

How To Support And Empower Employees With Disabilities

Creating an inclusive workplace means ensuring that employees living with disabilities have the tools and resources they need to succeed. It's a win-win situation: All employees are supported with the tools and flexibility they need to thrive in their positions, and employers create a culture of equity and maximize the potential of every team member.

Below, members of Forbes Human Resources Council share the resources and strategies they've found most effective for empowering employees with disabilities. From accessible technology to thoughtful accommodations, these resources not only support individual employees but also create a more productive and inclusive work environment for all.

1. Create An Empathetic Culture

Focus on creating an empathetic culture. Nothing beats the idea of inclusion. When people and organizations truly understand the power of inclusion and start living and breathing it, everyone feels comfortable. Once a firm is truly inclusive, it becomes the biggest support system for all employees, and the benefits to the firm are immeasurable. - Ruchi Kulhari, Unisys

2. Have A Dedicated Budget For Employee Accommodations

A dedicated budget for accommodations gives companies the flexibility to provide tools and resources that support employees living with disabilities. Keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all solution; you need to truly listen to each individual and partner with them to meet them where they are. Partnership, combined with a dedicated budget, will go a long way. - Jennifer Shewan, Wonolo

3. Ensure Team Members Fully Understand All Their Benefits

Employees should work with HR to fully understand what benefits they have under their medical, vision and dental plans, as well as other benefits.

Many carriers have a variety of programs relating to mental health, physical therapy and so on that may not be advertised or common knowledge. Partnering with your employee assistance program can also yield benefits and new avenues for people to learn about. - Erin ImHof, CertiK

4. Train Line Managers On How To Properly Support Employees

Each employee is the expert when it comes to their own disability, as well as when it comes to the support and equipment they may need. How line managers support employees living with disabilities is essential and sets the tone. Ensure all line managers are aware of the steps they need to take to support employees—they don't need to know everything, but they do need a supportive and “can do” attitude. - Charlotte Sweeney OBE, Charlotte Sweeney Associates (CSA)

5. Allow Job Candidates And Team Members To Submit Specific Support Requests

We provide an accommodation process designed to take requests for specific support structures. This gives job seekers and employees alike the tools and adjustments they need to participate in events and perform their jobs comfortably and effectively. An inclusive, accessible and equitable workplace starts with the job candidate's experience and continues throughout the employment journey. - Tammy Harper, CAI

6. Respectfully Ask For The Team Member's Input

Since most people who have some type of limitation or disability live with it 24/7, they are the best source of information on how to manage their issues. So, the best course of action is to simply and respectfully ask, “Is there anything I can provide to assist you?” - Tracy Jackson, HR E-Z

7. Leverage Employee Resource Groups

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are valuable for employees with disabilities—they help keep the company informed about employees' needs and create a supportive environment. It is crucial to ask employees about their benefit preferences and stay updated on trends. ERGs foster community, understanding and support, ensuring employees feel connected and supported by colleagues. - Paaras Parker, Paycor

8. Enable Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements—like remote work, flexible hours and job sharing—offer crucial support for employees with disabilities. These options make it easier to manage health needs, cut down on commuting and maintain a balanced workload. This flexibility helps employees thrive in their roles while prioritizing their well-being and work-life balance. - Laura Spawn, Virtual Vocations, Inc.

9. Allow Them To Structure Their Workday As Needed

Giving an employee with a disability flexibility in terms of when they do their job is important. For example, they may need to take several longer breaks during the day, which would extend the timeframe required to complete their tasks on a given day. Give them the ability to work at a pace that best suits their needs to achieve successful outcomes. - Janet Vardeman, Avanade

10. Provide Assistive Technology

Assistive technology, such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, ergonomic keyboards and hearing aids, can help employees perform tasks more effectively. Additionally, platforms like Microsoft Accessibility and specialized software can be tailored to meet specific needs, enabling a more inclusive and productive work environment. - Britton Bloch, Navy Federal

Article adapted from members of Forbes Human Resources Council

Reach out to FCH EAP for support

Workplaces play a considerable role in our mental well-being. We can all learn how to support each other and create a culture where it's okay to talk about mental health. This means fostering open conversations, learning how to recognize warning signs, and knowing where to turn for help. Our Clinical Account Executives are available to support organization's supervisors, managers, and HR professionals.

Connect with us!

800-777-4114 | www.FirstChoiceEAP.com

