

Being a great individual employer: Tess Reddington

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Introduction

Tess Reddington is an individual employer and employs a team of personal assistants (PAs) on behalf of her son, Richard.

Tess 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

- Include specific skills and interests in your person specification and job description so that you attract the right people.
- Explore people's values in the recruitment process – you can teach people the rest.
- Promote an open culture and encourage PAs to develop. This will motivate them at work and help you to retain them for longer.

Recruiting personal assistants

Tess and Richard have developed a person specification that outlines what they look for in a PA and a job description that outlines the support that they'll be expected to provide. One of Richard's hobbies is retro gaming and so the person specification asks for people that are interested in IT and/or retro gaming, to find PAs that Richard will get along with. It also focuses on the values that PAs need, for example **eager to learn**, a **patient** and **caring** nature and **passion** for high-quality care.

They've set up a website, [Richard's House](#), that introduces potential PAs to Richard, explains more about the support that he needs, and includes details of any vacancies. As well as the person specification and job description, it outlines information about the location, shift patterns, DBS checks and training opportunities. This helps to set realistic expectations about the role before people apply, to reduce the number of people who leave within the first few weeks because the job isn't what they expected.

If people want to apply for a role, Tess requests that they call to discuss the vacancy before they complete the application form. If they're suitable for the role, they can then fill in the application form that asks for information about their previous experience, qualifications and details about what makes them suitable for the role. Tess has found that some people don't have access to a computer to complete an application form, so Tess offers a 15 minute phone interview to collect the relevant information from potential PAs. She uses this information to shortlist people for a face-to-face interview.

When people are invited to interview, Richard's team leader will observe how they interact with Richard for the first 15 minutes. Then, in a more formal interview setting, Tess asks people questions about their values, and invites promising candidates to work with Richard for half a day. She says: "If people have the right values and genuinely engage with Richard, we can teach the rest."

They use a range of channels to promote job vacancies, including Facebook jobs pages, job sites such as Indeed and promoting via their local user led organisation (Cheshire Centre for Independent Living).

In the advertising, they differentiate how this vacancy is different to others – they promote the strengths of the team and benefits of the role including the opportunity to work for a friendly and supportive team and excellent training opportunities.

Richard's House is a single person service in West Lancs. Richard has a learning disability and some health issues, and his staff team support him around the clock to enjoy a busy active life.

The service has been up and running for more than 10 years and our staff currently have an average length of service of more than 5 years. Terms and conditions of service are excellent, with ample and on-going training, pension contribution, a rota planned well in advance and supportive friendly team.

Inducting new PAs

Tess offers new PAs an induction period of around four weeks, which includes:

- shadowing existing PAs and the team leader
- meetings about processes, policies, risk assessments and contract of employment
- learning around the ways of working with Richard, including communication and his day to day routines
- training about first aid, behaviour management, safe swallowing, and using Richard's AAC speech aid.

Tess and the team leader regularly observe new PAs to ensure that they're putting their learning into practice. She also asks new staff to fill in a reflective log about what they do each day and keep a record of any training. If needed, she extends the induction period to ensure that they're confident and competent to work independently.

Training for PAs

Tess is committed to providing ongoing learning and development for the team of PAs.

She works with the team leader to regularly assess staff skills and knowledge, identify any gaps in learning, and put plans in place to address these needs.

The team attends communication training every month to develop their key word signing skills, which is done with the wider community. They play Signbingo to engage everyone in the learning.

They also benefit from training with the Ace Centre, that provides bespoke training about Richard's AAC speech aid. This ensures that the training is tailored to Richard's needs, and helps his PAs to understand how to get the best from the programme.

PAs can do other training and qualifications to develop their skills. For example, one PA has done a 'Preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector' (PTLLS) course so that they can design and deliver training for the rest of the team, and the team leader has done an IT course to support with tasks such as keeping electronic records and using Excel.

Tess also promotes other opportunities for PAs to develop, for example, staff have presented at a national conference and they take turns in delivering training to the team in key word signing, and at team meetings, a member of staff takes the minutes. This encourages them to move out of their comfort zone and develop their 'core skills'.

Managing PAs

Tess maintains good communication with the team of PAs and thinks that this is the key to great motivation and retention. They promote an open culture which encourages PAs to discuss challenges and identify opportunities for innovation. For example, Richard's PAs support him in a new volunteering opportunity distributing for local charities.

She says: "I believe that staff at Richards House feel valued and trusted. They really do care about him and feel part of the family."

They do a staff handover each day and keep written records so that staff can keep up-to-date. The team leader to discuss their performance and any learning needs.

They hold monthly team meetings, including Richard, to reflect on what's working well and what's not, and identify solutions together. This is particularly useful to explore different ideas about how to keep Richard engaged and active.

About the Accolades awards

The Accolade awards recognises the achievements of individual employers who can show an effective approach to developing their PAs. There's a dedicated category for you 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 will 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 their 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