



WHAT IS IT?

Dining with a Difference offers a Menu of experiences for Boards, HR and other Directors, and Senior Line Managers, to enable them to gain business confidence about disability. <http://www.diningwithadifference.com/>.

The specific purpose of this choreographed Dining experience is to move senior executives from **unwilling** and **unable** to invest in improving their corporate disability related performance, to **willing** and, because they are more disability self-confident, better **able** 'to invest as leaders in changing cultures and behaviours across the business'.



WHAT DOES IT DO?

Senior executives from the corporate and public sectors are invited to dine with “leading authorities on disability as it affects business”. Dining events challenge and change the way chief executives and directors of private and public organisations address disability as a strategic business issue priority.

The Dining Directors are some of the UK’s leading disability opinion formers and authorities – all are business people in their own right and Associates of both business disability international and Business Disability Forum (UK) .

James Partridge OBE, DSc (Hon), FRCSEd (Hon)

James Partridge is Founder and former Chief Executive of Changing Faces (www.changingfaces.org.uk/), the leading UK charity supporting and representing people with disfigurements, which is now a £1.8 million organisation with 30 staff. He launched the charity after the positive response to his book (passing on lessons from his experience of severe facial burns when aged 18), (Penguin 1990), *Changing Faces: the Challenge of Facial Disfigurement*. James is a leading authority on transforming business cultures so that employees are valued regardless of difference. He advises many companies and government bodies on disability and equality issues. He has won various awards such the Third Sector award for Most Admired Charity Chief Executive and the Beacon Prize for Leadership. He has also played significant roles on public bodies such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and is now on the Department of Health’s Independent Reconfiguration Panel.



WHAT IS IT?

Phil Friend OBE

Phil Friend himself a wheelchair user, is acknowledged as one of the UK's foremost consultants on disability matters (<http://philandfriends.co.uk>). A powerful and highly popular communicator, his company - Phil & Friends - provides consultancy to many of the country's best known companies. In addition to his professional activities, he is a respected champion for equal opportunities and diversity in general, where his special blend of humour and direct speaking has won admirers from around the world.

Simon Minty

Simon Minty himself of short stature and limited mobility, has delivered training and consultancy in the equalities field since 1997. Specialising in disability, he has a Post Graduate Diploma in Disability Management at Work. Based in London, Simon works throughout the UK and internationally with small NGO's to large multinational corporates. He has a creative side, helping improve the portrayal of disabled people on screen and has worked with BBC, Channel 4 and Sky Television as well as independent production companies like All3Media, Endemol and Warner Bros. He's produced numerous videos and co-produced and performed in the sell out Edinburgh Fringe comedy show Abnormally Funny People in 2005, returning again in 2015. He is a host of [BBC Ouch podcast](#) and [Phil & Simon Show](#): a trustee of StopGap Dance and of Improbable Theatre: an Associate of [Business Disability International](#) and [Business Disability Forum](#). He established the [Disability Media Alliance Project](#) in California. A keen traveler, he won the Travel X Travel Writer of the Year 1999 – Best Television Feature for his Channel 4 travel programme in China.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In contrast with conventional training courses – which rarely attract c-suite participation - Dining with a Difference communicates key messages to senior leaders who participate through emotionally powerful, peer to peer experiential learning- perceived not as training but if anything as leadership development. Key takeaways include:.

- People with disabilities are human beings like everyone else and want to be treated fairly and with respect.
- Business needs to enable everyone to contribute to business success.
- Business operations (including company websites) should attract disabled talent, not deter them from applying for jobs.
- Providing reasonable adjustments to working environments so that people with disabilities can be at their best should be business as usual.
- Senior leaders are the “difference” who can change how their business operates.



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

'LIGHTBULB MOMENTS' SPARK A CREATIVE IDEA

James Partridge began exploring with **Susan Scott-Parker**, founder of BDF and BDI, ideas for engaging chief executives. He developed his thinking further with **Phil Friend** and **Stephen Lloyd** (hearing-impaired business development consultant prior to becoming an MP - <https://stephenlloyd.org.uk/>) – who had both worked extensively in business. All had a shared interest in learning and in innovation. They believed something different from conventional training would be required in order to engage with senior executives who, in contrast with HR practitioners, had much greater power to sponsor and resource disability initiatives in their organisations.

James describes the process as follows:

- At diversity/equality roundtable dinners with British Gas, business unit heads *“were challenged and empowered to tackle equality issues confidently. I had witnessed the light-bulb moments these dinners enabled... ‘within 3 hours, the Board got it’ and was wondering if something similar might be done re disability”*.
- *“Cornell University research was revealing that the companies that had the lowest Tribunal challenge etc after the DDA 1995 seemed to be the ones where there was top-Board buy-in. And it was obvious that being a member of EFD [Employers Forum on Disability, now Business Disability Forum] enabled some HR Directors/senior managers to get their CEO/Chairs to attend EFD events to good effect.”*
- At one EFD dinner, *“with Susan, I explained what I was thinking to Phil [Friend] and I think of that as the moment when he and I decided to actually do something – not trad training in any way but something much more engaging and short!”*



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE IDEA

Phil adds:

“We decided that what we wanted to do was have these conversations over a meal...a glass of wine, really nice food, organised people around the table(s)...We [also] began to realise it needed to be structured – beginning, middle and end...so it began to develop a kind of story.

We engaged a producer/scriptwriter [Izzy Mant]...she did a lot of writing for top TV shows. At the time she was relatively inexperienced but talented and full of good ideas. We three had conversations with her...she wrote scripts and roles...And then we had a pilot – a choreographed dinner with actors who played business people [ahead of going ‘live’ with actual business leaders].



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

ASSEMBLING THE KEY PLAYERS

Each of the key players brought distinctive skills and experience to the Dining project.

Mutual friend **Simon Minty** brought to the group a mixture of experience in comedy, performance, production and training (through *Abnormally Funny People* and *Acting on Disability*) – including the additional business rigour required – to develop **Dining With a Difference** as a ‘cultural change events’ business with scripted formats.

Simon: *“In terms of my background, I suppose the distinctive bit is the creative side...I was setting up a comedy team...I bring two things: a slightly more creative side. The other bit, I think, was business rigour. Phil and James are fabulous – for them, money is an accidental consequence – but I said, we need to get paid for this...I have one foot in disability training, one foot in performance.”*

James adds: *“What did I bring?...I think the fact that I almost 100% did the intro tells that, face and all, I used my social skills/charm as ‘host’ to the max... ensuring a relaxed atmosphere from the second the diners arrived... and some of them said later on words to the effect that “it was weird, I noticed your facial scars in the first five seconds I met you and then I didn’t see them again” – which was exactly what we were aiming at...”*



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

DEVELOPING THE DINING FORMAT

Phil: *The three of us and Izzy built up this idea. It needs to be in three acts – appetizers, mains and desserts.”*

Simon: *‘We had an outline – we would know what each of us were doing at each stage. We had to be respectful of each other as colleagues and as performers.*

As well as dining, the events included a number of exercises including an ice-breaker, the sharing of personal stories about disability, a quiz, photographs as stimulus for discussion, a video and asking participants at the end to write down an action that they will make happen back in their workplace.

James: ***“Our stories were important but even more so, they acted as catalysts for the diners to reveal their own... ‘my sister has...’ and those stories became ‘ingredients’ for the hosts to reflect on as the dinner progressed. And the fact they the diners were sitting so close to and interacting entirely naturally (eventually) with ‘a disabled person’, some for the first time, was also crucial.”***



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

DEVELOPING THE DINING FORMAT

Phil: *“We took my experience of running equality training and James’s experience at Changing Faces. The scariest thing [for diners] is, ‘I am embarrassed and uncomfortable’. The appetiser – it starts with language – what can you say and not say – conversation as a glass of wine is poured, shrimps in batter. And to aid this, why don’t we have questions which each course has to answer?”*

First question: what do you call a person with a scarred face?

Answer: You call him James!!

Each host was at a different table, taking in turns to answer the question. The room had to be small, free of other noise and interruption, wheelchair accessible...comfortable to create an atmosphere of safety.

With Izzy’s help, the three of us had a three-act table as a focus, each of us framing a question.’



HOW DID IT GET STARTED?

DEVELOPING THE DINING FORMAT

[Reflecting on the creative synergy among the founders during the development period]:
James, myself, Stephen, Simon – back in the 90s, I was coming up with ideas that mostly worked. Dining With a Difference was one of them...Stephen and I did reasonable adjustments – Simon did Acting on Disability and Abnormally Funny people. We had this amazing period of creativity, coming up with all sorts of ideas to make things change.

The project became a reality in 2000 with considerable help from the then EFD, the Board of (what was then) Consignia, now Royal Mail, who invested £30,500 in our start up fund – which covered the development and evaluation costs and several dinners - and Margaret Hodge MP, former Minister for Disabled People. The first dinners were "eaten" in the autumn of 2000, with the demand growing year on year.

We charged, and continue to charge, £700 per Dining host – ie if three tables for, say, 20 people, three Dining hosts EW required (£2.1k). The company also covers hosts' travel etc, an admin fee (c £250/dinner) and the venue and catering costs. The corporate host provides venue and dinner for usually 20-40 VIP guests.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Gourmet Dinners

Researcher Winnie Coutinho (2009) has summarised the “Gourmet Dinner” format as follows:

*Dining events are designed to ‘break down attitudinal barriers towards people who have disabilities and to create confidence around the subject so that employers are no longer afraid or anxious that employing disabled people will be bad for business’. Each course tackles a particular theme, with diners seated on separate tables each led by a member of the Dining team, who are some of the **UK's leading disability opinion formers and authorities on disability** and are all business people in their own right.*

Diners can expect to:

- *Participate in frank and open exchanges of personal experiences and views.*
- *Become more relaxed and comfortable with their disabled hosts.*
- *Develop the ability to describe the emerging disability agenda for business and for the communities in which they operate.*
- *Evaluate their company's previous achievements.*
- *Develop strategies to move into high performance.*
- *Leave with a new perspective, new energy, fresh insights and inspired to lead their organisations into action.*

Dining WITH A Difference



HOW DOES IT WORK?

A highly varied menu
Beyond the “Gourmet Dinner” format, other event menu options have been developed to suit business clients’ needs and budgets.

Dining offers a Menu of experiences for Boards, HR and other Directors, and Line Managers to enable them to gain business confidence about disability. Organisations are encouraged to choose our “Gourmet Dinner” our signature event - a four course five star dinner, but you can also consider our other menu options to suit your needs, your budget and your appetite.

All the options on our A la Carte Menu are designed to enhance your organisation's leadership in its approach to disability as a business and organisational issue.

OUR NEW A LA CARTE MENU

- ENTRÉES**
- **Coffee Morning**: over coffee and croissants, a Dining Director will discuss with you and a small number of colleagues your present position on disability issues and your options for developing your strategy.
 - **Drinks Reception**: bring a group of managers together to hear from a Dining Director about current issues involving disability and gain momentum for your existing plans.
 - **High Tea**: an early evening light bite to allow you to chew over with fellow directors and managers how your organisation is recruiting disabled staff or managing disability issues.
- MAIN COURSES**
- **Breakfast**: start your day with an invigorating event (with a full breakfast) led by Dining's Directors reviewing the rationale for taking disability seriously and your strategy for doing so – and leave with new confidence that you can make your business disability-confident.
 - **Luncheon or Supper**: a two-hour opportunity to gather key players for a careful analysis of how your organisation manages – and could better manage – employment and customer service issues so that disabled people are routinely catered for.
 - **Gourmet Dinner**: our signature event – a four course, five star dinner for board members, directors and senior managers during which Dining's Directors help you to renew your personal confidence about disability and how you can lead your business to greater rewards.
- DESSERTS**
- **Mentoring**: a Dining Director will work with you to enhance your leadership over a period of several months – possibly involving eating out!
 - **Second Helpings**: a chance to review cappuccino in hand perhaps, how you have followed up your commitments from your earlier Breakfast, Luncheon or Dinner with a Difference.
 - **Roundtable**: a problem-solving opportunity around a Lazy Susan of pastries – bring a group of colleagues together with a Dining Director.
- BANQUET**
- Dining has run a number of big events to which 100-200 people have been invited – choreographed to challenge your organisation and your suppliers to embed disability confidence throughout your whole operation.

A la Carte Menu Options

Organisations are encouraged to choose a meal to suit their needs, but we recommend they consider the following diet...

	BOARD/ DIRECTOR	HR DIRECTORS	LINE MANAGERS	DURATION AVERAGE
ENTRÉES				
Coffee Morning	✓	✓	✓	60 mins
Drinks Reception	✓	✓	✓	90 mins
High Tea		✓	✓	60 mins
MAIN COURSES				
Breakfast	✓	✓		90 mins
Luncheon/Supper	✓	✓		2 hours
Gourmet Dinner	✓	✓		3 hours
DESSERTS				
Mentoring 1-1	✓	✓		45 mins x 4
Second Helpings	✓			90 mins
Roundtable Clinic		✓	✓	90 mins
BANQUET				
	✓	✓	✓	3-4 hours

Prices for the various Menu Options are dependent on the number of Dining Directors or Associates present, the duration of the event or the particular option ordered (eg. mentoring). Administration, travel and accommodation expenses are an additional charge.

Following discussion, each event's price is negotiated and agreed between Dining and the host organisation to ensure a unique tailored event to meet your individual requirements and agreed objectives.

If you are interested in booking an event or would like further details, please get in contact:

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THIS LEAFLET IS AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

The hosts have described distinctive elements which have been designed into the “Gourmet Dinner”:

Table hosts draw on direct experience of disability and relate well to each other.

Phil: *‘Disabled wise people...act as ‘hosts’ or facilitators who guide the guests/diners through an evening that includes speeches and quizzes and “Eureka” moments. Each course has a theme, with surprises and activities to engage diners...I think one of the things that informed Dining With a Difference ... when we are talking about our own lives – James, Stephen, Simon, Kate [Nash] and Alice [Maynard] who came later – we are using our personal stories – people are moved by that.’*

Simon: *‘When we were doing dinners, we knew [from previous experience of disability events] that it should be entertaining as well. There was some interplay between [the hosts]...challenge in front of an audience.’*



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

Events target senior executives with power and control of resources.

Phil: *Because they [the diners] are very senior people, they have a different outlook. [From experience with] Abnormally Funny People – middle or lower managers, they might laugh a bit. But senior managers – they love it. It's massive. There is a confidence of being at the top table that allows you to go to other places. We didn't pretend, didn't do heart-rending – this was about people.'*

Dinners challenge stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Phil: *'[Diners are] given a drink in the lobby. We would hand them cards: "Find someone who has three points on their licence, has been published in 3 languages, drives a Renault Espace, has sailed in a three-mast sailing ship." It's an icebreaker with a point – all the extraordinary things have been done by me, James, Simon, Stephen. Disabled people can be clever, they have done stuff.'*



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

Advance preparation creates impact.

Simon: *'When I became involved, I started to look up the company beforehand. [There is a] quiz at the end of the dinner. If we wrote the quiz to fit that company, we got a lot more impact. I sent the rest of the team a briefing...these are the three quiz questions to illustrate.*

*One – if you went to your website, **put the word 'disability' into your search tool, what first three things came up?** A ripple went round the room. A good answer would be: 'We value our disabled people...' But more often, what would come up was, "If you become ill, this is our pension arrangement". The reaction: We need to change this!*

*Would usually **try to [highlight] an equality case that might be relevant to their area of business** – for example, mental health and bullying; £600K as a payout for bullying and mental health impact in one of their clients or competitors.*

***Opportunity – this is the market, the talent you could get** – 6%- 10% of university population declare disability – that's an opportunity.*

WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

Sample quiz questions (prepared for BP) and our answers as hosts:

1. When I typed “disabled” into your website search tool, what were the first three items that came up?

Canada students and grads

Business classifications e.g. Disabled Vet owned. Women owned – presume for procurement

Disability charity work in Portugal

6th item – Gold girl wheelchair athlete Tatyana McFadden from US who BP sponsored at London 2012

2. What percentage of disabled people became disabled during their life, rather than born with an impairment?

38% 62% 83% (answer 83% - Source: Papworth Trust and IPPR)

3. What is the name of the scheme for disabled drivers who need assistance at a petrol station?

At Your Service

Service Call

Suit Your Self Service (answer Service Call)

Bonus Q :According to Service Call’s website, who has the most Service Calls installed in the UK?

Esso – 363

Shell – 340

BP – 409

4. How many gold medals did Dave “The Weirwolf” Weir win at London 2012 Paralympics?

2

3

4

Weir won four golds, three at the Olympic Stadium and one in the marathon. On 2 Sept 5,000 metres, 4

Sept 1,500m 6 Sept 800m 9 Sept Marathon



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

SAMPLE CASE STUDY QUIZ QUESTION

A crane driver has applied to work with you. However, he has declared he has a hearing impairment. The Health and Safety manager is concerned this may prove a significant risk. he was once unable to understand instructions given to him by the Supervisor because of his hearing impairment. It is unlikely he would hear a shouted warning in an emergency or the horn of a truck if it emerged from a concealed opening.

Should Mr Roberts be dismissed from his job as his hearing impairment creates greater Health and Safety risk?



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

SAMPLE CASE STUDY QUIZ ANSWER

- *Actual case at Tribunal few years ago*
- *He was dismissed as hearing impairment thought to create greater risk and employer had a material and substantial reason for dismissal.*
- *Thought that Health and Safety overrides*
- *Roberts claimed disability discrimination*
- *Found in his favour as:*
 - *previous experience made him equipped to deal with hazards*
 - *need for oral communication to Roberts minimal – he works as a team without much need to talk*
 - *impact of communication difficulties minimal*
- *In a noisy industrial environment people should wear ear defenders so being hearing impaired has little impact*
- *Roberts and colleagues aware of disability, eyesight used so reduced risk and risk was theoretical and minimal*
- *Roberts won case*



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

SAMPLE LAW QUIZ QUESTION

DDA Customers - Website question (DDA was subsumed into the UK Equality Act 2003)

You have recently launched a new product/service and have instructed your marketing team to include it on your website. As part of the launch you propose offering a discounted rate for the service/product if the customer purchases on line.

Which group of people would have most difficulty accessing this?

- a) *Blind and visually impaired people*
- b) *Deaf and hard of hearing people*
- c) *People with learning disabilities*



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

TAILORED QUIZZES CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES, PROMOTE DISCUSSION AND LEARNING

SAMPLE LAW QUIZ QUESTION

DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) Customers - Website question

Answer – None, it varies

Part 3 UK Legislation: – Accessible services. Discount is unique so all must be able to access. Offered it via telephone or post as alternative reasonable adjustment.

Web sites are likely to be considered as “a service” as defined in law. Web sites should be accessible, particularly relevant to sight impaired people and those with learning disabilities. Sometimes to deaf people who only know sign language.

It makes no sense whatsoever to have inaccessible web sites as these limit your prospective customer base.



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

Use of humour and a confident tone by hosts with disabilities.

Simon: *'At the beginning we [the hosts] introduce ourselves...once we've sat down, then we talk about what our disability life is like. I talk about being at a petrol station – a guy who was black, said "Hello, Shorty!" I said, "Hello darkie!" He smiled and walked on.*

There was an element of "Goodness, me!"... Also, 'we know this and own this – if you give us nonsense, we push back.'

The business message is, "We want to get the best from our people". The personal message is, "This is what life is like, get over it."

Hosts help diners understand that people with disabilities are just like them.

Simon: *'Justin King – CEO of Sainsbury's with 300,000 employees – he was in the papers every day for being the best CEO in the world. He had brown shoes – I said, "I really like your shoes" – his face went weird – "where did you get them?" – "from Sainsbury's." Then we talked about travelling to America, jazz music – it was sinking in. We did four dinners with him. That was the bit that I loved – suddenly we were both chief execs. The point is, "Simon Minty is a human being."*



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

People with disabilities are supported on occasion to become table hosts.

Simon hosted some dinners internationally with other people with disabilities who for the first time acted as table hosts in a Dining with a Difference modelled event.

'Some [of these disabled hosts] said, 'we are terrified in front of senior people. We are way out of our depth'. I said to them, no, you are experts on yourself, on living with a disability, and on working for this organisation with a disability. This dinner isn't about understanding the balance sheet...Suddenly they are indeed 'experts'...and always from the first course, people wanted to talk about this.



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

Independent MSc research by Winnie Coutinho (2009) has identified **critical success factors which have emerged from diners' reports** of their experiences:

- The fun warm atmosphere and format created a relaxed, professional atmosphere that removed or minimised anxiety
- The sharing of personal stories by both guests and disabled hosts had a strong emotional impact
- The video featuring an American woman with a disability, an exercise that provoked a re-think about what 'disability' means and a picture at a race-course of Phil and his extended family who were all spending money because the race course was accessible triggered paradigm shifts in thinking
- The Directors were seen as role models communicating a powerful message about disabled people as humorous, human, capable, inspirational and successful
- Feelings inspired: moved, humbled and motivated to do move into action



WHAT MAKES IT DISTINCTIVE?

Some of the organisations that have participated in Dining events include:

- Accenture
- ALI
- Barclaycard
- Barclays
- BITC (business consortium)
- Bolton at Home
- BP
- British Telecom (BT)
- Cisco Systems (Europe)
- Citibank
- Citigroup
- City of London Police
- European B&D
- Goldman Sachs (Hong Kong)
- Granada Studios
- GMEC (Greater Manchester Employer Coalition)
- HBOS (Halifax Bank of Scotland)
- Intercontinental Hotels
- Jewish Care
- Job Centre Plus (UK Government)
- KPMG
- London First (business consortium)
- LSC
- Merrill Lynch
- London Metropolitan Police
- National Grid
- Post Office
- Red Cross
- Reed Business
- Royal Mail
- Shell Oil
- Unum Insurance
- Yorkshire Water



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

FEEDBACK FROM DINERS HIGHLIGHTS IMMEDIATE IMPACTS OF DINING EXPERIENCE

'Dining with a Difference is hugely entertaining and immensely interesting ... but it is also direct and unsettling ... one of the few events I have been to that has genuinely gripped and engaged the entire audience.'

Dan Flint
Resources Global HR Director - Accenture

'On a personal level I found this event so valuable the first time I attended that I was keen to host in-house. I appreciated the way that you were willing to customise the offering for us and it paid dividends with thirty of our partners leaving the event engaged and motivated to drive the change we want to see. This is a really unique and innovative approach to disability training, particularly suited to a firm's leadership.'

Robin Heath
Leadership Team - Ernst & Young

'The dinner was hugely impactful, thought provoking and barrier breaking.'

Liseli Thomas
D&I - BP International



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

FEEDBACK FROM DINERS HIGHLIGHTS IMMEDIATE IMPACTS OF DINING EXPERIENCE

'The event was a great success and eye opener, perfect for bridging the expectations of both executive and nonexecutive Board members. The evening created a relaxed and informal setting where facts were mixed with debate and discussion. Board members ended better informed and confident about how the organisation can meet the needs and expectations of disabled people. I can't think of a better way of engaging Board members in creating a disability confident organisation.'

Paul Gamble
Chief Executive - Habinteg

'Fantastic event - It was probably one of the most successful events that I have ever attended, given the feedback coming in from our senior members.'

Liz Potter
UBS Investment Bank

'The evening exceeded my expectations, which were already high.'

Brian Popplestone
Managing Director - Fulcrum Connections Ltd



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

There is anecdotal evidence that Dining With a Difference has triggered a variety of short-to-medium term impacts on diners and their companies. James: *“I could cite many instances of people going off to do things differently after [a Dining event] – and many I met subsequently have said ‘it all stemmed from that dinner’.”*

Granada Studios: Busting Myths and Misconceptions

One of the best and typical compliments the Dining with a Difference team received was during the host’s closing speech at Granada Studios. The host said: **Very honestly, before the dinner he’d been somewhat dreading it. He knew it was about disability, so he expected inspirational stories, a request for donations and some worthy (or even boring) tales.**

He said he realised very quickly that **the dinner wasn’t about charity or pity. It was about what a business could and should do about disability in their workplace and how the senior team needed to lead this and sustain it.** He said **he would leave looking at disability in a completely different light** compared to how he had when he arrived.



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

Barclays: The Mind Shift

John Varley the former global CEO of Barclays Bank was due to attend and host one of the early Dining with a Difference events. He explained afterwards that he arrived very nervous and sceptical. **Just two hours later what he heard transformed his opinions so much that he announced he would be the disability champion for Barclays and would set up a disability network to consult regularly – which he did.** He then went on to be the Honorary President of the Employers Forum on Disability/BDF and remains a disability advocate to this day.

James: *“John Varley was actually the Finance Director of Barclays at the time and was representing the top Board at the two-table dinner which Phil and I hosted. He was not expected to do more than say ‘thank you, very thought-provoking’ at the end. To say that the Barclays’ top people there were gob-smacked by his declaration about becoming the Bank’s Disability Champion would be an understatement. No such role existed and certainly he was the last person expected to step up to it.”*



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

Network Rail: The Immediate Impact and Creativity Through Discussion

The London dinner was attended by the board and senior managers from Network Rail. It was just before the Paralympics so there was a real buzz about accessible travel for disabled athletes and spectators. **During the Paralympics Network Rail stepped up to the plate and provided many stress free, barrier free travel experiences to disabled people.**

Sometimes the guests follow up with the Dining hosts afterwards. **Simon Minty received a number of emails after this Network Rail event which ranged from a request to spend time training managers in their large IT team, through to asking which agencies could help them increase the numbers of disabled applicants successfully applying to join Network Rail.**

There was a second dinner in Glasgow. Both Phil Friend and Simon Minty travelled there by train and Simon was a bit late. After discussion with the guests, Phil highlighted the need for a smartphone app that would allow disabled passengers to link with station staff in real time so they could be reassured that there is someone at the destination station to assist them getting off the train. This incident illustrated for the guests how first-hand experiences present product development opportunities for companies who listen to their disabled customers.

WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

BP: Responding to Social Media and crisis averted

This dinner was attended by an international group of BP employees involved in diversity in some way across the world. Whilst there was some very high level, strategic conversation, as well as the comparing and contrasting of approaches to disability in different countries, two elements stood out. One was local – **on social media the day before a disabled person had posted a photo of their local BP petrol station which had put a free-standing advertising board in the centre of the ramp into the shop. Despite the dinner being mid-evening, it wasn't long before a message was routed to the petrol station with a request to remove it and ensure that it wasn't placed there again.**

The other element that stood out was an answer to a tailored quiz question regarding which petrol company had the most 'service call' facilities (to help disabled drivers) installed in their UK stations. There was a whoop of delight when it was revealed BP was leading the way. **What the competition is up to often motivates investment in improving one's own disability related performance.**



WHAT IMPACTS HAS IT ACHIEVED?

Cisco Systems (Europe): Recognising the links between Disability and Diversity issues

On the first dinner, one of the delegates was very sceptical about disability being a barrier. This was helpful for the discussion as he spoke his mind and often said things others might have thought but not dared articulate. The Dining team prefer that sort of conversation to platitudes. The individual still couldn't quite see that discrimination took place and couldn't understand why someone wouldn't mention their disability or health condition on an application.

The Dining team member asked whether the delegate ever worried when he applied for jobs about putting his full Asian name on the application. He said he did sometimes, and adjusted his CV to suit. And then the penny dropped.



HOW COULD IT BE REPLICATED OR EXTENDED?

Relationships between hosts are critical.

Phil: *“If we were going to replicate this – you need to spend time letting people [the hosts] get to know each other, work on their blind spots – we did it as we developed the idea. Spent time building relationships [with each other].”*

And, together, the hosts create the distinctive 'magic' of Dining.

We mustn't forget that this choreographed dinner is, above all else - THEATRE!

- Susan Scott-Parker



HOW COULD IT BE REPLICATED OR EXTENDED?

What can, perhaps even should, be changed/reinvented if someone wanted to replicate the ‘model’ Dinners in the USA?

Phil: “Not a lot. You need to know a lot more about the law [in the US] – what we are mainly talking about is, it’s the right thing to do, so Americans are not really different [from the British in terms of culture and values]. I worked in America three months looking at the system – often what America does today, we do tomorrow...[in contrast with working in India, which Phil declined to do because of large cultural differences], In America, I would feel far more confident sitting with American business people to sell the same messages [but] need to know more about the law and how business works.

It’s about whether you get on with each other...We would be delighted to help if we could find ways of training a different group of people – those who “get” Americans. And who can hold the attention of a room of senior players as, in effect, ‘performers’.



HOW COULD IT BE REPLICATED OR EXTENDED?

The final word goes to founder James Partridge:

“I think we need to think about three aspects of Dining’s USP/DNA/experience (over and above the fact that we are all disabled) and if all three can be copied/replicated, then maybe we should try:

- **Chemistry:** *the three of us (and Alice and Kate) evolved a very powerful chemistry which created an atmosphere in which lightbulbs could go off and paradigm shifts happen. So many dinners became capsules for change, charging the diners with energy.*
- **Economics/Business nous:** *we all brought corporate instincts and experience. [NB: although I was CEO of a charity, I was running it as a (social) entrepreneur and could relate/exemplify business decision-making).*
- **Philosophy:** *we fostered ethical business thinking (and justice) around disability but never foisted it on a dinner. Most diners will have come with ‘Oh God, disability... meaning legal minefield, worthy champs, charitable stuff’... and we surprised them by doing it completely differently!*

So, if we were thinking of creating DwD in the UK (another team?) or in another country, I think we’d need to identify three people (or have them come forward) and interrogate them, coach them and let them fly! Might work – and could be fun!