

Disabilities and return to work planning

Highlights from Disability:IN's
2020 Executive Sponsor
Roundtable

Introduction

Thirty percent of American workers have disabilities,* and about the same percentage of families include one or more people with disabilities.** Many of these households include someone who is immunocompromised and sheltering with family during the COVID-19 crisis.

As organizations plan to return to the workplace, they can take away key learnings from experience implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) over the past 30 years.

Two of the more ubiquitous changes driven by the ADA are captions and curb cuts. Captions were created for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and curb cuts were introduced for people who use wheelchairs. Today these innovations benefit a broad range of people in many situations, from fans watching a televised game in a noisy sports bar, to travelers rolling luggage down city streets.

Message from Roundtable facilitator Megan Hobson, EY Americas Director of Administration, AccessAbilities Professional Network Executive Sponsor, and Disability:IN Board Member

As the EY Americas Administration Leader, return to the workplace planning is part of my day job. For many years, I've also served as Executive Sponsor of AccessAbilities, the EY professional network (employee resource group) focused on disabilities in the workplace. I've learned a great deal from the disabilities community that's especially relevant as we consider how to safely bring people of all abilities, including caregivers and people living with immunocompromised family or friends, back into our offices and client sites.

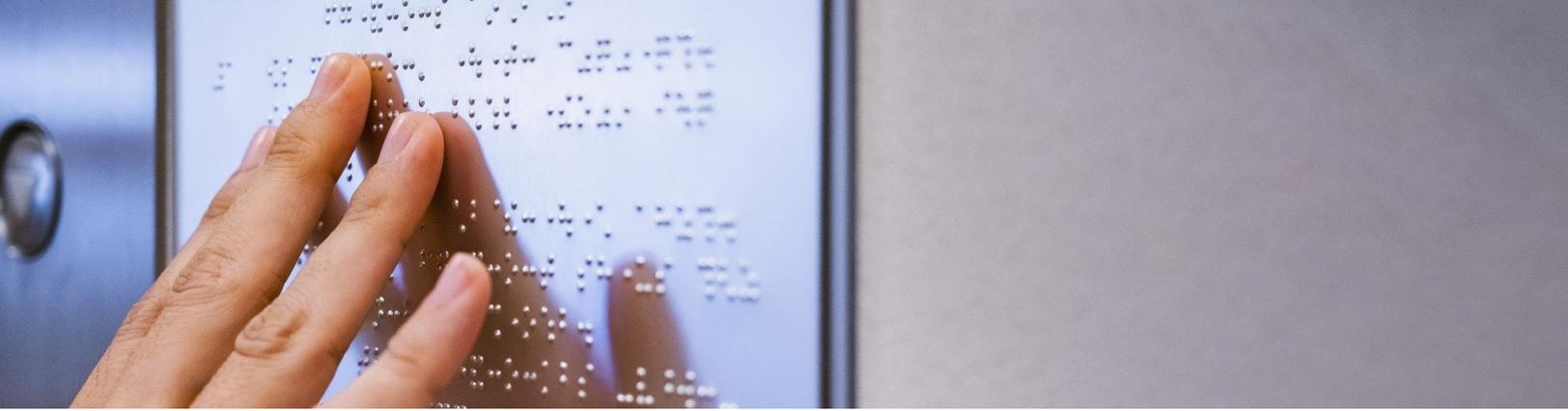
We know many organizations are facing these same issues and employee disability groups are uniquely equipped to share ideas that benefit the entire workforce. At Ernst & Young LLP (EY) we're integrating many suggestions from people with disabilities into our overall plans. We're always eager to learn from and share with our peers, and I was honored to facilitate a lively discussion among disability ERG executive sponsors at the Disability:IN annual conference.



Megan Hobson

* Source: Center for Talent Innovation, 2018.

** Source: US Census, 2000.



The roundtable

On July 16, 2020, EY and Disability:IN brought together over 40 executives from leading global companies to discuss how they're considering the needs of workers with disabilities and their families to build return to work plans that will help their entire workforces feel safer and more secure.

All participants were executive sponsors of disability employee resource groups (ERGs). (A full list of participating companies can be found on page 3.) The one-hour virtual conversation was kept confidential so attendees could speak more freely. Following a robust discussion, there was strong consensus to continue the dialogue. Among the topics identified for future exploration were innovative technology applications, employee hygiene and safety protocols, and enhancing caregiver and mental health support.

The discussion

Executives agreed on the importance of maintaining open communications at all levels of the organization. Most companies keep people informed via centralized portals or regular newsletter, intranet and/or email updates; they solicit feedback via surveys, listening sessions or "office hours" with leaders. Several CEOs have hosted all-company webcasts, sometimes with unscripted audience question and answer segments. Participants were eager to learn how others are leveraging technology to enable workforce scheduling and food service and simplify accommodations. Virtually all organizations are enhancing cleaning procedures, re-evaluating space and reconfiguring layouts to facilitate social distancing. Some are installing plexiglass barriers and/or touchless entry. Nearly all are requiring masks to be worn on premises and restricting visitors; most are supplying masks for all their people. Organizations are considering strategies for making clear face coverings available and promoting safer transportation to and from work for people reliant on mass transit. The conversation closed with general consensus that future discussions explore how to address expanding needs for caregiver and workforce mental health support.

Key themes

- 1. Promote frequent, transparent, two-way communications**
 1. Hold CEO webcasts, town halls with audience Q&A, post blogs
 2. Send regular newsletter and email updates
 3. Host listening sessions with leadership
 4. Encourage team-based dialogues
 5. Survey the workforce
 6. Plan ERG discussions followed by report-outs to leadership
- 2. Apply technology applications to**
 1. Schedule staggered employee arrival times/office days
 2. Manage entry flows and elevator traffic
 3. Enable food service ordering and pickup
 4. Automate accommodations processes
- 3. Reconsider facilities/space**
 1. Assess square footage requirements given increased telework
 2. Reconfigure layouts to promote social distancing
 3. Explore use of touchless entry
 4. Install plexiglass barriers
- 4. Make it easier to request disabilities support/find resources**
 1. Streamline accommodations processes
 2. Aggregate information into central portals/toolkits
 3. Improve content searchability and visibility
- 5. Optimize worker safety and security**
 1. Enhance cleaning and sanitation procedures
 2. Require employees to wear face masks
 3. Make clear masks available
 4. Limit or prohibit building access by non-employees
 5. Enable safer mass transportation to and from work
- 6. Expand mental health and caregiver support**

Upside opportunities

Several executives pointed out potential positives for businesses able to successfully navigate through these challenging times that will position them well now and in the future. They named four key areas of opportunity.

1. The success of telework can drive more hiring from under-tapped talent pools.
2. The shift toward virtual communication can accelerate digital accessibility improvements.
3. Experience with quick adaptation during crisis can strengthen organizational agility.
4. Empathetic leadership can create greater openness and trust.

How to get involved

The Disability:IN network of over 220 corporations expands opportunities for people with disabilities across enterprises worldwide. Its central office and 27 affiliates make it the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion and collective voice effecting change for people with disabilities in business.

Learn

- ▶ Visit Disability:IN.org for information and tools to advance disability inclusion in the workplace, marketplace and supply chain.
- ▶ Sign up to participate in the 2021 Disability Equality Index.
- ▶ Mark your calendar for July 12-15, 2021 to network with industry peers at the Disability:IN Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Join

Disability:IN members receive a variety of benefits including:

- ▶ Access to NextGen Leaders, a pre-screened talent pipeline of STEM and business college students with disabilities
- ▶ Access to a database of certified disability-owned businesses to meet your supplier diversity needs
- ▶ A global disabilities inclusion directory, monthly webcasts, newsletters and other timely information
- ▶ Communities of interest for executive sponsors, digital accessibility leads, global disabilities inclusiveness professionals, employee resource group leaders and more

Engage

- ▶ Highlight your organization's commitment to disabilities inclusion by inviting your CEO to join CEOs from leading Fortune 1000 companies in signing the Disability:IN CEO to CEO Letter.
- ▶ Contact diana@disabilityin.org to learn more about how your chief executive can sign on and be a champion for disabilities inclusion.

Participating companies

Accenture
Ally Financial
Astellas Pharma, Inc.
Bayer
BMO Harris Bank
Bristol Myers Squibb
Chemonics International Inc.
Chevron
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Choice Hotels International
Comcast NBCUniversal
Cummins Inc.
CUNA Mutual Group
Discover Financial Services
Dominion Energy, Inc.
Eli Lilly and Company
Ernst & Young LLP
Fox Corporation
Grant Thornton LLP
Jacobs Engineering Group
McKesson
Medtronic plc
Merck
Nielsen
Prudential Financial
Reed Smith LLP
Spaulding Rehabilitation Network
State Street Corporation
TEKsystems
Thermo Fisher Scientific
United Airlines
Visa, Inc.
Walgreens

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