



Best Practices

Self Identification

Disability:Inclusive Workplaces

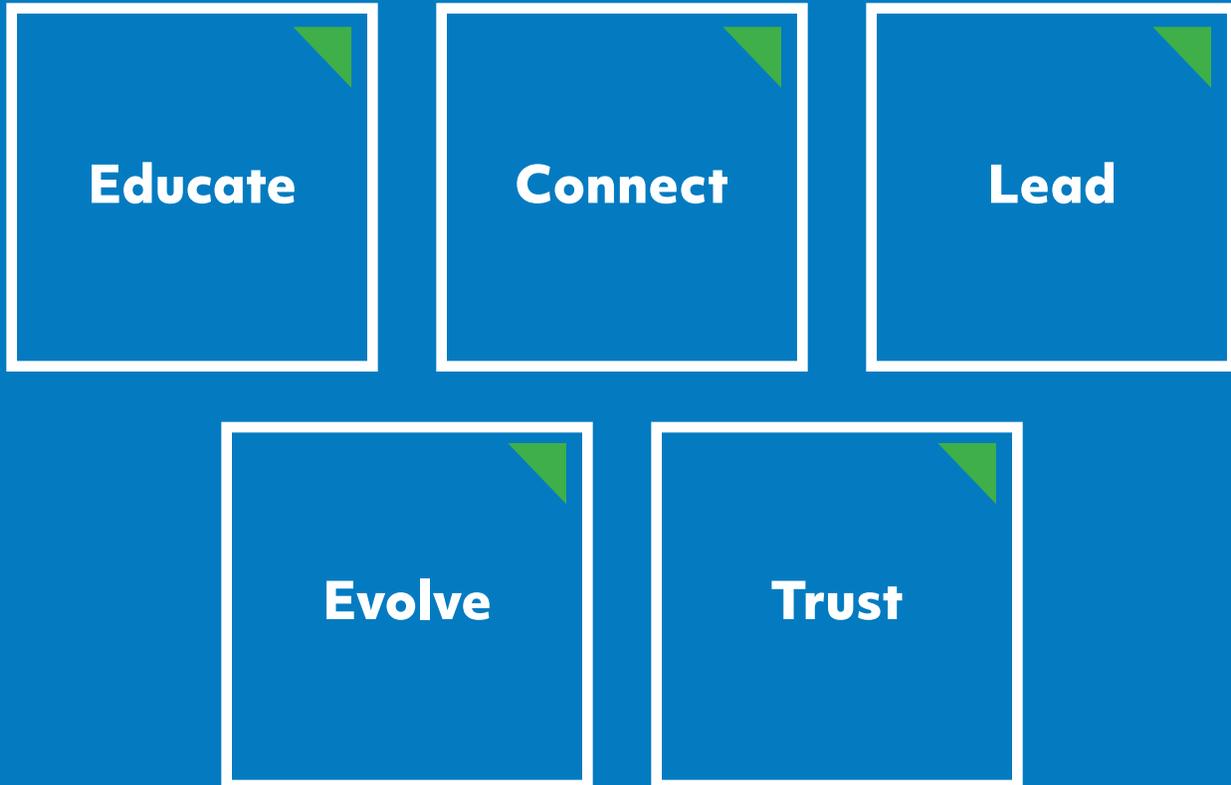


How can companies create a work culture where employees are comfortable disclosing a disability?

Now more than ever, how people identify, as well as when and why they disclose a disability, determines workplace culture. Research shows it is not an overstatement to say that having more people who openly disclose their disability creates an inclusive culture that has the power to dramatically shape future business culture and success. But here's the reality:

In interviews with leaders participating in the 2019 Disability Equality Index (DEI), we uncovered insights that offer fresh perspective on how to effectively boost the number of people who self-identify as having a disability. There's room for growth. While 92% of businesses encourage employees with a disability to self-identify and 95% have a confidential reporting process in place, on average, only 3.7% of DEI participants' employees disclosed their disability to their employer at any point. So how do you capture at least some of the 19% who qualify as having a disability according to the U.S. Census?

Start With These Five Key Actions



1. Educate: Use Your Experts

Many businesses reported that no matter how well vetted their self-ID materials were, there were unanticipated questions and feedback. The most common theme? Whatever collateral you offer, be sure to run it by your in-house experts—people with disabilities, often in Business or Employee Resource Groups (B/ERGs). As one executive said: When people with disabilities talk, non-disabled people listen.

“One key to our success was making sure our managers had the tools they needed to start the conversation with confidence. Strong manager-employee relationships are key to developing trust. To best position our managers for success, we provided them with resources to help them better understand the importance of self-identification, how to position the conversation and the most appropriate language to use when integrating the topic into team huddles and meetings. In addition, we’ve developed a toolkit that includes step-by-step instructions on the Self-ID process, explains what qualifies as a disability and provides information on who to contact with questions or concerns about confidentiality. We are happy to be seeing an increase in disclosure numbers since putting these efforts into place.”

—— Dawnita Wilson, Director, Global Diversity and Inclusion, Sodexo

2. Connect: More People, Less Paper

Not sure you have the bandwidth for more town halls, Ted-style talks or lunch-and-learns? This may change your mind: According to a recent Harvard Business Review study, face-to-face requests are 34 times more effective than emailed ones.

“It’s common for employees to ask why we need information on their disability status. Are we just being nosy? We are trying to dispel that myth by spotlighting the voices of people with disabilities. We’ve had great success when we ask military and disability ERG members to offer the reason why self-ID is important to them. They often stress that ‘your voice counts’ and discuss the larger reasons why a company is interested in gathering data. At one point, our department took the self-ID campaign on the road to some of the smaller offices. During those presentations and talks, we learned a lot about how to successfully approach the topic of disclosure.”

—— Kristen Cook, Manager, Diversity and Inclusion, McKesson Corporation

3. Lead: Take It From The Top Down

This year’s data shows that 94% of DEI companies have a senior executive who is internally known as being a person with a disability or ally. But less than 10% of senior-level employees were willing to disclose a disability (EY). Consider giving voice to mid-level leaders with disabilities who are eager to talk. In this way, a narrow self-ID conversation expands and shifts to one about openness at the office and showing disability pride.



People will ask about their journey. They can talk about their work and being part of a forward-thinking company. Put another way, instead of asking people to ‘come out’, you are inviting them into the fold.

“I have been fortunate to find a place that allows leaders and all of their employees to bring their best selves to work. I am dyslexic and this is my superpower. Often, my learning disability forces me to plan and over-prepare. Because I am forced to plan, I am usually over-prepared for things that most people consider no-brainers. So, when stress happens, I am much more prepared for it. One of the challenges I face with dyslexia is my sense of direction – it’s very difficult to navigate new places, which forces me to map things out to the gnat’s eyelash. And, because I have to review and crosscheck everything several times, my level of accuracy and attention to detail is heightened, ironically. There is a lot of passion around the topic of disability here and because so many people are comfortable talking about it, the idea of ‘disclosing’ a disability isn’t an issue.”

—— Nan Ferrara, EVP, Operations and Continuous Improvement (CI), Voya Financial

4. Evolve: Can You Do Less With More Energy & Purpose

You may need to change your strategy and then change it again. As long as you stay true to the company’s core values, you won’t find yourself too far off course. It’s your business to push people to engage in normalizing self-identification and to create a strategy in which disability is not equated with a deficit.

“Driving to a more inclusive and accepting culture included collecting videos from associates with disabilities across Anthem that captured how they felt about working here. In these videos, associates spoke openly about their disabilities and experiences, referenced the various benefits that our organization provides, supporting them to thrive in their roles, and provided their own individual perspectives on why it is important for associates to self-identify. Offering a platform for associates to share their stories, provided associates across the company an opportunity to hear and learn from them and others who already blazed the trail. As a result, the number of associates who chose to self-identify as having a disability or update their disability-related information following the launch of the campaign, more than doubled.”

—— Merrill A Friedman, Sr. Director, Disability Policy Engagement, Anthem, Inc.

5. Trust: How To Get It & Keep It

Encouraging employees with disabilities to self-ID requires trust and trust is built by actions leaders take. Investing time and resources in accessible tools and technologies and creating an easily accessed, responsive accommodations process can send the message that your workplace embraces people with disabilities— from candidates to existing employees. Your company values the creativity and innovation that result from a truly diverse workforce. Beyond that, executives said, be human. Put people, not their disability, first.

What Exactly Is The Definition Of A Disability?

Don't assume that employees know exactly what qualifies as a disability. If you survived cancer two years ago, are you considered disabled? YES. If you use a cane on bad days to get around at work — does that count? It depends. It would be considered a disability if the impairment substantially limits one or more major life activities and is of a duration of 6 months longer. Nearly 20% of the workforce fits into the current definition of living with a disability; 75% of individuals with disabilities have nonapparent disabilities (Census). The term "disability" is defined by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities," (2) a record of such an impairment, or (3) regarded as having such an impairment. For more information on U.S. disability non-discrimination laws, visit [DOL's Disability Nondiscrimination Law Advisor \(DOL\)](#).

Examples Include:

- Deafness
- Blindness
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Epilepsy
- Intellectual disabilities
- Partial or completely missing limbs
- Mobility impairments requiring the use of a wheel chair
- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- HIV infection
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscular dystrophy
- Major depressive disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Schizophrenia

Courtesy: examples, SHRM, definition DOL



Self-ID vs. Self-Disclosure: What's the Difference?

For purposes of this publication:

- **Self-identification** is the act of checking the box on the “Voluntary Self-Identification of Disability” form that you may see during the application process, during onboarding at a new company, or at regular intervals when asked by your employer. Completing the Self-Identification form is a voluntary decision.
- **Self-disclosure** is the act of personally communicating a disability to another person. It is a voluntary decision and may be necessary if an accommodation is needed to participate in an interview, at work or during other activities.

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