



Capability Building

Contact: Renate Braun

Of Course You Can!

Allianz's sponsorship of the Jubilee Sailing Trust is a great opportunity for communicating on diversity (see June edition). But it is also a great opportunity for a lifetime experience and personal development!



The Lord Nelson – or “Nelly”

A tall ship is beautiful and awe-inspiring, and the opportunity to sail on one was immediately appealing to me. I would recommend it to anyone who gets the chance to go!

To literally “pull together” and “learn the ropes”; to see how all these little hands put together can handle this massive

ship, was a wonderful team experience. The crew was truly diverse: old and young (from 16 to people in their 70ies), able-bodied and disabled, men and women, as well as multinational (mostly Welsh, Irish, and English but also Brazilian, Canadian, Swedish, Nigerian and German). Thrown together, seemingly at random, this bunch of mostly inexperienced sailors formed a perfect crew that sailed from Glasgow to Dublin and onward to Cardiff under the watchful eyes of a small permanent crew of “salty old sea dogs”. The wind was good, the sea was rough – it was just what you would expect from sailing across the Irish Sea – including green faces and involuntary fish feeding...

It took me a while to figure out why it is a special experience to sail together with disabled people. First of all, it was so absolutely natural to be part of a mixed ability group. There was no awkwardness. The approach was very simple: Nobody was forced to do anything they didn't feel up to but everybody did whatever they could. How inspiring to see how well some of them got by! How interesting to see how

(relatively) little it takes to make an extreme environment like a ship (compared to a regular workplace) barrier free. I often had to take a second look to orient myself under deck – “Which way am I heading? What side of the ship am I on? Ah right, that way.” What if you are partially or completely blind? Well, they just put little knobs underneath the hand rail on one side of the ship – simple as that. And if you can build stair lifts and wide enough

bathrooms for wheelchair users into a ship, how difficult can it be in a regular building? You can't read the compass? Never mind, there is a speaking one!

Still, there was something else, something special I couldn't quite put my finger on but in the end I worked it out. The focus – at all times – was on people's abilities, not their disabilities. Everybody did what they could and what they enjoyed. This created a wonderfully positive atmosphere and people...



Heave!



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...“magically” complemented each other. I felt amazingly comfortable at the helm – steering this huge ship with my hands on the wheel, watching the sails, feeling the tidal currents, adjusting to the swell. Some of my buddies didn’t want to do it. Calculating the wind direction and speed for the log, on the other hand, gave me a headache... Regarding disabilities, the only question ever was: “Do you want to try?” Nearly all of the disabled participants went aloft, some were pulled up in their wheelchairs, some managed to climb up themselves with a little help. As an able-bodied participant, this was not only very impressive and deeply moving to watch, it was also an

inspiration. You obviously ask yourself: “Can I climb up there? Can I climb out onto a yard arm and handle the sails?” And you answer: “Of course I can!”

It made me realize how much we tend to concentrate on our own and other people’s weaknesses. We look for ways to develop skills that are missing or not quite up there. The idea is to become a perfect employee with the full bandwidth of skills. The reality may well be that we are neglecting our natural strengths and creating competition where complementing one another could work much more easily and result in overall “joyful excellence”.

I would recommend the experience to anyone – and especially to team leaders – for the inside experience of unbiased team dynamics, for the experience of true diversity, for the insight into what people with very different abilities (physical or other) can achieve together, as well as the personal insight into how you yourself function in a completely new and extreme environment, coping with the elements and the tasks at hand.

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After a JST experience you will have:

- a fresh view on team work and team dynamics.
- a deep understanding of what diversity means
- confidence for tackling new or unusual challenges
- experienced new personal limits
- experienced taking great responsibility (a whole ship in your hands!)
- an improved understanding of different people's strengths and abilities (including your own)
- learned to work outside your comfort zone
- challenged your leadership and communication skills
- understood how to relate to diverse teams in a challenging environment
- learned the importance of fostering trust and respect in a team
- understood the role of communication and its contribution to an effective team

Since 2008 Allianz employees worldwide have had the opportunity to participate in a very special sailing adventure as part of the global Diversity Initiative. The [Jubilee Sailing Trust](#) offers the chance for employees to spend a week with disabled people on a tall ship. The goal is to promote the integration of physically disabled and non-disabled people.

Contact your local HR department for more information and check out the [Diversity Portal](#).



One word of advice, though: Don't experiment with sea sickness – just take the pills... ;-)



Your editor at the helm