



Ontario
Disability
Employment
Network

Réseau ontarien
d'aide à l'emploi
pour les personnes
handicapées

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Table of Contents

Part 1: What To Understand About The Power Of Inclusive Hiring	2
Some key ways inclusion empowers	2
The talent exists	3
What else the power of inclusion does.....	4
Moving from acknowledgement to action on D&I	5
Part 2: How to Charge Up the Power of Inclusion	6
Understanding D&I difference is crucial	6
Pandemic prompts more D&I conversation	6
Moving from talk to action.....	7
Stepping stones on path to power of inclusion	7
All for one — and one for all.....	10

Part 1: What To Understand About The Power Of Inclusive Hiring



First in a two-part series on the power of inclusion, and how to intentionally and successfully make inclusive hiring “business as usual”

The global coronavirus pandemic has rapidly changed the workplace; swiftly broken down some myths and misconceptions about disability that have lingered for decades; smashed some perceived barriers to employment for people who have a disability;

and sparked more conversation about the business benefits of inclusive hiring.

Inclusive hiring drives success on many levels in businesses. That’s the power of inclusion. Whether we’re talking about a small business in a rural community, or a multinational company with offices around the world.

Some key ways inclusion empowers

- **It changes employees’ lives and helps them be more productive and successful in the workplace.** Sometimes attitudes, unconscious bias, and myths and misconceptions are the biggest barriers to success for businesses and employees alike. As the International Labour Organization (ILO), a United Nations agency, states in its employer guide to workplace inclusion of people who have a disability, *The Competitive Advantage of Hiring Persons With Disabilities*, “disability inclusion is a process” of making everyone successful through awareness and intentional actions. “In the workplace, it includes providing the necessary support and accommodations so that [people] can be fully productive, to the greatest extent possible. To succeed in disability inclusion, it is important to create a climate of inclusion, based on commitment, disability awareness, and policies and practices.”
- **Research by Deloitte has shown that companies with inclusive cultures are eight times more likely to have better business outcomes.** And these are closely tied to employee performance and productivity. Businesses can’t succeed if their employees don’t. And for all employees a key part of being productive and successful is satisfaction.
- **Inclusive hiring leads to employee satisfaction and loyalty, when it’s done right.** Recruiting and retaining employees who have a disability makes a business stronger.

That's because there's less turnover, and fewer dollars and less time spent on the hiring process. Statistics show that staff retention rates are 72% higher among people who have a disability. Satisfied staff are dedicated employees, generally.

"There are many ways people with disabilities can be integrated into the workforce . . . it's certainly something that can be achieved through employers willing to open themselves up to hiring a person with a disability and reaping the rewards of doing that," says Joe Hoffer, controlling partner of Cohen, Highley, LLP, a law firm in London, ON. The firm has practised intentional inclusive recruiting for decades, and Hoffer is a long-time member of the [Ontario Disability Employment Network's](#) Business Champions League.

He says, when people "open their minds" and expect success not only of themselves but also of the employees they hire, "It amazes me how often you achieve that outcome. And by success, I mean not just in terms of operational success within the workplace, but success for that individual in their life."

- **Inclusive hiring enables businesses to fill needed roles with skilled, qualified people who are the right "fit."** Industries in Canada and other countries are facing labour shortages and expect these to continue over the next 10 years.

In Canada, an October 2019 report by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) noted, 85% of manufacturers have a hard time filling vacancies.

And a 2018 study by the Business Development Bank of Canada found 39% of small-to-medium enterprises (SME), which drive the Canadian economy, are having difficulty finding new workers.

Meanwhile the Mining Industry Human Resources Council has said the Canadian mining sector needs 100,000 new workers over the next decade.

Labour shortages like this aren't happening only in Canada.

A global Manpower survey showed that in the U.S., seven out of 10 companies reported labour shortages in 2019. That's 70%. In 2009, it was 19%.

In the U.K., the British Chambers of Commerce says four out of five manufacturing firms has trouble finding workers. It surveyed 6,000 companies across the U.K.

The talent exists



But there is talent available. It's there, to help business owners, hiring managers and recruiting professionals meet the labour shortage head on and shock-proof their businesses. It's in the disability talent market.

While 968,000 people who have a disability in Canada *are* employed, over 400,000 *aren't*, even though they're ready, willing and able to. So there is a large pool of talent available.

For the most part, these jobseekers use their personal contacts and networks to find employment. They also enlist employment service professionals for assistance. The talent is there in the disability talent market — and businesses need to access the power of inclusion. Some are, but more need to. A joint survey by the National Organization on Disabilities (NOD), Harris Interactive and the Kessler Foundation found that only 40% of businesses accessed assistance from employment service organizations when recruiting new employees.

What else the power of inclusion does

- **Inclusion increases productivity, employee engagement, and profitability.** [A 2018 Accenture study found](#), businesses practising inclusive hiring have 72% more employee productivity, a 45% increase in workplace safety, 28% higher revenue, 30% higher profit margins and two times more in net income than other companies surveyed in the study.

As well, in its [2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report](#), Deloitte noted that “diverse and inclusive teams are more innovative, engaged, and creative in their work.” It compared high-performing teams to low-performing ones. Deloitte’s conclusion? Its findings “supports the view that people must feel included in order to speak up and fully contribute” to a business.

Deloitte research also found that businesses which are intentional about inclusive hiring are more innovative than other firms; six times more able to effectively anticipate change; and twice as likely to meet or exceed their financial targets.

- **Inclusion adds to the economy, with positive benefits.** Not only does inclusive hiring help businesses be more competitive within their sectors, it also plays a role in boosting the economy in general. The authors of a [2019 TD Economics report](#) predict that with increased inclusive hiring in Canada, there would be a 1.4% (approximately C\$36 billion) increase in GDP by 2030. They added that “maximization of human potential” through more inclusive hiring “is the ultimate benefit” of policies geared towards it.

They also note, businesses that don't start intentionally recruiting people who have a disability will, in the next few years, find themselves lagging behind rather than being more competitive.



- **The power of inclusion drives cultural change within an organization.** In 2017, Deloitte developed a [new, four-level model of D&I maturity for organizations](#). It moves businesses from a compliance-thinking approach to D&I, to a strategic approach, “to create a truly inclusive culture.” In other words, the CEO needs to own and drive diversity and inclusion (D&I), not the human resources department.

“Diversity and inclusion has been a compliance function driven by human resources for too long,” says Josh Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, Consulting LLP. “Our new diversity and inclusion maturity model show that the most effective way to achieve significant gains is through leadership ownership, strategic measurement, and a culture of accountability for inclusion that is driven from the top down.”

- **Inclusion is a “winning” solution right at business’s fingertips, whichever way you look at it.** All these statistics make this clear. The talent pool of skilled, qualified people who have a disability can help businesses expand their base of qualified employees, so they’re prepared for the future.

Yet, there’s what Deloitte calls “a reality gap.” In its 2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report, Deloitte found that across the board, there’s now more focus on D&I, however “many businesses may be in denial about the reality in their own companies.” Deloitte’s research found that 71% of businesses aspire to have an inclusive culture. But only 12% have reached D&I maturity in Deloitte’s new four-level model.

There’s still a lack of knowledge that’s impeding businesses from capitalizing on the power of inclusion. A survey of small-to-medium-size businesses in 2017 by the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work found, 71% of businesses are not hiring people who have a disability because of a “lack of awareness in skill level.”

Moving from acknowledgement to action on D&I

Lingering myths and misconceptions about the skills and abilities of people who have a disability are still common. They can deter businesses from making their hiring policies and procedures more inclusive. But things are changing. As Deloitte notes, more companies are starting to focus on “eliminating measurable bias” from their talent acquisition processes.

Saying it’s important in your business is one thing. Learning about, understanding, and putting into practice the power of inclusion is another, entirely. In part two of this series, we’ll look at the keys for implementing D&I in your business — the right way, successfully — so you can harness the power of inclusive hiring.

Part 2: How to Charge Up the Power of Inclusion

As we covered in part one of this series, disability inclusion, or disability-inclusive hiring, is a powerful thing. It's a practice that has a lot of business benefits when it's approached the right way — intentionally, that is. One of the key steps — the first, arguably — is making sure disability is included in the diversity and inclusion (D&I) conversation and strategy for your business.

This is essential. Because disability intersects with other diversity: A skilled, qualified candidate who's the ideal "fit" for the role and has a disability, may also identify as a person of colour, or as a youth, for example.

Leaving disability out of the D&I conversation means you're leaving out the world's largest minority group: The World Health Organization notes that 15% of the global population identifies as having a disability.

Understanding D&I difference is crucial

You need to look at D&I separately. They're not the same. You can have a culture of diversity, but you may not have a culture of inclusion. The two have erroneously "been coupled for the last 40 years," according to a Gallup article by Ella Washington and Camille Patrick.

"Lumping them together reduces an organization's ability to improve both. Understanding and addressing them separately is essential," the co-authors noted in their [article, 3 Requirements for a Diverse and Inclusive Culture](#).

Here's the difference:

- Diversity means there are people from different ethnicities, religions, genders, orientations and abilities in your business.
- Inclusion, on the other hand, means everyone feels safe, comfortable, valued and accepted in their work environment.

Pandemic prompts more D&I conversation

Ironically, the coronavirus pandemic is playing a key role in helping businesses take that first "how-to" step of making disability part of the D&I conversation. In the new work-from-home normal, *all employees are being accommodated one way or another*. Whether it's through



flexible hours, or making sure staff have the software and hardware they need to work remotely, and be productive and successful in their jobs.

The pandemic has smashed through some perceived barriers to employment for people who have a disability; crushed some of the myths about disability; and sparked more conversation about inclusive hiring.

Moving from talk to action

So that's step one. Make it part of the conversation. But where do you go from there?

There are several things businesses need to do, to successfully implement inclusive hiring. Things must start at the top. The CEO — or, in a smaller enterprise, the business owner — needs to own D&I and drive it.

Steve Sharpe, the CEO of Sharpe Foods in Campbellford, ON and a member of the [Ontario Disability Employment Network's \(ODEN\) Business Champions League](#), has addressed other business leaders about the benefits of inclusive hiring. In a Business Champion profile interview, he put it this way: "That's where being supported at the top helps. That's why it was nice to talk to all those business leaders. If they go back to their human resources people and say, 'Explore this opportunity,' it's more likely to happen than if somebody else does it."

As Deloitte points out in its [2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report](#), there's a "reality gap" and "results appear to be too slow" when CEOs leave D&I to human resources or the "chief diversity officer."

"Diversity and inclusion is a business responsibility, not an HR responsibility," Deloitte notes, and it must be "part of the corporate infrastructure, just like compliance, IT, and security...".

Stepping stones on path to power of inclusion

Here are some of the other keys to harnessing the power of inclusion:

Forget the old rules of D&I. Follow the new ones. Deloitte published the "old rules" and the "new rules" of D&I in its 2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report. While there are seven so-called rules in both approaches to D&I, they're significantly different. One of the key differences is the way diversity is defined. Under the old rules, or old thinking, D&I "is defined by gender, race, and demographic differences." The new rules define D&I more broadly, "including concepts of 'diversity of thought,' also addressing people with autism and other cognitive differences."



While that latter component speaks to a very specific group or demographic, it could be considered a start at including disability in the new rules of D&I. (It's important to remember that legislation in countries like Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and the U.K., as well as the United Nations, defines disability much more broadly.)

Move from being compliant to being strategic about D&I. Deloitte developed a new, four-level model of D&I maturity for businesses to follow and measure their progress. It's a model that requires a change of thinking at the C-Suite level; of moving from thinking of D&I as "a problem to be managed" and complying with legislation, to strategically "leveraging difference to create business value."

- At Level 1, businesses are still in compliance mode on D&I initiatives.
- In Level 2, they start D&I programs, but they're ad-hoc and D&I is seen in terms of numbers and targets to meet.
- Transition starts at Level 3, when the business leaders start taking ownership of D&I.
- When they reach Level 4, D&I is ingrained in the organization and its people, and there's a true culture of inclusion. According to Deloitte's research, only 12% of businesses have reached this fourth level of D&I maturity.

Make inclusion part of your brand. Your brand is much more than having a logo for your business. Brand is *everything you do and everything you say; and how you do and say those things*. Tyrrell Schmidt, the Vice-President of Global Brand and Customer Experience Officer at TD Bank, said in a November 2018 *Strategy* article: "Inclusion and diversity are core to who we are. We want to make sure that we're reflecting those values and reflecting our customers and employees in everything we do."

Making inclusion part of your brand can include things like universal design. That is, making sure you take into account the experiences of people who have a disability in the process of developing new products. Or, make accommodations a standard offering — for everyone, not as an exception. As mentioned earlier in this article, this is what's happening for many businesses in the new work-from-home environment created by the coronavirus pandemic.

When intentional D&I is an integral part of your brand— regardless of business size, there are big pay-offs. When customers or clients, and employees, alike see themselves reflected and feel valued, and good about being an employee or customer of your business, this is inclusion. Which leads to numerous business benefits. These are some of the benefits that research has shown are possible: Businesses that practise inclusive hiring experience 45% more productivity,



and 30% higher profit margins. As well, employee turnover is lower. Staff retention rates are 72% higher among staff who have a disability.

D&I awareness training that intentionally includes conversations about disability is a good first step before you begin implementing intentional inclusive recruiting. Investing in D&I education for your employees does two important things:

- It shows your commitment — at the highest levels of the business — to creating a truly inclusive environment.
- Employee education can help overcome resistance to change.

Providing staff with disability awareness training can help dispel myths. As Danielle Collier noted in a [2016 Cornell University ILR School report on best practices for inclusion](#), it “helps to decrease stereotypes and judgements about individuals with disabilities, and can also offer concrete suggestions for interacting with people with disabilities.”

Training is important. However, removing bias — especially unconscious bias — is even more important. That’s because it can skew training, recruiting and the entire organizational culture on D&I. Businesses need to eliminate “measurable bias” from all talent processes (hiring, promotion, performance management, leadership development, succession and compensation.) There is more focus on doing this, Deloitte research has found.

“People today are slowly becoming aware of both unconscious and explicit bias, and some organizations are starting to take action to expose the issue and make institutional changes to deal with it,” notes the 2017 Global Human Capital Trends Report.

Proactively — not reactively — [source qualified talent from the disability talent pool](#). If you’re not doing this, you’re missing out on many opportunities and the business benefits mentioned in part one of this series. Even more important, when you intentionally recruit and hire qualified people who have a disability, you’re creating a culture of inclusion. You’re beginning to harness the power of it.

The top two ways that job-seekers who have a disability find roles they’re qualified for are:

- Through their networks
- With the assistance of professional employment services providers

Hiring managers and recruiters, then, need to do the same thing, from their side:

- Spread the word in your networks that there’s a role to be filled
- Connect with providers who can match your needs with the right candidate



Working with employment service providers that support job seekers who have a disability, can help make the disability recruiting and hiring process easier than you thought it was going to be.

Make everyone accountable. You need to have some key performance indicators around D&I for everyone. Especially managers. Managerial accountability is one of the “new rules” of D&I. When everyone has a stake in sustaining an inclusive culture, it will be sustainable. Accountability comes in at Level 3 of Deloitte’s new model of D&I maturity. This is where:

- Business leaders own D&I
- Systemic barriers have been uncovered
- The playing field is level for all employees
- There’s a strategy
- Progress is “monitored relentlessly”

Follow the examples of companies and countries that are leading the way. The financial services sector (banks, and investment and insurance companies) is the leading example to follow.

Globally, 18 financial services organizations are in [Refinitiv’s 2020 Top 100 Diversity and Inclusion Index](#), followed by the pharmaceutical industry at nine in the Top 100. Refinitiv measures 9,000 public companies using 24 metrics against four main pillars of D&I (diversity, inclusion, people development and controversies).

All of Canada’s five major banks are in the Refinitiv Top 100; three are in the top 20 of the global ranking: RBC (#4), Scotiabank (#10) and TD (#14).

The Valuable 500 is an international initiative to bring disability inclusion to the forefront with business leaders of national and multinational corporations. [The Valuable 500](#) launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2019.

The goal of this initiative is to have 500 firms serving as role-model businesses for fostering and accelerating change on disability and inclusive hiring.

At time of publication of this article (October 2020), 302 businesses in sectors ranging from health care to foodservice, to financial services, to air travel and to public relations, have joined The Valuable 500.

All for one — and one for all

All of these “how-to’s” for empowering your employees and powering your business through inclusion, are crucial for one thing — shock-proofing your business to keep it successful in the long term, in a working and business world that’s changing rapidly.