

Working with Dyslexia: What's it really like?

Dyslexia – struggling to read and interpret letters but not affecting intelligence – affects 6.3 million people in the UK. That's around 1 in 10 of us, and includes celebrities such as Keira Knightley, Thomas Edison and even Albert Einstein. Dyslexia can be frustrating and raise challenges for anyone, let alone when you're running a business! So what does it feel like, we asked Stephie...

Stephie: I was diagnosed formally at 18, I'd just started at London College of Fashion studying Art. I didn't want to admit it at first but when you don't know your Left and Rights it makes sense!

Me: Did you receive any help at school, or try any of the suggested techniques to help with your reading?

Stephie: Because I wasn't diagnosed at school, school was quite tricky for me and I had a lot of private tuition to make sure I achieved good grades. I was naturally very good at creative subjects, Art and dance but couldn't focus myself in Science or Maths. Once I made it to university I was given a tutor, specialist equipment and longer deadline.

Me: People with dyslexia are often very creative: is this the case with you or anyone else you know?

Stephie: 100%. Nearly all the students at art school are dyslexic. You're more open to a world of imagination and sometimes your brain works and sees things other can't. I often feel free to explore new ideas where perhaps others wouldn't. I have a sensitivity to things being 'out of place', which has made me extremely organised - really necessary for a fashion designer and even more so for running my own business!

Me: So, after graduating, you founded lingerie and loungewear company StephieAnn, a huge achievement for someone of your age. Did you come across any dyslexia-related struggles while starting up your business?

Stephie: Definitely. I find numbers very confusing. To me they often look like a rather funky Aztec puzzle. I struggle with large numbers and can't get my head around them. When people talk to me about numbers it's like time speeds up and I'm in the hurricane from The Wizard of Oz. I remember in a business workshop one of the tasks was to add up a whole series of numbers and they were meant to come to something. I nearly cried. I'm pretty good at writing and have to write daily so my spelling has improved a lot. At the start of StephieAnn I sent everything over to my Prince's Trust mentor to proof read. Something I shouldn't really admit to - it took me 24 months to grasp the meaning of turnover. Not great for a business woman but I got there.

Me: Are there any day-to-day struggles that you face with dyslexia, and how does this affect your work?

Stephie: *Concentrating for long period of time. At work I'm known for singing and dancing whilst I work, I find in a strange way this helps me concentrate and keep working with the flow of the music. (Check out my dance moves in our fab **video** on the website!)*

I find I have to push myself a lot to get out my comfort zone. Speaking in front of others has always been a problem for me and I recently discovered that people with dyslexia often have social anxiety and an inability to understand social situations. Growing up - and even now - although I hide it and don't think this truly affects me, I can sometimes see this in myself.

Me: What are the positives of having dyslexia?

Stephie: Far too many, I wouldn't be able to do what I do without being dyslexic. A heightened imagination, a mind which jumps from one place to another instantly and can merge two totally different ideas with another to create something awesome.

Stephie's Top Tips for Working with Dyslexia

1. Make lots of lists
2. Have a timetable, write all the jobs you need to do down, colour code it and time manage yourself
3. Make people repeat something as many times as you need to understand it.
4. Don't be afraid of being you
5. Put in place coping mechanisms, whether this is asking for help, or training yourself not to move too fast. (I am crazy clumsy. I move too fast sometimes and it cause me to drop and bump into things. Slow down!)
6. Train your mind to rationalise and work through problems slowly. Break the problem down and go from step to step.
7. Read! Find books that you really enjoy reading and give it a go, it really helps with spelling and writing.
8. Find the thing you're good at and stick with it.
9. Who actually cares if you don't know your left and rights?