



KUSH KANODIA: The examined life

CHAMPIONING EQUALITY & INCLUSION

Kush Kanodia (OE1991-96) has developed a portfolio career helping charities, social enterprises and non-profit organisations with a focus on disability, technology and healthcare. Kush is an advisor to the world's first Global Disability Innovation Hub, a partnership led by the University College London as part of the legacy of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and on the public advisory board of Health Data Research UK, the new national institute for health data science. Kush's social values roles are too numerous to list but they include Ambassador for Disability Rights UK, Director at the Centre to Access Football in Europe and Patient Governor of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

After achieving an MBA with distinction at Kent Business School, Kush's career began in the corporate world of banking and finance, including a period of time leading European data operations for Morgan Stanley. However, Kush was always interested in social good and as such was the trustee of Disability Rights UK which managed the

all-party parliamentary group for disability in Parliament. Having been selected as a torch bearer for the 2012 Paralympic Games as a role model and leader in raising awareness and empowering disabled people across sectors, Kush's social values led career really accelerated. In 2018, Kush was recognised in the top 10 most influential BAME leaders in technology at Parliament and he was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year 2019 at the Asian Achievers Awards.

"I am now able to walk due to assistive technology but in my Emanuel days, getting to school was a real ordeal and an achievement for me. I would arrive in so much pain that I just needed to sit down. My hips would dislocate regularly and it was intensely painful. The reactions at school to my disability were mixed. Some people were considerate and knew that it would take me a long time to get up the stairs one by one, for instance, but others



were less patient. It was the same with the teachers, some of whom would give me signatures for being late for lessons.

I wasn't particularly sporty but I enjoyed taking part in basketball and sports which involved less physical activity such as table tennis. I remember being in awe of Linford Christie when he came in to school one day to give us athletics coaching. My long jump wasn't great but it was a privilege to be taught by Linford. I will always be very grateful to Emanuel as in 1992 my father had a stroke and it was only due to the compassion and generosity of the school that I was able to complete my studies.



Much of my ongoing work with Ability Net and The GDI Hub involves assistive technology - devices or systems that help to maintain or improve a person's ability to do things in everyday life. This technology is transformative for disabled people and ranges from crutches or my computer aided design hip replacement



to more advanced technologies such as smart speakers, eye tracking software and driverless cars. A lot of assistive technology that was designed for disabled people is actually now going mainstream, for example touch functionality, text to voice and speech software. We're very fortunate that we're living in a time where if you imagine it, we can create it.

I'm on the advisory board for the GDI Hub, the legacy from the 2012 Paralympics, which is leading a £10 million fast-start global programme called AT (Assistive Technology) 2030, funded by the Department for International Development. It's a consortium of organisations including UCL, Loughborough University, London College of Fashion and many more based at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The idea is to accelerate disability innovation to create a fairer world for the 1.3 billion disabled people across the globe. Low tech assistive technology such as a wheelchair, for example, can be life transforming for a disabled person. GDI Hub have also created a Disability, Design and Innovation MSc which is really helping to change the mind set about disability.

I've been working with the Cabinet Office to create a national disability strategy to remove physical, virtual or attitudinal barriers for disabled people too. The medical model of disability states that a person is disabled because of their impairment whereas the social model states that a person's disability is caused by their environment. For example, in a shopping centre, stairs would

make it inaccessible for some disabled people but putting in a lift would make it accessible. There's also the attitudinal perspective that people can project their limiting beliefs on a disabled person and focus on what they can't do rather than what they can. Technology is changing at such a rapid rate, for example Microsoft have developed a seeing AI which uses artificial intelligence and a camera so a person can wave their phone and it will tell them what is in their environment. Disabled people won't necessarily be aware of this life transformative technology so it's about looking at the potential, possibilities and opportunities rather than the limitations so that you can come to solutions that work for everybody.

I'm really proud of the successful work I initiated to transform the NHS with the #NoWheelChairTax Campaign which saw the abolition of all disabled car parking charges at 206 NHS hospitals in England, helping 2.5 million disabled people access critical healthcare in England. We have now had our proposal to increase disabled street parking from one to four hours agreed at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and it should be implemented in autumn. As most hospital trusts have fixed capacity in their car parks, we would like to replicate the street parking model for all councils in England. This cross sector work across transport and health demonstrates the systems solutions I'm passionate about in order to tackle the most profound issues and challenges in society.

I am currently a Director for the Centre to Access Football in Europe which aims to make the match day experience accessible for disabled fans, working with FIFA and UEFA. It's tokenistic for a big club to have one or two wheelchair spaces to watch the game. No disabled fan wants to get into litigation with their club and it's a David and Goliath battle so

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we launched a campaign to compel the clubs to make reasonable adjustments to make their stadiums accessible and proportionally representational. When I was Trustee of the charity Level Playing Field, we went into direct conflict with the premier league to bring about systems change. Faced with the prospect

of being sued by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, clubs agreed to make the necessary changes. Two of the worst offenders were Chelsea and Manchester United. We had quite an acrimonious relationship with Chelsea, my local club, but I became friends with the project director for the redevelopment of their stadium and

explained why the changes were essential; it's so positive when you can connect with people on a values level. The redevelopment director was able to help to push through the changes when the club planned to move to Wembley Stadium and Manchester United followed suit. I am hugely proud that I contributed to this transformation.

I'm on the Covid19 priority research group with Health Data Research UK, where we prioritize research questions that are sent to SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies). I have helped to prioritise investigating the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on both BAME and disabled people.

A lot of disabled people feel isolated all the time but during this pandemic, society has, in a way, become disabled. One of the changes I see in a post-Covid world is that a lot of people will shift towards a more social value led career. The pandemic has given people an opportunity to reflect on why they are doing the job they are in, whether it brings them and their family happiness and perhaps make some fundamental changes.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. My journey is perhaps better reflected by the words, 'The unexamined life has no true meaning.' I used to think of my disability as a curse when I was in school and ask myself questions like 'Why am I weaker and smaller than everyone else? Why am I in so much pain?' Now I've discovered that you can choose to put negative or positive labels on disability. There are blessings a person can derive from any experience in life and mine has made me humbler, more balanced and grounded as well as passionately committed to helping other disabled people in the UK and around the world. I know what a challenge everyday life can be and this experience informs my work every day."

