

Learn from Others

Case Study



Christina Candey & The Grey Matter Group

Using online assessments helped me learn how to be a better employer and supports my PA's to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice so we can work together more effectively.

Background

I live in my own home and have employed PA's for the last 15 years. I currently employ three PA's who support me with a variety of things throughout the day and night. I need to be involved as much as possible in everything that my PA's support me with, even if it is just to hold the watering can whilst they get the plants for me to water.

Employing my PA's directly has made such a difference for me. Not just because of the increased independence, choice and control that I have, but also because they are so involved and committed to working with me.

Professional boundaries

Each of my current PA's has worked for me for over 2 years. In general things go well but, as in any job, we have rough patches too. Sally has worked with me for 6 years and does most of my sleep-ins. We have a great relationship and she supports me with many of my craft activities and keeping my garden looking beautiful and making it my little haven.



I love my life and with my PA's I have the opportunity to do everything I wish to. I do want to get better at articulating my wishes more clearly and reduce my frustration. I need to spend more time with my PA's helping them to understand where I am coming from. I know they need more because I would need more.



Although Sally and I have worked together for years, or perhaps because of it, we can get very heated if things aren't going to plan. The professional boundaries have shifted which has helped in some areas of our relationship but doesn't help in others. For example, I sometimes forget she is on her sleep-in and interrupt her for things that could wait till later.

This isn't the case with all my PA's and we have developed individual ways of working with each other. This is great if they have a particular interest or skill related to one of my hobbies but is equally frustrating when they don't all do things the same way when I need them to.

Sally brings her dog Barney in to work. Not only do I love the extra company but Barney is a valued team member as he patrols the garden keeping the cats out of my flower beds.

As an employer I know that I have high standards and always have a full plan for each shift. I try to be organised and on top of everything. I ask my PA's to do things the way that I would do them. This includes multi-tasking as we go along to clean and tidy small things that I have noticed. I do get frustrated that they don't seem to notice these things and use their initiative in the way that I would.

Eddie Stevens from The Grey Matter Group came along to one of the Employer Peer Support Meetings that I attend at the Surrey Independent Living Council. I was very interested in the assessments and e-Learning that The Grey Matter Group provide. It seemed like a great way for me to look at how I manage my PA's and work with them to see if there is anything that we can do better.

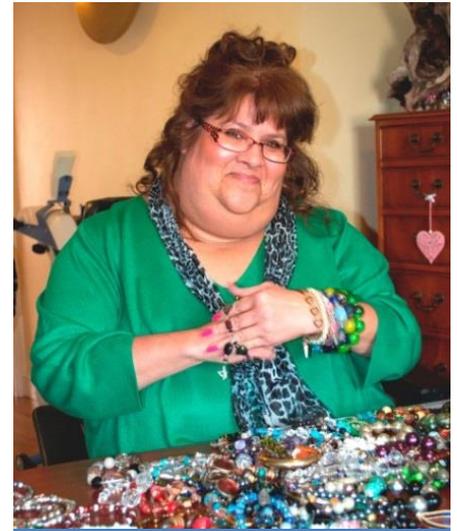
Becoming a better employer

My PA's and I were set up to take the assessments online. Sally and I went through the Common Induction Standards: Communicate Effectively assessment. We talked about the questions and answers as we went along. Following that I took some further assessments myself. I met with Gillian, one of my other PA's, and Sally to go through the assessments and draw up a plan to get all my PA's to take them. This meeting was a great opportunity to share our views and learn from each other. The assessments have helped me show my PA's that I am trying to be a better employer and not just talking about it.

What a 'to-do'!

I have developed a strategy to improve the way I start my shifts. I plan what I would like to get done each shift as I need assistance with most things. When I was going through the assessments with Eddie I found myself explaining that as soon as my PA's come through the door I bombard them with a list of jobs to do. I know this isn't a great start to a shift but didn't know any other way to make sure I got everything done. After talking it through I now run through the list of jobs whilst they are making a drink. Taking 5 minutes to start the shift properly definitely helps both of us.

I am working on a 'to do list' which we can add to as we go along so we can all be more efficient. Most importantly I want to be able to prioritise things more effectively and not get side tracked on the 'do it now' jobs which might not be as important as other things on the list. This is particularly important if I am trying to get somewhere on time as it can easily hold things up.



I love to try new things out and have a variety of hobbies to create and make things, which keep me stimulated and interested.



My learning

About half way through my first assessment I realised that some of the things I want to talk to my PA's about are going to be really hard for me because it's about me and I take it personally. The assessments have helped me to plan and prepare so I can address things in a more professional manner.

I have worked hard to make my home a beautiful, relaxing place to be and have made many of the decorations myself. I love looking round and thinking to myself that I made that.

When taking the assessments it is important not to overthink and complicate things. I was getting completely hung up on what the perfect answer was and not what the right answer was for me. As soon as I started to go with my first instinct the process suddenly speeded up and the things that I started to learn and highlight were much more relevant to me and my PA's.

Improving communication

As a result of the project Sally and I have a much better understanding of the way we communicate. I was surprised at just how much we learnt about each other in spite of the time we have spent working together. We are now both working on trying to be more aware of this.

- During the assessment Sally hesitated on one particular question as she didn't want to select an option stating that maintaining eye contact helps with communication. It suddenly made things clear that when Sally is talking to me and sits staring at the floor she is not ignoring me but in fact listening. It's just that she finds eye contact difficult.
- When I am unhappy or not sure about something I keep going on about it until it gets better, but Sally says things once and that's it. I now know that I need to listen much more carefully to things that Sally says as I can sometimes miss important information that I should pick up on, for example if she says she has a headache.



I use a Macbook laptop during the day and an iPad once I am in bed in the evening. Having the assessments online and being able to use the speech to text function on the iPad is great as it means I can still work once I am in bed without disturbing my PA as much during the sleep-in.

It is really important to me that people look at me when I am talking. I often use my eyes to direct people to look at something if I am unable to point with my hands at that moment.



Learning together

Working with Eddie and the assessments has supported us to develop a much better understanding of why I do things the way I do. My PA's know that although things take longer when I am involved in them, and I like to be involved in everything, that it is because I need to do as much as possible for myself or otherwise I don't feel like I have contributed to my life.

I was surprised at how easy it was to talk to my PA's about things. The assessments helped me to focus on how we could work better together and meant that I didn't take things personally or see them as a criticism.

My garden is my haven. Everywhere you look are ornaments and decorations. Some blend in with the plants and others add a blast of colour and interest.

It was incredibly helpful to take time out with the PA's and reflect on how things are going. Their comments included "I can really understand your obsessions and need to get things done there and then", and "you have the worst job in the world, you didn't ask for it and can never switch off from it". I didn't realise just how much they understood how I feel and appreciate the challenges that I face.

The Pros and Cons of Micro-management

I have learnt that because I "micro-manage" then I will get things done exactly how I ask for them to be done, but that in return it stops my PA's from taking any initiative or doing things for themselves as they expect me to direct everything. I knew that this was something that I did, but had never understood that in some ways I was training my PA's not to use their initiative.

Next steps

I plan to continue using the assessments with all my PA's as they have genuinely helped. They will be a great tool to help us prepare for supervision so that we can recognise what is going well and get better at addressing things that aren't working so well.

I have started the e-Learning on the Common Induction Standards as the assessments helped me realise how much my PA's and I benefit as I learn more about being a better employer and how my PA's should work.

Over the years I have got to know myself better by working with loads of PA's and trying out different ways of working that we have come up with between us. This project will help us to keep learning together and help reduce the frustration when things don't go to plan.

Using the assessments, explaining why I like to do things certain ways and taking time to talk things through has built my confidence and motivation to address things that I would have found difficult in the past.



I have two bird boxes in my garden which Sally has helped me install video cameras in. I can watch them from my kitchen whenever I want without disturbing them. I regularly need to adjust my seating position using my electric chair which might frighten the parent birds away.



Over the years I have provided a home for goldfish who have outgrown their homes of who have been won at the fair. My favourite is Timmy who has turned completely white in his old age.

The Grey Matter Group has developed the online assessments through CIS-Assessment.co.uk and e-Learning through LogonToCare.org.uk as part of a project funded by Skills for Care to deliver learning provision to support personal assistants and individual employers. This includes 500 free licences for Individual Employers and their PA's to use. If you would like to find out more or try them for yourself please complete the contact us form on www.tgmgroup.net