are becoming more aware of the advantages and value of disabled talent. So there's a huge pool of disabled people in the world. And if you have those represented in the workplace, then you're definitely likely to have more diversity of thought, people that represent your customer base and people that have valuable skills that might have been overlooked before. So there's many business benefits as well into tapping into that talent pool.

And in fact, 23% of working age adults are disabled, that's the UK statistic, but one in six globally. So it's a huge amount of people. A lot of us become disabled later in life. So I think people are recognising that they might become disabled themselves or they might start to realise it's a lot of people that are impacted that have value to add by increasing accessibility within your organisation. Plus attitudes towards disabled people are definitely changing and evolving. There's a growing expectation that organisations are inclusive towards disabled people, and bring in more disabled people into their organisation.

Allen: I love that piece there. Because I think, there's obviously a business case, right, for being aware, that's maybe your customer base, or clients that you're engaging with, or anybody that wants to interact with your organisation, there is an expectation, right, that you have a diverse and inclusive population, and even more so now within the disability space, right. So how are you creating that workforce that is reflective of society, right? So people are sort of being more curious and more inquisitive to organisations about what are you doing in this space?

But then there's also just that cultural progression that's happening in society, right. So as you say, people are becoming more aware of it, people's attitudes are evolving. And I could absolutely see that there's probably a generational shift here as well, right, the younger generation are much more tuned into these things and expecting that that is happening within an organisation. So with that in mind, then why now, right? So I know, there's everything that you just said in terms of those statistics. But what are the kinds of key things that organisations need to be exploring around disability inclusion in terms of programming?

Beth: Yeah, there's a number of reasons why it needs to be explored. Firstly, on a practical level, you might have people within your organisation with adjustments that might support them to have an equitable experience working there, but you're not quite catering to them. So that's one reason to explore it. But also, historically, disabled people have had to self-advocate within organisations or might not have been represented within organisations to start with. So you have a legal and moral responsibility as an organisation to champion that. And if you have fewer disabled people in your organisation, are most likely at the higher levels, it's important to amplify their voices within the organisation so that you do start to cater for more people.

And there is a big employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people, it's kind of stuck around 30% for a long time. So if we want to be forward thinking and to being fully inclusive organisations, then it's definitely something that needs to be explored how we can resolve that.

Allen: So all the facts are there with the statistics that you've shared with us, Beth, in terms of the population and the world and all of that. But then thinking about this from a business standpoint, and the organisations that we partner with, why do they need to be focusing in on disability awareness?

Beth: I think that's important as well in reducing biases that non-disabled employees might have. Because the more you interact with disabled people and see them within the workplace, you can reduce, you can debunk maybe misconceptions you've had, reduced stigmas, or fears around how to interact with the disabled community and help you along the way really.

Allen: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's where and I would say this, because I'm an internal Steps person, but I genuinely believe this as somebody who is interested in how people learn that helping reduce those biases and really raising that awareness, using our approach is really so valuable and kind of getting people to kind of come to understanding of what it's currently like in their organisation, right. What other biases that people have? How are we manifesting behaviours that support inclusion for disabled people? Or where are those areas for improvement?

So, let's start to drill down into that a little bit deeper, if you will, from our Steps to Change methodology. So just as a reminder, for listeners, we've got that four-step approach of see it, own it, change it, live it, and we always start with 'See it'. So Beth, thinking about our programming and the content, how do we get to 'See it'? And what are some of the things that are happening within the 'See it' phase of the learning journey for participants in our programming?

Beth: So the first part of 'See it' is we actually spend a lot of time doing some research into what the challenges might be that we need participants to see within an organisation. So especially if it's a programme on disability, we want to speak to disabled people within that organisation. We've had focus groups before, a one-to-one calls with employees, and they will discuss what challenges they've faced, maybe getting adjustments made, the positive things as well about their organisation, how included they feel within the culture.

And then we probably also speak to some non-disabled people, get their perspectives. Sometimes we hear people say there's no disabled people in my organisation, I don't think or I don't know what

adjustments we have or what we can offer. So it definitely gives us a window into how far they might be in their journey. And then we like to support that with some sector-focused research, because we know that for organisations in different fields, there's a lot of different considerations to make.

So we use that to establish what the challenges are, why they might not employ disabled people, or what could be changed in the culture that makes it feel more inclusive for those that work there who are disabled.

Allen: So really, as part of that research process, we're surfing mindsets that are currently in place within the culture in an organisation towards disabled employees, that's through the lens of the disabled employees, but also through the lens of the non-disabled employees within an organisation trying to really understand the kind of practical sense of what's available for disabled employees, depending on their different disabilities to support their working journey or their interactions on a daily basis, and then kind of benchmarking that as well against what's really happening within a sector? So we're getting a really good 360 kind of where that client might be on their journey for disability inclusion.

So we've done our research, we spoken to a good number of people we're aware of the sector challenges and whatnot. So then how do we take all that research and turn it into really good 'See it' content to hold up that mirror during a session? So how might that find its way into some of the scenarios that we would design?

Beth: So when we get to this 'See it' stage, it's really important, if not, before that we have lived experience within the design team. So that's our first port of call. We want to create something that reflects a lived experience and is authentic for participants in the session. So from there, we want to create scenarios and examples that might reflect day to day challenges, anything raised in the research that we think is an area for improvement, or things we could raise awareness of. So that's our focus in the design, and in the 'See it' stage, and maybe highlighting places where the organisation or people within aren't supporting disabled people with their behaviours or approaches that might be not optimal to an inclusive workspace.

Allen: So for the listeners, help paint a picture of what a typical scenario might look like that we would design, right? What are we actually playing out in this 'See it' bit so that participants can start to really see it coming to life?

Beth: The film scenario that we did recently involved in neurodiverse character with ADHD, and they were having a conversation with their manager giving some feedback about a meeting they've just been in where they'd been put on the spot. So we used that scenario to look at different ways they could have made the meeting a bit more accessible to them and see the impact it had on that character and the response of the manager.

The actor we had playing the character with ADHD, we wanted to make sure was authentically cast. So we cast someone who has ADHD who could share their own experience and bring that to the character. Obviously, not everyone with ADHD has the same experiences, but it gave us an extra layer of lived experience to influence how that was represented.

Allen: So it's a great example of film approach to supporting the 'See it' phase. Okay, so what about how this might show up in a live session, Beth?

Beth: I can give you an example of a recent live session we did, it was set in a healthcare setting, but it had a character who was deaf. And we had one scene on adjustments made for them in an appointment. But then we also had a character who was a wheelchair user, and their scenario focused on the challenges they face when adjustments weren't made. So the main thing we want to see from both the filmed and live sessions in this stage is that people recognise the biases and assumptions that they might have, and the different disabilities that people might have that they haven't considered, and put themselves in their shoes to understand the impact of micro behaviours on disabled people and how it might feel being them day to day in the workplace.

Allen: That's really powerful. Because I think as a non-disabled person, it's only when I find myself in those occasional times when maybe I need to open the door for somebody who's a wheelchair user or I suddenly find myself in a conversation with somebody who's either deaf or hard of hearing, that I'm kind of realising that I actually don't have a lot of interaction with individuals that have those types of disabilities, let's say for example, in this conversation, and then put that into the context of a workplace as somebody who's watching all of this play out or hearing from that character who might be neurodiverse in the filmed example and the experiences they're going through.

It's really eye opening, right, in terms of the extra effort it takes for those individuals to have to constantly go through different barriers that somebody that's non-disabled like me that I just take for granted. And so I think that's really powerful examples of helping people see it, right, and just the stuff that they might take for granted every day, but actually, what is it like for those individuals who are disabled however that disability might show up for them to just humanise it in a way rather than it just being a theoretical concept.

Beth: Absolutely. And it's important when we do these filmed or live sessions or virtual sessions, that we recognise the adjustments we need to make as well. Because obviously, we will be presenting to people who are disabled, and we can talk about disability, but we need to make it an inclusive space as well.

So for example, when we've made filmed work, we'll make sure that videos have subtitles, standard practices that include people. If it's an e-learning project, we'll do accessibility checks for colour contrast or check that it can be accessed by someone using a screen reader. And then the same for live sessions, we need to make sure that the space is accessible. We like to ask people what adjustments we can make, that helps them specifically, so it could be sending out materials in advance. So that's an important part as well. In the 'See it' stage, they can also see examples of good practice, as well as seeing scenarios with behaviours.

Allen: So in a nutshell, with 'See it', we say we're really aiming to hold up a mirror to the current behaviours within an organisation, and for disability awareness or inclusion programming, that can be through the challenges that disabled people might face in the workplace just to kind of get on with their daily interactions, but also from a non disabled perspective about the biases that they might

have, or the lack of awareness that they might have for their disabled colleagues. And really highlighting that and showing that play out so that we can move into the 'Own it' phase where people are really going to start to understand where they are on this learning journey, and maybe what are their fears or viewpoints or mindsets in this space. So let's move into 'Own it'.

Beth: So some of the aha moments that we talked about, that people might have in response to these sessions on disability, firstly, some people might just have an awareness recognition where they realise there's a character with sign language, and maybe they didn't know so much about the deaf community, they didn't know so much about 'Deaf Pride'. So there's some awareness raising, that can be one aspect of it. But then also, they might recognise their own behaviours towards people in the disabled community. So they might think something they're doing is inclusive, but learn that there's a better way to engage or support people or different ways they could do that. They might recognise themselves in the drama.

And then on top of that, they might also recognise from the way that disability has been presented, and it might contrast with other representations of disability they've seen before, that it's actually an asset to have disabled talent within your organisation. And in inclusion initiatives, it's not always looking at a problem, it's an opportunity. So that's another realisation that sometimes people have, and they start to think about the structural barriers that they're maybe not as difficult to remove, as they might have thought they would be.

Allen: You know, if they can have that real honest self-reflection and self-awareness of how they might have viewed, let's say, someone who might be deaf or interaction with someone who's a wheelchair user, or someone who's neurodiverse, that can be a tough thing for people. Because you might be sat there going, oh, actually, I think I'm inclusive as an individual, but really on the journey of being inclusive, I have not really paid much attention to disability on my journey. And that can be hard for some people, but it's a kind of crucial step to go okay, well, where am I really at? And what do I need to do now to get better in this space?

Beth: The important part of the 'Own it' phase is you've all seen it together, but what's going to make you have the collective responsibility to move that forward? And by seeing it and owning it together, you create a shared commitment that you are going to take the next steps to take what you've learned and apply it in a way that fits with your workplace.

Allen: Absolutely. And that transitions us very nicely into the 'Change it' as part of the Steps to Change process. So participants have owned where they're at in terms of their maybe biases or their understanding or awareness of the barriers that people with disabilities may face in the workplace, or challenges that they might come across on a daily basis. So as part of that developmental and learning journey, what's going on for participants in the Change it' phase? How are we helping them to really kind of take steps to grow and change their behaviours and mindsets?

Beth: Well, specifically for the 'Change it' phase, let's say, in a live example, and in the room example, we would use techniques such as hot seat in or forum replays. So what that basically means is, you might see a scene play out, and then you get the opportunity to firstly put that character on the spot, ask some questions, give them some guidance. And then the forum is where you speak to the

character and give your own suggestions, and then we might replay the scene and get to practice them in a safe space. So that's one technique that we might use to help people visualise how they change.

Allen: This is a really kind of key moment for that change. Because we start to put ourselves in the shoes of the character, right, as participants in the session, and really start to empathise with them and do our best to get a better understanding of their lived experience and engage in a conversation. And on a meta level, what's really powerful about this is we're demonstrating how you can have a conversation with a disabled person in your workplace, if that's not something that you're really used to being able to do, right? Because I think there can be a fear factor for some individuals, they don't want to get it wrong, right, they don't want to say the wrong thing, they don't want to upset the person. So by doing this exercise of hot seating or the forum replay, right, where we go back into a conversation and try to navigate it to a better outcome or a more productive outcome, you're really allowing the participants to go, okay, if we're going to get better, you need to be having discussions, and we need to kind of get over that fear barrier, or that doing something wrong barrier. And we do that by really starting to engage in good quality conversations with people that are disabled in the workplace.

Beth: Yeah. And I think more so than our other programmes, as well as giving takeaways on behaviours that you might want to practice, and then try out yourself. There's also a bit more focus on practical takeaways as well, because we know there's best practices, it's always evolving, but there's definitely advice we can give and suggestions for how to change both behaviours and processes. Part of the best practice information might be around language. So what's inclusive language to use this as always changing, so we don't want to say someone's right or wrong, but it's useful to share the best practice and inclusive language.

Some of the takeaways people might have from the session is the models of disability, we use those in the UK, or it might be more broadly some unconscious bias models. And understanding the difference between equality and what's equitable is quite relevant to this as well.

Allen: Okay. So participants have spent a little bit of time in the 'Change it' phase of the Steps to Change model, thinking about different ways to have good quality conversations with their work colleagues, we've given them some models to help them really provide a framework to support that behavioural and mindset change. And then we want to move them into 'Live it', right? So how are participants taking what they've learned and applying it into their everyday working lives? How are organisations really making this stuff stick?

Beth: To make sure it is properly embedded, we have with previous clients use learning circles, which is where groups of participants who took part in the e-learning or live sessions will get together on a regular basis and talk about their experiences, applying the learning. So that's one way of committing to living not just taking in the information and then moving on from it. So they can give each other feedback in that setting as well.

There's other ways that organisations can make sure they're living it as well. And firstly, something we'd highly recommend is partnering with a disabled-led organisation or another organisation that's

starting its journey on disability inclusion so you can support each other. And perhaps join in a scheme like the disability confidence scheme that we've joined ourselves at Steps that gives you some targets to start embedding disability inclusion in the workplace and bring more people on board who are disabled if you don't have that representation. Or you might even create your own disabled employee network as a live activity following a session.

Allen: And other things that have come out of sessions are everyday practical things, right? Maybe an organisation realises that they don't have sufficient ramp infrastructure for wheelchair users or maybe they need to really consider putting lifts in their business to support that type of disability.

Another thing, this is an example from within Steps, one of our colleagues has shared very many times that they are colourblind. And recently, they took the step to send an example of their type of colourblindness, right. Because if you're not colourblind, you think, well, why does it matter what colour the spreadsheet is? Or why does it matter how we're using different fonts or different colours of fonts to really make sure that it's easier to read, right? And my kind of growth moment was when they shared their email and they gave examples of kind of how they're seeing the world through a different spectrum of colourblindness. It was a real pause moment and a growth moment for us, because I think now I'm seeing more people, formatting their documents to support that individual so that it really meets their needs. So, it can be big, systemic things that could be little everyday changes that just help everyone feel that much more included within the workplace.

Thank you very much, Beth. That's about all the time we have left for this episode. I'm really pleased that you joined us and thank you for such an engaging and thought-provoking discussion. And thank you, listeners for joining us for this episode.

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As always thank you to our production team, we couldn't do this without you. I'm your host, Allen Liedkie and we look forward to you tuning in to the next episode, where we'll be discussing engagement across a multi-generational workforce and how our programming can support creating better understanding and lines of communication across the generations. Until next time, thank you. And remember you too can See it, Own it, Change it, and Live it.