

Realising the Personal and Professional Benefits of Self-Discovery



As Employee Relations Manager, Beth Smith engages daily with staff across departments and is tasked with supporting managers by understanding and resolving issues regarding sickness, absence, conduct, capability and grievances. Beth joined the NHS in 2012 as an apprentice at West Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust, and completed a Level 3 Business Administration course. She went on to complete the Level 5 CIPD course to become an Assistant Advisor within the HR function and moved to Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals (BSUH) in 2016. Beth continues to develop her skills to meet her HR professional Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements – expanding the skillset and knowledge that she can apply in her role.

Initial expectations

Beth was one year in to her two-year Level 7 CIPD course when she learned about the **Self-Discovery Workshop**. The workshop appealed to her primarily for two reasons. Firstly, by attending Beth wanted to gain some insight into how she was perceived by others and apply this learning to her daily interactions. Communication is integral to Beth's role and many of the conversations that she has are with individuals who are upset or dissatisfied. By learning more about how others see her and the impact that she has, Beth wanted to manage these difficult exchanges more effectively, improve the interactions and achieve better outcomes. *"I saw this as an opportunity to look more at myself and my communications style and how others may see me."*

Secondly, having focused exclusively on the development of her HR expertise, Beth hoped that the workshop would give her space to think about her own personal career development; clarify her aspirations for the future and give her some guidance to how to make these a reality. *"I felt it would provide me with the opportunity to focus on myself, what I want in the longer term and where I want to go in my career – which is not something anyone generally gives enough time to."*

The one-day workshop offered an opportunity to network and a chance to learn from and connect with people working in similar roles and/or with similar challenges – without a significant time commitment. Beth's manager was required to approve her as an attendee and given the value that the workshop would provide and the relevance to the role, her manager was very supportive.

Engaging and effective learning

The workshop challenged attendees to reflect on themselves; to think about how they might be perceived and to consider the impact that they have on others. It focused on the importance of self-awareness, how it contributes to the relationships we have and the role it plays in our interactions with others.

- **Positive group dynamics** - Although a diverse group in terms of backgrounds, knowledge and skills, with each attendee having their own personal story and reasons for attending - the group shared similar motivations and expectations from the day. The interaction and discussions with other participants were invaluable and icebreakers helped everyone connect with each other – not just within small groups – but across the entire room. Beth saw a huge benefit to the group dynamic, *“Being paired up for practical work really allowed for deeper reflection and allowed us to challenge each other and find areas where we could improve.”*
- **Time for yourself** - Before the workshop, attendees were asked to prepare a short introduction to themselves to present to the rest of the group. Not only did this immediately highlight the areas of commonality among the attendees, it also started individuals thinking about their long-term career journeys. The workshop gave attendees the time and support to consider their career and development options in more detail and provided practical guidance in how to plan their path and where further assistance and resources could be accessed.
- **Practical, effective learning** - A mix of theory, workbook and practical exercises ensured that the concepts were not just understood, but everyone had an opportunity to consider – either individually, with a partner, or with the wider group - how they could be applied to their own situation. On returning to their roles, attendees were ready to put into practice what they learned at the workshop. During the day, the group was asked to identify three actions that they would take to support their own personal development. *“It really made you think about what you wanted to focus on and when I read the goals at the end of the three months – I had achieved them all”.*

Practical and meaningful outcomes

The workshop gave attendees a greater appreciation for self-awareness and enabled them to apply this understanding to how they manage themselves and situations – both in terms of immediate action and in longer term career development.

- **Better communication with better outcomes** - In dealing with difficult conversations, Beth certainly feels that increased self-awareness has helped. *“In many situations, people simply want to be listened to and have their concerns acknowledged. Prior to the course, I would tend to pre-empt the situation and try to present a solution, before hearing someone out. I now take a bit of a step back and let people finish. The result is a calmer and more constructive conversation with a more successful outcome for all.”* By considering their own and other people’s motivations communication is clearer, relationships are more effective, and everyone benefits.
- **Career development** - At the workshop Beth was able to connect with the resources and support that would help her to clarify and begin to work on achieving her own personal career goals. Following the workshop, Beth received coaching. *“Being able to talk about my experiences and discuss challenges and how to approach them – with confidence – has been invaluable. The workshop was a significant stepping stone for me, since the day itself, I have successfully completed my Level 7 CIPD course and had a promotion.”*

Despite the best intentions, we may not always have the impact that we anticipate. Self-awareness is pivotal to making lasting improvements both professionally and personally. The workshop provides a mirror to see how you are perceived by others and how this impacts situations you face daily. This awareness allows you to make the changes that can lead to a better way of doing things and better results for all.