

Strategies to Encourage Self-Identification and Self-Disclosure

Many feel Self-Identification and Self-Disclosure are the same thing, but they're not. Self-Identification is a check-the-box exercise to ensure compliance with federal requirements and is prompted by the employer. Self-Disclosure is prompted by the job seeker or employee and is built on a foundation of trust which ensures there is no risk to disclose a disability. Whether an employee or job seeker self-identifies, or self-discloses, can be a sensitive topic for many employees with disabilities, especially those with non-apparent ones.

Here are a few best practice tips to encourage Self-Identification and Self-Disclosure:

1. **Trust:** Disclosing a disability is a dialogue between the employee and employer, prompted by the job seeker or employee, and supported by trust. The big question that has to be answered is: Does your organization foster a sense of trust for employees – regardless of their disabilities or health conditions?
2. **Communication:** Be open to discuss the value of Self-Disclosure/Identification within the organization (i.e. expansion of inclusivity marketing and messaging, creating Employee/Business Resource Groups, ensuring that resources and accommodations are provided, and creating a culture of inclusion). Please note, that inviting employees to self-identify is acceptable solely for affirmative action purposes (Outlined by Section 503).
3. **Training:** Training is vitally important for managers and employees with and without disabilities. A good starting point is having disability etiquette and awareness training provided at all levels of the organization. Studies show that integrating disability training into the workplace promotes and increases inclusion and a sense of belonging. As a result, this helps cultivate a disability-friendly workplace. It's important to note: trainings must be accessible for employees, regardless of ability.
4. **Educate:** Providing education to recruiters and hiring managers is critical, so they understand the distinction between Self-Identification and Self-Disclosure. The goal is to create a diverse workplace where all employees thrive. In order to ensure that recruiters and managers understand the benefits of Self-ID/Disclosure, developing a strategy and communications plan is a winning best practice.
5. **Messaging and Marketing:** What your organization does is as important as what it says to the public and employees. Ensure that disability-inclusive messaging, disability observances and best practices are highlighted in company collateral, on the website, and in social media. Credibility is built by including real images of individuals with a wide range of disabilities in all forms of communication.
6. **Options:** Provide various avenues for employees to disclose their disabilities, and at different times throughout the employment cycle, as individuals may not disclose during the hiring process but may at some point afterwards. In addition, employees often acquire their disabilities during their time of employment. Keep in mind the need for choices to allow for anonymity and confidentiality by name and outline these options in internal company communications.
7. **Explain:** Discuss how the information will be used if an employee discloses a disability. Explain how anonymity and confidentiality will be protected. On an agreed-upon schedule by the HR and D&I teams, determine how the affirmative action reports, for all groups, will be shared.

For more information about the National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) at The Viscardi Center, and the benefits of membership, email NBDCinfo@viscardicenter.org or visit NBDC.com.