

Guidelines for Managers and Supervisors of Personnel with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities have generally poorer health, lower education, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 15 percent of the world's population, estimated 1 billion people have a disability. On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development officially came into force. Over the next fifteen years, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. Persons with disabilities continue to be marginalized globally in the workforce due to myths that accommodations are too expensive and/or preconceived ideas of recruiters and/or hiring managers on how they would do the job with the persons disability. In fact, accommodations are generally not expensive and persons with disabilities bring unique characteristics and skills to the workforce.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) “recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.” Below you will find helpful tips and guidelines for managers to help create an inclusive (and accessible) workplace and culture for persons with disabilities.

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Culture for Hiring, Managing, and Empowering Persons with Disabilities

The Role of the Manager

Managers have a vital role in creating an inclusive work environment to attract, recruit, and retain valuable diverse skills and talent by providing day-to-day leadership, removing barriers, and building a culture in which everyone is respected. The type of relationship that a manager builds with team members also has a significant effect on developing and maintaining an open and inclusive culture based on respect. In addition, it is the manager's responsibility to identify additional resources and guidance (toolkits, training, etc.) existing within and outside the organization to provide support for persons with disabilities in the workplace.

It is the line manager who:

- has the ongoing responsibility for implementing the people management policies and practices that will support persons with disabilities at workplace,
- is responsible for creating a culture of diversity and inclusion within their team by promoting open communication and an ongoing acceptance and acknowledgement of the value of different perspectives,
- ensures that the workplace is a respectful environment for persons with disabilities, that is to say, each staff member recognizes and respects the qualitative differences in the experiences of persons with disabilities,
- informs their team that non-inclusive language is not acceptable and reminds that discrimination of any kind cannot be tolerated, and
- should handle conversations on disclosure of disabilities with empathy and avoid making assumptions about employees' disabilities. Given that building and maintaining trust is essential for such conversations, managers should respect employees' privacy and act accordingly.



It is essential that a line manager is knowledgeable about the organisation's framework for managing persons with disabilities and understands their role within that, including but not limited to making reasonable adjustments when needed.

Hiring Persons with Disabilities

Hiring persons with disabilities is not an act of charity. Persons with disabilities are hired because they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform well on the job and are held to the same standards as their peers without disabilities. Persons with disabilities have the same human rights as those without a disability and should receive the same considerations and opportunities for selection as those without a disability. Recruitment and Selection employees should include diversity and inclusion trainings and make guidance documents available to staff for further reference to minimize unconscious bias against persons with disabilities.

It is important for managers to know how to create an inclusive hiring process for persons with disabilities. Here are a few general tips to keep in mind:

Attract a wide range of persons with disabilities:

- Make it clear in your recruitment postings that your organisation is committed to diversity and inclusion, and welcomes applications from persons with a disability;
- Make disability hiring and the representation of different types of disabilities a priority in your organization. A diverse workforce is a stronger workforce;
- Understand the general process of reasonable accommodation and how to engage in the interactive process
- Explain the hiring process to every candidate, and ask whether they will need a reasonable accommodation for this process;
- Create a safe environment for employees to self-identify and self-disclose by reassuring that all details will be treated as confidential; Create inclusive job descriptions: define duties and responsibilities with statements starting with an action verb (present tense), use gender neutral and non-discriminatory language, use clear, simple, and precise language, be as specific as possible – write details regarding where, when, why, and how.
- Conduct targeted outreach to attract qualified candidates with disabilities. Successful recruitment efforts can be built through collaboration with community-based partners that have connections to qualified candidates;
- Ensure that job announcements posted on job boards and social networking sites are in formats that are accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Provide a point in contact for a person with a disability who may have questions about the recruitment process.

Make adjustments to your recruitment process

You may need to make adjustments to each stage of the recruitment process to make sure you do not put any candidate at a disadvantage because of their disability:

- You cannot ask questions about an individual's disability during the recruitment process. However, as part of the recruitment process it is important to ask all applicants whether they need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the recruitment or selection process;
- Make sure you give every candidate the time-bound opportunity with advance notice to discuss these in advance of an interview or other selection test. You should not make assumptions about what adjustments are needed or are feasible on behalf of candidates;
- Be knowledgeable and receptive to the Reasonable Accommodation procedures and flexible work arrangements for employees with disabilities. Understand how to respect privacy and confidentiality;



- Ensure that all supervisors understand the general process of reasonable accommodations especially as it applies to persons with non-obvious disabilities, and make sure to ask questions that are related to the essential functions of the position. “Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Ensure that the interview room is accessible or appropriately equipped to accommodate the candidates with disabilities;
- Ensure that selection exercises and tests are accessible for persons with disabilities, building universal designs into your selection exercises and tests from the beginning results in lower costs and less effort than trying to make them accessible once they are developed.
- Adapt tests or selection exercises, for example, by granting some additional time for completion, or questioning whether timed tests are needed at all

Remember, many adjustments are straightforward and can be implemented easily, at little or no cost.

Managing Persons with Disabilities:

There should never be assumptions about someone’s ability to perform to a high standard due to a disability. Developing an inclusive culture means recognising that a person with a disability can thrive at work if they are provided an enabling environment. The performance management should, in essence, be a positive process and focus on the support needed to empower all persons with disabilities to perform to the best of their ability.

- Make adjustment to the performance process
 - Ask your team members about which communication style works best – for example, they might prefer receiving instructions in writing or in person
 - Make workplace adjustments – for example, dividing large assignments into smaller goals, reducing distractions, using to-do lists, and providing space enclosures
 - Use accessible meeting rooms
 - Allow team members longer time to prepare for meetings
- Discuss performance
 - To effectively manage your team’s performance, you should have regular discussions with all of your team members on a one-to-one basis. These discussions can be formal meetings focused on the individual’s work, providing positive, constructive feedback and identifying development needs;
 - Establish written performance expectations;
 - Apply performance standards uniformly and consistently to all employees, including persons with disabilities;
 - Document performance early, and always;
 - Inform employee about observed performance issues. Identify what the most important message you want to communicate about your employee’s performance:



- Identify 1-3 key elements
 - Particular strengths demonstrated
 - Most critical needs for improvement
 - Most important development needs
- Ask employee what reasonable accommodation(s) they think will help improve their performance;
 - Describe how the person's performance fell short of the required standard with specific examples. Talk about the work and not the person, for example 'The sales figures for last month' rather than 'Your aggressive manner with customers';
 - Offer support and inform employees that assistance is available to enable employees to meet performance standards. This creates a safe space for disclosure and opens the door to discuss reasonable accommodation, which can play a key role in performance improvement.

If under-performance is an issue, managers need to discuss potential adjustments or support that could help bridge someone's gap in performance. Possible adjustments could include extra training or supervision, providing a mentor, adjusting someone's responsibilities or adjustments in the workplace.

Retaining & Advancing Careers of Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities should have the same opportunities for promotion and progression as all team members. Managers should explore additional opportunities to support advancement of a person with a disability, including but not limited to mentoring and employee network/support groups. It is important for managers to know how to create an inclusive environment and advancement opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Here are a few helpful best practices that can be modified or implemented to increase retention rates and advancement of persons with disabilities:

Career Development

- Ensure all online professional development classes and materials are fully accessible;
- Reserve a portion of employee training funds to provide disability related accommodations for training opportunities;
- Offer personal development and specialized leadership programs for employees with disabilities. Many employees, whether disabled or not, will benefit from training that helps develop confidence and understand their personal strengths and weaknesses;
- Managers/Supervisors should talk to every employee, including those with disabilities about where they see their career is going. Help them identify the skills they need to acquire in order to progress in their career.

Conduct exit interviews with separated employees with disabilities, make sure diversity and inclusion are also part of the questions asked to identify areas that need further improvement in your workplace.

Having a good understanding of the reasons for turnover will help you formulate more effective retention strategy and efforts for persons with disabilities.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For more information, below are additional resources for managers and supervisors:

JAN-Job Accommodation Network (www.askjan.org)

Business Disability Forum (businessdisabilityforum.uk)

ILO Business and Disability Network (<http://www.businessanddisability.org/>)

ODEP - Office of Disability and Employment Policy (www.dol.gov/odep/)

VCU-RRTC - Virginia Commonwealth University – Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
(www.worksupport.com)

NOD-National Organization on Disability (www.nod.org)

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (<https://www.un.org/development>)