

Quick Tips: Disclosure vs. Self-Identification

Recent amendments to the American Disabilities Act (ADA) are putting pressure on employers to ‘do better’ regarding recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans and employees with disabilities. Typically, there are two ways people with disabilities will disclose their disability in the workplace and they are commonly referred to as:

1. **Disclosure** - when an employee discloses information about his or her disability to their employer during the process of requesting an accommodation needed to successfully perform the essential functions of their job.
2. **Self-Identification** - when an employee voluntarily identifies themselves to their employer as a person with a disability either informally or in response to a formal request from the employer.

Current Self-Identification Trends

The goal of the recent amendments to the ADA is to create more inclusive workplaces where employees feel safe disclosing their disabilities and disability becomes less of a barrier to successful employment. Companies are starting to broach this challenge and are considering conduits they can adopt to help them become more knowledgeable about their employees who may have a disability. Companies are:

- Including disability-focused questions within all employee and/or diversity surveys
- Providing the opportunity to self-identify during onboarding along-side other data collection
- Promoting self-identification mechanisms as part of diversity

There are documented best practices to increasing the representation of people with disabilities in the workforce and to creating a more disability-inclusive workplace including:

- Articulating a clear business case for why employing individuals with disabilities is important
- Putting a face on disability by sharing the successful stories of employees with disabilities
- Fostering a strong employee resource group/business network on disabilities
- Capitalizing on the convergence of aging workforce issues and disability issues
- Assisting managers and employees to become “disability confident”
- Communicating why the company is asking those with disabilities to self-identify, how the information will be used and how anonymity or confidentiality will be protected
- Conveying the benefits of self-identification for the employee
- Providing multiple avenues for employees with disabilities to self-identify

The point of creating an environment where applicants and employees feel free to discuss their whole selves is to create a workplace where talented and capable people that were carefully selected, hired, rewarded and developed are able to give their absolute best performance.

Source: *The Conference Board Do Ask, Do Tell* research report

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