



Being your own boss

Work matters

by John Slade, RNIB
Employment Information
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So far in this column we have covered topics of getting into, progressing and staying in work. But what if you want to be your own boss? What if you have a really good idea for a product or service? Then perhaps setting up your own business and becoming self employed is the option for you.

Speaking from experience

Steph Cutler is 29 and has been shortlisted to win the 2005 handbag.com Barclays Business Plan Awards. She is a bright young entrepreneur with the world at her feet. Steph has Lebers Optical Neuropathy and she is registered blind.

Two years ago Steph was working in the high-pressure environment of the London fashion industry. This was her dream job, and she had worked extremely hard to get to this point. In 2003 she noticed a deterioration in her sight and was told by an ophthalmologist that she would lose her sight within three months.

"When I was told I would lose my sight, my aim was to remain as a fashion designer. I'd worked hard to get there and I didn't want to do anything else. But in the middle of losing my sight I realised that I wouldn't be able to carry on. I wasn't aware of things like screen magnification and Access to Work when I left my job, but looking back I don't think it would have made any difference."

"The most devastating time I had when I was losing my sight was when I was applying for job after job

and not getting anywhere. The lowest I've ever felt was when I was struggling all day to fill out an application form that I couldn't see just to get one more rejection."

"So I decided that I would stick two fingers up to all those employers, and set up my own business!"

"One of the things that I always remembered from the time when I was losing my sight was the help I got from a man on the London Underground. He was so helpful and his assistance was perfect. He mentioned that his employer had organised some visual awareness training a few months ago and that was how he knew how to guide people. That always stuck with me. I'd seen the benefit and the difference that training could make. I'd also experienced that most people didn't have much of an idea when it came to

Steph Cutler has started her own company,
Open Eyed: "I was determined not to let losing
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visual awareness. So that's how I got the idea for my business."

"I contacted Action for Blind People and spoke to Nazar Hussain, who is a Self Employment Business Advisor. Naz has been fantastic! He helped me formulate my idea and form a business plan. With Naz I know I always have someone at the end of the phone who I can get expert advice from."

"There are two main themes to my business now. The first element is offering visual awareness training in schools. I work with teachers to produce interactive lessons where pupils learn about guiding, play tactile games and wear sim-specs."

"The second element of the business is working with

commercial organisations to provide disability compliance consultancy. I work with a number of associates to facilitate a whole range of services including tactile signage, BSL interpreters, transcription services and so on."

"I was determined not to let losing my sight stop me from being ambitious. With some help and support along the way, I've been able to successfully set up Open Eyed, my own business."

If you would like to get in touch with Steph, please contact Open Eyed – Disability Compliance Services on **07855 941 766** or e-mail **steph@openeyed.co.uk**

Alternatively please visit **www.openeyed.co.uk**



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