

# A Guide to Disability Inclusion in the Workplace



At Hummingbird Humanity, we strive to amplify the voices of the unheard. As we observe **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** this October, we are reminded of its original purpose. In 1945, Congress declared the first week of October as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week, as an effort to educate the public about the issues related to disability and employment.

Since then, the language has evolved and the observance has been expanded to a month, paying tribute to the accomplishments of people with disabilities and advocating for their right to equal access. 1 in 4 adults (26%) in the United States have some type of disability, it is likely that your colleagues, managers, and organizational leaders are part of this community. In order to create inclusive workplaces, we must inform ourselves on experiences outside of our own.

This guide includes some terminology and models of disability, etiquette, and best practices for accessibility in the workplace.

## Terminology

A disability is an impairment of the body or mind that requires an individual to navigate the world differently as it relates to everyday life activities and interactions. There are different types of disabilities and they have been classified as [The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health \(ICF\)](#) by the World Health Organization.

### Definition



Mobility & Physical Impairment	Psychological Disorders	Cognitive or Learning
<i>upper/lower limb, dexterity</i>	<i>bipolar disorder, schizophrenia</i>	<i>dementia, dyslexia, ADHD</i>
Visual	Head Injury/ Brain Disability	Invisible
<i>glaucoma, color blindness</i>	<i>acquired or traumatic</i>	<i>umbrella term that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities that can be genetic or acquired such as lupus, fibromyalgia, diabetes, etc.</i>
Spinal Cord Injury	Hearing	
<i>accidental or congenital</i>	<i>hearing loss, deafness</i>	



**More in-depth information on types of disabilities can be found [here](#).**

# Models



## FACT:

**30%** of the workforce has a disability in one form or another – and the majority are keeping it a secret.

Disability activists and scholars developed the models of disability in order to name the various cultural responses to disability. Each model has its own history and is unique in cultural context. Below are three of the most discussed models:

## 1. Medical

The medical model of disability is presented as viewing disability as a problem of the person, directly caused by disease, trauma, or other health condition which therefore requires sustained medical care provided in the form of individual treatment by professionals.

In this model, disability is viewed as something that needs to be "cured," and that the individual must adjust or change in order to live a "good" life.



**Disability History:** Early and Shifting Attitudes of Treatment

## 2. Social

The social model of disability sees the issue of disability as a socially created problem and a matter of the full integration of individuals into society.

In this model, disability is not an attribute of an individual, but a collection of conditions created by their social environment. This requires collective action from society to ensure a universal design\* for all buildings and outdoor spaces.

*\*Universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.*



**Video:** The progress from medical to social disability model explained (2.5min)

### 3. Identity

The identity model of disability is a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled.

This view has arisen in direct opposition to the personal tragedy view of disability and impairment that is seen in the medical model, and builds on the social model to include disability pride and the civil rights movement.

More in-depth information on models of disabilities can be found [here](#).



#### **Q: Person with a disability or disabled person?**

It is important to note that person-first language is often used in formal writing. However, there are people with disabilities who prefer identity-first language. How a person chooses to self-identify is up to them and should not be corrected.

## Etiquette

### **How do I greet someone?**

If you shake hands with people you meet, offer your hand to everyone you meet, regardless of disability. If the person is unable to shake your hand, they will tell you.

When greeting a person with a loss of vision, always identify yourself and others. For example, “On my right is [person X].” Remember to identify persons to whom you are speaking. Speak in a normal tone of voice and indicate when the conversation is over. Let them know when you move from one place to another.

#### **Use:**

person with a disability, disabled person

### **Do I help?**

Ask if help is needed, but always wait until your offer is accepted. Listen to any instructions the person may have. Don't take it personal if your help is declined.



#### **Don't Use:**

cripple, handicapped, handicap, invalid

## What about hearing impairments?

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing loss, tap them on the shoulder or wave. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if they read lips. Not all people with hearing loss can read lips.

For those who do rely on facial expressions and body language for understanding, stay in the light and keep food, hands and other objects away from your mouth. Shouting won't help; written notes will. Use an interpreter if possible.

## What about mobility devices?

Leaning on a person's mobility device is similar to leaning on a person. The device is considered personal body space, so do not touch or move without consent. When talking to a person using a mobility device for more than a few minutes, place yourself at eye level by sitting down or stepping back.

### Use:

uses a wheelchair/mobility device

### Don't Use:

restricted, confined, wheelchair bound



### Use:

person who has or person with

### Don't Use:

victim of, afflicted with



## Anything else I should keep in mind?

When speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize achievements, abilities, individual qualities, and acknowledge their full humanity—they are parents, employees, business owners, friends, life partners, etc.

When planning events that involve disabled people, consider their needs before choosing a location. You wouldn't think of holding an event where others could not attend, so don't exclude people with disabilities.

*\*Adapted from [Words with Dignity](#)*

### **Crip time:**

A term used by the disability community to describe disabled individuals' unique relationship to time. Crip time highlights the complexity of the disabled experience in a world with many barriers to accessibility. This could include anything from the extra time it takes to move through spaces in a wheelchair (and thus the extra time it takes to arrive somewhere in an expected timeframe) to the way chronic illness and fatigue 'eats up' a person's time.

Needing extra time and recovery time to perform tasks, often necessary ones, means that other portions of the day will be sacrificed, something that is often not factored into how disability accessibility is understood. Crip time provides a framework to look at how different relationships to time need more inclusive acknowledgment and accommodation.

**Use:**  
non-disabled

**Don't Use:**  
normal (implies disabilities are abnormal)



**Use:**  
successful, productive

**Don't Use:**  
has overcome, inspirational, courageous

**Additional information on do's and don'ts can be found [here](#).**

## **Accessibility in the Workplace**

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) defines employment barriers as factors that prohibit or limit disabled people from their full potential in the workplace. These include:

### **Physical barriers:**

One of the easiest ways to make your workplace more accessible is to remove physical barriers per [ADA](#) guidelines. This includes:

- Parking spaces reserved for people with disabilities
- Entrances or doorways with accessible push buttons
- Elevators or lifts
- Accessible bathrooms
- Wheelchair-friendly desks and workspaces
- [Sensory Accessibility Checklist](#)

Visit [EARN](#) more information on removing physical barriers in the workplace.

## Lack of Assistive Tools:

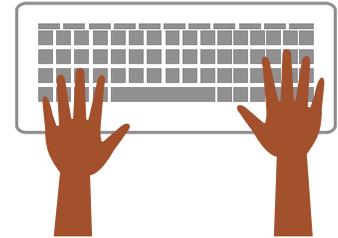
### Alternative Text for Images

Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols, or simpler language.



### Keyboard Input

Some people cannot use a mouse, including many older users with limited fine motor control. An accessible website does not rely on the mouse; it makes all functionality available from a keyboard.



### Transcripts for Audio

Just as images aren't available to people who can't see, audio files aren't available to people who can't hear. Providing a text transcript makes the audio information accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.



\*Adapted from [W3C Accessibility](#)

## The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Recognizes access to information and communications technologies, including the Web, as a basic human right.

## Lack of Systems:

### Recruitment

If your online job application system isn't accessible for those that are impaired, you are eliminating candidates with great potential from the very start. [Easy Checks](#) is a guide for a basic review of your website's accessibility.

### Interview

Making interview accessibility requests can be incredibly stressful. Alleviate this stress by providing information on accommodation requests on your hiring company page. It also shows your company's commitment to inclusivity. Guidelines for writing reasonable accommodation statements can be found [here](#).

### Onboarding

Consider creating the same training materials in different formats to make it accessible. For example, a chapter on workplace safety could have a written transcript, video, and audio recording.

## Workflow

As the workplace has moved from physical to digital, many disabled workers have felt that the playing field has been, if not leveled, at least made less uneven. There are many benefits to hybrid work:

- **Reduces barriers**
  - Remote work removes physical barriers, such as the commute time for a wheelchair user, to environmental conditions such as quiet and private spaces for people who have ADHD.
- **Everyone Wins**
  - Screen readers and voice control options on mobile devices help people with low vision, and also help everyone check their email or send texts while on the go. The closed-captioning features can help someone with a hearing disability follow a meeting in real-time, and also help someone whose primary language is different from others in the meeting.
- **When Over Where**
  - As technology advances, it's not where one works but how one works that will matter most. Whether it's specific technology, a certain kind of chair, monitor or headset, or the flexibility to work from home, companies are focusing on variables which help employees perform their best.

More tips from the [London Office of Tech & Innovation](#)

## Best Practice For Virtual Meetings

### Use In-Meeting Accessibility Options

Such as manual captioning or automatic transcription, screen reader support, and automatic transcription generation.

### Use Multi-Spotlight or Multi-Pin Features

To ensure that interpreter and speaker videos are visible for all.

### Use Companion Mode

Available on Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom, to use a secondary device to help with specific needs, like magnifying needs.



## Disability Inclusive Workplaces Have:



**28%**

**higher  
revenue**

**30%**

**higher economic  
profit margins**

**200%**

**increased likelihood of  
outperforming peers in  
total shareholder returns**

[Culture Amp](#)

When we are intentional in creating spaces that are accessible, everyone benefits. The classic example is the sidewalk ramp designed for wheelchair users, which also benefits people with strollers or luggage. When organizations are intentional in disability inclusion, both disabled and non-disabled employees benefit.

**We hope this guide will help expand your disability inclusion efforts, and set both your company and your employees, for success.**

# Resources

## Hummingbird Humanity-Related Guides

[A Guide to Mental Health and Well-being in the Workplace](#)

[A Guide to Inclusive Job Descriptions](#)

[Inclusive Language Guide](#)

## Videos

[Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution](#) by Netflix

[Adapt-Ability Series](#) by New York Times

[I'm a College Student with a Disability. Stop Treating Me Like a Child](#) by New York Times

[Changing the Way We Talk About Disability](#) by TEDx

[Autism at Work: A Global Program](#) by JP Morgan Chase

## Articles

[Disability Glossary](#) by ADL

[Disability and Health Inclusion Strategies](#) by CDC

[Disability Etiquette](#) by Job Accommodation Network

[Etiquette Handouts by Type of Disability](#) by Disability Awareness Training

[Disability Employment Policy](#) by Council of State Governments

## Books

[Disability Visibility: First Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century](#) by Alice Wong

[The Power of Disability: 10 Lessons for Surviving, Thriving, & Changing the World](#) by Al Etmanski

[Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body](#) by Rebekah Taussig

[Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Aspergers](#) by John Elder Robinson

[The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time](#) by Mark Haddon

## Podcasts

[The Accessible Stall](#) by Kyle and Emily

[The Disability Visibility Project](#) by Alice Wong

[Power Not Pity](#) by Bri M

[The Disability Equity Podcast](#) by John Hopkins University