

# WeCo Accessibility Services

## “How To” Kit on Employing Professionals with Disabilities

Thursday, October 22, 2020

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## “How To” Kit on Employing Professionals with Disabilities

Thursday, October 22, 2020

8:45am-10:00am CT

WeCo

Andy Emerson: Hello. We'll get started at 9am.

Welcome everyone. Thank you for joining today. We'll get started promptly at 9 o'clock. Just a couple of minutes.

Testing.

We have a lot to cover. Let's get started.

Female Presenter: The information found in this presentation are tips based upon the experiences and opinions of WeCo Accessibility Services Staff and should not be construed as legal advice. Regarding the development and implementation of employment practices, including disability accommodation, it is advisable to seek the advice of qualified legal counsel. The information in this presentation are the property of The Wehrman Collaborative, LLC. Please ask us before distributing this information, by contacting us at: [accessinfo@theweco.com](mailto:accessinfo@theweco.com)

Kelli Ryan: Hello and welcome.

Happy National Disability Employment Awareness month! This year we are celebrating 30 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 75 years of NDEAM.

NDEAM is held every October and focuses on educating employers about disability employment and it's really a time to shine a light on the amazing contributions that people living with disabilities bring to organizations every day.

The goal of our quick 'HOW TO' presentation is to send you back to your office with a better understanding and some peace of mind about how simple it can be to employ people living with disabilities with hopes that you feel encouraged to do so.

Your instructors today are Kelli Ryan, Director of Operations, and Laura Andert, Operations Assistant at WeCo Accessibility Services.

WeCo is not a typical accessibility company. We are mission based, and all we do is accessibility. WeCo is comprised of digital technologists who live with one or more disabilities. Our mission is to foster accessibility awareness and independence for all people, regardless of their disability.

We provide services by offering trainings, as well as auditing, consulting, usability testing, and remediation of websites, mobile apps and digital documents. We have been honored for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row as a NOD Leading Disability Employer. Staffed almost 100% by professionals living with disabilities from our entry level staff to executive management, we live and breathe disability employment!

Because all of the people in technical roles at WeCo live with one or more disability, our work has special significance to us. We live with the results of our work every day.

Your learning menu for today will include: Why Inclusion is so important, how to locate and successfully reach out to candidates who also live with disabilities, ways to make your application and interview process accessible, tips on creating your own disability accommodation system, points on how to encourage disability self-identification, both in the application process and among your existing staff.

So why is inclusion so important?

This year we are celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA, a civil rights law that protects access and opportunity for people with disabilities. *"The ADA is one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities **have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life** -- to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services, and to participate in State and local government programs and services."* This quote was taken from ADA.gov.

The ADA was designed to level the playing field so that everyone, regardless of disability or capability, can participate in life. That includes buying things, accessing services and being employed.

Our slide reads “Being a disability-including employer is good for recruitment, retention, engagement, and – ultimately – the bottom line” taken from Disability:IN. The photo shows hands from different individuals raised together in the air to show togetherness and inclusion.

Let’s talk about why Inclusivity is good for business. What WeCo learned with the shift to the virtual world caused by COVID is that because we already practice a lot of the operational accommodations for people living with disabilities, our transition was just business as usual. While other companies were grappling with how to work virtually, how to accommodate schedules and how to manage these virtual teams, we were growing the business!

According to a recent report from Accenture, companies that offered inclusive working environments for employees living with disabilities achieved an average of 28% higher revenue, 30% greater economic profit margins, and 2x net income of industry peers. What they have taught us is that including individuals with disabilities into your company’s workforce and then following that up with resources and support is just good business!!

Diversity and Inclusion matters to society and the economy– According to a 2013 survey from a BBMG survey titled From Obligation to Desire, 2.5 billion consumers worldwide, representing 36.4 percent of the global population, are aspirational – they define themselves in part through brands, and yet believe they have a responsibility to purchase products that are good for the environment and society.

In the paper “An Undervalued Market, the purchasing power of people living with disabilities” authored by the American Institutes for research, 92% of consumers have a more favorable perception of companies that hire people living with disabilities and more than 33% of respondents prefer to give their business to companies that employ people living with disabilities.

Businesses focusing on hiring people living with disabilities also help add to the economic status of this group. The buying power of this market is sizable and is only going to continue to grow as the baby boom generations enter into retirement.

The US Office of Disability Employment Policy categorizes persons with disabilities as the third largest market segment with around 1 million people, or 15% of the world’s population experiencing one or more type of disability. Nationally 20% of the US’s population, or 1 in 5 of your potential customers will experience disability in their lives.

After taxes, the disposable income for the working age persons with disabilities is about \$490 billion. That’s \$490 billion that is pumped back into the economy.

Disability communities are tight knit and word spreads quickly. Improve your brand loyalty by employing high-quality workers with disabilities.

The image used on this slide shows a woman sitting in a wheelchair, dressed in professional attire smiling with her teammates behind her at a workstation. There's a lot of value that inclusivity can bring to the team!

People living with various disabilities bring with them valuable perspectives into products, ideas, and processes. Feedback from people living with disabilities on product and service creation can be invaluable ways to inspire innovation and improve productivity.

People living with disabilities are a Dedicated workforce, are strong performers, have proven lower absenteeism, increased employee engagement and higher retention!

Employee performance and retention can be greatly improved by simple accommodation practices – which are essentially just creative alternatives for traditional ways of doing things. We'll refer to accommodations also as alternatives, adjustments and/or modifications as we go through our presentation.

Implementing alternatives or modifications into your company's normal operations helps ensure that all employees can do their jobs at the best of their ability. The employee will be able to focus on work, not on trying to find work arounds and alternate ways to complete their essential tasks.

This can greatly improve the efficiencies, innovations and creativity needed to be successful in their roles. Taking away those obstacles will leave your employee happier and more confident in their work and more likely to remain at your company.

Companies who aren't familiar with disability employment can get pretty nervous when thinking of how difficult and expensive these accommodations could be. In reality, you probably do some of this already. Making adjustments to your facilities and every day practices should not be scary!

These modifications do not need to be intimidating or costly! Most can cost \$0 to implement, and when they do, the average cost of accommodation per employee is less than \$500! Be empowered to be creative! And don't be afraid to include your employee in the process. They will know what they need and will most likely offer up solutions when requesting the accommodation.

Keep in mind that not every suggestion needs to be approved, you are allowed to offer up alternative solutions, up to actually denying accommodations under certain circumstances.

Some examples of workplace alternatives or adjustments that are used daily can be very simple.

A short list of some common types of accommodations that could be provided are:

Offering information in more than one format – you'll notice on our slides that we always have an accompanying picture that goes with the information we're communicating in the presentation. People of all abilities process and retain information in different ways.

The image on this slide shows a quiet workspace which includes a computer monitor, a calendar and some bookshelves. This helps reiterate to the participants that we're talking about workspaces.

We have different options for holding our interviews, our annual reviews, accommodation requests, etc., so if someone needs an accommodation, we have it at the ready.

Provide large computer monitors vs smaller options as part of the normal office equipment.

Have Assistive Devices available for computers like screen reader programs, talk to text programs available upon request, you can utilize community loan programs from organizations like PACER so you don't have to purchase them, you can test them out first and can be returned if they are no longer needed.

This can be helpful if a person's disability was temporary or changes along the course of their life cycle at your company.

Give employees access to quiet work areas, with plenty of space to move around. WeCo rents from a Co-Op space where we can office with each other, but also have the option of quieter, focus rooms that we can utilize if we need a more quiet area to concentrate.

Offering a choice of flexible work schedules.

There's so many more, and we will touch on others as we continue on. I just wanted to give you an idea of how simple and easy these can be.

These simple alternatives are then available for every employee, not just your employees who are living with disabilities. Who doesn't prefer a quiet workstation and larger computer screens??

We thought we would close this section by showing you some of the simple accommodations we make for our staff here at WeCo. As you'll see, most of these are about thinking ahead, and not going to a great deal of expense.

Our founder/President, Lynn Wehrman, always says that the most frequent accommodation she makes in the workplace is to pull a chair out from a table so someone in a wheelchair can join a meeting. Accommodation can be that simple.

The top left photo also shows risers we put under conference room tables and some of our workstations. We actually got these on Amazon. They are sturdy and clear. Most of the people working at Industrious don't know that they are in nearly all of the conference rooms now.

We also put our Keurig coffee machine and office supplies, like business cards, in a low credenza so everyone can reach them. We label supply drawers with Braille from a special label maker—also from Amazon.

The photo at the bottom of the slide shows our office space. Note how the workstations are against the walls. This makes it easy for power wheelchairs to get in and out, and for our staff who are blind to navigate the room and find their workstations.

Not every accommodation request is simple, they can come in all shapes and sizes. But as you can see, with a little creativity, and by working with the employee, a lot of these solutions can be done quickly and with little costs involved.

We're going to talk about recruitment and ways to locate and reach candidates living with disabilities.

Start with the people on your teams who recruit the talent. Sometimes when people haven't worked professionally, or even known anyone personally that lives with a disability, it can be intimidating to start those interactions in a professional, and protected scenario like recruitment and hiring. Consider some these tips for your recruitment teams:

Offer training to your recruitment officers, and other staff to learn about and understand laws and protections like disclosure, discrimination and equal opportunity to take the fear out of hiring.

Offer Disability Awareness or etiquette training to your managers, recruiters and other players to help make them more comfortable with terminology and sensitivity EARN, JAN and NOD offer great resources to get started.

Train them to understand the skills that people living with disabilities can bring to the table. We've already talked about PWD as a Dedicated workforce with valuable perspectives, and strong performances, it's important to realize that the life skills that PWD have can be easily translated into valuable professional skills as well.

The quote from this slide says: "A Skill of mine is looking at a problem and being creative on how I solve it and methodical on how to break it down. That has come from navigating the world in a wheelchair. This is an asset to me in the workplace."

Other skills off of the top of my head can include increased memory capability, laser focus, problem solving, increased creativity with an ability to look outside of the box. Time management and prioritization also come natural to people living with disabilities. All of these skills are necessary for everyday life, and so they translate easily into the workforce as well.

The vetting process needs to be done fairly, by focusing on the applicant's qualifications, not their disability. This slide shows a woman in a wheelchair being interviewed by a gentleman sitting in a chair.

Educate your teams to not underestimate the ability of a person with a disability.

When contemplating whether a candidate is right for the job, think about role suitability first and disability accommodation second.

Focus on their education and experience. Consider if they will be a good fit for your team and if they possess the desire to do a good job. If you do this, and truly hire the best person for the job, the accommodation part will be the least complicated part of the process.

At WeCo, we've found that accessibility is a very individual thing. Each person knows what they need and when we know that they are right for a position, we work together to make accommodation happen.

It's extremely important to remember that accommodation needs are different, and very separate from



employability for most roles. While there are some instances in which a disability might make it impossible to perform certain types of work, the technology available to most of us makes it possible to accommodate most roles, particularly in the tech, knowledge and retail sectors.

In many cases, the disability of a person has little to no impact on their ability to perform the job. They've read the position or job description and know what they are capable of – Most candidates will come into these interviews knowing what they will need to be able to complete their job duties.

Normalizing the accommodation process into every day operations will help bridge the gap and will help your candidates and employees feel more comfortable disclosing their needs earlier in the process.

Second step in your recruitment process will be ensuring that the job descriptions or position postings are in accessible formats and are easily accessed by everyone. Some tips on making them accessible include:

Make sure the documents are accessible – accessibility to screen readers is always a must, but also consider the content of the postings. Keep them simple, clean and concise. Too much information, long lists, or scattered information can make it difficult for people living with cognitive disorders to process.

Using numbered lists can really help when there are multiple duties, tasks or requirements.

Make sure that you have listed the essential job duties so it's clear to the applicant what will be expected of them. Like our image shows, the candidates can do a mental check of how their qualifications measure up to the expectations of the job duties.

Add physical requirements to your job postings. Examples of physical requirements could be ability to sit, walk, stand, ability to speak, Ability to lift, Drive a vehicle.

When WeCo lists requirements, we make sure to be as detailed as possible – an example is the ability to communicate vs ability to speak. Does the candidate have to have the ability to speak? Or is it ok for them to communicate in different ways.

Another example is the requirement to walk – does the candidate actually need to walk, or do they really just need to be able to be mobile? Part of my job is assisting others who are living with sight related disabilities, so I need to be able to walk to guide them.

Getting copies, running coffee, grabbing lunches does not require a person to actually walk, but they do need to be able to get from point a to point b in some way.

Being clear about things like the job requiring them to leave the building to run for things is vital in their decision-making process. The applicant will need to decide if they can complete these essential job duties and physical requirements – either with or without accommodation before they apply for the position.

Don't be afraid to state that accommodations may be available in order to complete those essential job requirements. When a job posting includes information about accommodations it sets the tone of acceptance and inclusion to the applicants. It can help to start build trust right from the start.

Always have a person of reference for any candidates who may have questions, concerns or difficulties with accessing your position postings.

LinkedIn has a large amount of Disability Employment groups where companies are encouraged to post open positions. Our image shows lots of different people being linked together in a large web, meant to represent all of the people in the candidate pool being linked together by different social media or community groups.

WeCo's LinkedIn group, Disability Employment Connection, or DEC, is just an example.

There are websites focused solely on inclusive employment that you can research and utilize.

Utilizing community partners where membership can help your company to be recognized as an inclusive company can help you gain you access to larger candidate pools of people living with disabilities.

Move your job fairs online! There are several organizations who offer online job fairs. Including online job fairs to your recruitment efforts helps to include individuals who may have difficulties being able to participate in the in-person fairs and helps reach more people in general. You won't be limited by geography – you can reach anyone, anytime, anywhere!

The next place to check for possible modification opportunities will be in your application and interview processes. The image on the slide shows a cartoon image of a gentlemen being interviewed by several people.

We use Wufoo forms for our applications as they have been verified as accessible, and every candidate is directed to fill it out completely. If it is not filled out completely, they are not considered. Giving people short cuts is always detrimental in the end, and people living with disabilities don't want to be coddled or catered to, they want to fight for a position just like everyone else.

Regardless of the position the applicant is applying for, WeCo lets the applicants know that accommodations can and will be a part of the process if requested.

WeCo has the accommodation consideration written right into our templates, so every single person we reach out gets told the same thing, regardless if the applicant is living with a disability or not "Let me know if you will require an accommodation to participate in the interview".

Accommodations we have come across in interviews can vary - from requiring a job coach to attend, accommodating an interpreter (provided by the candidate) and the most common is the request for an alternative type of interview.

We have several interview options available in case that request does come in, and they do! Our hiring managers have held interviews through interpreters, emails, chat boxes as well as onsite and virtual options- there's nothing that we won't do to make it so people can participate - after all, we've reviewed their application and resume and we're interested in them and believe they may be a good fit! The interview process should not hinder that potential from joining your team.

The important thing to remember is to not single out anyone, ask the same question and offer the same information to every single applicant, even if you know the applicant does not have a disability.

I'm now going to turn this back over to Kelli to talk about creating an accommodations system.

Kelli Ryan: We tried to come up with some of our most common accommodations that we try to normalize into our everyday operations. Some of these things we've done since the start, some of these we've learned to implement along the way. Remember, this is always a journey - even we're still on it! Our image shows people talking and shaking hands, one within a computer screen and one standing outside of it.

**Virtual Offices** - we've all learned this year that with a little ingenuity and some adapted processes, moving your staff online is very doable. This is an accommodation that has long been avoided by companies. Remote work has been a top accommodation request for many years, and now that it's proven to work, consider leaving this as an option for your workers, if their job role allows for it.

Allowing people living with disabilities to work from home removes so many hurdles and allows their time and energy to be put to better use – being efficient and productive members of your teams.

**Flexible Schedules** – we believe in offering our employees the option to make their own schedules. Some choose to remain in the more rigid schedules that are more widely used by organizations, but most of our employees choose to follow a more flexible schedule. Offering this to employees is good practice for many reasons: Your employees know when they are most productive, your employees will call in sick less because they can plan their appointments and other responsibilities around their projects and time frames. This doesn't mean you have to let them have complete free reign of their days, you can still have core hour expectations and of course strict deadlines on their projects, as well as daily/weekly check in meetings. We use a project management system that is accessible that allows us to assign tasks, track communications and set deadlines.

Remember to trust your employees. You trusted them enough to bring them on to your teams, trust them now to get their work done.

When providing equipment to your employees, consider **Ergonomic equipment** – when providing equipment to your employees consider ergonomic friendly options of keyboards, mouse and chairs. Footrests and monitor risers also help to promote good posture and can help keep your employees healthy from day one on the job and can help avoid an accommodation request for these in the future.

**Precise job duties:** I wanted to talk about job duties here and not just in recruitment. It is vital for job seekers to know what the essential job functions are of a job they are interested in applying for obvious reasons, but it's also important for current employees, and their managers, to know and understand their essential job functions – because life happens. Someone may not be living with a disability when they start but could find themselves in temporary or permanent disability within their life cycle at your company. A common type of accommodation can be removing non-essential job duties or possibly moving an employee from one role to a different, open position based on their ability to complete the essential job requirements. Have those job duties clear and concise from the start to take any guess work out for your HR and management teams.

Accommodations in training your employees. Just like how utilizing virtual job fairs ensures that people of all abilities can participate, the same thing rings true for trainings. It's ok to offer onsite training but find a way to offer this same training online. These can be live or prerecorded – we suggest utilizing a captioning service for online trainings and meetings if you plan to record them and use them in the future. It's a good rule of thumb to have recorded meetings or trainings verbatim captioned before sharing them with your teams as you never know if someone will need them in the future. Our image shows a woman being part of a virtual meeting or training with 4 other people who are on her computer screen.

Make sure that the information being shared onsite is also shared in the virtual meeting room. Power points that are made accessible are a great option to ensure that the information is being received by all. Be sure to add not only verbal cues to your presentations, but visual cues as well. People have different abilities when it comes to processing information, offering multiple ways to communicate your information is an important type of accommodation.

Be sure to describe the visual cues you've used on your slide.

You can digitize all handouts and send them out to the online participants prior to the training in PDF form. Offering your materials prior does not mean that the participants will already have learned what you're training. They will still depend on your trainers taking them through it. Offering it early just allows people a chance to review the materials early to ensure they can follow along and plan for their training experience. The goal of everyone is to get the most out of the time spent!

Virtual training, supplying accessible documents in advance, captioning, and adding visual and verbal cues are all types of accommodation! You can easily make these a part of your training preparation processes!

Let's talk about the fun stuff!! Who doesn't love a fun company picnic, happy hour, dinner or awards ceremony?? Our image shows a bundle of balloons inside of an office setting.

WeCo live streams our Christmas parties and awards ceremonies – when we were onsite, we invested in a camera that we could use so our employees who were out of state could still join us in Zoom. Now that we're all working virtually, we are realizing how amazing we can make these events. I'm talking FULL ON PRODUCTION with glitz and glamour!

Take into consideration your attendees' abilities. Could they all attend the event and participate in it? Can they enter the building? Can they join teammates at the tables? Are they able to participate in activities like raffles, motivational speakers, music, etc.

We have found that the best way to plan a big event is to ask the team members what they would like to do, and how they would like to do it – we take polls all the time of our team – who better to ask than the people who will be participating.

When you send out your invites, ask in the invite if an accommodation will be required. You do not need to provide captioning or ASL if it's not asked for.

If you are ever unsure of what someone is capable of doing, simply just ask them.

What a great time to let your new hires know how dedicated your company is not only to their successes, but to them as people as well. Like our image shows the word “ACCEPTED” in very large letters.

Talk about the culture of acceptance/inclusivity at your company – brag about the steps your company takes for inclusivity and accessibility and how proud you are of the progress you’re making!

WeCo is very different from other companies where we are made up 100% of people living with disabilities. WeCo fosters the acceptance, and normality, of our staff talking about their disabilities and how they cope, and how they utilize them as strengths in their roles at WeCo every single day. We joke about how WeCo as a whole is an ERG, because we use each other as resources every day.

The first page of WeCo’s Accommodations training for all staff members talks about our culture of acceptance and inclusivity. We talk about how much we encourage self-disclosure, how we support our staff who have self-disclosed, but also how we protect those individuals – our management and leadership team will never disclose information to others, our employees own their own stories and decide when they share it. But the truth of the matter is that we can’t help them make modifications or adjustments if we don’t know they need them!

People should never wait until there are performance issues to request accommodation, they are still subject to disciplinary action – they should request their accommodations BEFORE any issues arise. The sooner they disclose, the sooner they can get back to business.

So we have information in the presentation, as well as live links we send out to them prior to the meeting – so directly following orientation they know how and where to request their accommodation.

It’s very important that employees know and understand that we can’t accommodate them if they don’t disclose to us, that it’s up to the employees to reach out, but be aware that Self-disclosure can be scary and really uncomfortable for a new employee so it’s our responsibility to make them feel empowered and protected in order to do so.

I’ve attended several webinars and conferences this year focusing on inclusivity, and one of the common practices being discussed is the annual Self-Identification Survey. This is different than self-disclosure and accommodations that they are not anonymous. The image on this slide shows 5 office workers, with one of them having a visible disability as she is in a wheelchair. As a manager, you cannot tell visually if

any of the other 4 people are also living with a disability. And not every employee is going to be comfortable with disclosing that information. This is where a self-identification survey comes in.

Self-Identification surveys contain data given voluntarily and anonymously about disability status within your organization and used for statistical purposes only.

Research done by Cornell University's Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability has shown that some of the main barriers to employee's self-identifying are:

Risk of being fired or missing out on a promotion, Risk of being treated differently, Desire for privacy, Risk of losing health care benefits. And 44% stated the fact that the disability has no impact on their job performance.

There are several things you can do to help promote your employees to engage in the self-identification surveys:

Explain how the data is collected and how it's used to improve representation of people with disabilities within the company by Helping to implement ERGs within the company.

Provide statistical data on the need for more accessible workspaces, processes and opportunities, Normalizing disability employment within the company.

Another idea for you to consider is offering an opportunity to the employees who have self-disclosed or self-identified in the past to be a part of the campaign. Having others tell their stories and offer encouragement can be very helpful in building confidence in others who are still a bit scared.

Another suggestion is to encourage company leaders to self-identify if they are comfortable with it to show that this drive for inclusion comes from the top down.

Creating and fostering an inclusive work environment is the best outcome of these self-identification surveys.

There's no right or wrong time to run a campaign, a lot of the companies at the Disability:IN conference were discussing how they choose to start their campaigns about a month before open enrollment so it coincides with it each year – so they always know when to start preparing and employees start to learn when to anticipate it.

Retention of good workers isn't always about pay, it's also about how you support them and what your company can do to make them feel not only included but heard. we're going to talk about some

company resources. Our image on this slide shows 3 employees standing side by side with each other, one of the employees has arm crutches.

Start building up company resources for your employees to join. Work with your employees to create a disability ERG at your company. Being a part of an employer resource group within the company could help ease the concerns of employees who are considering either self-disclosure or self-identifying. These groups offer a sense of community and togetherness within your organization. Ask someone from leadership to be a sponsor and an advocate for these groups. Help these groups feel like they are being heard and take them with you on the journey you're taking towards being a more inclusive company.

Join movements like Disability:IN and NOD. These are organizations that recognize companies on inclusive journeys and are great resources not only for your employees, but for your company as well. Take the Disability:IN index to see where you are. Make goals to rank higher and higher each year!

A great way to find out what your company is doing well along with what could be improved upon in terms of accessibility and inclusivity is to ask your employees for their feedback. Perhaps this year you take a poll to see where you stand and next year you can implement the self-identification survey and do some bragging about the improvements you've made over the year.

Anyone on WeCo's staff will tell you the same thing: If you are unsure of what we need, ask. If you need help coming up with modifications or adjustments that work for a situation, just ask. If you want to schedule an event somewhere but are unsure if someone can attend – JUST ASK. YOU DO NOT HAVE ALL OF THE ANSWERS and should not pretend to. You'll stress yourself out and make things much more complicated than they need to be. Keep it simple by familiarizing yourselves with the resources that are available to you.

Some of the resources that WeCo relies on are: JAN – Answers to all of your accommodation questions: What can and can't be asked – what is considered reasonable?

Disability:IN offers a Free resource library, NOD offers tools and resources, EARN: Employer assistance and resource – training center and resources.

There are so many more out there, you just need to look and find them.



WeCo offers a number of free webinars and workshops throughout the year. Watch for them on our website, or sign up for our Accessibility Blog and/or Quick Tips email for notifications.

Our Accessibility Blog comes out a few times each month, keeping you up to date in changes in digital accessibility. Our Quick Tips are a fast-read learning guide and reminder to keep accessibility top of mind. Both are written by our Accessibility Team and guest bloggers.

Bookmark our Free Accessibility Library as a reference for laws, guidance and accessibility tools. It's a great resource, including our "Make a Business Case for Accessibility" section!

All of our resources can be found under the "Resources" tab of our website. Our Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn feeds also keep you up to date on the latest changes to legislation, emerging accessibility technology and on what we're up to. Follow us!

Please know that you can access WeCo at any time. You can contact us at [accessinfo@theweco.com](mailto:accessinfo@theweco.com), that a-c-c-e-s-s-i-n-f-o at t-h-e-w-e-c-o-.com. You can also call us at 855-849-5050 extension 1. Or visit our website at the weco.com that's w-e-c-o-com.

Thank you for joining our celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

We are now going to welcome Kelli Ryan and Laura Andert to answer any questions you may have.

Laura Andert: Hello everyone.

Kelli Ryan: Andy, did we have any questions come through during that presentation?

Andy Emerson: I haven't seen any. Can you explain what an ERG is?

Kelli Ryan: Laura, I know you just did some research on that. Do you want to give an explanation?

Laura Andert: Yes. I'm glad this question came in. ERG stands for Employment Resource Group. I just have to say, this was so fun researching. Basically, it's a leadership group in your company that

comes together or is created by people who want to empower your employees and really stand for making the company as a whole. I want to say so much here! Making the company as a whole as best as it can be.

Whereas, employees of this leadership group come together and they come up with ways to make their mission more empowered. Kelly, can you help me with this? There's so much to say. I just love it.

Kelli Ryan: It can be all sorts of different groups. Obviously, in this presentation we're talking about people living with disabilities. Like Laura was saying, it's where people can come together and discuss ways to make their jobs easier. They can talk with other people going through the same things. Sometimes it's used to talk with management or executives on how to make the company more inclusive. That would be the goal to get more resources in, maybe different support, things of that nature. Thanks, Lynn, for asking that.

Laura Andert: I wanted to add, Employee Resource Groups, they come together and think of fun things to do to get out there in the community and help support. Whether it's volunteer for an activity or an organization as a team. That's really where the empowerment comes from. Team work. Doing this all together.

Andy Emerson: Another question I received, it seems like WeCo staff are very open about their disabilities. What happens when someone isn't open?

Laura Andert: I can answer this. As you learn in the presentation, it's really up to the individual employee to self-disclose their disability. Here at WeCo, again, we do not pressure someone to be as open as they want to be with their disability. We invite them and encourage them to share their experiences, or if they're struggling with a task, how they are struggling. We encourage them to be open and honest about how we can help them make it better.

Kelli Ryan: Sorry.

Laura Andert: There's so much to say here. It's really up to the them how much they want to disclose. We do, here at WeCo, we do not pressure anyone to be more open. Go ahead, Kelly.

Kelli Ryan: Disclosure is a very personal decision. It's a very personal experience. I think the biggest thing is reminding and letting people know that we want you to disclose as early as you can if an accommodation is required, because we want to get you back to being the best that you can be. We understand that there is a fear, but that's why we try to have as many conversations about accommodations and how inclusive we are and how supportive we are from the very beginning so that there's a little bit more trust built up by the time that they are ready to disclose.

Laura Andert: Yes.

Andy Emerson: That's awesome. What kind of challenges do you face with disability disclosure and job performance?

Kelli Ryan: Again, I think it's a very personal experience. If someone is performing under, obviously during that discussion, accommodation and disclosure may come up. That's great. That's OK. But we really encourage people to disclose before those performance issues happen. You can still be subject to some disciplinary steps if you wait too long. As soon as you feel or notice that your employee's performance is starting to lessen, start opening up some dialogue with that employee as soon as you can.

Andy Emerson: Wonderful. How long does your accommodation's process take?

Kelli Ryan: That can vary a lot. If it's something as simple as someone needing to change their schedule, if it's something as simple as just getting them logged into a program on their computer, that's very fast. But if we have to order something, or if we have to make a huge shift, that can take more time. We do have time limits set for expectations within our process. Once we receive that accommodation request, we have x amount of days to respond, and from there, x amount of days to come up with a decision. It can really vary depending on the request.

Laura Andert: I was going to chime in. Yeah, basically what you stated, Kelly. It really depends on the accommodation the employee is asking for. We are here at WeCo, or at WeCo, we make this process at WeCo as smooth as possible as far as accommodations process. We hope employees do speak up if they need accommodations, and don't hesitate. But we invite them to speak up if we see a performance issue on a test or project that they're leading, we politely say or invite them, initiate the conversation in a polite way. Yeah.

Andy Emerson: Awesome. Thank you. It sounds like a lot of these accommodations are on a case-by-case basis. I just wanted to highlight that.

How do you handle the situation when other employees inquire about an accommodation you put into place for someone else?

Kelli Ryan: It's something I ran into more at my old job than I do here. Obviously, WeCo is so different. Everyone kind of has a same, but different experience that they're living through. That empathy and understanding is already there.

For companies that aren't like WeCo, it's all about building that culture. It's all about training your employees and management on disability employment, disability sensitivity, things of that nature. Really, getting that culture in there of acceptance and support, you can always remind people that there are protected classes and protected things like FMLA that you don't really want to worry too much about what other people are doing and what other people are going through. But I definitely think it's a culture situation.

Andy Emerson: Awesome. Thank you. If anyone else has any other questions, feel free to put them into chat to everyone or to the WeCo Accessibility account. I have one more question. How do you communicate the accommodation process and how do you ensure it's acceptable?

Kelli Ryan: Sorry, you cut out.

Andy Emerson: How do you communicate the accommodation process to your staff? And how to ensure that that's accessible?

Kelli Ryan: Laura, do you want me to take it?

Laura Andert: Yeah. And then I'll chime in after. Go ahead.

Kelli Ryan: I think it was in June, we did a full-on accommodation process training. We got all of our staff together and really went through the process, what the expectations would be for them to understand what will happen when they make that request. We also have several places within our system where we have links. We use forms a lot. We have word docs and the option to fill out a form. We have live links to those forms using platforms that we know are accessible. We've had our people test them. So they have access to them whenever they need them. We have it listed on our internet. We pretty much have it everywhere saying, "hey, use us if you need us."

Through training. In orientation we talk about it. It's in several places within WeCo.

Laura Andert: Kelly, I will piggyback on what you said. Just to comment, when you came on board with WeCo, you thought of the brilliant idea of using Wufoo forms. Those forms are just so great. They are accessible and they're pretty smooth-going. I'm just saying, for filling out forms versus a word doc or any other documentation program, I would say in my opinion, forms are the easiest way for communicating to get what you want requested to your employer.

Andy Emerson: Awesome. That takes us to the end of our time. Thank you for joining us today. Thank you to our presenters Kelli Ryan and Laura Andert. I hope you can join us in the future. If you have any questions, [ask@theweco.com](mailto:ask@theweco.com) is a great way to reach us. Have a great day.

Laura Andert: Thank you for joining! Have a great day. Hope you learned a lot.

[End of webinar.]