



Summary of the episode “See what others can’t – as a blind”

Diversity Dimension: People with Disability

In this episode, we discuss the challenges and opportunities that people with disabilities face in the workplace. Our guests are Sergio and Fabricia.

Can you please introduce yourself?

Sergio: My name is Sergio. I am 56 years old. I have been blind since I was 2 years old. I have a rare genetic problem. I studied business administration at university. I like carpentry, and when I was 30 years old I was a Brazilian champion in judo. I play soccer with the people who are blind, and I love to hike with my wife. I live in Sao Paolo and I use a guide dog to get around Sao Paolo.

Fabricia: My name is Fabricia. I have been working at TÜV NORD AG since September 2020. I am a senior manager in the Digitalization and Innovation department. I'm also from Brazil and I've been working in Digital Transformation for the last 7 years. Before that, I studied logistics and worked in international business for 10 years. I moved to Germany last February, but I met Sergio through a project with the Innovation team in Sao Paolo in 2018.

Can you tell us what your work environment is like? What is your experience with your colleagues and managers? Why do you think people tend to be reserved when it comes to people with disabilities?

Sergio: I usually talk a lot and joke around with people. That's why it's easy to introduce myself to the team and things are less likely to get awkward. Sometimes there are problems when people don't feel comfortable talking to me directly. If someone has a question, they should just ask. The person should not assume that if I have a disability, I am not able to do other things. So ask questions, don't imagine or assume anything, because the most important thing in a relationship is to communicate with each other!

What is your recommendation for managers and colleagues to make the work process easier?

Sergio: My recommendation is to give people with disabilities the same challenges and opportunities as everyone else, because we want to be treated the same as everyone else. But don't draw the conclusion that one (blind) person is similar to another one. It's a terrible conclusion.

Fabricia: Be more open and make everyone feel comfortable because at the end of the day they just want to be a part of the team. In the end of the day they might need some help with one task

or another. We learn a lot from them and they learn a lot from us. For example, when I started working with Sergio, we didn't have a regular desk to sit, you just came and sit wherever it was free. But for Sergio it was important to have his own chair at the right place and then he knows how to go around. In the beginning we changed a lot the furniture because of different projects, without thinking that Sergio has a methodology of how to walk around the office. And if every day we were changing the scenario, for him it is difficult to walk around. So the little things that do not really affect us, may affect the others.

What advice would you give to young people with disabilities who want to pursue this profession?

Sergio: To have self-confidence and to find your abilities. Also as a blind person, you should pay attention to your appearance, because the first impression matters – even if you don't see yourself. You should also show that you are up to challenges and that you work harder than others, because we need better results than the usual results that everyone else can bring.

What is the key recipe for diversity?

Fabricia: The more diverse you are, the easier it becomes. Because the more you're exposed to different perspectives, different ways of doing things, the more everyone benefits. We learn how to be more innovative. For example, when I want to explain colors to Sergio, I have to think of a method to describe them. So I was telling him that orange may be associated with the sunlight on your skin, or something similar. Once you have a diverse team, you become more creative and innovative. The closer you are to people with disabilities, different ways of thinking, different cultures, the more the company has to gain.

Fabricia, how has Sergio impacted your life and what do you take away from working with people with disabilities?

Fabricia: I am always looking for ways to make everyone feel comfortable, whether they have a disability or not. It's very important that everyone feels part of the team. With Sergio, I had to find other ways to make him feel comfortable in our company. Because usually I do something visual and with him I always have to think of something new and different. That challenges me and I'm happy about it. I've also become more grateful, because when I realize that something isn't easy for me, I think about Sergio, about how many hobbies he has, that he hikes in the middle of the forest and does all these things despite his disability, because he always challenges himself.

We think it is very important to have Diversity and Inclusion at the work place, for getting different perspectives, ideas, to think outside the box and to see the world from different points of view.