

# Learning to be yourself at work

Kirsty Bennett reports from last week's Bring Yourself To Work Week across our London Victoria campus, where Partners' individualism and diversity were celebrated

## CHARLIE'S OPENING SPEECH

"I've decided to make myself the subject of experimentation by talking about me," Chairman Charlie Mayfield told the packed room of Partners during his headline event at Bring Yourself to Work Week. "I want to peel back a few layers."

His childhood as part of an Army family is where Charlie's story begins, leading to his first official job in the Army at 18, then working for brands such as Horlicks and Lucozade during his pre-Partnership career, before arriving at his current role – becoming Chairman of the Partnership nine years ago.

He shared what he's learnt along the way – how he's dealt with pressure, as well as overcome experiences that he says were almost debilitating.

"What's the purpose of me telling you all this stuff about me?" he asked. "When you look at me, who and what

do you see? Indeed, when you think about who you're working with, how do you perceive them? And what would it be helpful for them to know about you?"

That, he said, is the point of BYTW. "Although it takes courage, I would encourage you to take steps that may be small or large to share a little bit more about yourself."

## DESIGN THINKING

What can you expect from the man who runs John Lewis's mysterious Room Y innovation department? Well, a thought-provoking session on 'Design Thinking' for starters.

John Vary, Innovation Manager at John Lewis (above), talked through his career highlights to date – starting with the 'real start' of his career as an 11-year-old on a Peckham market stall, through to his five-year stint at



John Vary

Burberry where he was charged with fashioning the way the Regent Street store incorporated technological innovation into its design.

"Room Y is our in-house skunkworks where we can think differently and create our own perspective on what the future could be," he revealed.

John shared two clips with Partners: Ric Elias's *Three things I learned when my plane crashed* 2011 TED talk, and Apple's philosophical 1997 *Think Different* TV ad. "Life is so busy and there are a lot of egos in the world," he said, adding that the clips provide a 'powerful mindset to ground you'.

## ABILITY

Mental health was in the spotlight at the Ability event, as the new network for Partners who face mental or physical challenges made its debut.

Telegraph columnist Bryony Gordon (right) was the first of three guest

speakers to talk openly of her experiences – about living with chronic Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and depression since she was a teenager. It's a story she told by reading extracts from her book *Mad Girl*. Around one in four people in the UK suffers with mental health issues and 'often the media representation is just not true', said Bryony. "Brains are like any other organ – they misfire."

Ashley Fulwood, from OCD UK



Bryony Gordon



'WE ARE UNITED BECAUSE WE'RE PARTNERS AND SCHOOL OF THOUGHT IS A FORUM WHERE I AM YOU AND YOU ARE ME'

Janice Johnson, School of Thought network



shared his story of living with what he described as 'contagion OCD'. Today, he's overcome his condition and, to demonstrate this, he licked the sole of his shoe – to an audible gasp from the audience. David Jones, Partnership Registrar, Waitrose, talked about the stigma surrounding mental health as he shared his own very personal family experience.

## THE INCLUSIVE FAMILY

A conventional family: what does that actually mean? The answer is different for all of us and that was the sentiment behind Anna Butcher's session on 'the inclusive family'. Anna, a Talent Programme Manager at Waitrose, talked about being part of what she described as a non-conventional, non-nuclear family – emphasising how it shaped her as a person.

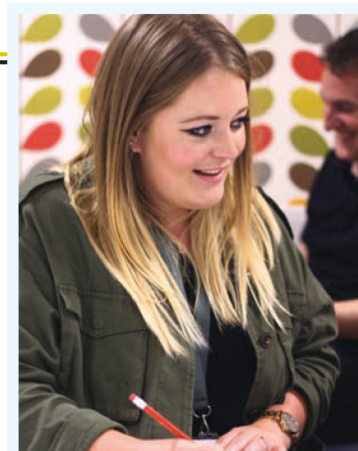
Simon Fowler, Director of Communications (and lead sponsor for the Partnership's Working Parents Network), spoke frankly about becoming an 'accidental parent' to his partner's son, which kick-started a conversation about Partners' differing experiences of family.

## SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Which subjects do we regard as taboo? It's a question Janice Johnson, Finance Systems Trainer, Waitrose, posed at the launch of the Partnership's School of Thought network. This aims to promote diversity of thought and explore cognitive difference between Partners, said Janice: "We're united because we're Partners and School of Thought is a forum where I am you and you are me."

Discussion at the first event centred on Autism and Asperger's as guest speakers from Research Autism, Zillah Bingley and Holly Judge, talked about some of the challenges faced by those affected by Autism, particularly in the workplace.

**Missed BYTW Week? Don't fret! You can catch up with all the action in our blog of the week on the Partner intranet home page, which includes a new film – and read more about Ability's debut event at GazetteOnline!**



## COMMENT

How to summarise Bring Yourself to Work Week in one word? Courage. Because it must have taken a large dose of bravery for those speaking at sessions to open up to audiences of, essentially, strangers, writes Kirsty Bennett (above).

Hats off to the Partners, managers and leaders who dug deep to share their stories in the hope that it might inspire others to feel more confident in sharing just a little more about themselves at work.

I attended several events – blogging about them on the Partner intranet – and each made its mark on me. Thirty minutes with one of our Employment Lawyers Laura Coey kicked off my

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Kirsty Bennett, Gazette Reporter

experience of BYTW Week and it was fascinating to get Laura's take, first-hand, on what Brexit could mean for employment law in the UK.

John Vary's session on 'Design Thinking' was a personal highlight. Too often we get caught up in the everyday and John's approach encouraged us to think about the bigger picture, drawing on the sources of his inspirations.

The week, overall, was one that brought a great sense of perspective. In what were intense sessions at times, there emerged a realisation that just by scratching the surface you'll see the variety of life experiences within us all.

Want to join the networks? See the Partner intranet > Home > Being a Partner > Diversity and inclusion > Networks for how you can, via Google+.