

Here's Why Disability Awareness and Confidence Training for Your Employees is Key to Creating an Inclusive Work Environment

Second in a two-part series

In 2021, there's more awareness, conversation and action on disability-inclusive recruiting and hiring of talent, than ever before. This is a good thing. For job seekers who have a disability; businesses; and the economy alike. Numerous research reports, studies and statistics show disability inclusion is a win-win for everyone involved in the journey.

For one thing, it's good for your brand, and business: 78% of Canadian consumers say they prefer to purchase from businesses that are disability inclusive. Then there's the business success aspect of it: [A 2018 Deloitte report noted that](#) companies practicing inclusive hiring are eight times more likely to have successful business outcomes, than others not doing so.

Inclusion leads to workplace transformation

Organization-wide company culture transformation happens with intentional disability inclusion.

Paul Clark, Executive Vice-President of TD, said this in a 2020 episode of [You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D](#), a podcast produced by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) that explores the many facets of disability inclusion in business and employment:

“When you look inside of TD, I think what you're seeing is an organization that recognizes, one, our colleagues are demanding this (an inclusive culture); two, it's a strategic imperative if we're going to win, and three; it's just a heck of a lot more fun to work in an environment that's diverse and inclusive.”

He added, “We have a ton of fun. And I think we have fun because people feel they can be themselves. They don't have to hide who they are, and they can bring their whole selves to work. It makes a huge difference.”

Having the right attitude, awareness and confidence — for everyone, at all levels of your business — is essential for experiencing all the positive business benefits and company culture that can happen with intentional, proactive disability-inclusive recruiting, onboarding, and retention/promotion.

This is why it's vital for businesses to invest in [disability awareness and confidence training \(DACT\)](#) for everyone in your organization. From front-line staff, to hiring managers, to the business owner or CEO. It should be your first step to making disability-inclusive hiring, "business as usual."

How DACT helps avoid, or mitigate, many concerns

It's important to learn and understand that disability is complex and personal. It impacts each individual differently. And how you understand or perceive disability, affects how you'll address it in the workplace.

- **It's vital for preventing assumptions and generalizations.** Jean-Marc Valmont, Human Resources Manager at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), said in a session on disability awareness and confidence, at a March 2021 ODEN Rethinking Disability virtual conference:

"One of the first challenges I experienced in this field (HR) in particular, was that people with disabilities are often kind of lumped into one category... That was one of the struggles we had from an internal aspect, with our hiring managers."

- **Without DACT, stereotyping can happen.** And you'll probably — unconsciously — use labels. Your innate perception of disability will impact how you see and treat people. That's why stereotypes about people who have a disability are harmful. They perpetuate outdated ideas, myths and misconceptions, and fuel bias.
- **You'll make fewer mistakes on your journey — ones that could cascade, otherwise.** Even if you've already started the disability-inclusion journey at your business, it's never too late to start educating yourself and everyone else in your company. Otherwise, it's like setting out on a drive and deciding to take the scenic backroads without a map, or GPS: More than likely, you'll end up making wrong turns that make the trip a lot harder and longer than necessary.

Said Jean-Marc Valmont: "When I first started out, my goal was just to get representation (of people who have a disability). I wasn't focused on finding the right individual, for the right role. And so, when we were going through a hiring process, I was really encouraging our managers to take on staff that probably weren't right for certain roles. And that led to a lack of performance, which led to our managers not ... being comfortable enough to deal with performance issues, which just kind of compounded all the issues we were having."

- **DACT can help you reduce employee turnover and the high costs of it.** High turnover is a critical business issue in several sectors. Having the right attitude, awareness, and confidence about disability-inclusive hiring, helps you create a culture that can make you an employer of choice. Everyone wants to work in an

environment where they feel valued and safe. That's inclusion. And valued, safe, and engaged employees will stay.

Want a bottom-line incentive to invest in DACT? Consider this:

It can cost an average \$4,000 to \$18,000 to replace **one employee** when you factor in recruitment, initial training and onboarding. This amount is much, much, higher when replacing management and leadership positions. Most studies show that replacing an executive-level employee costs up to 213% of the annual salary.

- **It's critical for managers, and for effective performance management.** Don't think you need to or should, lower expectations, or circumvent standard processes, when it comes to managing staff who have a disability. Managing employees who have a disability requires the same performance-management treatment, standards and procedures that you follow for everyone else on your team.

The key to any employee's success is consistent, positively delivered, supportive performance management. Don't wait to address problems until performance issues reach a point of no-return, or when an employee is struggling.

- **You'll learn to master the "Golden Rule" of disability inclusion, awareness and confidence.** [Ask The Person](#). Never assume, for example, that the way you're used to onboarding and training a new employee, is right for every employee. Everyone learns differently. And don't automatically think that a new hire who has a disability, needs or doesn't need an adjustment or accommodation to be successful and productive. Ask the person what they need to bring their best to the job. In fact, you should ask your whole team what they need to help the whole team be successful.

Committing to success with DACT

The disability-inclusion journey requires commitment at all levels, and it needs to be driven, from the top down. But it can't be an initiative that happens only in some departments of the business. To create a truly inclusive culture, disability awareness and confidence must permeate every level of your organization.

Here's the best thing about investing and engaging in disability awareness and confidence training — even if you're already on the disability-inclusive hiring journey: You'll be setting up yourself, your employees and your business, for long-term success.

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