



Implementing Grayce's Reverse Mentoring Scheme 'Walk a Mile'

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Discover how to implement an EDI-focused reverse mentoring scheme to promote social learning, strengthen employee relationships, and shape an inclusive culture.



Introduction

“Grayce is built upon a belief in the value of the emerging workforce. Since the business's inception, we see it proven every day that, given the platform and the opportunity, emerging talent far exceed expectations in the workplace.

We are shaping the leaders of the future across change and transformation, tech and data - and we don't take this responsibility lightly. The way we develop the emerging workforce today has a direct impact on how our businesses will be led in the future. This is why our graduate Development Programmes train young professionals in a holistic way.

Mentoring is a key aspect of our Learning & Development philosophy at Grayce. Alongside technical and soft skills training, we also recognise that leaders must engage in the cultural conversation around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Something which our Analysts are knowledgeable and passionate about!

Contributors

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Thank you to the respondents of our 'Walk a Mile' survey.

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With this in mind, our reverse mentoring scheme, 'Walk a Mile', harnesses our people's passion for EDI, to drive positive change at Grayce, our client organisations, and the wider business world.

In this thought leadership paper, we share how and why we created 'Walk a Mile', along with business and personal development benefits, which we hope that other organisations will use to implement their own reverse mentoring schemes.

Through 'Walk a Mile' and this thought leadership paper, we aim to advance the conversation and - more importantly - action, around EDI at organisations nationwide!”

- Geoff Smith
Grayce CEO



What is Reverse Mentoring?

The traditional concept of mentoring sees senior colleagues sharing guidance and support with junior colleagues. Reverse mentoring flips this idea on its head, with junior colleagues taking on the role of mentor and senior colleagues becoming mentees.

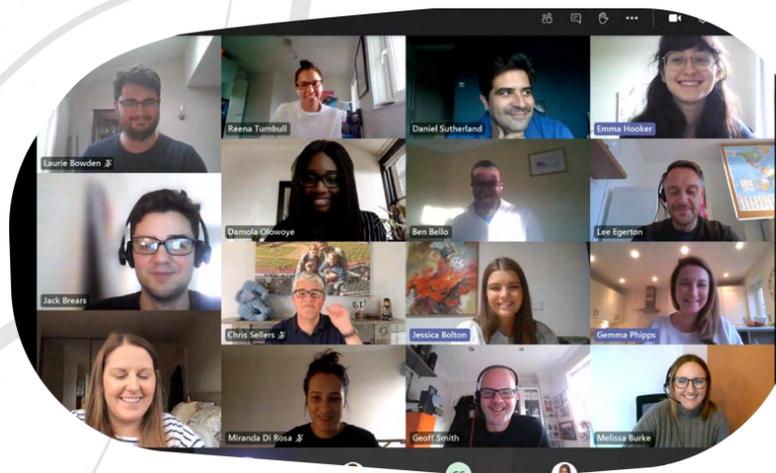
The Governmental Statistics Service (GSS), part of the UK Civil Service, have a successful reverse mentoring scheme. Diversity & Inclusion Reverse Mentoring Champion at GSS, Jason Bradbury says: "Reverse mentoring is the perfect way to take advice and guidance from those in organisations whom, whilst hierarchically more 'junior', have a unique and powerful perspective on their lived experience. In other words, what's it really like to be on the receiving end of my leadership?".



Reverse Mentoring is when junior colleagues provide insights and guidance to more senior colleagues, shedding light on the ideas and lived experience of young professionals.

Reverse Mentoring Objectives

At Grayce, our reverse mentoring scheme is a key part of our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy. The Grayce reverse mentoring scheme, 'Walk a Mile', connects Grayce Analysts with members of the Grayce Leadership & Board Teams for junior colleagues to share their EDI knowledge. In these pairings, the more junior employee takes on the role of mentor and the more senior employee takes on the role of mentee.



It's an opportunity for employees from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences, perspectives and voices with senior employees through learning, collaboration and connectivity.

Together, our pairs discuss life experiences in a safe, confidential space. This scheme is designed to: promote diversity of thought; educate around EDI issues; strengthen employee relationships; create a trusted network of support; and bolster an inclusive, collaborative company culture.



Inception of Walk a Mile

Grayce CEO, Geoff Smith says: "At Grayce, we pride ourselves on continuously promoting and embedding an inclusive culture that celebrates our differences, as well as connecting over shared similarities and experiences. But we knew that there was – and still is! – more to do when it comes to EDI at Grayce. So, when one of our Consultants, Ben Bello, suggested to me that Grayce launch a reverse mentoring scheme, I needed all of a nano second to agree."



Grayce Consultant, Ben Bello says: "Initially, the concept didn't begin with reverse mentoring itself. In the midst of George Floyd's murder, the COVID-19 pandemic and mass shift to remote working, I'd been reflecting a lot on equality and career progression. This prompted me to reach out to a former colleague, Carmel Moore, from an earlier client assignment at a FTSE100 pharmaceutical organisation.

She responded saying she actually wanted me to mentor her as well. So, we then had a series of two-way mentoring sessions, listening to each other, and in particular, me sharing what it's like to be a young, black man in the workplace. This was such a positive experience for both of us that I felt I needed to bring the idea into Grayce!

At the start of the pandemic, members of HQ were doing regular wellbeing check-in calls with all Grayce Analysts and Consultants. It just so happened that Geoff called to check-in with me. Straight away, he was keen to hear my take on what could be improved at Grayce. It was in these check-in calls that I pitched reverse mentoring. Minorities often don't have a seat at the 'biggest' table – Leadership & Board level – so I wanted them to have representation at this senior position. Geoff and I presented the idea to the Grayce Leadership & Board Team who were all immediately onboard to be mentees!"

“Minorities often don't have a seat at the 'biggest' table...so I wanted them to have representation at this senior position.”



Inception of Walk a Mile

Former Transformation Director at EY, Carmel Moore, undertook reverse mentoring with Grayce Consultant, Ben Bello. This mentorship experience inspired Ben to kickstart the 'Walk a Mile' scheme at Grayce.

Carmel says: "The world moves fast and how else can leaders stay fresh, relevant and skillful, unless there is someone younger to trade skills and perspective with through reverse mentoring?"

It acts like a cold shower for shocking leaders into realising unconscious bias - much more effective than a classroom! Reverse mentoring is also an early warning radar to pick up how employees are feeling, which is far faster and more honest than an engagement survey.

To be compelling, to be implementable, to make good business sense, the programme needed to appeal to the Grayce Leadership Team. So, we put in place a framework that included clear metrics, feedback and good governance, so that participants felt safe knowing that they would be supported."

Ben says: "We need to make these uncomfortable conversations about equality, diversity and inclusion more comfortable. EDI needs to be front of mind for leadership teams. And the best way for them to really connect with EDI is making it personal. These topics have the potential to make people anxious or uncertain. Nobody wants to offend other people. So, these pairings offer opportunities for you to be curious and inquisitive to explore and understand differences, bolstered by the safety of a supportive structure and environment."



Why the name 'Walk a Mile'?

Traditional mentoring and reverse mentoring are typically understood to be one party delivering guidance and advice to the other. However, Grayce chose to call our reverse mentoring initiative 'Walk A Mile' to echo the phrase 'Before you judge a person, walk a mile in their shoes'.

The sentiment of this phrase challenges you to understand and empathise with someone else's experiences, feelings and thought processes. The name 'Walk a Mile' emphasises the collaborative nature of these relationships. Mentors and mentees are both 'walking a mile' in another's shoes to learn about their lived experience.



Before you judge a person, walk a mile in their shoes.

Carmel Moore says: "Mentoring works best as a conversation. It is not a one-way broadcast. Mine and Ben's combined wisdom and life experience generates richer and more useful perspectives on career and life challenges.

Getting an unfiltered take on what it means to be a young, ambitious, black professional in the world now is an important lens for me, as a middle-aged, white, Irish Catholic woman, to be able to see the world through. The two-way dialogue made our conversations livelier and, above all, more honest, especially as there were moments of vulnerability for us both."



Structuring the Scheme

Here we share how we structured 'Walk a Mile' and why we did it in this way...

1

When the Leadership & Board Team were pitched the idea, they agreed to be mentees.

2

Analysts involved in our EDI initiative, EveryOneEmpowered, were invited to be part of our 'Walk a Mile' pilot.

3

18 mentors and mentees signed up.

4

Virtual speed-networking sessions allowed participants to get to know each other and choose who they'd prefer to be paired with.

5

We analysed participants preferences and confirmed mentoring pairs.

6

Mentors were given confidence training & wellbeing support from a qualified, external Coach & Mentor throughout the scheme.

7

Each pair had at least 6, 1-hour, 1-2-1 mentoring sessions over a 6 month period discussing EDI topics at their own pace.

8

Participants shared their experience and feedback in a confidential survey.

9

Survey feedback has informed running of the second cohort & Grayce's EDI strategy.

Creating Psychological Safety & Building Confidence

Ensuring we cared for all participants was our most important priority. As the focus of the mentorship was EDI, we were very conscious that it involves sensitive and personal topics. So, creating an environment and processes which support psychological safety was crucial.



Mandy Sinclair is an independent Coach and Mentor for Grayce. Mandy provides ad-hoc coaching and mentoring sessions to employees around anxiety, confidence, career goals, communication - and more.

Drawing on her coaching skills and breadth of corporate experience, Mandy provides expert guidance and a trustworthy sounding board, supporting Grayce employees to be their best, most authentic selves.



Structuring the Scheme

For our 'Walk a Mile' pilot, Mandy provided confidence coaching and wellbeing support to the mentors. Mandy says: "I recognise the immense value that comes from junior employees sharing their knowledge and experience with others. This is a really effective way to drive real change in actions, behaviours and beliefs, along with supporting diversity of thought and continuous learning at all levels in an organisation."

Mandy hosted several confidential sessions with our mentors, empowering them with the skills and knowledge to lead mentoring sessions with confidence, set boundaries and challenge their mentees where appropriate.



Grayce Analyst & EveryOneEmpowered Co-Chair, Emily Bollands says of her involvement in the 'Walk a Mile' pilot: "In our sessions with Mandy, mentors could talk through how to deal with different situations that may come up during mentoring. It was reassuring to hear Mandy affirm that the power was truly in the mentors' hands. We needed to feel comfortable before opening up about equality and diversity related topics, so building a strong mentor-mentee relationship was crucial."

Ben says: "It was really important that we had Mandy's support. If anything came up in the mentoring sessions that we weren't comfortable with, then we could raise it with Mandy."

It was reassuring...that the power was truly in the mentors' hands. We needed to feel comfortable before opening up about EDI topics.

Mandy says: "The sessions were interactive, honest and drove real action. I found them enlightening and, at times, challenging, and sobering. I learned a lot about how it feels for the Analysts on a day-to-day basis."

The sharing in these sessions reinforced how essential it is that we have open and honest conversations about EDI at all levels and that we provide safe spaces for people to do that. In order for that to happen there needs to be psychological safety in teams and that needs to be deliberately built over time."



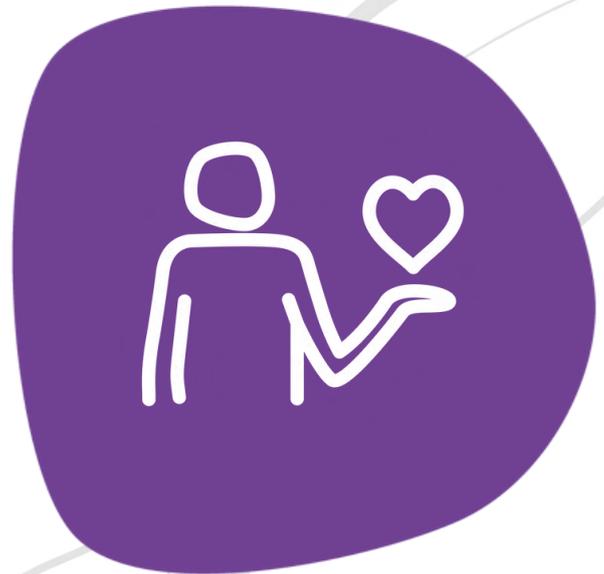
Structuring the Scheme

Shaping Learning Agreements

All mentor-mentee pairs created a learning agreement, a template for which was provided by Grayce. Each pair then tailored their agreement so they could easily set and enforce boundaries. For example, when reaching a topic that a participant didn't want to discuss, they could say: 'I'm not comfortable going any further here. Can we change the topic?'

This provided a pre-agreed structure to the sessions, acting as a psychological safety net, should either participant need it. We feel that embedding and enforcing mutual respect into the framework of the mentorship added weight to the holistic support around this scheme. In turn, we hope that this gave participants the confidence to open up and be vulnerable knowing that there was a clear, polite way to enforce their boundaries.

I felt we'd created a supportive and confidential space which allowed me to open up.



6-Month Duration

Our pairs completed six, 1-hour, 1-2-1 sessions over a six month period. Emily Bollands says: "My mentee was Grayce's Strategic Growth Director, Giles Reid. Prior to our first session, I hadn't spoken to Giles before. So, it was important to build up a trusting relationship with my mentee in this first session, finding out more about him, rather than diving straight into heavy topics. After building this foundation, I felt we'd created a supportive and confidential space which allowed me to open up."

We feel that one session per month for six months was a realistic and sustainable commitment for participants. It provides enough sessions to build a strong relationship, along with enough time for reflection and opportunity to go away and complete action or do research, prompted by the conversation.



Results of Reverse Mentoring

We invited all participants of our 'Walk a Mile' pilot to complete a confidential survey about their experiences. This was comprised of qualitative and quantitative questions which we discuss the results of below...

94%

of respondents felt that reverse mentoring helped to break down barriers between junior and senior professionals.

"I've found the 'Walk a Mile' scheme rewarding, enlightening, humbling, insightful and enriching in equal measure. I can't thank Shenade enough for the time she has dedicated to being my mentor. This has been the highlight of my month, every month!"

- **Melissa Burke, Mentee & Transformation Director**

67%

of respondents felt more engaged with the Grayce community as a result of taking part in reverse mentoring.

"Reverse mentoring helped me better understand the drivers of today's diverse graduates. The Grayce Leadership & Board Team are now better informed and our Analysts have a stronger voice."

- **Chris Sellers, Mentee & Chair of the Grayce Board**

89%

of mentees felt that reverse mentoring helped to improve their knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion issues.

"I learnt so much about my mentor's experiences as a young, black woman in the workforce and what she would like to see from employers. I've learnt more about perspectives I hadn't known about before. Meeting new people and sharing truths is such a good way to build empathy and learn from each other.

At the same time, it reinforced my view that treating everyone with kindness, respect and empathy is so important for society, collaboration and success."

- **Victoria Birtles, Mentee & Head of Brand, Marketing & Communicatons**





Describing the reverse mentoring experience...



**Educational
Supportive
Accommodating
Refreshing
Rewarding
Enlightening
Thought-Provoking
Humbling
Insightful
Enriching
Enjoyable
Open**



Results of Reverse Mentoring

100%

of respondents found their involvement in the scheme to be 'valuable' or 'extremely valuable'.

"Reverse mentoring is a great way to understand a different demographic from myself. It has made me take a more proactive approach to understanding what life is like for others and, in turn, what more myself and Grayce can do to provide support."

- **Daniel Sutherland, Mentee & Financial Services Practice Director**

100%

of respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the scheme allowed them to build a meaningful connection with their mentor or mentee.

"I have a far greater appreciation now for the sorts of factors that influence decision-making at the highest levels of Grayce."

- **Laurie Bowden, Mentor & Grayce Analyst**

"Reverse mentoring has been my favourite experience at Grayce to date. I've learnt a huge amount about Grayce and myself, built a genuine relationship with a senior colleague, and felt like my opinion was truly valued. It's exposed me to the complexity of business change within organisations and highlighted Grayce's focus on making positive progress in terms of EDI."

- **Shenade Hillman, Mentor & Grayce Analyst**

45%

of respondents felt they gained an insight into how Grayce operates

"My confidence has really grown since taking part in the 'Walk A Mile' scheme. I feel empowered to share my opinions and call out comments or behaviours that I don't feel are appropriate."

- **Ben Bello, Mentor & Grayce Consultant**



Business Benefits of Reverse Mentoring

A benefit frequently highlighted by mentors and mentees throughout the survey, was that the scheme provided equal opportunity for mentors and mentees to empathise and educate each other on their world views in a safe, supportive, and open environment, that removed traditional barriers to communication presented by organisational hierarchy.

Mentees most commonly reported that their perspectives had shifted because of the mentoring sessions, with many stating that, moving forward, they will actively apply the lens of others' experience when evaluating business decisions.

Indeed, Mentee & Grayce Transformation Director, Melissa Burke says: "My perspective has changed in a number of ways, especially how crucial it is to take a step back and to consider the variety of different perspectives to any business decision, action or approach."



Cultural Benefits

Our survey revealed the following cultural benefits...

- Informed the Leadership & Board Team's decision-making process. By 'walking a mile' in the shoes of emerging talent, senior leaders at Grayce can further consider the perspectives of a diverse range of individuals.
- Emerging talent at Grayce are better informed about how senior leaders make decisions.
- Discussed current organisational challenges and generated ideas together to drive the business forward.
- Created a safe and open space to discuss EDI and other work-related issues.
- Broke down hierarchical barriers between employees.
- Built a culture of empathy, collaboration and continuous learning.
- Empowered emerging talent to confidently articulate their views and challenge, where appropriate, to advocate for better outcomes around EDI and other work-related issues.
- Boosted engagement during lockdown, helping people to build relationships whilst remote working by replacing 'water cooler' conversations.



Business Benefits of Reverse Mentoring

Organisational Improvements

In addition to this, as a result of the conversations between mentors and mentees in our 'Walk a Mile' pilot, the following outputs have been implemented at Grayce...

- Secured additional budget to recruit EDI Lead, Alana Lukens. Sitting within Grayce HQ, Alana champions our EDI strategy going forward.
- Improved MSA documents with additional clauses to provide further protections for Grayce Analysts from harassment and discrimination, in line with our values.
- Updated annual leave policy to reflect a wider range of religious holidays.
- Enhanced paternity and maternity leave.
- Strengthened partnerships with organisations, such as Business in the Community, Tech Talent Charter and Code Nation, to build a robust external network with which to discuss challenges and share best practice on EDI.
- Launched second cohort of the 'Walk a Mile' scheme, rolling out mentee opportunities to Grayce clients.

Future Focus

"Moving forward, I am thrilled to be leading the roll out of future cohorts of our 'Walk a Mile' scheme. The business, company culture and personal development benefits of taking part in reverse mentoring were so significant that we decided to share this with our clients. Grayce Analysts receive recurring praise from our clients for the fresh perspective they bring, their innovative attitude, and how 'switched-on' they are to social issues. We then feel well-placed to extend Analysts' insight around EDI topics to our clients, along with senior leaders at Grayce.

We are excited to continue this educational experience, kickstarting an important conversation around EDI at a cross-industry level.

The publication of this thought leadership paper also demonstrates our commitment to implementing positive change as a result of Analyst feedback, raising their voice to make a meaningful difference to Grayce's EDI strategy, employee experience, and now the wider business world, with the introduction of 'Walk a Mile' to our client network."



- Alana Lukens
Grayce EDI Lead



Conclusion

Firstly, we'd like to give huge thanks to everyone who was involved in our 'Walk a Mile' pilot. From mentors and mentees, to logistics, planning, implementing improvements, and creating this thought leadership paper, your efforts have made a meaningful positive impact at Grayce.

Reverse mentoring has underscored the importance of exchanging experiences, knowledge and ideas on equality, diversity and inclusion in a safe space.

It's been a brilliant, educational journey from an idea, Grayce Consultant, Ben Bello shared with our CEO, Geoff Smith, in 2021, to now launching our second cohort of the scheme. This spark that ignited the 'Walk a Mile' scheme further indicates the immense impact that emerging professionals can make when given the opportunity and support to succeed. And that's precisely the philosophy upon which Grayce was built - an unwavering belief in emerging talent and the transformative impact they can have on organisations.

Ben says: "An initiative like this is not just a 'tick in the box' diversity exercise. It's about making tangible, positive change."

Geoff says: "Reverse mentoring has helped me view situations and previous experiences from a much wider range of perspectives. I've learnt a huge amount thanks to Ben being so candid in our conversations. I'm grateful to be able to carry these insights with me moving forward."

From strengthened bonds between our employees, to triggering more informed decision making, policy improvements and strategic partnerships, there's been so much to gain as individuals and as a business.

As a consultancy working with FTSE100 & 250 organisations across Financial Services, Retail, Energy, Insurance, Legal Services, FinTech and Tech, Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare, we are excited to now double down on our EDI efforts at an industry-wide level.

We hope that the experiences and insights shared in this thought leadership paper have inspired you to walk a mile in someone else's shoes.



Join the Conversation

Have you taken part in reverse mentoring at your organisation? Share your experience with us...

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grayce.co.uk

