

INTRODUCTION

Different Drums and Different Drummers

If I do not want what you want, please try not to tell me that my want is wrong.

Or if I believe other than you, at least pause before you correct my view.

Or if my emotion is less than yours, or more, given the same circumstances, try not to ask me to feel other than I do.

Or yet if I act, or fail to act, in the manner of your design for action, let me be.

I do not, for the moment at least, ask you to understand me. That will come only when you are willing to give up changing me into a copy of you.

I may be your spouse, your parent, your offspring, your friend or your colleague. If you will allow me any of my own wants, or emotions, or beliefs, or actions, then you open yourself, so that some day these ways of mine might not seem so wrong, and might finally appear to you as right – for me. To put up with me is the first step to understanding me. Not that you embrace my ways as right for you, but that you are no longer irritated or disappointed with me for my seeming waywardness. And in understanding me, you might come to prize my differences from you, and far from seeking to change me, preserve and even nurture those differences.

Extract from:

“Please Understand me II” by David Keirseay and Marilyn Bates

Step Ahead is firmly committed to diversity in all areas of its work and we recognise that we have much to learn and profit from diverse cultures and perspectives; we believe that diversity will make our organisation more effective in meeting the needs of all our clients and candidates.

Step Ahead actively promotes equal opportunities and ensures that this policy is promoted and communicated to staff and candidates alike. This applies in the recruitment, selection, training and promotion of all staff employed by the Company and amongst those who use our services – both candidates and employer clients. Promoting equality of opportunity means that everyone is treated solely on the basis of competence and merit, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

Step Ahead also recognises that discrimination may be direct, indirect, by association or by perception, and that all forms are prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.

This policy applies to all employees, workers, contractors and subcontractors, regardless of employment type or location, including offshore, remote, hybrid and overseas staff.

All employees are made fully aware that discriminatory acts are treated as gross misconduct. We draw all employees’ attention to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (www.equalityhumanrights.com) Employment Code of Practice, which includes guidance relevant to employment services and recruitment through employment agencies.

Step Ahead is committed to being an organisation that:

- Develops services to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities;
- Endeavours to have a workforce generally reflecting the population;
- Understands how valuing diversity can improve our ability to deliver better services;
- Actively consults with different individuals and communities to ensure that services which are provided are responsive and reflect the diversity of need;
- Provides all employees with the training and development they need to enable them to achieve organisational goals;
- Provides a supportive, open environment where all employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
- Listens to its customers and involves them in the development of services that recognise and value diversity;
- Believes that both customers and employees have important parts to play in making this happen;
- Ensures that any subcontractors appointed will promote equal opportunities in line with legislation.

Step Ahead will ensure subcontractors, outsourced providers and offshore partners comply with equivalent equality and diversity standards, with contractual enforcement where necessary.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Overall, our Diversity Strategy is to ensure that our Diversity Policy is applied fairly and consistently across the Organisation, as an integral part of the service we provide.

We recognise peoples' differences and aim to ensure that each individual is treated with respect.

To achieve the aims of our overall strategy we will take action to address discrimination, as well as action to promote diversity in employment and service.

The strategies reflect the existing and forthcoming UK legislation and definitions for Equality.

All the specific strategies, actions and outcomes are company-wide and apply to all places of work.

This includes offshore, remote, hybrid and third-party operated environments.

This policy applies to all employees, workers, contractors and subcontractors of Step Ahead regardless of location, including offshore and overseas personnel.

POLICY

Harassment Prevention and Dignity at Work

Step Ahead is committed to preventing harassment and creating a respectful working environment.

We will:

- Take proactive steps to prevent harassment, including training and awareness
- Treat all complaints seriously, promptly and confidentially
- Protect individuals from victimisation during and after complaints
- Ensure managers are trained to identify and address inappropriate behaviour

Step Ahead will take all reasonable steps to prevent harassment occurring in the workplace and across all work environments, including offshore and remote settings.

Harassment may include conduct related to any protected characteristic or any behaviour that violates dignity at work.

Recruitment, Training and Development

Step Ahead aspires to a diverse workforce which has the skills and understanding to achieve a quality service responsive to individual and customer needs.

As an organisation, we are committed to ensuring that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. As an employer, we aim to ensure that all employees treat each other with dignity and respect.

We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is unacceptable and where individuals feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice. In the unlikely event that harassment occurs, we have strong policies and procedures in place to deal with it.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications. All recruitment and selection, whether internal or external, will be conducted on a non-discriminatory basis and monitored by the Manager. No vacancies circulated to employees will contain any directly or indirectly discriminatory statements. Any ability or psychometric testing used in recruitment and selection will be free of bias. Training in recruitment, selection and appraisal will be provided to all necessary employees. All recruitment materials including application forms will be designed to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.
- Require all our employees to undergo relevant training as part of their induction. All training and development services will be planned and executed on a non-discriminatory basis and made available to all employees.
- Mandatory refresher EDI training will be completed at least every 12–24 months depending on role risk and responsibility level.
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and carrying out their work responsibilities, including offshore and remote staff via appropriate digital delivery methods.
- Offshore, remote and overseas staff will have equal access to all training, development and performance management processes through appropriate digital

platforms and time-zone accessible delivery methods.

- Regularly review our recruitment, selection, training and promotion procedures, ensuring they remain fair and reflect current best practice. All promotions will be on a non-discriminatory basis.
- Recruitment, selection, training and promotion outcomes will be actively reviewed using equality monitoring data to identify and address any disparities or systemic bias.
- Maintain records in recruitment, training and employment and use this information to assist in identifying areas of inequality. Monitoring of recruitment, selection and promotion will be undertaken to assess the success of this policy.
- Equality monitoring data will be reviewed at least annually by senior management, with findings used to inform corrective action where disparities are identified.
- Help all employees to realise their full potential by ensuring they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs as well as promotion opportunities. Appraisals are intended to form the basis of employee development.
- Step Ahead will take proactive steps to identify and remove barriers to participation, including those affecting underrepresented or disadvantaged groups.
- Develop processes to deal with harassment, bullying and dignity at work and create a safe and open environment.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Offshore and Remote Working

- Step Ahead recognises that employees may work from offshore locations, overseas delivery centres, or remote environments.
- All equality, diversity and inclusion principles apply equally regardless of work location.
- Offshore and remote employees must have equal access to training, development, performance management, grievance procedures, and career progression opportunities.
- Employment decisions must not be influenced by geographical location unless objectively justified by role requirements.
- Step Ahead will take reasonable steps to ensure that offshore partners, outsourced providers, and international contractors adhere to equivalent EDI standards.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

Whilst these may be different for different employees, they will be designed to reflect this policy and to promote it.

All terms and conditions will be continuously reviewed to ensure their alignment with this policy. Wherever possible, working patterns will be “family friendly”.

The implementation of employment policies that are attractive to people returning to work will be given high priority.

These principles apply equally to offshore, remote and overseas employees, subject to local legal requirements where applicable.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy



Employment

Step Ahead aspires to maintain a diverse workforce which has the skills and understanding to achieve a quality service responsive to individual and customer needs.

As an organisation, we are committed to ensuring that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. As an employer, we aim to ensure that all employees treat each other with dignity and respect.

We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is unacceptable and where individuals feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice. In the unlikely event that harassment occurs, we have strong policies and procedures in place to deal with it.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications.
- Require all our employees to undergo relevant training as part of their induction.
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees needs in recognising and carrying out their work responsibilities.
- Regularly review our recruitment, selection, training, and promotion procedures, ensuring they remain fair and reflect current best practice.
- Maintain records in recruitment, training and employment and use this information to assist in identifying areas of inequality and help all employees to realise their full potential by ensuring they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs as well as promotion opportunities.
- Whenever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers member of disadvantaged social groups may experience in seeking, and during, employment.
- Develop processes to deal with harassment, bullying and dignity at work which can operate within a safe and open environment.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Operating Step Ahead's Service to Candidates and Employer Clients

All dealings with employer clients and job candidates will be conducted in accordance with this policy, as well as the law, and monitored by the Manager.

All job vacancies and temporary assignments from employer clients will be accepted and handled on a non-discriminatory basis only.

Appropriate measures will be taken to bring this policy to the attention of employers, clients and candidates in written communication with them.

All advertising, marketing and promotional material will reflect this policy. All pre-selection methods will reflect this policy.

Step Ahead employees must not make remarks, either verbal or written, which could result in direct or indirect discrimination.

This applies equally to offshore, remote and overseas employees and contractors.

Race

Step Ahead is committed to achieving racial equality. We recognise our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and undertake to strive for racial equality both in employment and service provision.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Provide services relevant to people's needs, respecting their cultural and social identities.
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities.
- Work with other organisations to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and racial harassment.
- Only accept an environment which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.
- Encourage people from minority communities to apply for employment and training opportunities in areas and levels where they are under-represented.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Religion

Our strategy is to counter unlawful discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion and belief and to promote good relations between people of different religions and beliefs.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Strive to create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief
- Improve the understanding of religion and belief among our staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities
- Along with other organisations promote understanding and good relations between people of different faith communities
- While separate from our Race Strategy, our actions for religion and belief will be broadly similar in principle
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation

Carers

We wish to create an environment where employees, both women and men, are free to share their needs and concerns as carers and are not disadvantaged in the workplace by doing so.

We acknowledge that caring responsibility may include caring for children, a person with a disability and older people.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Work with employees to identify the needs of all carers and develop appropriate arrangements to meet those needs
- Within the constraints of effective service delivery, Step Ahead will make the best possible use of flexible working practices to support carers in our workforce
- Promote awareness of what flexible working practices are available to support carers

- Develop an organisational culture, which provides a supportive environment for carers
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation

Sex

Step Ahead is committed to achieving sex equality under the Equality Act 2010 and undertake to strive for sex equality in service provision and employment.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Create an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour.
- Encourage men and women to take up employment and training opportunities in areas where they are under-represented
- Set targets to achieve a better gender mix throughout the organisation
- Work alongside other organisations to promote sex equality
- Provide flexibility within the working environment which recognises and supports work and home balance requirements (also see Carers strategy)
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation

Sexuality

Step Ahead is very aware of the real discrimination that people face due to their sexuality and life choices, and we are committed to removing this unfair treatment from our working environment.

We strive to create an open environment where people feel safe to be open about their sexuality and difference if they choose to do so.

The organisation will work to make its service accessible to everyone, and ensure that our employment policies and service delivery are free from sexual orientation discrimination.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Develop policies and procedures to prohibit unfair treatment on grounds of sexual orientation
- Provide the same level of service irrespective of any employee's or customer's sexuality
- Where appropriate, develop services to meet the needs of people of all sexualities
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation

Disability

Step Ahead recognises that people with a disability can be disadvantaged, both by the working environment and by social attitudes, which often only reflect the needs of non-disabled people. We are committed to achieving disability equality by, wherever reasonably practicable, eliminating both unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and the disadvantage experienced by people with a disability. We also recognise that improvements in the operation of our services can reduce the disadvantages faced by people with disabilities. To achieve our aims, we will:

- Recognise our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and any other legislation.
- Strive to provide services, which are relevant to the needs of people with disability.

- Try to ensure that all our services and documentation are accessible and available to people with a disability.
- Whenever possible modify our procedures to make full use of an individual's ability and make reasonable adjustments to our facilities as necessary to accommodate people with a disability.
- To ensure that our Equality Act duties are met, we shall perform regular "audits" of our premises, services, and processes.
- Where needed, provide managers and staff with training in awareness and confidence to support people with a disability.
- Whenever reasonably practicable, continue to employ staff who become disabled during their employment, and assist in any re- training which may be necessary.
- Guarantee people with a disability an interview for any employment vacancy for which they meet the minimum essential criteria.
- Provide systems which seek to maximise access to employment by people with a disability
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation

Step Ahead will ensure a clear and timely process exists for requesting and implementing reasonable adjustments across all locations, including offshore and remote environments.

Age

At Step Ahead, we recognise that age discrimination can affect all age groups and both sexes, age is no indicator of effectiveness in work activities and employment decisions should not be based on age. We will value people regardless of age and aim to provide services that should be sensitive to the needs of all age groups. We will work to create an environment where people are judged on their ability and experience, rather than on misconceptions and prejudices about age.

As an organisation we are committed to opposing unjustified age discrimination and recognise the need for our own strategy to be in line with the Equality Act 2010.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Remove age-related criteria in our employment and recruitment practices.
- Work with organisations to eliminate age discrimination.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Cohesion

Step Ahead recognises that it may also need to address unfair treatment affecting groups without protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 in line with existing or forthcoming UK legislation. For example, the review of legislation on employment of ex- offenders, a group which is estimated by the Home Office to cover over a quarter of the working-age population.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- Continue to review and progress the organisation's Diversity Policy and Strategies so that they reflect the true diversity of society.

RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff

All staff will be given full training and support to ensure this policy is put into practice. However, we expect a personal commitment from all employees in making it effective and in setting an exemplary standard for others to follow.

All members of staff will take responsibility to:

- Ensure they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity.
- Become familiar with this policy, to follow it, and ensure that any staff for whom they are responsible do so as well.
- Draw to the attention of their line manager any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services.

All staff, including offshore and remote employees, must have equal access to reporting and support mechanisms.

Directors and Senior Management

The Directors have corporate responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of our work. The Directors have responsibility for developing the organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively and for ensuring that it is implemented.

Directors and Senior Management are individually and corporately responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented in their areas of responsibility.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE SUFFERED BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION OR HARASSMENT

- If you think you are being bullied, harassed or discriminated against it is a good idea to make it clear to the person who is harassing you that their behaviour is unwelcome and that you want it to stop. However, you do not have to do this, particularly if you are feeling bullied or intimidated. If you do choose to address your concerns to the person be clear and assertive but take care that you are not perceived to be bullying the individual. Individuals may find it helpful to ask a friend, colleague, or manager to be with them in a support role.
- If speaking to the person in question has failed to stop the problem, you should talk to your manager. If it is your manager or supervisor who is harassing you, speak to someone higher up. Your complaint will be dealt with quickly, thoroughly and sympathetically.
- It is usually best to try and sort things out quickly and as close to the problem as possible.

Discrimination can happen accidentally or through thoughtlessness. Harassment or bullying can be unintentional. Often, once an individual understands the problem, he or she will be willing to change their behaviour.

- If your manager is unable to help you, or refuses to help you, you should use the company's grievance procedure. You have a right to be accompanied by a work colleague or suitably qualified trade union representative at any hearing into your grievance.
- If you are not satisfied with the result of a grievance procedure, you have a right of appeal as detailed in the Grievance Procedure. You have a right to be accompanied by a suitably qualified trade union representative or a work colleague during the appeal hearing.

These procedures apply equally to offshore, remote, and internationally based staff, and must be accessible through appropriate communication channels regardless of location or time zone.

Breach of the Policy

Any apparent breach of this policy by an employee will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Procedure. Proven discrimination, harassment or victimisation will be treated as gross misconduct.

RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

- Employee Handbook
- Grievance Procedure
- Safeguarding Policy

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy



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