

Engineering the Ordinary

What sorts of actions help make the ordinary happen more readily?

We have written elsewhere about making a [great ask](#). Here we want to look at some of the broader factors involved in building a great life, through the story of Lucy.

Lucy is a real person. She lives in a small country town and one of her life great passions is flowers. She grows them, knows all the names, time of year they flower, and so on.

So it's really important to start with strengths, gifts and passions rather than deficits. Now is the time to think through how these strengths, gifts and passions can be applied. Look for openings. Start small and with people you know. This will make things easier, especially if you are just starting out.

Lucy and her family thought a logical extension of her passion would be to work at a florist shop.

Lucy has the passion and therefore the enthusiasm to get involved in anything flower related. Working in a shop with other florists, and with customers coming and going sounded really exciting to her. It adds a new dimension, a new way to apply and share her passion. She already also already had some skills to bring too – for example, she enjoys making arrangements with her homegrown flowers.

Figure out your 'in'

It turns out that Lucy and her parents know the local florist shop owner well. This became a key relationship to build on.

At the first meeting with the owner she grumbled that she would like to put her florist on for an extra day per week but cannot afford it.

Aha! Lucy had her "in".

Create your win/win

The next step was to match this passion and talent with the need of the florist shop owner, to create a win-win situation. This led the family to decide that having an external support worker coming in was not the best idea. They saw an alternative.

The proposal for the florist was that she could put the person on for another day, using Lucy's funding. In exchange, that person would also help Lucy out and train her in an apprentice-style role.



The florist would simply continue in their florist role, rather than take on a second job as support worker.

In this way the language and imagery of “support worker” was avoided entirely and therefore increased the sense of authenticity and belonging in that role in the eyes of others. It also helped cultivate a notion of “a calling” in life.

While Lucy brought some prior skills to the role, an initial lack of competency in this context is not a barrier to moving successfully into the role, as apprentices typically have little prior knowledge, at least professionally.

So the family made the ask, and with the groundwork they’d done, it just made sense for the florist shop owner to say ‘yes’.

Craft the support

It was also really important to move the owner into the right headspace and get her excited, so they made sure they linked it back to the vision that Lucy and her family have. If a person is on board in this way, then it is more likely problems can be sorted out creatively rather than hands being thrown in the air and an exclamation of “it’s all too much”!

Now it was time to “pave the way”, to ensure things start as smoothly as possible.

Lucy and her family thought through these questions:

1. How best is Lucy supported?

They met again with the florist shop owner to bring them up to speed. They were deliberate in making this the



context within which perceived deficits were addressed, as naturally as possible. It is not something they lead with.

2. What do the other employees know about disability? Do some attitudes need fine tuning? What will help them make a connection? Are there any useful strategies, e.g. with communication?
3. What sort of things would Lucy initially be doing? Could she practice some of this at home first before starting?
4. Can Lucy get to the workplace independently?
5. Would Lucy be comfortable starting off doing a whole day, or would this need to be something we built up over time?

The family feel that once Lucy is embedded in this valued role, other things are more likely to present themselves. For example, could Lucy study towards a formal qualification in floristry?

They remain mindful of ways to consolidate and sustain this role. For example, Friday afternoon drinks might be a way to strengthen relationships.

Finally, it is important to check in regularly to see how things are going, if things have stalled somewhat or are flowing well. Address any issues as soon as they arise, and look for indicators of personal growth and satisfaction.

And of course, don't forget to celebrate achievements!

Top tips for creating a role

Remember you are not asking for a favour; this is not about a sense of obligation or charity.

Be clear what existing need you will be solving.

Think through what support is need to fulfil that need in a way that slots in with already established work practices and culture.

Work on crafting a typical role not a "special" one.

Talk to us about creating your role

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