

The background features a dark blue gradient with faint, light-colored technical graphics. These include several circular gauges or dials with numerical scales (e.g., 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260) and various circular patterns, some solid and some dashed, suggesting a complex system or data visualization.

ACCOMMODATING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BASED ON THEIR ABILITIES

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HOW COMMON IS DISABILITY?

- 26% of people in the U.S. report having some kind of disability (disclosure is voluntary)
- Today's 20-year-olds have a 27% chance of becoming disabled before reaching retirement age.
- Only 30.9% of people with disabilities between the ages of 18-64 are employed.

REASONS FOR THE LOW LEVEL OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

Lack of accessible education/skill development for people with disabilities

- However, universities and employers are working to change that

Concern about lower levels of productivity

- Studies show that the productivity of disabled workers is no less than that of their abled peers

REASONS FOR LOW LEVELS OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

Fear of lawsuits/legal costs (relating to hiring, firing, or providing accommodations)

- Studies show that the benefits (increase in profits, retention, and innovation) far outweigh the potential costs

Fear of customers' reactions to people with disabilities

- Studies show that employing people with disabilities improves customer loyalty and satisfaction

COWORKERS' FEARS WHEN WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Poor quality of work or unequal workloads
- Resentment of accommodations such as modified inclement weather policies
 - On the surface that seems unfair – but it can be crucial for a person unable to walk on ice
- Negative interpersonal interactions:
 - Conversations made more difficult due to awkwardness, discomfort, guilt, pity, or fear of offending

HOW HAS COVID-19 ADDED TO THESE FEARS?

- People with disabilities are identified as being at greater risk of serious complications
- Indications of disabilities can be mistaken for contagious illnesses including COVID-19
- As a result, people with disabilities are more isolated than before the pandemic



HOW DO WE OVERCOME THESE FEARS?

FOCUS ON ABILITIES!

START WITH INCLUSIVE CONVERSATION

Discomfort is good when it leads to inclusion and understanding

- Respectful questions
- Supportive answers
- Accommodations appropriate to position and disability
- Learning from mistakes

Discomfort is bad when it divides people through fear

- Unwilling to ask questions for fear of offense
- Attempts to accommodate that are ineffective or unnecessary

Disability Etiquette

Examples:

- Person-first vs identity-first language (e.g. person with autism vs. autistic person)
 - Which is correct? It depends on a person's preferences
- Avoid negative descriptors
 - Has Cerebral Palsy vs “is suffering from” or “is a victim of” Cerebral Palsy
- Demonstrate the same level of respect you would use when interacting with an abled person.

DON'T ASSUME DISABILITY MEANS INABILITY

- People with disabilities often self-accommodate according to specific disability
 - Sturdy sport shoes with tread to prevent slips and no raised heel
 - Soft shoes with a thick, cushioned heel for comfort and reduced distraction

IF SELF-ACCOMMODATION IS INSUFFICIENT, ANY MEMBER OF THE TEAM CAN HELP

1. Provide a safe, encouraging environment to have these conversations.
2. This isn't just HR/Supervisor responsibility; anyone can help if they see an opportunity
3. Example – A team member showing me where the extra chairs were, so I could find one that works for me. (Happened due to conversation)

PLAY TO A PERSON'S STRENGTHS WITHIN A POSITION/TEAM

- Disabilities can become strengths in some cases.
- As with any team, productivity depends on working together, depending on one another's strengths, compensating for weaknesses. No one can do it all.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS FORCED BUSINESSES TO EXPAND WORKING FROM HOME

This can be both a challenge and an advantage

- Physical disabilities are more easily hidden
- Staying home may be a comfortable situation for someone with social or neurological challenges.
- However, it can also cut a person off from peer support or services needed to manage the disability
- Multi-tasking, especially caring for children to during work hours, can be more difficult if the working parent or the child has a disability.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MASK

- People with some types of disabilities can not wear a face covering safely.
- At the same time, going out in public without a mask puts both the person with the disability and others around them at risk.
- People lie about disabilities as an excuse for being unmasked
 - Leads to people with actual disabilities being viewed with suspicion
 - Like misuse of reserved parking, abuse of an accommodation does not negate the fact that some actually need it.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MASK

Personal Situation

- I can use a typical tight mask, but it because of sensory sensitivity associated with autism, it causes severe distraction.
- I can't drive, walk where there is traffic, or perform technical work with anything tight around my face.
- Yet, not wearing a mask could be an opportunity for viral transmission.

DISTRACTIONS FROM THE MASK IMPACTS SEVERAL ASPECTS OF LIFE

- Driving. Distraction could result in a fatal accident.
- Walking with street crossings could also be deadly when distracted.
- Technical work with the tight mask could result in damaging mistakes.
- Essential shopping. Distracted by a tight mask, I often leave the store without items I need, even if I bring a written list.

SELF-ACCOMMODATION VARIES WITH SITUATION – INCLUDING THE OPTION OF AN ACCOMMODATING FACE COVER

- I drive only alone so no mask is needed.
- Walking outdoors, there is room to maintain distance.
- For shopping, I use the accommodating face cover.
- If I need to work on-site, I will close the office door.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html#:~:text=61%20million%20adults%20in%20the,is%20highest%20in%20the%20South.>
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QUESTION AND ANSWER TIME

Apply what we've learned

Don't be afraid to ask challenging questions

Be respectful