

# **Taking disability confidence global**

Practical tips on how to increase disability confidence in organizations

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# Foreword

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When EY started our EMEIA (Europe, Middle East, India and Africa) disability journey in 2014, we felt quite overwhelmed. We didn't know where many of our disabled people were working, what their disability was or what their experience of their workplace was like. The UK had been focused on disability for several years, as had France and Spain and America even longer than that. However there was no consistent approach, so EY hosted a small working group of interested parties to brainstorm the challenges and start exploring some actions.

We identified three key areas of challenge:

- ▶ Lack of consistent sponsorship – such as a lack of budget to focus specifically on disability and a lack of senior sponsorship on the topic
- ▶ Structural, geographic and societal challenges – such as local legislation, different definitions of disability and sharing real estate with a third party, and
- ▶ The need for mindset change needed to drive behavior change – such as raising awareness about the impact of unconscious bias and assumptions that lead to low expectation and a lack of accountability

Four years on, we have slowly progressed in some key areas, but we still have a long way to go. To celebrate progress and start sharing leading practice, we convened a conference to look at how an organization could think about their disability agenda globally.

Ninety people from organizations such as Starbucks, Microsoft, GSK, Dell, Accenture, Blackrock, Zurich, Fujitsu, Shell and Atos and representatives from the public sector joined us to share inspirational personal stories and leading practice. Twenty-two speakers took part in various panels discussing topics such as the business case, recruitment of people with disabilities, making workplaces accessible and the power of storytelling.

We didn't want this conference to be a one off, so to keep the conversation going we have produced this booklet, which aims to share the key learning from speakers at the conference as well as practical tips on what you can do to increase disability confidence in your organizations.



**Fleur Bothwick, OBE**  
EY EMEIA Director of Diversity & Inclusive  
Leadership

# 1 The business context

## 1.1 Key drivers shaping disability confidence across global organizations

The appetite to employ people with a disability has been pursued for over 100 years, starting with governments and businesses in Europe trying to reintegrate soldiers returning home from World War I. More recently, many organizations have sought to capitalize on the market power of people with disabilities. Today, efforts to promote disability inclusion in the workforce are accelerating, enabled by five major factors.

**1 Policy and legal mandates** – there is a growing number of policy and legal mandates in countries around the world that encourage, if not compel businesses to accommodate people with disabilities.

**2 Improved medical understanding** – the medical understanding of the many forms of disability is improving. Innovations in healthcare, mobility, information and communications technology, and workplace design and practices are making it much easier to make a diagnosis and for people with a disability to engage with business and work.

**3 Changing perceptions of disability** – the issue increasingly is recognized as something affecting all of humanity in one form or another, at some time in our lives. Around 95% of disabilities can occur during a lifetime and can happen to anyone. Back pain, for example, is a prominent disability among workers and around the world, the workforce is rapidly aging, leading to increased incidences of disability in the workplace.

### **4 A clearer business case**

- ▶ **Recruitment and retention of talent:** In tight labor markets, older workers and people with disabilities are a valuable resource pool. In the US, only 18% of people with a medically determined disability were employed in 2016. In the European Union, less than half of all people with disabilities had any form of employment.
- ▶ **Productivity:** Workers who develop a disability and fear discrimination or retaliation for requesting accommodation are likely to be less productive. Rather than being an expense, disability confidence initiatives can reduce hidden costs of low morale and high rates of absenteeism and staff turnover.
- ▶ **Innovation:** A person with a disability develops alternative perspectives, approaches, and strengths that can help a business solve problems. Diverse perspectives, when encouraged, enhance creativity and innovation.
- ▶ **Market development:** Organizations increasingly are designing universally accessible products and services to reach more customers. Employees with a disability are well-situated to identify and understand new market opportunities.

“Disability confidence is a business leadership issue. It is time to put it on the global business agenda.”

**Caroline Casey**  
Founder, #valuable





- **Brand differentiation:** Some organizations position disability confidence as part of their brand, similar to how they have made a commitment to environmental sustainability. In this light, marketers see disability as an opportunity, not a problem.

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**Inclusion is a basic human right:** While all of the above drivers are powerful, there is an increasing realization that everyone is valuable and disability inclusion is at its core a basic human right. Younger generations are more inclined to celebrate diversity and authenticity. They expect organizations they work for to have a social conscience and treat people fairly. People with a disability want a more supportive environment to “come out” and bring their “whole selves” to work. In short, inclusion is simply the right thing to do.

“We find that when we design with people with permanent disabilities in mind, we end up with something that benefits everyone.”

**Hector Minto,**  
a technology evangelist at Microsoft

## Disability as a market opportunity

- OXO developed the Good Grips kitchen tools with the aim of countering the challenges of arthritis. The tools’ ergonomic designs have proven popular with all kinds of cooks since they were introduced in 1990. In their first 10 years, sales grew 37 percent annually to reach \$30 million. Sales growth continued at 30 percent annually in their second decade. Good Grips have become an Oxo signature product.
- Electric toothbrushes were first created for patients with limited motor skills and for orthodontic patients (such as those with braces).
- Dropped curbs/sloping ramps between the pavement and the road were originally designed for wheelchairs – people with prams and luggage also benefit.
- Closed captions and transcripts were designed to help deaf people understand movies without needing to hear the dialogue and in a US survey<sup>1</sup> almost all students asked believed that captions helped them, regardless of whether they had a disability or not.

<sup>1</sup> 3 Play Media, Student Uses and Perceptions of Closed Captions and Transcripts, 2016



## “People with disabilities are part of the business ecosystem, and we need to embrace that.”

Former management consultant turned social entrepreneur and activist **Caroline Casey** heads up the #valuable campaign, which calls on businesses worldwide to recognize the value and worth of people living with a disability.

“I see disability very much as a leadership issue. If it doesn’t have that visibility at senior leadership level, change will continue to be slow, and piecemeal as it has up to now. It’s my belief that the disability agenda hasn’t moved as fast as it should because we haven’t had prominent leaders from outside the disability community stepping forward and saying: people with disabilities are part of the business ecosystem and we need to embrace that.

“Another big barrier is lack of awareness. Companies also need to take a clear, objective look at where they are now. Something like 80 percent of disability is hidden. That’s a huge amount. Unless you go out there and ask questions and properly engage with your own people, it’s easy to think that disability isn’t an issue. But so many people are dealing with it, either directly or through a loved one. It’s something that will affect all of us at some point in our lives. We need to stop thinking about it in terms of otherness, of ‘them and us.’

“Disability is tricky to deal with, no doubt about it. It’s so incredibly diverse, and people worry about saying or doing the wrong thing. It’s time to face up to that, to acknowledge that it’s awkward and uncomfortable – then commit to having those conversations anyway. There’s also the fact that we’ve got used to seeing disability through a charity lens. That’s important, of course, but it’s not a strategic driver for business.

“This is not just about employment and talent pools and realizing potential, important though that is. It goes across the whole supply chain. This is potentially a £8 trillion market. We’re asking businesses to look at their own suppliers, and their policies and approach to disability, and at all their services and points of engagement, from shops to websites to meetings with clients. We want businesses to be going out to everyone they deal with and saying: we’re putting this at the top of our agenda, why don’t you do it too?

“Our immediate goal with the #valuable campaign is to recruit five leaders who’re willing to stand up and take ownership of this issue. We want them to go out and challenge the rest. The message to business is much more powerful if it’s coming from their peers. Just look at what happened when Sheryl Sandberg spoke out about gender. We want to build a really strong community that leads the way and shows what’s possible. Hopefully in a few years we’ll be talking about the Valuable 500, not just the Fortune 500!”

“Given how commonplace disability is, it is time to ‘normalize’ it. Disability is not the ‘other’ but all of us.”

**Susan Scott Parker,**  
CEO, Business Disability International



## **“Mental health is not an EY issue: it’s a business issue and we have to get more confident in addressing it.”**

**Rose Colville** is a manager within the PAS team at EY in Bristol. She is co-chair of the EY Mental Health Network in the UK.

“Whenever I give a talk to colleagues, I always start by asking for a show of hands from everyone who thinks of themselves as having ‘mental health.’ It’s really interesting to see who’s silently adding the word ‘problems’ to the end of that phrase. In fact, the whole room should be putting their hand up. If you have a mind, you have mental health. It’s part of being human.

“We’re all on a continuum, and we all feel differently mentally – just as we do physically – every day. One of the things we’re trying to do within the network is shift the conversation away from mental health to focus more on wellbeing. You might have a fully diagnosed mental health condition, but have a higher level of wellbeing than someone who maybe doesn’t have a condition but doesn’t look after their mental health very well.

“The aim of the network is very simple. It’s to tackle these kinds of misunderstandings, and remove the stigma that still attaches to mental health in the workplace. We want to get to the point where this is a topic that can be discussed openly, and where people are fully aware of the support that’s available to them and feel comfortable asking for help.

“Our priority at the moment is to reach as many colleagues as possible. We’re planning a series of webinars focusing on different conditions and trying to debunk some of the myths and misconceptions around them. We also want to talk about the practical steps people can take to look after their own wellbeing. Hopefully we can move the conversation away from dealing with mental health crises to how we can look after ourselves better on a daily basis.

“We operate in a culture where it’s tempting to say ‘yes’ all the time. I’ve been in that position myself, taking extra responsibilities on at the expense of my own wellbeing. I want to see a shift instead to a culture where people feel comfortable and confident about setting boundaries. It’s not about being unwilling or lacking commitment: it’s about knowing that if you take a proper break, you’re going to come back more energised and more productive.

“I think as more younger people come into the business, we’re starting to see that shift happen anyway. They have this expectation that the company they work for will have a wellbeing strategy in place, and will make it a priority. I think they’re more open, too, and more used to having those conversations. We can learn from that, I think. Mental health isn’t an EY issue, it’s not a professional services issue, it’s a business issue, plain and simple, and it matters to EY clients too. We have to get more confident in addressing it.”

# 1.2 The history behind the current disability landscape

We are often told that organizations and people are looking to increase their disability confidence but don't know where to start. This can be a complex topic with a rich history impacted by legislation, public policy and most technology.

## Diagnostic frameworks

There are many types of disability (see Table 1) and over the years, medical advances have improved our understanding of the human condition so that many more people today are diagnosed as having some form of disability.

Disability is not a simple binary designation: able versus disabled. Conditions range along spectrums from mild to severe, with varying impacts on one's ability to perform in the workplace. Disability can also be temporary, it can be visible or hidden. Yet, we tend to focus on severe cases of disability and ignore the fact that most people with a disability can and do work without complex and costly accommodations.

For a long time, disability has been only defined medically, and medical diagnoses are used to determine legal protections, social benefits, and employment quotas given to people with a disability. For professionals seeking to accommodate a person with a disability in the workplace, diagnostic complexity can seem overwhelming.

In addition, the community of people with a disability tends to be very fractured as advocates compete for recognition and scarce resources. As a result, there are few organizations that unite the community and serve as a single point of reference or partner for business leaders seeking to promote disability confidence across their organizations.

Businesses seeking to advance disability confidence must move past a focus on medical classifications and diagnoses, and shift their emphasis from "disability" to "ability."

Table 1: Medical-based definitions of disability

| Type                                   | Examples  |
|--|---|
| Physical or motor                      | Loss of limbs, loss of ability to move a part of the body                             |
| Sensory                                | Loss in ability to see, hear, smell, touch, taste                                     |
| Cognitive                              | Traumatic brain injury, dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, autism, Down syndrome   |
| Psychological, emotional or behavioral | Anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder |

Sources: World Health Organization, US National Institutes of Health, US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.





## Disability in numbers

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- ▶ As many as one billion people are affected by disability, and 45 percent of the global population when family or friends are included.
- ▶ One in five people in Europe and the US live with a disability.
- ▶ Eighty percent of people with a disability acquire it in their working years between ages 18 and 64 as a result of illness, injury or aging.
- ▶ In relation to the total population of Germany every 11th inhabitant has a severe disability (9.3%)
- ▶ In emerging markets, 80-90 percent of people with a disability are not employed.
- ▶ The spending power of people with a disability in the UK is estimated at £212 billion, and globally it is estimated at £8 trillion.

“Underpinning everything is the social model – we start from the point that it isn’t the disability that’s holding the individual back, it’s the environment in which they are operating.”

**Rukasana Bhaijee,**  
EY D&I Manager in UK&I

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Public policy frameworks

The public policy context for disability inclusion has evolved significantly over the past 100 years. In the wake of two calamitous wars, many governments in Europe adopted points and quota systems that specified the number and type of disabled people organizations should hire as an effort to share the cost and organizational burden of reintegration and recovery.

The United States was the first nation to pass a comprehensive disability anti-discrimination law – the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Many European nations, plus Japan, China and others followed by expanding anti-discrimination laws to

explicitly include people with a disability.

The ADA provided a legal definition of who is disabled and who qualifies for anti-discrimination protection. For example, the Act gives anti-discrimination protection to people associated with a person with a disability (e.g., a parent or spouse) when accessing public transportation or accommodation when accompanying a person with a disability. This broader definition of disability based on legal rather than medical conditions dramatically expanded the responsibilities of the public and private sector.

Table 2: The evolving policy context for disability inclusion

| Act   | Significance   | Workplace implications   |
|---|--|--|
| Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)  | Legal prohibition of discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications for people with disability.            | Created enforceable mandates requiring physical and practical accommodations in all government and public spaces (including work places, stores, theaters, etc.) for people with disability. |
| UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)                                 | Aspirational principles – based on a vision asserting that equal treatment for all people with disability in all spheres of life is a basic human right. | Encourages employers to focus on the person and go beyond minimal compliance with accessibility and anti-discrimination laws and regulations.  |
| EU Disability Strategy, 2010-2020 and similar national and transnational strategies and visions | Social – welfare model that combines anti-discrimination mandates with affirmative action quotas and incentives for fair and equal treatment.            | Seeks to harmonize disability confidence across national boundaries.   |

Sources: US Department of Justice, United Nations, European Union.

Over time, the ADA in practice was deemed insufficient or not relevant in countries which lack the US's strong and enforceable legal-based regulatory model. This led to a broader push for equal and fair treatment as a basic human right, as codified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities passed in 2006. The Convention is a moral call to action and parties are expected to design and implement laws and regulations to end all forms of discrimination against people with a disability.

Due to its global scope, the UN approach allows for tremendous variation in policy and practice, which creates complexity for disability confidence leaders in multinational organizations. To help fill in the gaps, the European Union formulated a 10-year Disability Strategy to hasten adoption of national laws and coordinate to minimize variations across member states.

While each effort has its merits, they also have had unintended consequences. The ADA is often seen by corporate managers as a costly and rigid mandate that can reduce accommodation efforts to a legal compliance matter relegated to the HR or facilities functions, rather than focusing on maximizing the potential of the individual.

The UN approach is ambitious, but it is also aspirational and subject to vastly different cultural norms regarding disability around the world. Quotas in the EU can have the effect of reducing disability confidence to human or tax arbitrage. Organizations may hire people with a disability to meet the quota, but they don't develop plans to fully empower them or utilize their skills. Or, they can pay a fine that funds public welfare programs instead of meaningfully integrating people with a disability into the workforce.



## **“The challenge for many businesses is in identifying where responsibility for productivity actually sits.”**

**Susan Scott-Parker** was the founder of Business Disability Forum (UK) and is now founder of Business Disability International, which aims to mobilize the power of global business to liberate human potential.

“There’s a lot of talk about the business case for hiring disabled people, but I prefer to look at it slightly differently. To me, this shouldn’t be about coming up with justifications for employing hundreds of millions of people (both disabled and not yet disabled) on the basis of capability and potential – we shouldn’t need to justify treating all applicants, employees and customers fairly and with respect. We need to put an end to these out dated, divisive and counter-productive ways of thinking.

“Businesses need to be ready to make adjustments for everybody, to enable them to do their jobs. There’s strong evidence that corporate disability expertise helps cut sickness absence, enhances productivity, improves engagement and leads to overall better customer service. It’s not about disability. It’s about being human. If it’s better for me to start at 10 a.m., why does it matter if child care is tricky, I have an aged parent or because I’ve got arthritis and I’m slow to get going in the morning? The point is to remove the barriers that stop me making the greatest possible contribution to the business.

“The challenge for many businesses is in identifying where responsibility for enhancing productivity actually sits. This isn’t just a question of HR changing policies, it’s about facilities, IT, procurement, marketing and new product development too. We need a different culture and different ways of working across all those functions. Question: how long does it take to change a lightbulb? Answer: 18 months, if you can’t figure out whose responsibility it is to source the light, pay for it and put it up. That’s far from a joke if you’re the person getting migraines caused by bad lighting. There’s definitely a case to be made for creating a new role, a chief workplace officer, with responsibility for ensuring that policies in HR, IT and the built environment are properly aligned.

“I know that many business leaders want to deliver the best practice that we branded ‘disability confidence’ some 15 years ago. They understand the damaging impact of a legal compliance culture – which communicates in effect – ‘we will only treat you fairly, only treat you properly, if we have to.’ Increasingly, people are recognizing that disability is an employment, consumer and human rights priority. Businesses that embrace that shift will be in the best position to realize the potential of their people, while enhancing the customer experience for everyone, and enhancing their own standing as responsible employers.”





## Technology and workplace practices

While the prevalence of disability is increasing, so are the types of accommodations readily available in the workplace.

- ▶ Thanks to legal requirements, most modern workplaces have basic elements of accessible design. Moreover, flexibility has become a hallmark of modern workplaces and includes providing workers with many different kinds of work settings to accommodate different working styles and needs. Furniture and lighting are increasingly adjustable.
- ▶ Computer hardware and software and mobile phones increasingly include accessibility features to control font size, colors and brightness, to auto-read text and to work with hearing aids or without hands.
- ▶ Flexible hours, telecommuting and tools for remote work and collaboration make working anywhere, anytime possible.
- ▶ Wellness programs that focus on lighting and air quality, options for exercise, and food services with nutrition in mind all are easily adaptable for people with a disability.

While a plethora of amenities are available and relevant for people with a disability, they don't automatically materialize or get used. Procurement personnel need to be aware of accessible options. IT and facilities staff need to be trained in how to use these tools, and they in turn need to train employees with a

disability. Talent personnel must be trained to identify practices, such as the recruitment process, which can create barriers or discriminate against people with a disability.

Ultimately, disability confidence advocates say externally-generated medical labels, policy prescriptions or workplace solutions are helpful, but insufficient. Understanding medical conditions and the law don't necessarily change corporate culture and vanquish old thinking and messaging.

This cultural shift requires leadership and commitment from inside the organization to design their own best practices, and commit to stay the course in every country where they operate.

This is a long journey. Business leaders often don't know much about disability – its prevalence in the organization, who are working with a disability, or what their own corporate policy already prescribes. The stereotype is that people with a disability are extreme cases or special needs that aren't the responsibility of the private sector.

When businesses do address disability, it's often based on charity – such as sponsoring the Special Olympics and Paralympics. Recruiting those with a disability for media and branding purposes is another approach. While good for visibility, such strategies also risk sensationalizing disability, when in reality it is a “normal,” everyday workplace reality.

“So many people who are cancer survivors or have dyslexia or RSI or lower back pain see those as challenges to work around – they wouldn't frame them as a disability.”

**Kate Nash, OBE**  
CEO & founder of PurpleSpace

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“If you have to ask whether something is accessible then it's likely not to be.”

**Jenny Lay-Flurrie,**  
Chief Accessibility Officer at Microsoft

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“Without senior people stepping up and setting the tone, real change won’t happen.”

**Iain Wilkie**

Former Senior Partner at EY UK&I and sponsor for the UK’s Ability EY Network

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**“We want to shift the conversation away from accessibility to focus on productivity.”**

**Hector Minto** is a Technology Evangelist for Microsoft. He believes that inclusive design can benefit everyone, disabled or not.

“Our approach to inclusive design is based on the social model of disability. We start from the position that disability isn’t a diagnosis, it’s a mismatch between the person and their environment that can happen to any of us, at any time. The experience of someone who’s deaf trying to use a device is the same as that of someone who’s trying to use it while listening to music on their headphones.

“For a designer, constraints are a wonderful thing. We find that when we design with people with permanent disabilities in mind we end up with something that benefits everyone. Take the ‘sticky keys’ feature. That’s designed for to make it easier for users with a physical disability to use a keyboard, but it’s brilliant if you ever need to type one-handed, for example because you’ve hurt your wrist or your holding a coffee. The point is, people with disabilities don’t need ‘special’ features. That kind of thinking just further reinforces bias.

“I don’t have a disability, but I use these features all the time. When I need to focus, I’ll put my device into greyscale mode. The colors disappear, and I can’t see the messages coming in from the side. It’s designed for people with visual impairments, but I find it invaluable for cutting out distraction. There’s a new feature in Windows 10, too, called Focus Assist, which again cuts out notifications. It’s brilliant if you just need to quit wasting time and get something done, but could also be seen as a tool to combat work stress and positively impact mental health.

“I also use the dictation feature regularly. That’s designed for people with conditions such as arthritis, RSI and dyslexia, but I find it a really comfortable and productive way to work. Similarly, the ‘Read Aloud’ function is designed for people with visual impairments but I use it all the time so I can listen at the same time as working on something else. It’s also a brilliant way of checking for mistakes in a written document – you pick up different things when you hear something than when you’re reading. I use magnification, too, to get people to focus on specific sections of a slide if I’m giving a presentation.

“The point is, all these features are already there. When we go in to meet employers, we often start by talking about employees with disabilities very quickly they’re asking us to train everyone, not just those with disabilities. We want to shift the conversation away from accessibility to focus on productivity instead. Suddenly, people are finding it easier to do what they need to do without having to have a conversation with HR, or use special software or whatever. That’s really what we mean when we talk about inclusive design.”

# 2 Taking disability confidence global – so where do you start?

## Step 1

### Develop the business case and secure sponsorship

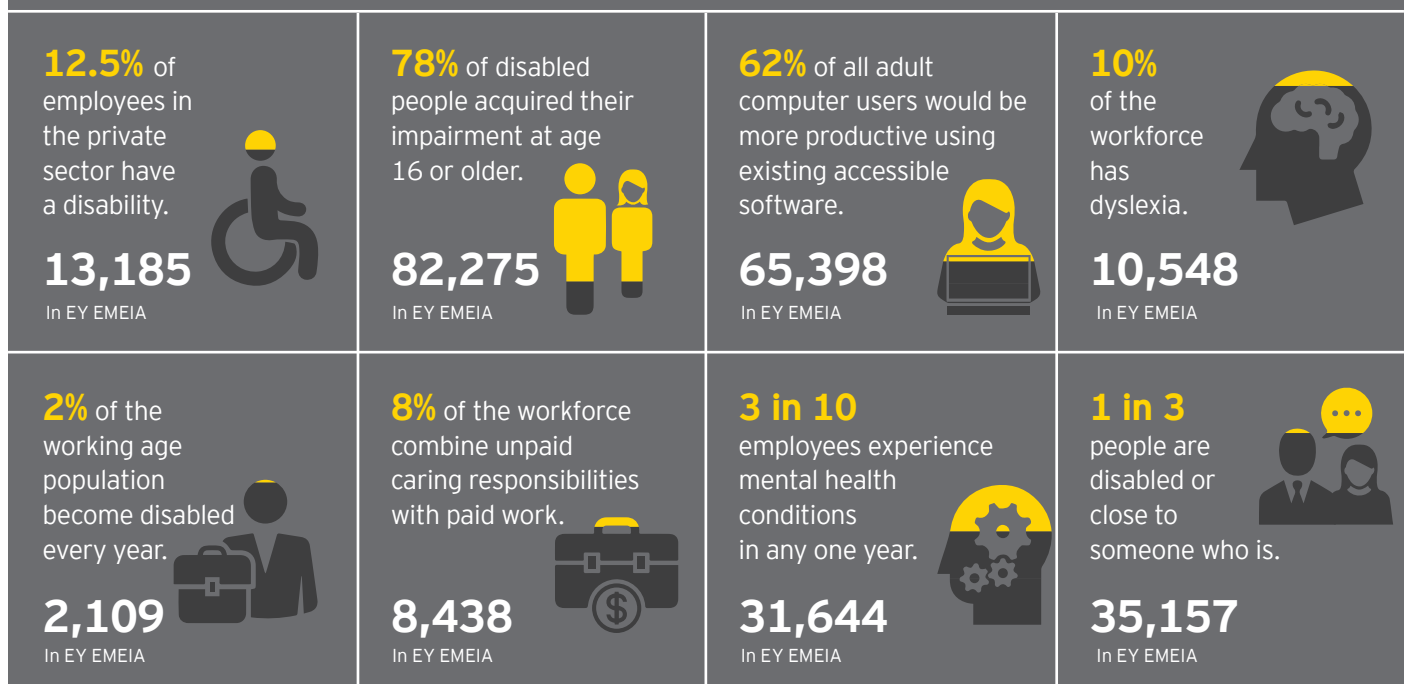
Various aspects of the business case are covered on page 4 and we also found it helpful to use the formula developed by the Business Disability Forum to create a disability profile of our EMEIA population.

Your business case should tie in as closely as possible with your business objectives. In our case our business strategy is called Vision 2020+ and critical to executing this strategy is that our teams are high performing. That they offer a variety of perspectives that will drive innovation and that the individuals

collaborating together feel included and valued which will drive their engagement. So we want to recruit from the widest possible talent pool and when talent is with us, we want our people to feel supported in every way to reach their full potential.

You also need good sponsorship from your key stakeholders. We have found progress is accelerated when you have Partner Sponsors and one great Sponsor who has now retired from EY is Iain Wilkie, who really raised the bar with a focus on storytelling and strengths.

#### EY EMEIAS potential disabled community based on a formula from the Business Disability Forum



EY EMEIA workforce =105,000

“Disability isn’t a diagnosis, it’s a mismatch between the person and their environment that can happen to any of us, at any time.”

**Hector Minto**

a technology evangelist at Microsoft



## “Without senior people stepping up and setting the tone, real change won’t happen.”

A former senior partner at EY UK&I and sponsor for the UK’s Ability EY Network, Iain Wilkie now runs his own executive coaching firm PathMaker Consulting. He is an internationally recognized leader in changing workplace attitudes towards stammering and stuttering.

“Stammering is an interesting condition. It’s a hidden disability, but when it happens it’s incredibly visible. Your vulnerability is there on display for everyone to see and hear and experience with you. It took me a long time – about 40 years, in fact, to get to the point where I was prepared to share my own story. That’s a whole lifetime of feeling embarrassed and inadequate, and believing that it was a weakness that should be hidden from the world.

“The aim of the video we made to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities was to raise awareness of the fact that there are so many people at EY already dealing with a whole range of disabilities, from dyslexia to cerebral palsy to mental health issues. We also really wanted to focus on the strengths people have had to develop in order to overcome these barriers and build a successful career.

“Deafness is a great example. Around 55% of messages are conveyed not through what we say, but through our facial expressions and our body language. If you can’t rely on your hearing, you’re going to have to get pretty good at interpreting those non-verbal signals. The ability to read what’s really being communicated is hugely valuable to a business like EY. If you’re excluding that group, for example by not subtitling your videos or not hiring a sign language interpreter for your conferences, you’re missing out.

“I think personal stories are a hugely powerful way of getting the message across. Suddenly it’s not abstract, it’s real. It’s the people you work with every day. I think it builds confidence in every sense – among those who’re sharing their stories, among their colleagues and managers about having those conversations, and among people who might not yet have disclosed their own disability.

“An organization needs to be telling those stories and creating those role models at every level. It’s so important that people can see themselves, or someone in the kind of role they’d like to have in a couple of years’ time. They should be thinking, that could be me if they can do it, so can I. So it’s also vitally important that senior people take the lead, and are open about our own experiences. Without those people stepping up and setting the tone, real change won’t happen.”



## Step 2

### Connect with your disabled community

Depending on the geographies that you are operating in, this can be particularly challenging but it is critically important not to make assumptions or generalize – you need to ask your disabled people what works well for them and what you could be doing differently.

With the diversity of EMEA there are some geographies that are constrained by local legalization and some works councils and unions. That said, we managed to include a question in the demographic section of our EY Global People Survey for about 60% of our countries. While the results are anonymous we were able to analyze the outputs to better understand how our disabled community felt.

Another great way for us to connect with our disabled community is through the EY Purple Champions program. It is basically an allies program for individuals who are supportive advocates for our EY people with disabilities. They help to create safe and inclusive environments and support our people through their words and behavior and recognize that people with disabilities can perform better if they can be themselves at work.

Purple Champions sign up on line and are invited to share their experience of disability. People can network across the members virtually and several allies have already volunteered to host webinars to talk to people about their condition and their journey, for example, one member ran a webinar about strokes.

### Top tips for disability allies

- 1 Don't define someone by one characteristic, see the person not the impairment.
- 2 It's OK to describe groups of people with common experiences e.g., people with disabilities, disabled people.
- 3 It's OK to use everyday expressions such as "see you later"
- 4 If you are unsure or need to know something, ask.
- 5 If you make a mistake apologize, learn from it and move on.
- 6 Don't be a passive bystander; if something feels wrong say so.

Adapted from PurpleSpace guide







## “How EY is connecting with their disabled community.”

**Rukasana Bhaijee**, EY UK&I D&I Manager leads the Bridge the Gap to Success program for employees with disabilities.

“Bridge the Gap to Success is a personal development program for individuals who identify as having a disability. The aim is to help our people develop their own disability confidence, by focusing on strengths. Underpinning it is the social model: we start from the point that it isn't the disability that's holding the individual back, it's the environment in which they're operating. That's the thing that needs to change, not them.

“We also start from the position that anyone who faces difficulties of whatever type will develop strengths, as a result of the strategies they adopt for dealing with those challenges. So I'm a person of visible faith, and as a result I might well have had to become more resilient in overcoming perceived bias. Someone who is deaf might be great at reading body language, while someone with dyslexia might be a great big picture thinker. Those are all things that can benefit us as a business.

“I believe that openness is the key to unlocking that potential. We want to hold on to our disabled talent, and create advocates within the organization. Some of our Bridge the Gap alumni have gone on to become highly visible and very effective role models. By helping individuals become more confident in talking openly about their disabilities and harnessing their strengths we're helping to break down barriers and create a culture where being open is the norm.

“The program itself is very practical. We teach people how to work with personal and professional change models, and how to analyze and understand their own strengths and abilities. They create an action plan, then go off and work on it, with regular opportunities to come back together with the other delegates and share experiences and support each other. Building that network is a vital part of increasing confidence too. We also work with individual's counsellors, helping to improve their disability fluency.

“We're constantly checking participant feedback, to make sure the program is achieving what we want in terms of retention and promotion. We also look at the results of our EY Global People Survey. That showed us that the number of our people identifying as having a disability doubled between 2015 and 2017. To me, that's a really powerful indication that our culture is changing, and that what we're doing in terms of creating role models and sharing stories is having a positive impact.”





**“We’re not doing this for fun. We’re genuinely committed to hiring people who are blind or visually impaired.”**

**EY Germany D&I Manager Patricia Heufers** is running a series of workshops for blind and visually impaired students in Stuttgart.

“To date, we’ve run two one-day sessions for blind and visually impaired university students, and implemented it as a regular recruiting event with more in the pipeline. The feedback has been excellent. The delegates really welcome the opportunity to find out more about the company and to hear what it’s really like to work here if you have a disability.

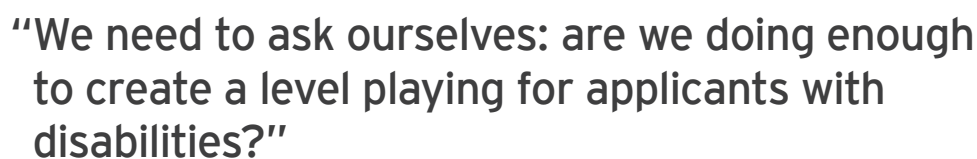
“The agenda is very practical and interactive. Before each session we ask delegates to write an application, either speculative or for a specific job that’s being advertised. During the workshop they get detailed one-to-one feedback on that application, including targeted advice on how to tailor their CV to get the results they want.

“We run mock interviews, to give them an insight into the type of questions they might be asked and the preparation they will need to do. Then there’s a presentation from one of our blind EY colleagues, Michael. He talks about his experiences of working in a global consulting company, what they can expect from EY, what kind of software is available and what they can start doing now to prepare themselves for corporate life. There are also lots of opportunities to ask questions and to network and share experiences with each other.

“When we first put the agenda together I thought the mock interview would be the most valuable part. In fact, the students respond really well to Michael’s presentation and to the individual feedback. As a result, we’ve made a conscious decision to keep the workshops to around 12 delegates and to slightly increase the time we allocate to the one-to-one sessions.

“Clearly, there’s a lot of demand for an initiative like this. We get far more applicants than we can accommodate. To me, it’s so important that we work to bring down the barriers that stand in the way of this group and so many others. One of the questions we’re asked over and over is, ‘Do I have to disclose my impairment when I’m applying for a job?’ We tell them there’s no right or wrong answer – but if you’re worried that by being open you’ll ruin your chances, then why would you want to work for that employer anyway?

“One of the delegates from the first workshop subsequently applied to EY, and now has a job with us. She joined the second workshop to talk to the students. That’s such a powerful way of saying to them, ‘We’re not doing this for fun. We’re genuinely committed to hiring people who are blind or visually impaired, and here’s the proof.’”



“Before my illness, I was involved in a lot of recruitment activity for EY. In all the years I did it, I think I saw very few candidates who had an obvious physical disability. That made me think – is there something about our recruitment process that puts off candidates with disabilities? Maybe such candidates have a perception of what it would mean to work at EY and that it wouldn’t suit their circumstances? Long hours and having to spend lots of time in the office?”

"I already know that lots of organizations advertise career opportunities in publications for people with disabilities, and that's great. I wonder though if their mainstream advertising could be more explicit in stating that having a disability doesn't preclude a successful career at that organization – and that, actually, that organization would welcome applications from individuals with disabilities. I think this would certainly address the perception issue that I mentioned.

20 | Taking disability confidence global: Practical tips on how to increase disability confidence in organizations



## Step 3

### Ensure your people are disability confident

Whilst a lot of the steps focus on how to attract and include people with disabilities there is another step that organizations should take to ensure disabled employees thrive. It is critical to ensure that everyone in the organization is disability confident and has a clear understanding of disability, their responsibilities and what assistance is available. Our workplaces need to be truly inclusive and ensuring our people have the knowledge and skills required to make this a reality is key.

This can be approached in a number of ways such as;

- ▶ Recruiting and educating allies
- ▶ Including disability case studies in existing people training (e.g., unconscious bias training, manager training, recruitment training)

- ▶ Using role models and storytelling to raise awareness of different experiences of disability, including hidden disabilities
- ▶ Structured training for teams who will be working with people who are, for example neuro-diverse
- ▶ Webinars, podcasts or events to educate on specific conditions, for example strokes or mental health
- ▶ Focused communications around international day of people with disabilities (e.g., the #PurpleLightUp led by PurpleSpace)



**“We want to send out a strong message that EY is a place that judges people on talent alone.”**

**Amar Shankar** is a partner with EY in India. Now, as partner ambassador for the country’s disability strategy, he is exploring ways of bringing more people with disabilities into the workforce.

“Since I became partner ambassador for our disability network in India, we’ve made a number of practical changes to the way we do things. We started with EY recruitment teams. Before, people would come to them and say I’m looking for someone with these skills, and this level of experience, and that was it. Now the teams will ask them: is this role suitable for someone with a disability? Now, that conversation is happening right from the start of the process.

“We’re also briefing the teams that go out to university campuses. We want them to be sensitized, and actively looking for opportunities to increase the diversity of our workforce. Our pre placement presentations now talk about disability, so that students with disabilities know we’re seeking them out. Last year we had a couple of interns who came to us through that process. Their mentors did a great job of giving them a really excellent experience.

“Here in Delhi, we’ve spoken to all our managers to make sure they’re aware of this agenda, and asking them to start thinking about the gaps in their teams and whether they could be filled by someone with a disability. That highlighted some interesting issues – clearly, we need to do more work to get people focusing on opportunities rather than barriers. We also launched a drive with colleagues at the headhunting firms we use. As a result we’ve been able to recruit a number of excellent candidates who also happen to have a disability. And we’ve started the process of reviewing our policies, to make sure they’re not putting unnecessary barriers in people’s way.

“I would say we’re making slow but steady progress. There’s a lot of realignment to be done, and we need to make sure that people are aware of the benefits. Currently, we’re focusing on promoting the EY Purple Champions program and also creating some visible role models, whose stories we can then use to inform and inspire others. We’re actually in the process of recruiting some candidates with disabilities to front office roles. I think that will send out a really strong message to everyone that EY is a place that judges people on their talent alone.”



## Step 4

### Make accessible technology a key consideration

Accessibility itself is an enormous topic and it can be hard to know where to start. There are the accessibility needs of individuals as well as a responsibility for the organization to ensure accessibility is a key factor when developing new products, services, websites etc. So often conversations on this topic end up focusing on the cost of a particular adjustment, but there are many things that can be done that make a real difference to someone and incur minimal, if any, cost.

Some leading organizations such as Shell and GSK have rolled out a global approach to managing individual's accessibility requirements, but for most the topic is still approached locally. EY has set up a one stop shop for IT accessibility that has one single point of contact globally with local teams offering services. As well as creating easy access it has helped the

business to learn about the needs of their disabled community and EY teams are able to report on the frequency and types of requests made.

Organizations often develop new services/websites and part of the initial design process should be accessibility. There are global standards for web accessibility available, the W3 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which are recognized globally and offer information on how to make web content accessible to all. When developing anything new, involve disabled employees in the design and testing phase to ensure that accessibility is a consideration from the start. It's a lot easier to build in accessibility from the beginning than to try and retrospectively "fix" something.

## Step 5

### Create a level playing field for applicants with a disability

According to the World Health Organization the percentage of disabled people who are in employment is significantly lower than those without disabilities. This coupled with the fact that 78% of people acquire disabilities within their working life means that organizations need to ensure their recruitment processes and procedures take into consideration disability.

There are a number of things that organizations can do:

- ▶ **Advertising** – are your job adverts inclusive? Does the wording automatically stop certain people from applying? Do your job adverts show that the organization welcomes people with disabilities? Is your organization known for its disability confidence?
- ▶ **Applications** – is the technology you use for applicants accessible to people with different accessibility requirements?

- ▶ **Interviews and assessments** – do you ask if applicants have any accessibility requirements? Are the activities you are planning suitable for people with different abilities? Does the person being interviewed need more information beforehand to feel comfortable?
- ▶ **Disability confidence** – are your recruiters disability confident? Make sure that everyone involved in the recruitment process is disability confident, from recruiters, to hiring managers and any external agencies.
- ▶ **Onboarding** – do you have a process in place to implement any adjustments required? Is it possible to have adjustments in place from day one? Is the team manager disability confident? Is the team disability confident? Do you have a disability network people can be connected with during the induction process?





## “Put people in the right role and you’ll often find that the impact of their disability is lessened.”

**Daniel Aherne** is the founder of Adjust, which provides practical training and consultancy to help increase employers’ understanding of neurodiversity.

“There are lots of different definitions of neurodiversity. At Adjust, we focus on the four most common conditions: autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Our aim is not to assign labels, it’s to encourage employers to focus on people’s strengths. It’s a celebration of individuality.

“Part of what I do is about changing processes that might be excluding neurodiverse candidates. Someone with dyslexia might struggle to complete a written form – so get them to give you the information verbally instead. Non-literal interview questions such as ‘If you were an animal, what animal would you be?’ can be very challenging too. Ask for the information you want, in a clear and straightforward way.

“When it comes to the consultancy part of my role, working with employers to help them support an individual, I concentrate on five different areas. First, how much training has their manager had in understanding and dealing with neurodiverse conditions? What are the gaps in their knowledge, and how can we address them?

“Second, would the individual themselves benefit from having more information about their own condition, so that they can better understand their strengths and the support they need? Third, provided the individual is happy for that information to be shared, are their colleagues aware of their condition and what it means in the workplace?

“That really links to the fourth area, workplace culture. Particularly in the corporate world, there’s often an expectation that people will still be in the office at 8 p.m. That can be challenging for people with neurodiverse conditions. Take ADHD, for example. The received wisdom is that it’s all about being easily distracted, but actually people with ADHD can often focus intensely for short periods of time, and get huge amounts done. If that person leaves at 5 p.m., it’s easy to see how that could lead to resentment among their colleagues, unless they’re in full possession of the facts.

“Finally, and perhaps most important of all, is the physical environment. Some people with neurodiverse conditions often struggle in an open-plan office, so we work with employers to find practical ways to mitigate that. Could that individual be allocated a desk in a quieter corner, rather than by a door or printer or somewhere else that people tend to congregate? Could they wear noise cancelling headphones, or use ear defenders?

“My work is all about maximizing productivity, and that means focusing on strengths. I want us to get to the point where an employer will focus on the fact that an individual excels at bringing in new business and celebrate that, rather than, say, trying to force them to be better at admin. That’s a waste of energy. Put people in the right role, one that makes use of their strengths, and you’ll often find that the impact of their disability is lessened.”



## Step 6

### Consider how you communicate

Ensuring communications are accessible to all is an area where organizations can make a big impact. Many people with disabilities can be excluded from a number of communication methods, when some small changes would erase these problems.

Across the globe there are various standards around ensuring communications are accessible. One of these is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that includes the requirement that information must be provided in accessible formats and that technologies are appropriate to different kinds of disabilities. While these standards are aimed at organizations sharing information with the public, these should also be referred to when sharing information internally.

Some things to consider when communicating are:

- ▶ Are your documents available in different format e.g., Braille, different font, audio? Is it clear how people can request these different formats and do your people know how to action?
- ▶ When designing PDF documents are your designers considering accessibility? (e.g., labeling images, heading orders)

- ▶ Do you use the in-built Microsoft Office **accessibility checker** on all your documents?
- ▶ Do all of your videos include captions?
- ▶ Does all of your audio content include a transcript?
- ▶ Do you provide live captioning on webinars or virtual meetings?
- ▶ Do you provide sign language interpreters if required?
- ▶ Do you offer alternative ways for people to contact you?
- ▶ When hosting events, either live or virtually, do you ask people if they have any accessibility requirements to be able to fully participate?

Many of the things listed above are very quick and easy to implement, but would make a huge difference to people with disabilities trying to access content. As with technology, when developing any documents or communications, accessibility should be something considered from the start.







## **“A good network provides a safe space for challenging assumptions, and moving beyond them.”**

**Kate Nash** is the CEO and founder of PurpleSpace, the professional development and networking hub for disabled employee network leaders.

“The most successful networks – the buzzy, vibrant can-do communities that are really making a difference – tend to be the ones that align themselves with the overall D&I strategy. They recognize that businesses want to improve the quality and integrity of their data, and that you can’t do that simply by going out and asking the question: are you disabled? So many people who are cancer survivors, or have dyslexia or RSI or lower back pain see those as challenges to work around – they wouldn’t frame it as a disability.

“You’ve got to start elsewhere. Don’t start by trying to improve your monitoring program – that’s never going to deliver quality data. Instead, start by improving your workplace adjustment program. Make it easy for people to get the practical support they need to make their working lives easier rather than having to try to find their own workarounds. You’ll be amazed by how quickly word gets around and people start to come forward.

“Make your network attractive. Think quirky, head-turning and engaging. Identify the key people in your organization, and get them to tell their stories. Look for the golden nuggets: What did the business do to support them? What did a particular line manager do that made a difference? What has the individual learned about themselves? It’s all about acknowledging difference and casting it in a positive light.

“This is why authentic campaigns – the videos, the storytelling – are so powerful. If you can really create a culture where people feel comfortable to bring their authentic selves to work, the quality of the data will go up automatically. And that’s the first step towards putting together a strong business case for treating disability in the same way as we’ve already come to think about race, gender and sexual orientation.

“At PurpleSpace we talk a lot about ‘the soft bigotry of low expectation’ and how the beliefs we hold about our own capabilities and those of others can hold us back. A good network provides a safe space where we can challenge those assumptions and, hopefully, move beyond them. It has taken time I think for people to realize that in many ways disability is just like any other point of difference. As disabled employees begin to network with each other as well as their champions and allies, across nations, so too did the idea for the #PurpleLightUp come about – as one way of celebrating the economic contribution of disabled people during International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December each year. So get involved in that too – be part of this new movement – at the end of the day it will be from us all building disability confidence from the inside out that will drive lasting change.”





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**The Power of Storytelling**

- BE YOURSELF.
  - BABYLAIS - THIS IS ARE
  - FUTURSO
  - NETWORKS ARE CREATING movement...
- PERSONAL STORIES
  - BRINGING AUTHENTICITY
  - TEY VIDEO...
  - INFLUENCERS HELPING FEEL.
- CHANGE NEEDS TO COME FROM TOP DOWN...
  - HELP PEOPLE TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL
  - IAN WILKIE EY
  - THE PATIENTS ARE THE PROBLEM NOT CONTAINING ATTITUDES.
  - ABILITY EY
- WANTED SISTER STORIES
  - SALLY BIBB EXCHANGING STORIES
  - CHIVES THOUGHT THE STORIES WERE TO BEING ASSERTIVE
  - GENEVIEVE BARR
- CARE ABOUT THE RIGHT THING CARD FOR PATIENTS
  - BE CONFIDENT & PUT PEOPLE AT EASE...
  - IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY IT'S THE WAY YOU SAY IT!
  - BECOME AN ACTRESS
  - CHANGING WAY SOMEONE'S MIGHT BE OFFERED
- THE POWER OF COMPARISON IS HUGE
  - THE MORE EMOTIONAL THE BETTER.
  - JAMES STORY NOT BEING UP BUT AHEAD!
  - EDUCATE LEADERSHIP
- IT'S NOT SHOWING OFF IT'S SHOWING YOUR STRENGTHS...
  - DON'T COME FROM WEAKNESS
  - HELP LEADERSHIP get INVOLVED.
  - CONCLUDE
- HONOUR PEOPLE'S HUMANITY
  - HEAT POL 14 NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO SHARE EMOTIONALLY
  - EDUCATE PERSONS
  - DISABILITY IS MY USP!
    - THINK OF THE DIFFERENTIAL THAT WANT TO LEAVE THEIR HEATH...
- CONNECT TO YOUR VALUES
  - RECOGNISE YOUR STRENGTHS
  - SUPPORT SOME ROLE MODELS
  - SUPPORT THEM FROM TIME TO TIME WITH COACHES

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