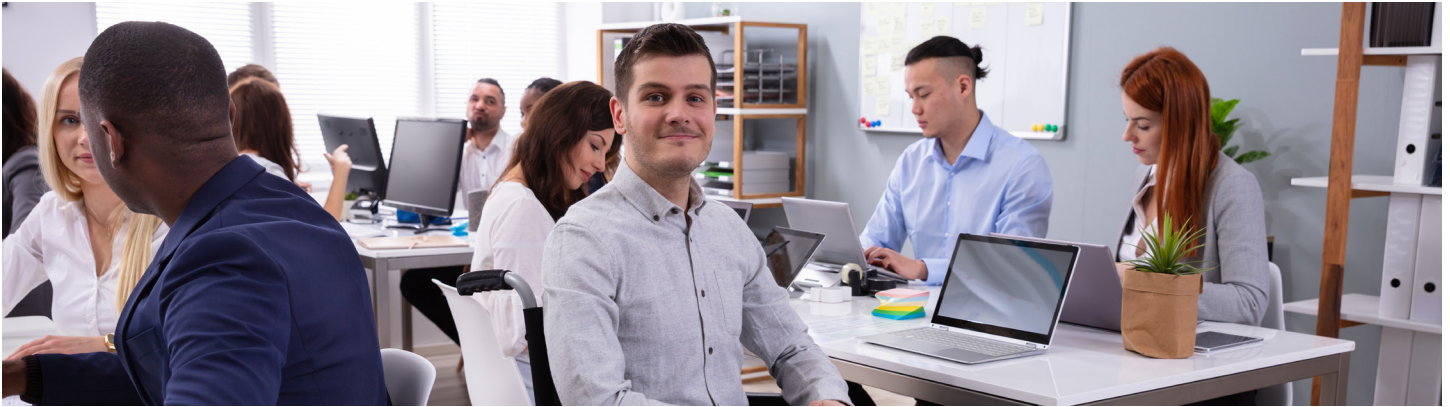




## 15.3 Including People with Disabilities in Your Workplace



### Understanding Equity vs. Equality

As we explored in *The Case for Inclusion in the Workplace*, equity and equality are two important but different concepts. For a workplace to be inclusive it must be equitable. This is vital for people with disabilities to fully participate.

Equality might be that two employees each have a cubicle with a desk. Equity recognizes and acknowledges that the employee with a disability might need an adjustment – or an accommodation – to their workspace to be successful in their job. This might be a wider cubicle that is easier to access for a person who uses a wheelchair, a quieter work location for a person who has an anxiety disorder, or a stand-up desk for a person who has a chronic back injury.

### Mitigating Unconscious Bias Towards People with Disabilities

An important concept when considering unconscious bias towards people with disabilities is ableism. Simply put, this is the preference for someone without a disability.

Ableism assigns less value to people who have developmental, emotional, physical, or psychiatric disabilities by limiting their potential and discounting the need for accommodations or adjustments in the workplace. Ableism – and the microaggressions that go along with it – are often a form of unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias is an automatic mental shortcut that helps us to sort the millions of bits of information that our brain is faced with at any moment. Sometimes unconscious bias is helpful and can serve us. It can tell us when we are safe and when we are not.

However, unconscious bias can often get in the way of making effective decisions. What we believe to be true isn't always the case. The messages that we receive from media, our cultural background and our lifetime experiences shape our unconscious biases.

For tips on how to mitigate biases, visit tool #12.2 *Unconscious Bias and Mental Health*.

# Ask the Expert: Listening and Learning from Employees with Disabilities to Proactively Identify and Remove Barriers to Inclusion

Perhaps the most important thing to know about ensuring that employees with disabilities are included is this: engage them in conversations about EDI. As an inclusive leader, curiosity and empathy are two of your most important skills in your inclusive leadership toolkit.

Ask good questions (that includes the hard ones, too!) and listen to their answers. Suspend your judgement when you hear things that you might not agree with or that make you feel uncomfortable. This is an opportunity for perspective-taking and to learn about the experience of others. Here are two important questions to get the conversation started:

1. What makes you feel *included* in the workplace?
2. What makes you feel *excluded* in the workplace?

Seeking out constructive feedback and then applying what you have learned will help to remove barriers to full participation in the workplace for all employees, not just the majority.

*Disclaimer:*

*Hire for Talent has made every effort to use the most respectful words possible while writing these materials. We realize, however, that the most appropriate terminology may change over time. We developed these materials with the intent to respect the dignity and inherent rights of all individuals.*