

Ability Round Table

A Resource for Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Associate Resource Groups (ARGs)

Facing the Choice and Challenges of Self-Identification

Know the difference between self-identification and self-disclosure.

- Self-identification: Making HR aware of any condition that may qualify as a disability in order to ensure the company's accommodations process can meet any needs you may have to perform your best in an inclusive environment
- Self-disclosure: When you share personal information about yourself with others for any number of reasons, including casual conversation, a desire to be understood, a request for assistance or to share learnings or experiences, to name just a few

What can you do to encourage self-identification?

1. Recognize there will always be some, regardless of the focus of your group or the amount of encouragement you give, who will choose not to identify, AND THAT'S OK. Identification is a right, not a requirement.
 - The choice to self-identify as part of a particular minority group, including the disabled, must always be respected and preserved.
 - Some managers and work teams are better at or are more prepared to be diverse and inclusive than others are. This also means some work environments are more or less hostile than others. Admit you probably have areas that need work. The better your company is at training employees on navigating biases and understanding the importance of inclusion, the easier it will become for your employees to feel secure in their disclosure.
 - Recognize no matter how good you get at creating an inclusive workplace, not everyone is willing or able to accept their disability, yet alone disclose it to the company. Be patient, and let your employees find their own timing.
2. Provide a secure process for disclosure that preserves the anonymity of the individual.
 - The choice to disclose and to whom they will disclose must always remain the right of the individual.
 - You must have a process that allows identification in stages controlled by the employee. (i.e., HR, manager, supervisor). This will allow the employee to disclose at their own comfort level and to those they feel need to know.
 - Make sure to advertise the opportunity to participate in self-identification through a variety of channels to ensure maximum employee awareness. This must include education on the difference between self-identification and self-disclosure. Help your employees understand the benefits of each, for both themselves and their company.
3. Determine what actions and changes these disclosures will become a catalyst for within the company.
 - No one collects data just for the sake of collecting it. Know what you will do with it, and make sure your employees know as well. The more transparent a process is and the more it will help the employee, the more trust it will engender.
 - Make sure the promised changes actually happen. Your employees are making a privacy sacrifice in the hopes of bringing about change. Do not let them down.

Teach your company the power of compassion. When a person has experience with being judged and evaluated by the public on the basis of their disability and the public's own biases, they tend to become closed and cautious.

Only a willingness to admit to and overcome biases and show true compassion for individuals and their abilities will create an environment of trust and increased self-identification.

If you have a disability ERG/ARG, we want to help you make it better. If you don't have one, we want to help you get started!