

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

BUSINESS CASE  
DEFINING YOUR INITIATIVE  
PLANNING PROCESS  
COMMUNITY PARTNERS  
**BUILDING YOUR CULTURE**  
SCREENING & REVIEWS  
MEASURING SUCCESS  
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

“The positive energy fostered by a diverse and inclusive team is exemplified in TRU's distribution centers, through the team's "Differently-Abled" hiring initiative. Over the past few years, our DC's have hired over 250 team members with disabilities, many of whom have had difficulty securing a job throughout their lives. This concerted talent strategy has reminded us that valuing each team member's strengths means valuing diversity. That, in turn, has enhanced our collective team's contribution and commitment to delivering joy to children of all ages!”

– Jeff Kellan, Vice President - Supply Chain, Toys “R” Us

Building your communications plan

Understanding the basics of disability etiquette

Interacting with employees with specific disabilities

## In This Chapter

As with any new organizational initiative, communicating openly with employees is essential to ensuring buy-in from the workplace and the success of your disability employment and inclusion program. Additionally, you may decide you want to communicate to external audiences for reasons such as helping to grow your recruiting pipeline or building awareness and excitement around your leadership in diversity and inclusion.

You will work with your site communications team or your corporate communications team to develop a plan based on your communications goals. It will contain specific messages, channels of delivery and timing for each of your relevant audiences.

## Consider These Potential Audiences

### Internal Audiences

- Employees at large
- Managers and team leads
- Executive leadership
- Employee resource group
- Site leadership
- Frontline supervisors
- Union leadership

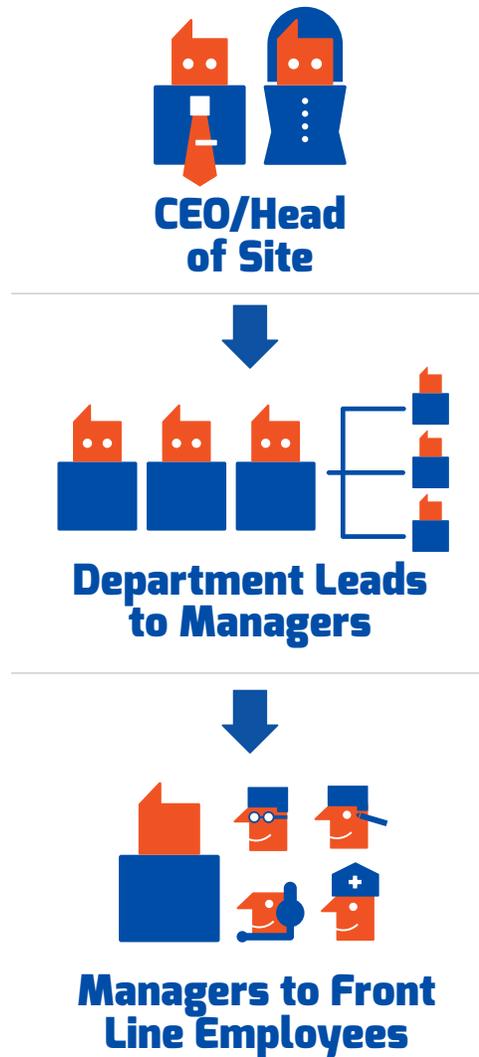
### External Audiences

- Local and area public school system
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Provider agencies (when applicable)
- Local government
- State government
- Corporate customers
- Individual customers
- Local media

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

## The Communications Cascade

The “communications cascade” is an effective way of engaging internal audiences. In this model, your messages flow from the CEO/head of the site to his or her leadership team/department leads. Department leads then share the same messages with their managers, and the managers are then tasked with communicating with their teams of frontline employees.



For this to be successful, it is essential that everyone uses the same set of talking points and understands that following the script is mandatory, not discretionary. The speaking points will announce your initiative, clearly explain why it is positive for the company and employees, and cover what might be considered when interacting with your new employees. It is also helpful to provide the leaders with a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help them answer employee questions.

Of course, this is best when reinforced on a continual basis through communications in other existing company communications channels such as Town Hall Meetings, newsletters and intranet sites.

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

## Encouraging Self-Identification

A critical component of building an inclusive workplace is recognizing and supporting current employees who have disabilities. Whereas policies in the past have discouraged employers from asking employees about disability status, new regulations under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require federal contractors to invite employees to self-identify as an individual with a disability – a best practice that all companies should follow.

Encouraging self-identification can take many forms – from including information about self-identification in regularly scheduled employee communications, to full-blown self-identification campaigns. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) has developed a form for federal contractors to use to invite employees or applicants to self-identify as an individual with a disability. At the very least, companies should make this form readily available for employees to access, and encourage self-identification using this form on a regular basis.

## Fostering an Inclusive Workplace

Before you begin interviewing and hiring people with disabilities, it is important to provide training to your current workforce on disabilities. Investing in this training upfront will help foster that culture of inclusion you want to achieve.

### Goals of this training include:

- Providing a basic overview of the disability community
- Supporting employees in becoming comfortable working with their coworkers with disabilities
- Improving communication techniques and skills, and reducing misunderstandings
- Providing workers with strategies to handle their own fears and anxieties related to disability

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

## Basics of Disability Etiquette

- Treat people with disabilities as you would like to be treated
- Smile and be friendly
- Use a normal tone of voice
- Talk to the person with the disability, not to his aide, coach or sign language interpreter
- Resist talking about disability unless it is relevant to the task at hand
- Never assume that a person with disabilities needs help. Ask if he or she needs help before taking action

## Practical Tips – Interacting with a Person Who ...



### Uses a Wheelchair

- Rearrange objects to accommodate a wheelchair before the person arrives
- Consider distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles (curbs, stairs, steep hills, etc.) when giving directions to a person in a wheelchair
- Do not push, lean on or hold onto a person's wheelchair unless the person asks you to. The wheelchair is part of his or her personal space.
- Know where to find accessible restrooms, telephones, water fountains, etc., in case the person asks for help with finding them
- See additional tips below for mobility challenges



### Is Deaf/Hard of Hearing

- Let the person take the lead in establishing the communication mode, such as lip-reading, sign language or writing notes
- Talk directly to the person, even when a sign language interpreter is present
- If the person lip-reads, face him or her directly, speak clearly and with a moderate pace
- In a large meeting, have people raise their hands and have the meeting leader point to the next person who speaks; this will allow for easier lip-reading, or for appropriate time for the interpreter to begin signing
- Do not be afraid to ask and answer questions
- Do not position yourself in front of a window or harsh light or the person who is deaf or hard of hearing will have difficulty seeing you
- Do not talk over other people

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

## Practical Tips – Interacting with a Person Who ... (continued)



### Has a Speech Impairment

- Pay attention, be patient and wait for the person to complete a word or thought – do not finish it for the person
- Ask the person to repeat what is said if you do not understand. Tell the person what you heard and see if it is close to what he or she is saying
- Be prepared for various devices or techniques used to enhance or augment speech. Do not be afraid to communicate with someone who uses an alphabet board or a computer with synthesized speech.
- Do not be afraid to ask and answer questions
- Try moving to a quieter area if you are having difficulty hearing/ understanding



### Has Vision Loss/Impairment, Blindness

- When greeting the person, identify yourself and introduce others who may be present
- When asked to guide someone with a sight disability, never push or pull the person; allow him or her to take your arm, and then walk slightly ahead. Point out doors, stairs or curbs as you approach them.
- As you enter a room with the person, describe the layout and location of furniture, etc. Be specific when describing the location of objects.
- Do not leave the person without excusing yourself first
- Do not pet or distract a service dog; the dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working. It is not a pet.



### Has a Cognitive Disability

- Keep your communication simple. Rephrase comments or questions for better clarity.
- Stay focused on the person as he or she responds to you
- Allow the person time to tell or show you what he or she wants
- Ask the person to repeat what is said if you do not understand. Tell the person what you heard and see if it is close to what he or she is saying.

# BUILDING YOUR CULTURE

## Practical Tips – Interacting with a Person Who ... (continued)



### Has a Mobility Challenge

- Ensure accessible location for work areas and meetings, wide aisles that are kept clear of obstacles and accessible bathrooms close to primary work space
- Provide extra time to get from one work area to another
- Provide priority seating in meetings and trainings
- Arrange for notes/minutes to be provided to employees after meetings
- Make computer equipment software available (speech-to-text, word prediction, keyboard modifications) when possible
- Provide accessible parking in close proximity to the building
- Arrange for adjustable desks and/or tables in work areas
- Allow for advanced planning for business trips, when possible, to ensure accessibility



### Has a Mental Health Condition

- Avoid stereotypes and assumptions about the individual and how he or she might act
- Recognize but respect when people are acting differently than they typically do. Keep in mind that a person acting out of character may have difficulty interpreting social cues.
- Be patient. Allow the individual time to think and answer questions.
- Know that stress can aggravate a situation. Taking steps to alleviate some of that stress may de-escalate the situation.
- In a crisis, stay calm and be supportive as you would with anyone. Ask how you can help, and find out if there is a support person who can be sent for.