

Stephen's story




How OpenBlend supports **disability inclusion** at work


We love speaking to our customers and hearing how OpenBlend is helping to embed more effective conversations at work. It's less frequently, though, that we speak to the end users of our technology.

After a great conversation with OpenBlend user, Stephen Salmon, last week, it's definitely something we'll be doing more often.

Stephen joined Guidant Global – part of global workforce solutions firm, Impellam Group – in January 2019 and moved into his role as Senior Marketing Executive for talent marketing later that year. It's a varied and interesting role – but it's not the only hat that Stephen wears within the company. He's also a disability inclusion specialist who, as a full-time wheelchair user, draws on his own experiences and knowledge to support progression in the areas of disability confidence and inclusion.

We wanted to hear more about the great work that Stephen does to promote disability inclusion and ask him how OpenBlend is helping to support this at Impellam Group.

 **Stephen, tell me about your role as a disability inclusion specialist. What does that entail and how can organisations create positive change in this area?**

 "My role is to raise awareness of the barriers that people with disabilities face on a daily basis. That awareness is really the first step in enabling the understanding that then supports inclusivity. As an organisation, Impellam is working to be the best it can be in that regard and having the opportunity to further that cause is one of the key reasons I chose to join the business."

Stephen's story



“Enabling regular and open conversation is hugely important and that really forms the foundation for inclusivity. As I see it, the two are intrinsically linked because conversation is key to enabling people to understand what constitutes a barrier – and we need that knowledge if we are to succeed in levelling the playing field.”

Stephen Salmon, Guidant Global

Ultimately my goal is to enable people to feel a sense of belonging, irrespective of their disability – or any other diversity for that matter. It's about creating a company and a community that actively works to remove barriers so that everyone has access to the same opportunities and is celebrated for who they are, and what they bring to the organisation.”

Q What would you say to HR and business leaders who may be reading this and who want their organisations to become more inclusive but perhaps don't know where to start?

A “Enabling regular and open conversation is hugely important and that really forms the foundation for inclusivity. As I see it, the two are intrinsically linked because conversation is key to enabling people to understand what constitutes a barrier - and we need that knowledge if we are to succeed in levelling the playing field.”

Q Let's talk about OpenBlend...how do you use the platform and how do you feel it benefits you as an individual?

A “OpenBlend is a great tool. It enables a unique type of conversation between managers and employees that you wouldn't typically find in the workplace. I

use it regularly - both to review my progress, but also to reflect on how I'm feeling and update my 'blend' accordingly. Best of all, the platform provides a safe space in which I can confidently let my manager know what I need from a wellbeing and performance point of view. Just being able to have those conversations and say “Hey, I'm struggling with a medical issue right now and need to take some time off” really helps me to manage the stress that inevitably comes with that.

Secondly, and because OpenBlend supports broad conversations that extend beyond the typical one-to-one, the platform even helps to dismantle misconceptions with regards to disability. Because my one-to-ones are typically led by me, I'm able to tell my manager as much or as little as I want to about my medical needs, but equally, those conversations give my manager an opportunity to understand my unique needs and wants - and from my perspective. To give you an example, for me, being in a wheelchair is not disabling in the way that many people may think. My wheelchair is actually my freedom so it's not my paralysis which disables me, but rather people's attitudes and the physical access issues I have to deal with. Those are the things I really want to talk about as I work to improve disability confidence and inclusion.”

Stephen's story

Q It's really wonderful to hear that feedback. Casting your mind back to previous employment, though, how did your one-to-ones compare then versus now?

A "Joining Impellam Group was actually my first foray into the corporate world after leaving the military. I'd planned to stay in the military for the entirety of my career but my journey changed direction unexpectedly and I had to rediscover a new purpose. I would say that the conversations I had with my superiors in the past were very different to the ones I have today. The main difference being that I'm now able to be myself and talk about the things that matter most to me - both as a disabled person, and as an advocate for disability inclusion.

There's actually an Oscar Wilde quote that sums this up really well: "Be yourself, everyone else is taken". OpenBlend very much helps to facilitate that by ensuring people can express themselves without fear of prejudice and therefore feel that same sense of belonging that everyone deserves."

That's very true. Enabling people to be themselves at work is the very essence of an inclusive culture. We definitely share your passion for that. What else can organisations do to keep progressing when it comes to inclusivity at work?

"Include the people you're trying to include. Never have a conversation about us, without us. Ask us what we need and want because we're the experts on that.

That's actually something I often say to the young disabled people I talk to through my work with Whizz Kidz. These are young people who have bundles of potential and so much to offer. They just need an inclusive work environment that enables them to speak up and express what they need in order to reach their full potential. Tools such as OpenBlend are a key part of the solution in those terms – and now more than ever [in the world of remote work]."



"OpenBlend is a great tool. It enables a unique type of conversation between managers and employees that you wouldn't typically find in the workplace. I use it regularly – both to review my progress, but also to reflect on how I'm feeling and update my 'blend' accordingly"

To learn more about the OpenBlend platform and how it can support conversations in your organisation, get in touch.

BOOK A DEMO

GET IN TOUCH

OpenBlend

FIND OUT MORE