

Being a great individual employer: Charley Zakrzewski

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Introduction

Charley Zakrzewski is an individual employer and employs a team of five personal assistants to support her with her everyday care needs. Being an individual employer has enabled her to be more independent, and she's committed to ensuring that her team are supported to provide the best care and support they can.

Charley was nominated for the 'Best individual who employs their own care and support' Accolade award in 2019/20. This case study shares some of the things that make her a great individual employer and gives practical tips and ideas to help you to recruit, develop and manage your PAs.

Key learnings

- Charley has found that advertising vacancies on social media has been the most effective way of recruiting PAs.
- Training and qualifications ensure that PAs can support you in the best way possible.
- Being a good employer will motivate your PAs to do a great job and help you to retain them.

Recruiting personal assistants

Charley has worked with previous and current PAs to create her ideal job advert. She ensures that the job description is honest and detailed so that potential applicants know exactly what role involves. She highlights the values that people need for the role, including patience, a good sense of humour and flexible. She also asks that people can drive her van, handle money, do housework, support her with childcare and likes animals – these are some of the most important aspects of the role.

She uses a range of websites to advertise vacancies including care-specific job sites, the local council's jobs page and job sites such as Totaljobs and Reed, and has found that advertising on social media has been the most effective way of recruiting PAs.

Charley asks people to fill in a short questionnaire before the interview, which asks questions about what they're like as a person. Charley lives with her mum and has shared custody of her nephew, so the application process involves questions to ensure that potential PAs are the right fit for the whole family.

After reading the application form, she invites potential candidates for a face to face interview. There's a structured two stage interview process – first takes place in a local café, the second in the home/place of work.

She asks people the same questions so that everyone's given an equal opportunity and so she can easily compare their suitability – she asks questions to find out what they're like as a person and whether they'd fit in well with her family life and existing team. This helps her to find the right people for the job, the first time.

Inducting new PAs

When new PAs join Charley's team, they do a month-long induction which is very hands-on.

During the first week they shadow experienced PAs to find out more about Charley and what support she needs, which also gives them the chance to ask questions. Charley ensures that she's confident that new PAs are competent to work alone, before they start working independently.

New PAs are supported to do training, such as moving and handling and health and safety. Where possible, Charley is involved in training and it's delivered in her house so that it's tailored to her needs.

New PAs also get an employee handbook and access to Google Drive where they can download care plans, how-to videos and health and safety information.

She sets a six month probationary period which gives Charley and new PAs the chance to settle into the job. She's found that this is the right amount of time for someone to learn the job and get an idea whether it's right for them.

During these early days, Charley gives regular feedback via email and face to face meetings. They discuss what's going well and if her PAs need any more support, for example, further training.

Training for PAs

Charley's committed to ensuring that her PAs have the right skills and knowledge to do their job well.

She reviews her team every month to see if they need any more training, and works closely with her medical team and local college to ensure that they get up-to-date training that's personalised to her care and support needs.

She applied for funding to pay for this training through Skills for Care's individual employer fund. Thanks to this funding Charley can pay for in-house training and clinical care certificates that are tailored to her needs, to continually develop her PAs as her care needs change.

Managing PAs

Charley takes an open approach to managing her team of PAs and says:

“I’m an avid believer that creating a happy workforce creates a happy team.”

She ensures that her PAs can voice their opinions and concerns in one to one meetings and has an anonymous suggestion box. She regularly communicates with her team through a weekly email, regular supervisions (every two months) and an appraisal every three years.

As well as discussing their own role, Charley asks for regular feedback about herself as an employer. This encourages her and her team to continuously improve.

She welcomes her PAs to talk about any personal problems that might impact their work, whilst keeping a professional relationship. She says:

“I do not go over boundaries but I do help my staff when they need it, as I know that if personal problems arise this can affect work.”

Her PAs admire this approach and it helps them to perform better in their role. One of them said:

“Knowing she is there to talk to allows us to deal with all problems and move forward in a positive way. Knowing that your employer cares boosts moral and helps encourage us to go that extra mile for her, as she does for us.”

Charley strongly believes in looking after her team of PAs and shows that she values and appreciates them. When they’ve done a good job or go the extra mile, she sends them a thank you card or an appreciation email. They also run an ‘employee of the month’, go on day trips and have a Christmas party where everyone gets an award for their hard work. She spends 1:1 time with her PAs to build their working relationship, which might involve watching a TV programme, going to the cinema, baking or going to a restaurant.

One of her PAs said:

“She tries hard to keep work fun and always thanks us for our good job.”

From experience, Charley knows that making her PAs feel valued means that they’re more likely to stay working with her.

About the Accolades awards

The Accolades awards recognises the achievements of individual employers who can show an effective approach to developing their PAs. There’s a dedicated category called the ‘Best individual who employs their own care and support.’

Entering these awards is a great way to recognise and celebrate the hard work you and your PAs do every day. And if you get through to the final stage, you’ll be invited to our celebration event with your PAs – which can really boost their morale and confidence.

Individual employers can nominate themselves or be nominated by someone else such as PAs or someone from a user led organisation.

The nominations usually open in the summer. Sign up to our quarterly newsletter to keep up-to-date at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/IEnewsletter.

More information

Skills for Care has practical resources to help you to employ personal assistants.

Employing personal assistants toolkit

This toolkit guides you through the process of employing PAs, including sections about recruiting, inducting and managing them.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/PAtoolkit

Individual employer funding

Individual employers can apply for funding to pay for training for themselves and their PAs.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/IEfunding