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Being prepared to make mistakes

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In the same week that I began work as National Coordinator of Inclusive Church, I went to my choir practice and parked my car right in front of a wheelchair ramp. I was so embarrassed when someone had to come into the practice, find me and ask me politely to move it. I had prevented a wheelchair user from entering and they were still waiting outside! It was a low point in my career with Inclusive Church, made even worse by the fact that some of the choir members knew what my new job was. I was mortified. My takeaway from this event- apart from that I have terrible observational skills! - was that we all make mistakes, and it's what we do to learn from them that matters. Some of our best learning comes from the mistakes we make. Doing something wrong and feeling embarrassed is not the end of the world; rather, it is an opportunity to grow and change.

Research by the disability charity Scope found that [67% of us feel 'uncomfortable' when talking to a disabled person](#) [1]. This is because of a fear of 'seeming patronising or saying the wrong thing?'. The trouble is, it's not the non-disabled among us who suffer from this embarrassment; it's disabled people themselves, who are just further stigmatised, marginalised and isolated. The same holds true for every marginalised group- if we avoid talking to someone different from us, especially when that person is in a minority, it is that already marginalised person who is made to feel more unwelcome and unwanted in our society. We need to learn how to make mistakes and take the embarrassment on the chin. The furthering of inclusion is more important than personal mortification.

As well as potential embarrassment, I think another reason we fear making a mistake when it comes to inclusion and diversity is because we are afraid of other people's anger. We don't want to deal with it and

we don't think we have to. Sometimes, though, that anger is justified, and we don't need to take it personally. Or perhaps we do- because we, as a White person or a straight person or an non-disabled person, are part of and benefit from a system which discriminates against people of colour etc and which makes things easier for some people than for others. We *should* feel bad about that, and we should work to dismantle the unfair system from our position of privilege. It is by learning to be humble enough to take criticism and by listening to and learning from marginalised people that we will hopefully do better next time. Through the mistakes we make, we can become more and more inclusive. That is, after all, what we're aiming for, isn't it?

Blog written by Ruth Wilde, National Coordinator of Inclusive Church

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Links

[1] <http://www.inclusive-church.org/newstatesman.com/voices/2014/05/two-thirds-us-are-uncomfortable-talking-disabled-people-we-need-time-money-and-effort>