**Podcast transcript**

**Series 2, Episode 4: Faith at work**

**Steven** Welcome to this month's episode of ‘Talking Inclusion with’, from Inclusive Employers.

I'm Steven Copsey, your host for today, we're going to be talking about religion, belief, and faith in the workplace. We'll explore religion and belief as a protected characteristic, share stories and experiences and offer advice to employers to ensure all employees of faith can prosper in the workplace.

Before I introduce our guests, this podcast is brought to you by Inclusive Employers, we challenge and support organisations to be more inclusive, making workplaces a safe space for people to contribute their skills and experiences fully to their organisation. These podcasts are for anyone who has an interest in inclusion and diversity. In our podcast we share life stories and experiences. Learn about best practice and hear practical advice for employers from our guests, as well as Inclusive Employers own inclusion and diversity experts.

Today. Our fantastic guests are :-

Reverend Dom Jones, Chaplin from Hampshire Constabulary

Hi Dom

**Dom** Good Morning

**Steven** Halyma Begum, L & D Manager from Co Op, who is also co chair of

Co-op’s race network, trustee at Diversity Matters Northwest and Chair of Greater Manchester Women and G irls equality panel.

Hi, Halyma

**Halyma** Hiya.

**Steven** And we also have Joseph Aninakwa, Consultant at Inclusive Employers.

Hi, Joseph,

**Joseph** Good Morning. How you doing?

**Steven** To start today's podcast, we're going to talk about what employers need to know about faiths and religion and belief as a protected characteristic.

People belong to a multitude of religious and hold various beliefs in the UK, and according to law, employees have the right to not be unfairly discriminated against, due to their religious or philosophical beliefs. So, let's start by introducing our own faiths. Joseph?

**Joseph** I come from a Christian background, you know, where I believe in believe in God, I kind of started off as Catholic. And now I'm Pentecostal, , so for me, I have a relationship with God, I, I believe that we're all here for purpose. I mean, he believed that we're here to build and maintain relationships, if we're not here building and maintaining relationships then what are we doing? We have a relationship with our colleagues, or friends or families if we have none of that. So, Christian faith, that's me.

**Steven** And Halyma. How about you?

**Halyma** Yeah, I'm Muslim. I believe in the One God, Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet.

**Steven** And Dom

**Dom** So I'm also a Christian. I'm Anglican. So Church of England, and I'm a priest, but I work for the police as a full time chaplain. And so yeah, I believe in the one god, and that his son is Jesus.

**Steven** Dom. Let's start with you. What should employers know about religion and belief? And why is religion sometimes a contentious topic?

**Dom** I think religion can be a contentious topic because there are many different views on it. And people are very passionate about their their views. And it's one of those topics that people don't tend to talk about openly in the workplace, religion, politics and money spring to mind and say, it's one of those topics that isn't talked about as openly as perhaps it could be.

And I think it's a topic that is so close to people's hearts, people who follow a favourite religion will normally be very passionate about it and be something that they perhaps have grown up with or come to later in life for a particular reason. And it's it's very strong, emotive topic, and, and I think that sometimes can be seen as contentious.

**Steven** And from an employer's perspective, do we think that there are specific things that should be considered when thinking about those who do believe in a specific faith, who do practice a certain faith and how that fits in the workplace?

**Dom** As we've already said that faith is a protected characteristic. So we need to make sure that people are able to practice their faith and to live out their faith in a genuine way while they are in in the workplace. And so, that means that then there needs to be consideration of reasonable adjustments so that people are able to, to to practice and live out their faith in a way that is right for for them. And that will look different for each of our our faith groups. And, and also different for individuals as well, depending on their level of practice and their level of commitment.

**Steven** Halyma any extra thoughts on that religion is a contentious topic, particularly in the workplace?

**Halyma** I guess. Yeah. Sometimes I'm Muslim and Muslims seem like they're always under fire in the media. So every time something happens in the media, it just seemed to impact Muslim people, and especially in the workplace, because sometimes people are nervous about whether they should be visible about their faith or whether whether the perception of being Muslim, a lot of the time in the media is associated with negative things.

So people may not want to be vocal and openly talk about their faith, just in case they may feel they've been judged or, you know, some preconceptions made about them. So people may feel it's easier just to not talk about faith and just go about your work day.

**Steven** Joseph, have you got anything to add about employers and why they should be understanding about religion and belief, particularly in that workplace setting?

**Joseph** I think that there's many different faiths, and many different religions. Some people see what they believe in as a faith. Some people see what they believe in as a religion. And it's, it's important as an employer to understand the differences between the two. A faith is like someone's way of life. Religion is also someone way of life, but it's just all dependent upon how that individual sees it. You know, sometimes employers will put things all in a box, your faith and religion are exactly the same thing. It's not exactly the same thing all the time, because it means different things to different people.

And it's important to allow staff to be able to express themselves, you know, have you given them a space to express themselves? Halyma may have a have a prayer room, in your, in your workplace, or if you're working at home, you know, you pray at home. As someone who's Christian, we do pray, some of us pray and quite loud, some of us pray in silence, you know, it's all dependent upon that particular person and individual. And it's important to ask and give those people from different faiths, especially within the workplace, within the office, that space and that time to do so because it's important to them.

You might have, whether it be Muslim person or a Christian person, they might drink. And it's not always appropriate to think why are you drinking? And especially that person who doesn't have the faith. I always find sometimes that I'm always condemned for being a certain faith and some of the actions that I do, although they're not harmful to that individual, but that individual may not believe in God. But they say, “Yeah, but you believe in God, you should be doing this, and you should be doing that…”. So I think it's very important to be mindful of what triggers people as well, because it's not nice to be told you should be doing this, you should be doing that. Or not. So I kind of hope that makes sense.

**Steven** According to YouGov 41% of Britain say they belong to a particular religion, with a third of Britain's belonging to one of the recognised Christian denominations and a further 7% belonging to other religions. Joseph with a fairly large proportion of people belonging to a religious group. Why do you think people still experience discrimination because of their religion or belief?

**Joseph** I do believe that people within a workplace still are discriminated against. So for example, I'll give an example for my for myself, I'm a Christian, I've always been a Christian. And we all make mistakes. We're human beings. We're not made perfect. We like to be perfect, but we're not made perfect so we make mistakes right? Now. I guess for me, you know, I've got three children, 13, four, and five months, right. And I'm married now. And whenever I may say to someone, not everyone, I say “Yeah. My daughter is 13.” And then they’ve seen that she doesn't live with me, and they say “she doesn't live with you – why?” Yes, it's a previous relationship. I feel that there's that ‘Why’ - Why did you make that mistake? We all make mistakes. And I think it's important to to understand that, you know, you make mistakes, and we learn by from those mistakes, and we move forward. And I always feel sometimes a bit apprehensive about saying, “Yeah, I have a 13 year old” and I get “oh, but you've been married for so long”. I've been married for seven years. But that was out of marriage. I feel they're not saying it, but I feel it. I feel that burning it if they're looking at me, or I hear on the phone, people from different faiths do get discriminate against not just, you know, Christian, not just Muslim, not just Hindu, but everyone gets discriminated against in some shape or form. And majority of the time is sometimes someone with no faith that you actually get it from, which is no faith or no religion, which is really weird.

But then also within your same circle, you will still get that discrimination, you know, in the workplace and outside of the workplace. And it's important to speak to that person. I think I said at the very beginning, we were put on this earth to build and maintain relationships. But if you're digging at someone, are you building on that relationship? You're not, you're pulling it down. So what you say and how you say things is important, as well as the intent? Is the intent to make that person feel excluded or Is that intent to make them feel included? is important.

**Steven** Dom. You're a force chaplain at Hampshire Constabulary. Can you tell us a bit about your role? And what a day in your life might look like?

**Dom** Yeah, sure. So as Force Chaplain, I have the privilege of leading a team of Chaplains across our force. So we have 22 chaplains that cover the hole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the majority of my team are volunteers. And I'm full time employed by the force. And the team are a multi faith team made up of a range of different faith groups. And we offer a confidential listening ear to all of our officers and staff of all faiths, and none. So what that means is that people can come and talk to a chaplain, about whatever's going on in their life, whether that's home life, or work life, and we will listen, we're not there to judge, we're not there to preach or convert, we are there to listen. And that's a really important thing that we get across is that you do not need to have a faith to come and speak to a chaplain, first and foremost, we are a listening ear to absolutely everybody in our organisation.

If people want to talk about faith, then we're perfectly equipped to do so and we're more than happy to do so. But we won't bring the topic up unless the individual who's coming to speak to us does. So yeah, it's about offering someone that people can come and speak to. So all of my team and I, we are motivated by our faith. That's a reason that we go in and we serve the Constabulary. And of course, I’ve said my team, the majority of them are volunteers. And so it's their faith that enables them to do that and to give up their time freely to care for our officers and our staff.

So a typical day, I guess with all jobs, there's no such thing as a typical day. But the type of things that my job involves in will be driving around the county of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and spending time with officers and staff. So whether there'll be a one to one sessions, when people are offloading talking about what's going on in their lives, or whether that's attending training days and briefing days, getting out and about operationally with our officers and to come alongside them to learn what they do and to support them. We also go out on wellbeing visits and we'll go to different teams, different stations, we rock up and always bring in some sweet treats. The way to everyone's heart is a bit of cake. And we offer them an opportunity to come, talk to anybody that they may wish to. But actually the biggest message when we're going out and doing these wellbeing visits is that we're here on we care and we're making sure that people people know that.

So the chaplaincy team with in Hampshire Constabulary is here for the 5000 ish people that make up the constabulary, but we're not here for victims of crime or perpetrators. We are an internal resource looking after our officers and staff. Yeah, I said it's about offering a confidential listening ear.

Of course, there's also some sides to it. Well, I'm involved in perhaps some more religious things. So whether that be blessing of memorials, taking a funeral, taking of services, we offer that function to the Constabulary. So this week, I've been blessing a bench in memory of a former officer, who died a few years ago, I've been working on a memorial service, and we're going to be holding later this month. And I've also been planning a memorial service for Stephen Lawrence Day, which will be coming up soon. And so I get a range of different activities. So it keeps me out of trouble. And it's a really varied role.

**Steven** Dom - what do you see in the force with regards to faith? Have you seen an increase or decrease in people participating in their faith over recent years? Or has it stayed the same?

**Dom** I've been with the Force for five years, and I've definitely seen an increase in diversity in the force, people of different faiths are joining. And we've been doing a lot of recruitment around that, I'm really excited to say that we've just launched our Muslim Police association in force. And that's to work alongside our already existing Christian Police Association. And we're seeing an increase in people wanting to engage and to partake in their faith and activities. And that's why we were able to launch another faith based and networking force due to that.

And I think that as we strive to be a more inclusive force and more representative of the people that we serve, then we will see more and more people feeling free to practice their faith.

And I think that with it with a pandemic, what we'll have seen is that a number of our staff have been able to work from home; obviously our offices haven't been able to they still been out and about but a number of our staff have been able to work from home and I think with that we've seen some people reengage with with their faith and be able to practice it more more easily when they've not been tied to an office. And of course, over the pandemic, one of the few good things that came out of it was the increase in streaming of worship and services. And so people have been able to access it more easily, and perhaps attend worship from their home where they might not have been able to before.

**Steven** Halyma, is faith visible at Co-op?

**Halyma** So as a Muslim working in the last 17 years, I think it's had peaks and troughs. Muslims are like I said, it seems to be that we're always in the paper for negative things. And I started just after 911 in 2005. At that point, or young me operating in a non-Muslim environment, I prioritise fitting in, above my religion, or, you know, openly displaying it, praying under staircases, delaying prayers due to meetings, or delay in opening my fast due to work taking priority. However, I think, as an organisation, we're really evolved.

You know, working in the head office, now we've got dedicated prayer rooms, we're in the process of opening a new prayer room in one of our London stores, we're doing a lot of things to educate our leaders and managers on understanding people's faiths, so colleagues can bring their whole self to work. We're now in the month of Ramadan, one of the holiest months for Muslims.

And even five years ago, it didn't feel like leaders gave it much thought. However, only last week, we held our first live Ramadan if there at the Co-op Head Office, and that was bringing Muslim and non-Muslim colleagues to breakfast together, we also invited the local Imam from the mosque to come and do the call to prayer live in the head office. So, you know, times are certainly changing. We're moving towards a culture where employees want colleagues to choose to be comfortable in displaying their feet. And they all are they also want to be part of it and learn about it. So yeah, definitely is creating that culture where everyone can be themselves and be visible about who they are.

**Steven** And why do you think you're seeing that change? Halyma?

**Halyma** I think, you know, there's a real need in our businesses at the moment to include people, they want colleagues to have a sense of belonging to that organisation. And if the organisation wants to appeal to their employees and wants to create that lasting relationship, it needs to let colleagues be themselves and bring their wholeselves rather than just, you know, coming in, it's not about that clocking in for 9 to 5 and going home anymore. With the pandemic, we brought our whole family on, show you through Teams, everyone sees each other. So you want to be able to be comfortable. And employers are willing to accept that and want colleagues to feel comfortable. And in order to retain colleagues in order to create a culture of belonging, employers are doing more and we as an organisation are doing more to make sure our colleagues feel like they belong at the Co-op.

**Steven** Dom. We mentioned earlier that COVID has enabled people who work from home more accessibility to connect to that faith. But have we seen other factors at play here?

**Dom** Yeah, I think I think the pandemic has had some some positive effects on people being able to be to be open. And being able to, to attend worship and at different times of day because of the online function. So I think that's something that is that is definitely happening. And it helped. And I think we're on a journey as a world to be more inclusive and open and we still got an awfully long way to go. But we're we're certainly making inroads, and I'm seeing some positive changes happening across the road at the moment. And yeah, we've still got a long way to go. But I think we are recognising that people are individuals. They're holistic beings, body, mind and spirit. And there's a much more of a strive to allow people to be their whole self.

**Steven** And Joseph, have you seen people be more open, honest and visible with their faith in workplaces over the last couple of years?

**Joseph** Yeah, I would say, um, as a youth leader as well, I guess a lot of the start with the youth, you know, a lot of the youth are a bit more open. And when I say this, so last year, you know, England played a team. And there were three players who, you know, took some penalties, Black players who took some penalties. And obviously, there was, you know, a lot of heat that they got after that from from missing those penalties. And one of the person people that took the penalty was Saka.

Now, Saka was one of the young people that were in my church. And one thing that came about was that, you know, he'd done one or two, you know, interviews on what's on afterwards. And for him, he was like, “my faith, my faith is what has kept me moving forward. And my faith is what kept me strong, my faith, and my god is that that's what drives me, that's what enables me to be the best version of myself”. And he's very open, you know, with it within his workplaces or football within my workplace, from the very get go.

I guess, for me, within my LinkedIn or on my CV, I put on a youth leader that ultimately says to you, that I'm a person of faith, you know, at my church, and I take pride in, you know, teaching young people from 15, to 16, in terms of Christianity and what's not. So for me, I do so. And a lot of the people, or the other youth leaders are very much so, some of them are YouTubers, a lot of them, you know, talk about within their workplace on what's or not even one of the organisations I used to work for or to, which are faith driven. Everyone was very much talking and living their faith, you know, in the work that they do, how they do things in in their emails, it sparked a lot of conversation, and even to some of the people who are not of a certain faith, is starts conversations with them? You know, why do you do this the way you do? What's the purpose of it? And when you do fast, okay, what does it do for you. And, you know, for me, it connects me more to God, enables me to build a stronger relationship with God by also strengthens me, you know, spiritually as well as physically. I've believed that our minds are very powerful. Our minds drive us to do everything that we need to do. But without our mind being strong, how can we do what we need to do? You know, we can have muscles and what's so not, and it's all about what you believe and what you think.

**Steven** Now let's talk about people's experiences of faith in the workplace, the good and the bad. In 2017, there was a belief at work survey, which reported that 3% of British workers say they've personally been discriminated against in the workplace because of their religion or belief. Halyma, can you tell us how your faith has impacted your experiences at work?

**Halyma** I don't think I've necessarily been discriminated against by it. But I do feel I've not been able to openly display it earlier on, as I mentioned, I've always felt nervous.

As a Muslim, I'm required to pray five times a day. And the winter days, the the prayer times, end up between that nine to five hours, so you have to do it in the work hours, but whereas in the summer hours, I can delay it and do it at home. So it always feels like having to go to the prayer room feels like ‘Oh, what am I skiving’? ‘What are people thinking about me’, and I'm always really conscious about it.

And then sometimes it's a lack of awareness from others on the call that meeting times or put in long meetings are there and there's not that acknowledgement that you need to pray. And earlier on, I was really not confident about calling out and say I need to pray, I'd rather just sit there work through and I do think the things that was a lot around.

And Joseph mentioned it before, like, as a Muslim, I personally don't like to be around alcoholic environments, like bars or pubs. But I was the only Muslim, I was the non only non white in a group of you know, 20 managers or so. And it was difficult, because trying to fit in the social events would be around bars and pub quizzes or pubs. And I always felt like, you know, I had to choose between my faith, and if I didn't go then am I causing a hindrance to my career development. And it was always like, oh, I'll just go along with it. I'll just go along with it.

But I guess, with age as maturity levels, and again, I think the employee you're trying to do their bit as well. I'm more comfortable now calling out and saying, you know, that's not the environment I want to be in. I think people are more considerate around it when planning team events when planning group activities, actually, you know, it does is this inclusive of everyone, not just myself because

I'm a Muslim, you know, we might have previous alcohol addictions on the teams, things like that, or even with the gambling ones, casino events. It's more inclusive. And that thought process is there in terms of saying, you know, what are the options? Is there halal food available? Can we go there, those things are considered so it feels much more comfortable. But historically, that awareness wasn't there. And I personally always felt I was tied down. I was like, oh, shall I do this shall not and it just felt easier just to go along and not prioritise my faith.

**Steven** Joseph, do you believe that being Christian has affected you in the workplace?

**Joseph** No. Halyma paints a very good point, in terms of what you believe in and how you feel that might be a hindrance on your career to maybe not attend certain events that happen on what's on and there's a very fine line to you know, like Halyma said, you know, do you go? Do you not go? And I have to now assess, okay? How important is this get together? How important is it to my career, is it gonna benefit me. And a lot of the time, I'll take that time out to know who's going to be there. And I'll try and engage with those people who are going to be at that get together, I do want to speak to you beforehand. And then I can decide whether I want to go to that event or not.

Because I guess for me, at certain work functions, there's a lot of language that's used. And I don't necessarily adhere to a certain language being used. So therefore, I don't feel comfortable being in that environment. And I don't want to be seen to be advocating for that environment, especially when I'm online with young people. So ‘oh Joseph, what did you do today’? And I'm like, Yeah, I went to work for sure what happened? Yeah, it was a bit uncomfortable, you know, I'd rather not be in that environment. So it does & it can hinder on me, but I try and assist it as best as possible.

And I remember, for a period of time, I wasn't drinking at all. And, you know, they were like, Why? Why do you not drink and I'm like, you know, what, I want to clear my body, I want to be, you know, a bit more pure. And this was literally training for position I was in, I ended up not drinking at all, like they will come on, I was like, no, no, apple juice is fine with me. I'm good. I'm good with apple juice. And that's the stance that I took at that moment in time. And I stuck with it. And then everyone knew that, Joseph, this faith guy, Joseph, this Christian guy, don't use bad language around him. Don't say this. Don't say that. And I understood. For me, for me, it's fine. It's about making people aware that you have a certain faith. And these are the things that you liked. And these are the things that you don't really like. And it's important for other people around you, to respect that hasn't really hindered me It probably has, but I am where I am now. And I'm in a good position now. And I like where I work now.

**Steven** And Dom, how does faith impact people working within the Force? How does it impact their working life

**Dom** Within the Force, we try to offer a safe space for anyone to practice in their faith. And as I mentioned, we currently have two faith based networks, and I hope there'll be there'll be more coming and a team of 22 chaplains who represent five different faith groups, we have a comprehensive religion and belief policy within the force, which enables our Officers & Staff to hopefully feel free to be who they truly are, and to live out their faith at work.

And I mean, if you were to ask our officers and staff, of faith, I think they would say that their faith makes them a better police officer or a better member of police staff. Policing is quite often described as a vocation. It's a very demanding job that requires your all. And I think that it's a very spiritual occupation as well. And it's one of those roles that people will go into, because they want to make a difference, and I feel it, it will attract and does attract people of faith because of that.

So I think it's hard for me to talk on behalf of the people in Hampshire Constabulary, but I think that if you were to speak to them, they would say that faith is integral to what they do to their job. And I would hope that during some of the dark times of policing some of the times when it's tough, it's traumatic, that it will be faith that carries them through. And it will be faith that gives them that courage and that energy that they need. And I certainly that's true from myself, although I'm not on the front line with officers. The job can still be tough, it can be demanding, and it can require a lot from me. And it's because of my faith, I'm able to do it and because of my trust in God, that I'm able to do it and the time that I take out to spend in God's presence is absolutely essential to enable me to do my my role.

**Steven** Halyma, you mentioned trying to fit in when you've started in the workplace. Have you seen anybody hiding their religion at work?

**Halyma** I guess so. As Muslims we openly display so I'm wearing a headscarf today. Sometimes you can see me wearing a longer abayas, but would I wear a long abayas to the workplace? Probably not. I’m uncomfortable with it being going on public transport wearing my longer abaya and my headscarf because just around what people might think and then working in our head office environment, it's that preconception. What would people think if I'm wearing my long abaya, and my headscarf? Do they think I'm somebody els? Does it change their perception of me so I probably wouldn't wear my abaya to work.

My headscarf is part of my identity and I've worn it since I was 15 years old, so it’s always there with me. But I've known colleagues, you know, on CVs and name changes Muhammad, when that comes up, that's an obvious one. One of my colleagues, her surname is Muhammad, but she she's used her middle name Adam previously, just to see what difference it makes to job applications, and a lot of times you will see when Muslim names or any names really, from ethnic minority backgrounds come up, there's less uptake from employers than there would be if there's a standard John Smith name. So sometimes, yeah, I think there certainly is, even with the hijab, there's so much on the media around it. The Hijab ban in different countries, makes me nervous about it, and a whole part of our country doesn't follow in that way. But yeah, I can totally imagine people being nervous around wearing the headscarf or they're a buyer, in workplaces.

**Steven** We're now going to move on to thinking about offering advice for employers to ensure that people of faith are fully included in the workplace. So Joseph, let's start with you. religion and belief is a protected characteristic. What should employers be doing to ensure that they're fulfilling their legal obligations in this area?

**Joseph** I guess one main thing is making sure that they have this in their policies.

One important thing is making sure that you actually display it, and you let people know that they're welcome no matter what faith they're actually from. And that's even before they even apply for a job. One thing my previous employer actually had was different, um, prayer rooms for different faiths on what's so on. So wherever it was a Prayer room for Muslims, but what basically it was a, it was a fully multicultural faith centre, ultimately, where no matter what faith you belong to, you can go if you need a prayer, you got a prayer room, if you need people to pray, we've got people to pray with, and some employers have the ability to have that space. Some employers have the ability to create that room, you know, on what's on.

And it's about, you know, recognising that you may have someone of faith within your workplace that you know of, but it's good, okay, maybe maybe put on that survey. Because it's not all the time whenever you start a workplace and you have to fill in that form. And it says, tick this box for a certain faith. Most employees don't say ‘why’. And the ‘why’ is very important. Why do you want to know this? Do you want to know this because of stats, or do you want to know this to include me? It's very important. And that's why I speak to some, some some colleagues about some organisations about the ‘why’ is important. Because if you answer the ‘why’, then people will tick that box a lot more, then you have your data, but then also, you add to the benefits that you actually give your staff and you make them feel included, not excluded.

Those are some of the things that I would say that, you know, employees should have, an employee should aspire to actually have, because the more that they have, the more they attract certain people of certain faiths, where we have this Christianity where we expose them, whoever is Hinduism, whatever faith you are, if you know that that workplace, has a good vision, has a good mission, and it's in their policies, you're most likely going to apply there because, you know, you don't have to change yourself. You know, you don't have to hide part of yourself. You want to bring your full self to the workplace.

**Steven** Halyma, you work in the L & D Department at Co-op, and are Co-Chair of the race network at Co-op. So what do you do at Co-op to ensure that people of faith are included and are able to prosper?

**Halyma** Well as the colleague network for our ethnic minority colleagues, what we really advocate for is communication. We want our leaders, our managers to be comfortable about having those open, honest conversations to acknowledge it. We need to create a work culture where colleagues are able to be open and feel safe to talk about their faith openly, and still feel like they belong. We need employees to recognise and celebrate different religious and cultural events, raising awareness amongst colleagues and customers about key calendar events. And that's what we do as part of the rise network.

And as I mentioned, before, we had the Ramadan Iftar last month. This week it’s Vaisakhi. We celebrated that with our colleagues and through those key calendar events across this year, we'll be raising awareness, we're supporting our employer to talk about and have those conversations.

And I think our leaders need to be vulnerable as well, in terms of, you know, when you don't know about something, we want them to say, you know, I don't know about it, but I am willing to learn and things like reverse mentoring, understanding someone's faith, someone's culture, those things go a long way.

I got an email this morning, and it started up with ‘Ramadan Mubarak Halyma’, and it just went into what they need from me. But that acknowledgement that we're in the month of Ramadan from a non Muslim colleague, it makes a huge difference. It makes employees feel like they belong to this organisation and the organisation values their important key days, just like how we want people to value our families, our friends, they also value our religion.

**Steven** You mentioned that point of key events there. How do you decide on a annual basis, which are going to be your key events for that 12 month period?

**Halyma** Yeah, that is a hard question. It is definitely hard. And I guess even going back to Joseph's point around that diversity data, what we have done, we previously didn't and over the last two years, we've gotten really focused on collecting diversity data. We do colleagues surveys as well to capture the diversity of our colleagues population and then understand where there's gaps in terms of what are we not recognising what we're not celebrating? So each year we'll review - we've got five colleagues networks, will we work with our colleagues networks to understand what are the key important dates to colleague networks? To our colleagues, what is our data telling us and via that, we'll come out with certain dates. And again, it'll go through the colleague networks again, you know, these are the days does this feel right? Does this feel okay? And then they'll be set in stone for that year. And then the next year, we'll do the same process again..

**Steven** All about that consultation and co-production there. Yeah. Fantastic. Dom, what advice would you like to give to employers when it comes to faith?

**Dom** Embrace it. We're holistic beings, body, mind, and spirit. And I think we need to we need to embrace that. Absolutely. I as you might expect me to say I would say to employers, perhaps consider having chaplains in your workplace who can care for your staff spiritually, as well as mentally, and I would totally agree with one of the point Joseph’s made about making sure that you have a really good policy, a really good religion & belief policy or similar, an inclusive policy that enables staff to live out their faith for work and answers, the questions that they may have about practising their faith at work, eating and staff canteen, uniforms, dress code, that type of stuff, put it in a policy, so staff know that they can be truly themselves. And they can find it in a really easy place. They don't have to go hunting for these answers, they don't have to ask somebody, but they can find it in a policy and they can give themselves that knowledge that they know that they are welcome to bring their whole self to work.

**Steven** That brings us to the end of today's discussion.

Thank you, Dom,

**Dom** Thanks, Steven.

**Steven** Thank you, Halyma.

**Halyma** Thank you, Steven.

**Steven** Thank you, Joseph.

**Joseph** Thank you, Steven.

**Steven** If you'd like support on this topic, Inclusive Employers members can use the religion and belief resource pack on our website. Otherwise, please do get in touch with us and we'll be happy to help.

On the next podcast. We're going to be discussing disability at work. How are you supporting disabled colleagues? Are there any barriers to stop disabled people joining your organisation and what can we all do to ensure everyone has the opportunity to be successful at work?

**Closing credits** You've been listening to talking inclusion with Steven Copsey. If you've enjoyed listening to this podcast, then please subscribe and leave a review from wherever you get your podcasts.

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