



## Season Four Episode four– released November 2023

The episode discussed the importance of neurodiversity in the workplace. Imagine working in an environment where your neurodiversity is not only recognized, but celebrated. That's the world we're envisioning in this special panel episode of Doing the Opposite: Business Disruptors, where Jeff is joined by three experts in the field of neurodiversity:

*As Jeff says "If we behave in a way that gives everybody inclusion, from the way they operate, to the way they think, to the way they address issues, to the sensitivity you have to show human beings with empathy and respect. If that was a norm, then the neurodiverse environment is only a bump in the road of adjustment."*

### Jeff Dewing

*Hi and welcome to Doing the Opposite: Business Disruptors-the podcast where you get to meet your leaders who have swum against the tide, thrown out the rulebook and changed the way their sector does business. I'm Jeff Dewing-author, speaker and the founder and CEO of CloudFM. Before we dig into today's episode, just a reminder that you can now watch all episodes of Doing the Opposite on YouTube.*

*You'll find all the links in the show notes below. Today, I'm joined by a brilliant panel of leaders and experts as we discuss a really important issue for anyone who runs teams, has employees or, in fact has colleagues-so pretty much anyone who works in business, and that is the subject of neurodiversity in the workplace. Research suggests up to 20% of the population is neurodiverse, but it's only in relatively recent times that we've really started to talk about this.*

*Joining me are three people who I know feel equally passionate about this. Dr Jasmine Virhia is a postdoctoral researcher in psychological and behavioural sciences at the London School of Economics and Political Science, who has recently led an amazing project called Utopia, built from 100 diverse voices in financial and professional services. Then there's Dan Maudsley is a multi-award winning broadcaster, podcaster and senior producer at the BBC , who says his life was at crisis point before he was diagnosed as an adult with ADHD. Then we have Angela*

*Pretner-Smith, the MD of This Is Milk, a consultancy, training and technology business based in Glasgow, as well as founder of Neve Learning, a platform that has been built to help organisations manage and deliver professional learning in a way that includes neurodiversity and is aligned with a future focused education framework. Angela has a diagnosis of dyspraxia and also identifies as autistic.*

*And now there's lots more being written about this incredible subject of neurodiversity, and in a recent article by Deloitte-says that following decades of stigma around people with neurodiverse conditions, it does appear the employer's attitude to this talented minority are changing. Deloitte says the workplaces with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be as much as 30% more productive. Abilities such as visual thinking, attention to detail, pattern recognition, visual memory and creative thinking can help illuminate ideas or opportunities that teams might otherwise have missed .Hi, everybody, fantastic to have you on the show. I'd like to say 'hello' personally to Jasmine, Dan and Angela. Why do you believe a conversation about neurodiversity in the workplace is one that should be taking place in all organizations today? So I'm gonna come to you first, Jasmine.*

### **Dr Jasmine Virhial**

I believe that having a conversation about neurodiversity in workplaces is essential for all organisations to have now, because it gives us a better understanding of how people operate. I think a lot of organizations have missed out on talent pools that they haven't been able to access before because, much like a lot of our society, organisations often focus on neurotypical norms. They operate in ways that are tailored to specific groups of people, and actually, by having a better understanding of how all people operate, we're more likely to diversify our talent pipelines and have more innovative and creative businesses.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*Brilliant. Thank you so much Jasmine, that's a great overview. Over to you, Dan*

### **Dan Maudsley**

I was diagnosed nine years ago now, so I've got a lot of experience of being in a workplace and not knowing I had ADHD and also being in a workplace being diagnosed with ADHD and then over time, seeing how workplaces have started to understand how they have to adapt for people who are ADHD. In terms of why it's so important to understand, I mean, personally it's been so important for me-my career has advanced in ways it wouldn't have done if I hadn't been diagnosed and if my employer hadn't really got to grips with what that meant. So personally it's, you know, for staff development it's really important. But also I think I've brought things to where I work that perhaps others wouldn't you know. So by bringing in neurodiverse staff, you get new, different perspectives, different outlooks, different skills, different ways of approaching things and if you can foster that you can really get amazing results. It's about having that mix in your team

**Jeff Dewing**

*And Angela.*

**Angela Prentner-Smith**

Hi! Why should businesses care about neurodiversity in the workplace, it's because you already have neuro-distinct people in your workforce. We are already there! We may not know it, you may not know it, but we're already there and that to me is fundamental. Learned only last week—apparently dyslexia is the number one disability in the population, over and above everything else, and some people don't know that dyslexia is under the neurodiversity umbrella, but it is very much so. And another thing that I think is really not common knowledge yet is that we don't fit into nice little neat boxes. You know you're not just dyslexic and that's your box. Neurodiverse profiles tend to overlap more than they sit neatly in boxes, and particularly myself I'm dyspraxic. I've been assessed for dyslexia and dyspraxia, but I know fine. 'Well, I'm like you know over here on the ADHD and over here on autism', and if you looked at me as a child, I think by today's standards they'd have identified me as autistic. As an adult, maybe not, but we're fluid, we don't stay one way. Our brains also develop, and it's got to be something that people start to pay more attention to in the broader sense of what neurodiversity means

**Jeff Dewing**

*So I guess-one of the things listening through those three great explanations is that we're all now moving, certainly post-Covid which enabled us to accelerate the way we will behave as leaders and companies. But diversity has become something that isn't just a buzzword anymore. People are genuinely looking for diversity. Now, diversity comes obviously in all shapes and sizes-not least with neurodiversity. So, Jasmine, can you sort of talk me through some of the different types of neurodiversity in workplace, but more importantly how it might display.*

**Dr Jasmine Virhia**

Sure. So, I think both Dan and Angela have touched on this briefly and I don't want to takeaway from their own lived or personal experiences. But, for example, those who have ADHD or maybe autistic, there are elements of hyper-focus, you know, these deep dives into things that are really, really interesting, and I think often when people talk about neurodiversity, there are stereotypes in the workplace that are stereotypes that are typically quite negative, and that's something, again, I think is really important when we're thinking about why organizations need to focus on this is to address these misconceptions and understand the great and positive behaviors associated so with ADHD and autism, for example, the ability to hyper focus, to go

above and beyond and find creative solutions to business problems that someone else might not necessarily come up with themselves, for example

### **Jeff Dewing**

*So again, I think I play that back into my business. One of the things that we do as a business that's growing and thriving is we use the term 'we have to laser focus on this'. It's about laser focus. We don't do anything properly and do it well and do it fast. It's about laser focus. So that brings that whole new dimension because there are people who get easily distracted or whatever. If you've got people in a diverse environment that can bring that skill set, then that creates the outcomes we're searching for! So, Dan-you discovered that you had ADHD as an adult. You touched on it but there's things you now do that perhaps you might not have done had you not been ADHD. But how did that sort of present itself to you? Give us an example, really, of how it affected you when you were diagnosed?*

### **Dan Maudsley**

So, I was diagnosed at a stage which is quite common in adulthood. I think the two main reasons people get diagnosed in adulthood is either that their children have just been diagnosed and they suddenly think hmm, I see a lot of these things that we've been going through about my child. Actually, that sounds a lot like me as well. What happened with me-I had very young children at that stage. For me it was my like the wheels were just falling off. You know at home. I just had a second child, so I had one very young baby, a toddler, and I just wasn't operating how I thought expected myself to be. It was very difficult for me to focus on childcare and work and balance everything else. As I say, it really felt like the wheels were coming off and I was in a bit of a crisis point. And thank for my wife-her mum used to sort of teach SEN children and work with them a lot. She knew all the signs and she kind of steered me gently towards a diagnostic test online and it was just sort of a light bulb moment.

I knew straight away and I booked an appointment with the GP the next day and it went from there. I got the diagnosis and it was a real moment of clarity. I could look back on so many things in my life and suddenly think you know, actually that now makes sense. And at work, you know, things started to improve quite quickly. A-because I had the understanding of why things might have been going wrong. And also, you know, medication helps a great deal. It's-unlike autism for example, ADHD responds very well to medication. So with medication, with understanding, I could build from there and I was suddenly able to do things I never, ever, thought I would be able to do

I had been working on news summaries. They were hourly or half-hourly, short very deadline focused, which was great because it kept me on track. But suddenly I found I was able to do longer term projects, planning things, stuff I just hadn't ever considered that I'd be able to do, just because it felt so... You know I'd look at other people doing these long-term projects and think how on earth do they keep all this and you know, all this going'? And I went on and did a sort of a two-year deep dive which became a podcast called Paradise. It's had millions of

downloads, it's won awards and all these kinds of and I just, you know, I look back from that point and think you know, back to that crisis point when I got the diagnosis and I just cannot imagine, you know that that's the turn I would take. I'd be doing these big projects that you know take organizing and you know produce results. It was an extraordinary transformation.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*And how did your employer react when you were going through that process.*

### **Dan Maudsley**

So this was nine years ago and I think if I were to measure it on the way employers respond today, it wasn't great but it was based on the fact that you know, there were so few people-I use this expression but sort of coming out as ADHD. It just wasn't as an adult, you know, you didn't tell your employer that you had ADHD. You know, the language wasn't there, the framework wasn't there. So I went through a sort of HR process and I had a bit of assessment and certain things you know they were able to do which were really helpful. Like I stopped doing night shifts because it was really sort of throwing me off, you know I was just, it was causing me all sorts of problems, so that was a big one. And then I did move on to a program team, which is less, you know. I mean the deadlines become daily rather than hourly, which creates more difficulties for me. But that transition was done quite gently, which was helpful, and I was able to work out how I would sort of transition from doing these hourly deadlines to daily deadlines

There were things that they did but the boss I have now-we have conversations about my ADHD, how she can help, what we can change. The whole team knows I have ADHD. There's quite open conversations about that. It's, you know, it's a. It's a much better environment now than nine years ago, but you know, the world in terms of neurodiversity was entirely different even just nine years ago.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*So I guess you'd hope that with that experience, that they certainly your boss and people around that sort of environment will now think differently about ADHD than they would have done when they were first presented with it. Is that some part of the learning, I guess right. Angela, one of your businesses, Neve Learning. It focuses on training. Can you explain how neurodiverse person may learn differently to a neurotypical person?*

### **Angela Prentner-Smith**

How this all came about was we were responding to a Scottish government challenge to look at how to improve online learning, really how to make immersive online learning. So we'd all gone COVID and were suddenly doing nine hour Zoom calls for training and that wasn't really working for anybody. At the same time, I was trying to obtain an ADHD diagnosis for my son and when we were doing our user research to solve this problem for the government, we

discovered actually, what people were telling us is that what we had right now wasn't working for people anyway, and everybody learned differently

So, yes, some people were coming to us and saying I'm dyslexic, therefore I have trouble retaining information if you're speaking at me for any longer than like 20 minutes. Some people were saying I feel really socially anxious in group settings. Some people were saying traditional learnings never really worked for me. I've forged my own path. Some people were saying they had a diagnosis and this was why. But for many people it was just they made their own pathways. They'd found their own workarounds to school, to learning, to workplace learning. So there's so many different permutations of how a person might learn differently. It's again back to that point that all of our brains work differently, but there's there's specific things that we can say 'right, well, this is more likely in a dyslexic person'. Dyslexic people tend to be very visual. They connect ideas a lot, so giving them screeds of written text can be quite a challenge, particularly if they do have Marin's Erlen, which is about the colour contrast on the page, which I myself have, although I'm not dyslexic. So chunking information up is really quite important from a neurodiverse friendly perspective. Changing formats, offering multiple formats, giving different sort of accessibility features, is really important. But there what we found is there were some universal principles that just made for better learning for everybody. Be really clear in what it is that you're trying to teach. Break things down, give things to people in multiple formats and then personalize for them. For some people, like a deadline, that is the best thing they could have. Other people need all of the information up front and they want to go through absolutely everything and they will show up to the first class having read the whole thing. So making things better from a neuro, neuro divergent perspective makes it better for everyone anyway, because we all learn better like that. So understanding, I think, particularly the working memory aspect.

So there's different parts of your memory. I've been on a journey! The working memory typically in some with dyspraxia, ADHD or dyslexia tends to be shorter, so you don't retain the information for doing short tasks as quickly. Or you know a short conversation. You might like 'oh, a squirrel over here' and you've not retained that. And often with dyslexia it's like you'll read the first few lines and then you've forgotten it already. So my husband-that's the challenge that he has. He can read each word. He has no problem with that. By the time he gets to the end of the sentence he's forgot what was at the beginning of the sentence. So there's a working memory challenge.

However, there's many different kinds of memory that your brain has, for example, episodic memory, which is your memory for events and situations, where in someone with dyspraxia autism, that tends to belike a super skill and a superpower. And my team often referred to me as the trap, because I just like-if I'm in a meeting, I basically can tell you everything that happens there and they'll try and say that. And I was like 'I know that happened, don't even argue with me'. I know what happened because that's how my brain retains information. However, I can drive to the same place 17 times and the 18th time I will completely forget the

directions, and that has happened to me, and I've had to pull over and get the sat nav out for somewhere that I've had to drive to several times. So memory is an interesting one. So tailoring to the fact that working memory could be a challenge for someone as a base is a good place to start right.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*So, again, if I bring that into practical solutions in my business. We've got people as you can imagine, senior people. We have to make decisions pretty quickly on the fly, and so on and so on. But there's two or three people that will present a problem and we'll say you know, 'let's talk about it because we need to make a decision at the end of this call' and they're going 'I can't do that. I've got sleep on it. I've got to think about this before I can add any value to this conversation'. Now because of our attitude again, post-COVID, we are accepting that people are the way they are we not judging them for it? So if someone in that team says I need to think on this, then we'll all stop and we'll let everybody think on it, because that is about giving people the freedom of feeling no anxiety or reduced anxiety, stress, and you need to think about it. You take the time to think about it. That's about a diverse attitude, as opposed to whether you're on this spectrum or this spectrum or whatever it's about people behave differently, that's a simple fact and I think the more courage leaders show in accepting that it's not about you suddenly saying 'I've got to move into this area don't understand with autism' and it's not about that. It's never been about that. It's about how do you let people be their best selves, in whatever form that comes. What are the structures that create that extra challenge in a workplace environment for neurodiverse people? How do we shift those barriers, or those perceived barriers to make or to enable neurodiverse people to feel more comfortable being in those environments?*

### **Dan Maudsley**

I think one of the things is, so much of the workplace is about sort of quite soft skills that aren't always obvious, especially to people with ADHD or autism. There's two jobs—they're exactly the same, jobs that have come up quite recently, but the applications were slightly different. And one just said something along the lines of 'with regard to the job spec, how do your skills match up'? Essentially. Very broad, single question, big blank sheet of paper for you to fill in. The other one asked much more specific questions 'looking at our output in this area, how could we change this to achieve this', that sort of thing. With that, that was great because I could really drill down into that, give a very thorough answer and show all my expertise in this area. This great, big, broad, wide, open question is so much more difficult. Look at that and I just struggle immediately. It's like, how much do they want me to say? What do I need to cover? Do I need to say everything? Do I need to just pick out certain things and go really deep on that? And that, for me, just creates a kind of a stall, you know, and I end up sort of dithering, dithering, dithering, you know, and eventually I'll do it and I'll sort of put some together and it's you know. Now it's the same job. But if someone was to look at my two applications, you know I think they'd get a very different idea of who I was from these two. And it's just the approach of

you know of how they've asked the questions. It was interesting what you're saying about working memory, different types of memory, my memory of-I think you said episodic kind of things that have happened. You know that classic interview question, if 'think of a time when'. I know I can do it. I know I'm great at that you know but tell me a time... Oh God. If I've been asked it in advance, not problem, I can. I can really have a conversation with someone. They can help me pull those things out, but there in an interview room. No.No. Is that something I have to do in my job? Do I have, in my job, think of a time when something happened? Never? But that's how it's tested in an interview. You know things like that.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*That's brilliant. Jasmine, when thinking of recruitment-again the same situation-for some neurodivergent people. The interview model just doesn't align right. Take me through your view of the way that should be approached.*

### **Dr Jasmine Virhia**

Yeah, I think Dan just touched on it as well and what you were saying before about leader shaving the courage to let people be who they are. I think leaders also need to be courageous in doing things non-traditionally. So if we're thinking about the interview model being put on the spot in that way for something that's not necessarily going to be required of you in your role day to day means that you're not really assessing the skills that are necessary for someone to do their job well. So if I were you to use the example of software engineer, for example, let's say, a software engineer who is autistic, and if we are thinking of stereotypes, that perhaps the way in which they pick up on social nuances or social cues or adhere-do they or do they not adhere to the expected social norms in workplace. If you are judging someone's capabilities in an interview to be able to communicate those things and do they fit in? So we also need to acknowledge that people in interviews often succumb to similarity bias and affinity biases as well. So how much is this person like me? Or how much is this person like all of these other people that I've hired in this role? You're really not going to diversify your talent pipeline. So, instead of basing your assumptions or how you're grading someone's competency based on social skills, can you provide them with tasks that are relevant to what they will be doing when they are in the job

And I think people are often hesitant to do this because it requires a redesign and are structure or it might be increased time and effort and money. But actually you're more likely to hire the right people for the job, will diversify your talent pipeline and you'll probably save money in the long run by having to go through recruitment processes over and over again if you hire someone that actually wasn't the best fit for the role. You know whether this is for those that who are autistic, have ADHD or any type of neurodivergence, by having an understanding, even in your application process, if they feel comfortable sharing this and I intentionally don't use the word disclose there, because I think there's a lot around inclusive language that we need to talk about too. But, if you have an understanding of how someone's how, when they are autistic,



how that manifests for them in the workplace, you'll have a better idea of how you can really assess their skills in an equitable way, rather than judging them against other candidates or a skill set that actually isn't really measuring what they need to do

### **Jeff Dewing**

*What's really interesting-I do a lot of keynotes and the big subject that I talk about interviews dead. Interviews and not fit for purpose. The way in which we're told to do it, supposed to do it. As Dan said, 'give me a time when'. It's nonsense. So we banned interviews about two years ago and now we have assessment days. Assessment days require no writing, they require no typing, they require no reading. What we do is we just bring a team of people together which might be a load of applicants, it may be existing people within our organisation, and we set little challenges, which are real challenges. They're visual, they're working as a team, they're getting to know each other, and we build rockets out of spaghetti. Who can build the high-fork out of spaghetti, and soon and various other bits and pieces. But what that does is it solves, because one of the things what we say is when you doing an interview, no matter what questions you are, how good you think you are, it's a lottery. It's the flip of a coin, because you don't really know if that person's going to work out until they've been with you for two, three, four months. Why do we not get that right in the first place? So with our assessment days, since we've been doing these assessment days, we've had a 99% success rate in retaining people after six months, because all we did was we enabled them to feel safe and comfortable. They demonstrated their ability to work in a team environment and support each other. They demonstrated their ability to either lead or not lead, because that's the type of person. They demonstrated their ability to care about helping the other the people and then rather than the interviewer having to make judgment on what they saw and heard through one set of lenses. Have you got anything to add to that, Angela, in the way in which you recruit?*

### **Angela Prentner-Smith**

I agree with everything that's been said. If I was to talk companies, which I often do because I've become quite a speaker on this topic and they often ask where do we start?

I think the very first thing is, when you write your job description, make sure you are writing something that is actually what you need. You know, if you're saying we need a great team player and that person is actually going to be working as a data analyst and really not have to work in a team at all, are you asking for the right things? And I think that is the first and fundamental thing that you can do to get it right is make sure it's actually what you need. And then test for that and exactly what you're talking about the assessment centers. If you're wanting somebody to be really creative in your organisation and you want somebody that's a brilliant visual designer, and then you throw out their CV because they made typos in it-you're not assessing for the right thing. So, yeah, I think if we could just really start with just asking for what we actually need of the job, that would be a really good start.

## **Jeff Dewing**

*There's a lot of reporting about neurodiversity, especially focusing on the challenges of people with ADHD, for example, and what are some of the positive attributes that neurodiverse people can bring to the market? I mean, the World Economic Forum reported this year that many firms are now actively recruiting people that are neurodiverse.*

## **Dan Maudsley**

The areas where neurodiversity is really being valued and you can see it actively being recruited on. There are often areas where it's very straightforward to measure output and how beneficial individuals are to companies. They're usually financial. It's very clear who your top performers are in those sales, investments, those kind of areas. And when people are measured on results rather than process, neurodiverse tends to shine really well. The problem in other places is sometimes it's not very straightforward to measure those things. So inhospitality, how can you really measure how happy a customer was with a guest, was with the interaction they had? In journalism or broadcasting, how do you really measure how an audience reacted to something? It's just not as straightforward. So you start to fall back on these proxy things like-do they turn up on time, do they turn up at work, drinks, All these kind of things are completely irrelevant but people do get judged on. So it's really about stopping and thinking how you're actually measuring people and very often you'll realize, if you stop using these rubbish ways of trying to judge employees, you start to see that actually having certain individuals on your team brings something extra that is not...If you're only recruiting people of a certain type, you're only going to produce one thing. But if you have diverse neurodiverse people, it's a different way of looking at things. Problems get solved in different ways and that can really be beneficial. But if you only rely on quite traditional ways to measure that, you don't always see it.

## **Jeff Dewing**

*Angela, you talk about the strength of dyspraxia and how dyspraxia is without a visible role model. Explain to me what that actually means.*

## **Angela Prentner-Smith**

So I feel like dyspraxia is the often overlooked neurodivergence. There are only two visible role models with dyspraxia, and that's Daniel Radcliffe and Florence Welch. So they're the ones that are always kind of rolled out as your role models and they're good role models to have like fabulous role models.

When I was identified with dyspraxia, I was in my 20s and I was given a list of all the things that were wrong with me and it was actually a really light bulb moment for me to go like, 'okay', it wasn't because I used to get told I was lazy, because I couldn't do sports, and it was like, 'no, I'm working three times as hard at this and I don't understand why I can't keep up with you. I don't get it either. I don't understand why I don't know my left from my right and I'm in my 20s'. I did learn my left from my right when I learned to drive, but it took me nine driving tests

to get through that. So it was like that kind of moment. It wasn't until coming up for well, it would have probably been over a decade later that I actually realized that there were strengths to being dyspraxia as well, and this is when I was on this journey of really understanding neurodiversity. And when I first came across she was like 'oh, wait a minute, they mean me. Well, this is me they're talking about. Okay, I get this right, okay'. And that's when I started to understand that actually a dyspraxia brain, where you know we're less than probably about 8% of the population, is really quite a unique thing and can have.... Basically like your divergence is you have a spikey profile. You have low lows and high highs, so my verbal reasoning is up on like the 98th or something percentile. So on a verbal level, of verbal reasoning, I'm probably the smartest person in the room most of the time. However, my processing speed I'm down at like the 12th percentile, so like it's being peaks and troughs in terms of your cognitive ability. And there are genuine differences. If you scan somebody's brain with ADHD, it is different. Neuroscience is a wonderful thing. If you look at somebody with dyslexia, they actually the bit of their brain when they're reading that lights up is the opposite side to somebody without dyslexia. So literally you are wired differently. Some of the differences with dyspraxia is to do with your mirror neuron network, so that's the bit of your brain that looks at things and goes 'I can copy that 'and I cannot do aerobics. Cannot do line dancing. I have been taught the Gay Gordons that many times and I cannot do it. And in a dyspraxia brain your mirror neuron network works differently than neurotypical brain. What your mirror neuron network is also responsible for is empathy, and people with dyspraxia are typically known to be like empathic powerhouses, like supreme empathy. But how that shows up as a child in school is being overly sensitive, unable to cope, overwhelmed, and I was certainly like that. I used to cry in PE. Dodgeball was traumatic, like genuinely traumatic. My son says, like 'what was wrong with you? You couldn't play dodgeball . And I'm like 'oh, shut up, just because you're an athlete'. So there's like it's wonderful that all our brains are wired so differently, but there's genuine differences there. So the same bits of my brain that are responsible for the things that I'm really bad at are also responsible for the things that I'm really good at and the other strengths at dyspraxia that I didn't know had to do with that was being quirky, a good writer, problem solving. So there's lots of things there that actually have meant I'm a really successful person. Just took me nine times to pass the driving test! I was never good at sports. You've got super strengths and you've got super drawbacks and stuff like that.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*So let me, let me just ask you one quick question, where you take massive calculated commercial risks, what ever label we want to place on it, and then you look at sports and dodgeball. Is it fair to say that you didn't love dodgeball and you didn't love sport?*

### **Angela Prentner-Smith**

I was traumatized by sport, genuinely yeah.

## **Jeff Dewing**

*So the reason I asked that question is that, again, using the principles of human nature as opposed to specific people in specific areas in our business, we have a thing called the six geniuses, and it's the genius of the galvanization, the genius of invention, the genius of all these different things. What it does is it is a process that we go through in our senior services what do you like? What do you like and what do you hate? Or what do you like and what do you not like? So, for instance, in my world I would put pins in my eyes before I do my expenses. Right? Because I just can't stand, I just hate it with the passion, right, so much so that I end up being very skin very frequently because I've not done my expenses. But the key to collaboration is saying and recognizing that in our business world, our environment says you're only allowed to do what you love, because there is somebody else near you that loves what you don't love. So when we went through that process, three people-one guy and two womanward love doing expenses'. So I said 'Would you do my expenses?'. So that's just a little example of when you understand what it is you love... why are you doing stuff you don't love? And it also comes down to the fact that people will be being wired. It says 'I do like my job. It's bits that don't like it'. Well, get rid of the bits you don't like, because there's somebody next to you, one way or the other, that would love to do that. So Jasmine-I'm really interested in this next bit before we move into wrapping up. People often talk about deficits, for example, the directness that some autistic people will have in a corporate environment, and it's also about I'd like to discuss how changes in the corporate environments that are designed to benefit some neurodiverse people. So talk about how that fits in, in that corporate environment*

## **Dr Jasmine Virhia**

Yeah, well, I think what Angela said about the peaks and troughs and being incredible at some things and not so great at other things really, really summed it up. But I use the example in-so stereotypically people with autism or who are autistic are assumed not to have good social skills. Well, actually, who are we or the general population to assume what is good or bad? And I use the example in a corporate environment. I've never actually worked in a corporate environment, I've pretty much stayed in research and academia, but I speak to a lot of people in corporate environments and I have this sense or this understanding that you need to be very direct in some instances. In some, people will be around the bush and there's a lot of waffle and there's a lot of circling back and using these big corporate terms that don't really mean anything. But actually to get a job done or to communicate something that might be quite difficult, having some very difficult conversations. Actually, is that not a strength of someone who is autistic who has very direct and blunt communication Instead? If it's to the point and it gets the job done? So again, how much are we perceiving deficits or things that people excel at in terms of being good and bad because of social norms that have existed for how many years, and we need to think about who's created these social norms that we need to try and fit into these certain types of boxes. Like Angela says, these boxes don't need to exist. We're fluid as human beings and think when we're thinking about corporate environments, I don't just mean

the physical environment. There are tangible changes that all of us have benefited from having to work from home, from. We've all become so much more in control of our working environments. Depending on where you work, you might have been mandated to go back into the office two, three, five times a week, or some-you might be able to work completely remotely and, I think, taking into consideration a lot of the things that we learned from COVID in physical environment being one of them, but also communication preferences. So this is one thing. I've been interviewing a lot of neurodiverse people as part of my research and one thing that has come up quite a lot is understanding that some people have different communication preferences and again-I think this is people generally. It's not specific necessarily to someone who is autistic or has ADHD. Some people don't. Being like called on a whim, actually, if you could give me half an hour to think about what you want me, we want to talk to me about, we'll have a much more productive and beneficial conversation. What else have they mentioned? So communication preferences, physical environment. Generally, I think all changes when we're thinking about equality, diversity and inclusion, whether it's accessible entrances to a building, whether it's having breaks in making sure people aren't back to back, sat on Zoom all day and end up Zoom-fatigued, for example, and can't communicate what they need to. All of these changes that we make for underrepresented populations in corporate environments will benefit everyone, because these people that are underrepresented will perform to a level that you know they can excel, and by doing that, they're more likely to collaborate, they're more likely to communicate and they're more likely to show up, and I say that in a sense of authenticity. I can show up who I am, as I am, and it's appreciated and valued, and I think that's what's really important here.

### **Jeff Dewing**

*What is the one thing if there was only one? What is the one thing that organisations should and could do today to get themselves prepared for what we've been discussing? So I'll come to you first, Dan.*

### **Dan Maudsley**

Yeah, it's about. I think you've really hit the nail in the head in terms of culture and just trying to understand people and, you know, sort of bend with them, just not having a toxic culture full-stop. You know it's going to benefit everyone. I think you know that's pretty clear. But you know, especially, for instance, with ADHD, you know Rejection Sensitive Dysmorphia is very real. So you know if you're berating someone, you are just going to squash a person with ADHD down. They're not going to, you know, rise to the. You know they're not going to spring back because you've had to go them. They're just going to curl up in a ball, whereas if you can accentuate the positive with someone with ADHD, they will like walk over broken glass for you. You know they will go to the ends of the earth because you know they're getting that sort of positive feedback. You know-positive feedback is brilliant and it doesn't mean you can't discuss difficult things, it's just how you go about them. You know, don't go into a conversation to berate someone, just sort of talk about how you know you can make things better and help. Now I

think, as you've been touching on, you know that's something that can benefit everyone. But it is also quite important to remember that ADHD and autism and dyspraxia, all these-they are disabilities, you know, and there are legal requirements as well and sometimes it will mean you do have to make a personal adjustment for that person. You know you will have to have that HR hassle and think about actually for this member of staff do have to do something extra. But if you improve the culture generally, you are going to make, you know, the whole workplace better for everyone, but especially for, you know, for neurodiverse people, and remembering what we said right at the start, that there are plenty of people who are neurodiverse and have no idea that they are. So when you change the culture as a whole, you will see that it benefits a lot of people who may not have a diagnosis or even know that you know that they are neurodiverse

**Jeff Dewing**

*OK, so then let me come on. So what is the one thing that organisations should do, could do to get themselves prepared? So let's go on to you, Angela*

**Angela Prentner-Smith**

I think it has to be a focus on psychological safety, and by that I mean it's that ability to come to work, be yourself, speak up, raise challenges and not be penalized for it. Because making the workplace more psychologically safe for everybody has an even more impactful result for minorities of any kind and neural minorities or otherwise, and that's data. Data back that up, and I think if you have a workplace where people can openly challenge, people can raise ideas, raise risks, well that's all good and it will cater to the neurodiversity within your organization as well.

**Jeff Dewing**

*Brilliant, thank you and Jasmine?*

**Dr Jasmine Virhial**

I think leaders, organisations need to, audit who is being given opportunities, and that's not just who comes in the door, it's who has been given opportunities for those stretch projects, for those growth opportunities and for that training within an organisation. Because that's how you know, when people feel valued and they're being given those opportunities, they are more likely to stick with you and they-like Angela said, you know it's going to contribute to those psychologically safe climates. You'll get the best out of your people.

**Jeff Dewing**

*Listen. Thank you so much to each and every one of you. It's been an incredible journey, incredible stories and great, great diversity in the conversation. And what's lovely is there's been a common thread which has really come through strong. So thank you very much and I hope we get to speak again soon. Well, that was a fascinating conversation. Thanks to my guests-a big*

*thanks to Dr Jasmine Virhia, Dan Maudsley and Angela Pretner-Smith on incredible content, incredible views and, from a background of experience in them, let alone spending a huge amount of time and research understanding the impact of neurodiversity and the amount we don't know about. When I say we I'm talking about the general public, the general environment of businesses. It's something that is coming to the fore, and rightly so. But I think the thing that I found really fascinating about that story is, I think I'm visualizing, there's peaks and troughs, the mountain and the ground, and what's happening is that businesses are generally behaving on the ground and the peaks are.—'Oh, how do we deal with this unusual group of people, this minority'? And it seems like we've got some of the messaging maybe we've got to do a lot of stuff to include the neurodiverse people and of course, I hope it came out in the episode which I think it did—that actually it's not peaks and troughs. If we behave in a way that gives everybody inclusion, from the way they operate, to the way they think, to the way they address issues, to the sensitivity you have to show human beings with empathy and respect. If that was a norm, then the neurodiverse environment is only a bump in the road of adjustment. It's not a peak and trough, and we are truly missing out on talent that can take us to entirely new areas that we probably never expected or knew was possible, because we see the world through one lens and the beauty of collaboration and diversity is you get so many more lenses, which can only be good. Sowe need to move on from stigma. There should be no stigma when you've got neurodiversity that excel in certain areas and struggling others—well, there isn't that the story of every human being? Every human being as strengths and weaknesses? Why do we think this is any different? Please do follow us on social media—all the links in the show notes to this episode and, of course, one of the things that we're also doing now, as you know, we're also on YouTube, which would be great if you could click the subscribe button, because that way it helps us get incredible guests such as the ones we've enjoyed today, and I hope you're enjoying the panel approach as opposed to individual guests format as well.*

*So I'm Jeff Dewing, author of bestselling Book *Doing the Opposite* and CEO of CloudFM. You can also find out more about the podcast and my incredible guests by heading to [tojeffdewing.co.uk](http://tojeffdewing.co.uk) and clicking on podcast, and you can also watch these conversations on YouTube. All links are in the notes to this episode. A big thank you to Gabby Ortega at CloudFM, my team at Thinking Hat and of course the production team Sam Walker and WhatGoesOnMedia. Hope to see you soon.*