

FACEBOOK LIVE WITH ACCENTURE AND LEONARD CHESHIRE DISABILITY

Video Transcript

Heidi Strawson: Hello, welcome to the first of our four Facebook Live sessions being hosted today by Accenture Community and we're joining you from Accenture's London office to mark the 25th anniversary of the United Nations' International Day of Persons with Disabilities. And I am joined here today by Neil Heslop. Hello, Neil.

Neil Heslop: Heidi, how are you?

Heidi: I'm good, thank you, Neil. Very excited. You're the CEO of Leonard Cheshire Disability, one of Accenture's foremost Skills to Succeed partners and we will be spending a bit of time today talking about our partnership, and the work we do around the enablement agenda and perhaps some of the things we'd like to do more of. But before we get into that, I wanted to invite you to tell us a little bit about Leonard Cheshire Disability, tell us a bit about the work you do and just as a reminder, Neil, in the promotional materials we used for this session, we were quoting something you said recently and I'm just going to read it back to you because it sets the scene for us: "No one who wants to work should be denied that right due to disability." What were you thinking?

Neil: I think it's a statement of the blind in the office, I would have thought, so I don't think it's a particularly remarkable thought. First of all, thank you very much for inviting me to be here. It's great to have the opportunity to engage with the wider Accenture Community and share a little bit about our work, what it is we've been up to. If I may, just a quick thumbnail sketch of what we do for your colleagues who may be less familiar with us. So Leonard Cheshire Disability: 70 years old, one of the world's leading disability charities. We work right across the globe, six and a half thousand staff, 3,000 volunteers, and each year we support about 30,000 persons with disabilities with a variety of activities, all of which informed by our basic belief that all individuals have the right to live, learn, and work as they choose. And that's a profoundly held belief of ours and I think the quote you just described really focuses on that work side of things and I think it's a statement of principle that most people would buy.

Heidi: I am sure everyone listening in here today certainly would, Neil, and I think it's one of the reasons we have been partnering with you as we have since about 2008 around our Corporate Citizenship Skills to Succeed agenda. You've been with us as an

organization on the journey that we first embarked upon equipping people with the skills to get a job or start a business. For those of us who were around at the beginning, you were the only organization working globally to specifically support the demographic of people with disabilities and you are doing that in very many countries around the world and I think really that was part of the reason why ours was a natural coming together of what we would like to call “high-performance organizations.” Can you tell me a little bit – we’re going to talk I think about the shape and nature of that, but how would you describe it? It’s a really around the livelihood agenda, isn’t it?

Neil: Very much so. I think the first thing I should say is I’m relatively new to Leonard Cheshire. I joined the organization a year or so ago and one of the reasons I was attracted to join the organization to play a part in this vital work is because of exactly the kinds of partnership that we had, the focus that we had, and the potential to grow that over time. So the specifics around our work agenda, I think most individuals that you talk to with a disability—and I’ve lived with a disability myself for 30 years—their aspirations, wants, and needs are pretty simple. It sort of comes down to how do I get inclusive education, and how do I get an opportunity to have the independence that I want either through my own business or through getting these skills to move into employment?

Heidi: One of the things I think really lent itself to our partnership in the early days was that you are very responsive to local markets and you work through partners, you work and support directly through your own establishments and you are very responsive

both to the demand of employers, the local market context as well as the needs of the people in those communities and that resonates with us and that’s how our business staffs in different markets. Therefore, it might be the case that people need support to get a job or to perhaps start a business. We see quite a difference of pathways for people. But another thing I know you do that we really value is you have that end to end helping identify the people in the first place who perhaps aren’t in a position to realize their potential and then seeing them through to the point of job readiness and then actually on the job or in business support and training, and preparing that receiving ground. And actually this reminds me, there is a housekeeping announcement I should’ve made at the beginning. We are taking questions, so if anybody is watching this live you can post them in the Comments box or you can be using the Twitter feed of #InclusionStartsWithI and #IPWD and we have had a question in, Neil. It is around the latter end, the receiving end. Getting skilled and being positioned to apply for a job is a massive challenge for people with disabilities around the world, but actually even when they are in the door sometimes there are still challenges, prejudices, and reasons why people can’t fully achieve their potential. What does Leonard Cheshire do around the agenda of perhaps almost coaching the employer?

Neil: I think you said two or three things that I think are really important. Number one, everyone is an individual and different, so therefore, the approach needs to be flexible. We talk about acting local and thinking global, but being responsive to individual needs and individual cultural context, and



that's profoundly important. That's all rooted at how do we support both the individual and the organization as they go through this change to build confidence, to knock down practical barriers, some of them real, some of them perceived. And whether they are real or perceived almost doesn't matter; they all have to be addressed. So the approach we take is to work with the individual to build up their skills and confidence around advocacy, around overcoming practical issues. But absolutely the point you are making, it's about working with employers to support them about edging into this space to get to the position where they have a fantastic experience of employing individuals and seeing their business thrive as a result of this.

Heidi: I know colleagues of ours in our Inclusion & Diversity practice sit with colleagues of yours in leading advocacy groups such as that convened by the ILO and others to try and push the agenda. Because we take our responsibility as a leading organization very seriously in terms of that advocacy agenda and that receiving ground and we are very proud to be able to go to those events and meetings hand-in-hand with Leonard Cheshire supporting the policy work that you guys do. But I want to shift the conversation slightly if I can. You were telling me an astonishing statistic earlier about the number of Accenture people who have been physically, actively supporting Leonard Cheshire: 1,000 people thereabouts.

Neil: That's right. Over the course of the partnership, more than 1,000 Accenture volunteers have got involved to support the work and that's been done in a variety of different ways in different places.

For example, in Bangalore, 96 Accenture employees ran the marathon for us to support our fundraising efforts, but also there were examples of volunteering by people of mentors, younger people making the transition into the world of work, to support them in making that movement into a work environment and to your point once in a working environment, to ensure that those individuals have the opportunity to prosper and to progress in their career aspirations. And that support happens in a variety of ways through mentorship, through informal networking, through peer supports and so forth. So the richness of volunteering both for the volunteer and the impact that can be had for the person with a disability, it's pretty extraordinary.

Heidi: Well, if any of those folks are listening or watching here, then thank you very much. If anyone else is watching and wondering how they'd like to get involved, if you've got a bright idea, bring it to us. Would love to hear it. We are looking at ways to use technology and so on to allow more engagement for Leonard Cheshire and the people we are supporting some more of that to come perhaps.

Neil: I think it's also helpful, though, Heidi, to give people a sense and scale of what your support has enabled us to deliver for individuals.

Heidi: Yeah, tell us a bit about that.

Neil: Well, just over the course of the last three years we've worked with more than 15,000 individuals and about 6,000 of those have moved into formal waged employment and a full 4,000 have been receiving success in establishing their own



employment by setting up through entrepreneurship, small businesses and some of which have gone on to grow very, very significantly. So what we are incredibly proud of the partnership because that is a very practical example of how your support is changing and supporting the transformation of individuals and their abilities to support their families. But against the unmet need however, I think it does signify that there are tremendous opportunities for us to make bigger and faster progress to get out the 80 percent unemployment rates across Africa and Asia.

Heidi: I don't mean to cut you short, I'm getting the message that we are coming to the end, but you and I can talk about this for hours. Thank you so much. We are really at an interesting point in our partnership exploring where we will go next and how we will get that scale and impact. We don't have time to talk about that now. I'm very happy to say there are three more Accenture Community Facebook Live events coming up the next, which will be hosted tomorrow and you will be visiting our colleagues in Argentina to hear about their project so I hope people will join that. I certainly will, but meanwhile, Neil, it has been great having you with us today.

Neil: Thank you and thank you for your help.