

Ink-sulting:

Why tattoos shouldn't limit your career prospects.

Some employers may view face piercings and tattoos negatively, but more companies are realising the value of self-expression at work.

Vikki Knowles
The Guardian

Tuesday, 11th August 2015



We hear it time and time again: having tattoos will hinder your job prospects, and a new recent survey from YouGov shows little change in attitudes towards body art. Around one in five Brits have tattoos, and while 44% of adults said they would feel no differently about someone with a large tattoo, 36% still said they would feel less positively about that person, with just 3% thinking more positively.

Nevertheless, 86% of those with body art didn't regret having it, so it seems self-expression is still important to Britons in the workplace.

According to the Colourful Lives report, 33% think a casual dress code would improve productivity and nearly double that feel that it would boost their happiness, with the report noting one in 10 bare their tattoos at least once a week.

So, while research from the British Sociological Association of 15 managers warns that some viewed tattoos negatively, it seems they are out of step with the attitudes of staff. With your productivity and happiness potentially at stake, is there refuge out there for the ink-proud?

Meet Hilary Jones. Sporting long red hair and tattoos since the early 80s, she interviewed for Lush when the company first started in 1995. Two decades later, she's still working for the cosmetics company, now as their ethics director.

Along with companies like Google and Ikea, Lush has a reputation of being a tattoo-friendly employer but actually, Jones tells me, there is no official policy and they've never had an internal discussion about tattoos. "We don't have an appearance policy," she says, "we've never been prejudiced against anything."

She recalls a "really lovely" employee called Ben, who interviewed for a job at the Lush factory with 25 facial piercings. He told them he hadn't worked for three years because of his appearance – but that he was also very reliable and would do the best job possible.

"We just thought: you don't even have to discuss the facial piercings, because we've never judged anyone on what clothes they wore. They could come in a suit or a pair of jeans; what we're after is the attitude of the person," says Jones.

Having 25 facial piercings or tattoos up the side of an employee's face is irrelevant, she says. "We don't discriminate on the grounds of colour," she notes, and "our customers don't care about that; they care about quality customer service." And that seems to be in great shape, as this year Lush has been crowned top out of 100 UK high-street stores for its friendly customer service.

30 Jones says that Lush became a safe haven for those who were normally met with prejudice; that goes for gay people, vegetarians and vegans as well, with Lush employing many more people from these groups than the national average. "It's a safe harbour," she says. "We all just accept each other."

Of course, one way to avoid tattoo policies altogether is to be self-employed. Lee Hiller is a freelance hairdresser in Bristol, with a tattoo sleeve on his left arm. Many of his clients are inquisitive about his
35 ink, and being his own boss means he can dress as he pleases, but that wasn't always the case. Working at a supermarket in his late teens, he was asked to cover up his tattoos – with a watch, a wristband, and even asked if he could wear a longer shirt.

"I'm not being a rebel," he says, "I'm not trying to make a statement. I'm dressed really smartly." He felt that his employer didn't accept him visually, and moreover, that those workplaces that do embrace
40 tattoos are much more relaxing to be in. "It's not like [the employees] are slacking. It's just that everyone's allowed to be themselves."

For those of you with visible tattoos, there's nothing stopping you achieving a successful career, says Hiller. "There are loads of jobs where it wouldn't matter," he says, from carpentry and building work to brewing wine or beer. "There's so many options. If you want to be a music producer, it doesn't matter."
45 He says the employers who uphold a "small-minded" policy on tattoos are not ones he would choose to work for anyway. "The types of jobs that you are not allowed tattoos for are probably the most boring jobs."