

Neurodiversity Celebration Week

1 year ago



Insight from On Verve director Bianca Angelico

From the 18 to the 24 of March, the worldwide initiative Neurodiversity Celebration Week helps challenge misconceptions of neurodiverse conditions including ADHD, dyslexia, autism, and other neurodevelopmental disorders.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age, and I struggled academically until I was given support, guidance, and adapted my learning tools. Now in my career, I am proud of my journey and share what support I need from my colleagues. My coworkers, lead DayMaker Ellie Atkinson, and operational support Fara Painter, also offer their insight into neurodiversity support at work.

My Dyslexia story

When I was diagnosed with dyslexia, I wasn't given the support needed at my school due to a lack of understanding surrounding my diagnosis. Sadly, the school thought that the best thing for me was to be moved to a special needs school.

I lasted at that school for a week. My parents fought for me to go back to my own school, where I was challenged and felt like I belonged. Eventually, I was mentored by a teacher there, who understood my neurodiversity and could give me support and patience.

When I studied at university, I was diagnosed with a reading disability that placed my reading age at that of a 15-year-old. I used audiobooks and podcasts to study, as the lengthy academic journals and books were sometimes too overwhelming for me to work with. I also used highlighters to break up long bodies of text, as the different colour background made a world of difference. It was tough, but I graduated and have now worked up to a director role at On Verve.

I masked my dyslexia for many years – people didn't see my spelling mistakes, for example, because I had a support system at home that could help me. But when I stopped masking seven years ago, I was able to thrive. Being open has also helped my colleagues, like Fara and Ellie, vocalise their experiences and ask for additional support in the workplace so that they can flourish too.

Neurodiversity is a superpower

Today, my dyslexia is my superpower. I truly think that without it, I wouldn't be where I am at On Verve. It makes me a creative problem solver who doesn't see things from a traditionally "logical" neurotypical perspective. At work leadership meetings, my different way of thinking means I can bring a totally different perspective.

Ellie and Fara also find that their neurodiversity enhances their work at On Verve:

Ellie: My ADHD meant that I really struggled at school because everything felt the same every day, but I thrive in the problem-solving environment of guest services and can fully commit myself to tasks, as there are new challenges that make every day different.

Fara: My dyslexia means that I'm detail orientated and incredibly thorough. At On Verve, I feel confident in my abilities and that lets me bring joy to my work.

Supporting neurodiverse colleagues

My own experience has developed my leadership style, so I can offer Fara and Ellie any help they need. I understand how hard it is to get bogged down in the detail of tasks if too much information is given, so I make sure to give clear instructions and cut through the "fluff." I also make sure colleagues have access to tools for emails and work schedules to help with their productivity.

I will always discuss my own dyslexia because if I wasn't so vocal about it, I don't think my co-workers would have felt as comfortable coming forward to talk about their own conditions. That openness can help reduce misconceptions around neurodiverse people's experiences and can help neurotypical colleagues understand our unique perspectives.

Neurodiversity is not a buzzword

Neurodiverse conditions are not buzzwords neurotypical people can use to describe behaviours they dislike. It's insulting to hop on the bandwagon of a group that are actively discriminated against in the workplace. Instead of uplifting your neurodiverse coworkers, labelling yourself as "OCD" when you like order, or "dyslexic" when you struggle with spelling when you are not diagnosed, turns our lived conditions into insults, or flaws. It belittles neurodiverse people's experiences and stereotypes our conditions.

If there is one take away I'd like for neurotypical people to have from this week, it's to understand that neurodiverse symptoms differ for everyone, and mislabelling yourself helps people misconceive and underestimate our abilities.

Finally, to my neurodiverse community – there is nothing wrong with you. Being open about your disability should lead to an empathetic and supportive workplace. Be confident in your abilities because you deserve recognition and support for the valuable work you do.