

# BRG Ableism/Audism Fact Sheet

## Background and Purpose

The Disability:IN ERG/BRG Leadership Committee has prepared this fact sheet to assist corporate disability Employee Resource Groups/Business Resource Groups to advance a deeper understanding of thinking and actions that stem from misconceptions that surround disability.

## Definitions

**Ableism** - The practices, beliefs and attitudes, intentional or non-intentional, that assign inferior worth to people who have developmental, emotional, learning, neurodiverse, physical or psychiatric disabilities and are based on a medical (to be fixed) vs. social (a dimension of human difference) model for disability. It is a form of repression.

**Audism** - Discrimination or prejudice against individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Examples of Ableism & Audism

### ENVIRONMENTAL

- Company events focused solely on physically demanding activities
- Company off-site social events in locations that are not accessible for all
- Refreshment, Buffet and Dining Tables out of reach for wheelchair users or Little People
- No early planning or insufficient quantity for Sign Language Interpreting and CART
- Holding events that do not accommodate individuals adversely affected by noise and sensory overload

### LANGUAGE

- "I don't even think of you as disabled"; "It's wonderful that you have an Interpreter"
- "I am so OCD"; "That person is crazy"
- 'Hearing Impaired,' 'Deaf and Dumb,' 'Midget', 'Wheelchair Bound'
- 'They are a threat to the comfort and safety of others'
- 'They are an inconvenience, lazy, liars, or manipulators'

## ACTIONS

- Utilizing words and tone used when speaking to a small child
- Bending over or kneeling when speaking to a wheelchair user or Little Person
- Uninvited touching the person or their mobility equipment
- 'Forced Help' insisting on providing help neither requested nor wanted
- Becoming insulted or condescending toward the person who declined assistance
- Thinking that communicating with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing is "too much trouble."

## ASSUMPTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

- All disabilities are visible (75% are non-apparent).
- People with disabilities need to assimilate and perform the job like it is usually done
- 'Gaslighting' e.g. not believing a person with a disability who is offended or hurt by an action or comment as in "Do you really think that their comment was rude?"
- Evaluating how disabled you think a person is by how they appear
- Not believing someone when they state they have a disability and need an accommodation due to non-apparent disability

## Strategies for Combating Ableism/Audism

### COMPANY BEST PRACTICES: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Holding Education & Awareness Campaigns on Disability/Deaf-friendly environments
- Providing reading materials about ableism/audism
- Including/integrating disability training in all appropriate company trainings
- Holding alternatives to experiential or simulation exercises. Good alternatives include:
  - Panel discussions;
  - Personal storytelling;
  - Hosting events presented by individuals and groups of individuals with disabilities on inclusive technology, sports, theatrical performances, and music productions.

## COMPANY BEST PRACTICES: MANAGERS/SPONSORS

- Involving disability community representatives in policy and product development
- Applying lessons from other communities such as the LGBTQ strategy
- Handling performance management discussions separately from disability conversation
- Coaching leaders and other employees on ableism/audism
- Providing training on disability etiquette and respectful language choices
- Sharing business case research and articles on disability as a competitive advantage
- Including accommodation requests in all meeting invitations
- Including workplace accommodations information during performance reviews
- Providing closed captioning or CART services upon request for all large company meetings and having in place standard mechanism for making these requests when meetings are announced
- Being aware of and able to readily direct people to the organization's reasonable accommodations process

## ALLY BEST PRACTICES

- Removing yourself from ableist/audism conversations
- Participating in disability campaigns/communications
- Getting involved in awareness activities such as accessibility audits
- Educating colleagues about Universal Design principles, e.g. inclusive features that are easily used by all such as level entrances with automatic doors
- Knowing and Sharing company's reasonable accommodations process
- Being an empathetic listener when people with disabilities choose to confide in an ally and maintaining any requested confidences
- Letting colleagues with disabilities know that if they need anything, you are available
- Reminding co-workers that 75% of disabilities are non-apparent and to expect that any of their colleagues may have non-apparent disabilities
- Becoming informed and doing your best to regularly utilize disability etiquette and respectful language choices ([United Spinal Association Etiquette Guide](#))

## Additional Actions to Consider (from the 7/15/19 ERG/BRG In-Person Committee Meeting)

- Build engagement with local Disability:IN Affiliates on how to connect the dots around this subject
- If an interview with a job candidate with a disability does not go well, offer a re-do (there may have been unrecognized Ableism/Audism conveyed that adversely affected the interviewee)
- Plan education on this topic at the beginning of new employment life cycle initiatives
- Include this topic for all training on cultural interactions
- Recognize that experiential activities may result in sympathy and not empathy; but even empathy doesn't mean "I know"
- Start with the environment by being intentional up front. For example, all events and meetings should have Sign Language and CART as basic logistic requirements
- Prepare educational materials in positive terms using 'how to' rather than 'don't do' phrasing