

# **The New Business Frontier: Disability Inclusion, An AbilityLinks Webinar**

Real-Time Summary\*  
June 14, 2017  
10:00–11:00 A.M. CST

## **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Good morning, everyone. It is 10:00 a.m. Central Time, and we are ready to begin our webinar. And with that I'll turn it over to Kathleen Yosko.

## **KATHLEEN YOSKO**

Good morning and welcome to today's AbilityLinks webinar for business leaders, "The New Business Frontier – Disability Inclusion." I'm Kathleen Yosko, President of Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital, located in Wheaton, Illinois, part of Northwestern Medicine. AbilityLinks is an outreach program of Marianjoy designed to connect job-ready individuals who have disabilities with inclusive employers who are seeking them. AbilityLinks recently celebrated its 15-Year Anniversary. Today, we are announcing the launch of the new AbilityLinks interactive website, which we encourage you to visit: [AbilityLinks.org](http://AbilityLinks.org)

Today's topic is very timely. To that end, we have assembled an impressive group of expert panelists, who will share their knowledge and experiences, facilitated by Scott Hoesman, a longtime supporter and member of the AbilityLinks Steering Committee. Scott is the CEO & Founder of inQUEST Consulting, a group of highly regarded thought leaders and business people who are passionate about diversity and inclusion.

Welcome Scott, and welcome panelists.

## **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you, Kathleen, and thank you, everyone. So panelists, that's putting you on notice, we've got a job to do. Kathleen, thank you for the introduction. At inQuest Consulting, we certainly believe in the power of diversity and inclusion and we believe firmly that disability inclusion has to be part of that overall conversation. And in our work with clients, we, unfortunately, find that too often, disability inclusion is missing from that equation. So, I am pleased to have gathered a panel to have a very robust dialogue with us this morning.

I will be asking the panelists a series of questions, and we'll engage in a robust dialogue and hope to reserve some time at the end for some of our participant Q&A. We have three employees with disabilities sharing stories and experiences. I think what you're going to find, as you listen to them, is it's not a singular experience. So, without further ado, let me move to the introduction of our esteemed panel this morning, and if you are logged into the WebEx, you should see there a slide showing all four of them. So, first let me introduce you to Bradley Anderson.

Brad is the regional director for the U.S. Department of Labor and the OFCCP. The Chicago or Midwest region is the largest region agency for the Department of Labor, where Brad oversees ten states for 100 employees. And we are thrilled to have Brad with us from the Department of

Labor, but it comes with a bit of a disclaimer. Brad is not in a position, as you might imagine, to endorse any of the companies on this webinar or the particular solutions that we may outline, but he is here to share with us an overview of some of the best practices that the Department of Labor and OFCCP are seeing. Is that a fair disclaimer?

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

That's fair.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you, Brad. Pleasure to have you with us.

Next on the line we have Kierstin Miller, a recent master's graduate of Oregon State University in environmental engineering, currently with EA Engineering, Science and Technology as an engineer. You're joining from Colorado this morning, and it is a pleasure to have you, so thank you.

We have Shannon Webster, a recruiting program specialist at Exelon Corporation, one of the largest energy corporations in the world—and interesting tidbit about Shannon, in October 2016, so just this past fall, she received the title of Ms. Wheelchair Illinois and will compete for the national title in August coming up. So, Shannon, welcome to you.

Third, we have Amanda Fowler, and Amanda is a media relations specialist for Northwestern Medicine and an avid blogger, particularly on the topic of disability awareness, and her blog is called "[Jelly-Side Up](#)." I have privilege of reading those blogs and encourage you to check those out. So, with that, panelists, I would like to welcome all of you.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Shannon, I'm going to start with you with the first question, and you're with Exelon, as I mentioned, as a recruiting specialist—and I'll tell you, as prep for this webinar, I did a little digging on Exelon. and I was amazed at what I was able to find out there on the web regarding Exelon's disability inclusion work.

**SHANNON WEBSTER**

Thanks, Scott. Like Scott said, I work for corporate acquisition here in downtown Chicago and I've been with the organization for a little over two and a half years, starting at Exelon's operating companies. We are a leading utility and energy company across the nation. When I started, definitely, the disability space wasn't where it is at today.

Today we have our own specific landing page for disability, when you search on our website. We were recently ranked by Diversity, Inc. as one of the top 50 companies to work for in 2017. So, we're progressing a long way in terms of the disability space, but in terms of my interest, it was driven by the position itself and how much I could grow as a recruiting professional in the industry and really be able to drive a lot of change in disability inclusion space in an industry where it's not often thought of as a disability-friendly area. The utilities space is very defined as hard-working, men climbing up utility electrical poles, so I'm excited to be here at Exelon now in the corporate headquarters and really getting the jobs to change from inside out.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Excellent, Shannon, that's a fantastic testament. So I'm hearing you say that the presence of Exelon may have made some initial -- had some initial impact on you, but really what was primary in your mind was the job responsibility, and was this a challenge for you in your career and a good next step for you, so kind of like that owned the door, the work in the disability

inclusion space, but really for you, you were looking for the job that was the right fit.

**SHANNON WEBSTER**

Yes, definitely.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Amanda, I want to go to you with the next part of this question. You have an interesting story and journey. Could you share a little about that background and before you do, I would like to ask how important was it for you and what is your story about coming to the position of media relations specialist at Northwestern Medicine?

**AMANDA FOWLER**

Thank you, Scott, and thank you to the listeners for tuning in. This is an important topic and I didn't realize how important the topic was until I was in a place that I needed these kinds of services. In 2005 I experienced a traumatic brain injury as a passenger in a car accident. It was so severe, less than 5% chance of survival, and in that moment I realized how crucial healthcare is. And that began my journey as someone with a disability, and at that time I had to re-learn how to do everything, talk, walk, swallow, move anything.

So my world was completely turned upside down and I was so grateful for the rehabilitation services at Marianjoy, and I realized that their mission is not just to get you back to life but back to your lifestyle, back to your everyday life. And I think that the whole mission of the disability community in general is let's get ourselves in the community, in the workplace, and just participate with everyone. So I was fortunate to find AbilityLinks when I finally graduated school. I was happy to be able to go through undergrad and grad school in writing, and I was looking for a job. I found AbilityLinks and they were hiring into the place that saved my life, Marianjoy and I am so honored to work with them today from the other side and help other people as I have been helped.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you, Amanda, that story is so compelling and I think impactful on a number of fronts. But hearing from Shannon and Amanda two different perspectives. One was, yeah, Shannon, I wanted to see the door open and this was an employer who was supportive, and then Amanda, on the other end of that, you're saying, wait a minute, I believe so much in the mission of what the rehabilitation work at Marianjoy did, I wanted to go work there and align. Thank you both for sharing those two perspectives. Brad, I want to go to you now from an OFCPP and Department of Labor perspective. So we have four panelists employees with organizations and you're representing the DOL here. What are you seeing in terms of trends from companies who are more visible and vocal in the disability inclusion space? Is it helping at all? Does it matter or make a difference? What are you seeing?

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

One thing we're seeing, there really has to be commitment at the top. You have to walk the talk. At the president level. And those that have employee resource groups also address -- not only address diversity and inclusion and other issues, but address the disability aspect. So, that's one thing that is very important.

From the Department of Labor, I did just want to briefly say that what we do is enforce federal equal employment laws, and one is Section 503, which actually was a precursor to the Americans with Disabilities Act, and that enforces both equal employment and affirmative action as relates to people with disabilities. I just want to clarify that the affirmative action component

only applies to Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. The ADA does not have an affirmative action piece.

And so, when it comes to self-identification, one of the things that is interesting, recent study shows that companies that have multiple ways of self-identifying anonymously are three-to-four times more likely to meet the aspirational goal of 7%, and what that 7% goal is, it's a goal for any company that has a contract with the federal government, requiring them to make an effort, a good-faith effort, to try to attain 7% of the workforce constituting people with disabilities.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Brad, I'm going to interrupt again. What was the percentage again?

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

That is 7%

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

7%, and companies more visible and vocal with varying self-ID campaigns, how much do they increase their likelihood of attaining that aspirational goal?

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Those that have multiple methods of self-identification are three-to-four more times more likely to meet that aspirational goal.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

I just want to underscore that for our callers and those who are dialing in, because for many of you -- not everyone -- the Section 503 and the aspirational target of 7% is something many of you are still thinking and working on incorporating into planning. So, Brad, I think that's a key point that it's not just one way, it's multiple ways of self-ID that generates higher likelihood of success.

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Yes, and two other aspects that are important in the recent study by the Conference Board found, and that is that those companies that also train managers in disability awareness and hold them accountable to meet inclusionary goals, those companies are more likely to meet the 7% aspirational goal.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

So it's not just a page on a website or it's not just an EEO statement, which I know you believe is important and support and that's one of the requirements, but it's going beyond that, looking for other avenues and activities to support disability inclusion. I think that's a key point. So thank you for that.

I want to move from this notion of companies being visible and vocal in the disability inclusion space to this notion of the disclose or not to disclose. And, Brad, you just mentioned the importance of self-ID as part of the 7% aspirational goal. Amanda, I'm going to ask you. So this notion of whether as an individual, with traumatic brain injury, you don't immediately disclose, right? On site or first meeting. Can you tell us a little about the thought process for you about whether to disclose or not.

**AMANDA FOWLER**

Definitely it's -- as we say, it's always something you have to think about with a non-apparent disability; traumatic brain injuries often are non-apparent. Sometimes they are. In my situation, at this point in my life, it is not apparent. So it's a choice I've had to make. And fortunately for me, I give so much credit to my employer for being so welcoming and so inclusive. It's never been viewed as a negative, even in whispers. It's something to be celebrated, in a way. Which sounds like a strange thing to say, right?

But life is so much about taking what has happened to us and using it for good, and I feel that with my fortunate recovery, I am able to use my experience now and be vocal about it, whether it be as a spokesperson, if you will, to tell people, this is okay. It is okay to have a disability and be in the workplace and really, it's no big deal. The more we talk about it, the less taboo it will be. That's important.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you. Amanda, from your experience, you've had a very welcoming, open workplace that has valued, welcomed and respected and heard your willingness to self-identify and disclose.

**AMANDA FOWLER**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

However, we know that's not the case for all employees. And, Brad, I'm wondering if you could talk a little about some of the situations where you're seeing where employees are sharing that they're uncomfortable self-disclosing, and some of the challenges that you see out there in terms of trends on why it would make someone reluctant to self-disclose.

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

So there is some research coming out on this, and Cornell University led a lot of this with other organizations, and interestingly enough, it's very -- it's kind of intuitive and makes a lot of sense. Research shows that the number-one driver for whether or not an individual is going to disclose that they have [a disability] -- or going to actually fill out a self-identification form is whether or not they need an accommodation. That's the number-one issue that would actually prompt someone to say, okay, I think I'm going to go ahead and disclose that I have a disability. Another important factor is the relationship that they have with the supervisor.

And this is where I talked a little earlier about training and you see how important training is, because if your supervisors understand the policies -- and hopefully the organization has policies in place for things like a reasonable accommodation -- the data shows that even if you have a formal process to go through human resources and make accommodation requests, people will more likely talk to their supervisor first. So, what we see is the companies that have leadership [promoting inclusion] from the top and that they have inclusive workplaces and diversity, including disability inclusion, that it's going to be more likely that individuals would self-identify, and as I said, the two drivers are whether an individual needs an accommodation and how supportive their supervisor relationship is. Those are the two big drivers.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you for that, Brad. I think it's interesting in that research coming out, the importance of the relationship with the person they report directly to. Not only on this topic. We hear that from overall employee engagement survey data results. We hear that about retention, loyalty scores. So, it's a common thread, the importance of our supervisors and the mid-level ranges. One of

the things that we are seeing now with many of those who are active in this disability inclusion space, is it doesn't always mean that you have to do a separate training program, that you can incorporate disability inclusion into other curriculum offerings that you're having, right?

So it doesn't require necessarily a complete four-hour module that gets dropped in in the classroom, but these topics can be woven into existing curriculum and that's one of the best practices that we're seeing, because we know that the demands for our front-line supervisors in particular are higher than they ever have been before. The demand for training and the content that needs to be shared with them is greater than ever before. We are seeing companies who are taking that as a serious approach, how do we maximize every event we have with them? So thank you for sharing that.

Kierstin, I want to go to you with the next question. So Kierstin, if you could share a little bit about what it was like when you joined EA Engineering Science and Technology?

### **KIERSTIN MILLER**

All right. So a couple people from my graduate program already worked for EA. My would-be boss, actually he happened to email my graduate adviser asking if he had any other soon-to-be grads with kind of my research experience and my background. I sent over my résumé and I got hired. So for me, disability didn't come up at all initially. I was, however, drawn to the company because we're fairly small, especially our Denver office only has nine people, which is great for me as an autistic person, it's nice and quiet. The company also is 100% stock ownership, it's a public benefit corporation, works exclusively on environmental projects, and these things were also really important to me and sort of superseded the lack of disability inclusion and also, to be honest, I was really excited that someone wanted to hire me. So there was that.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

I love that. So, again, this is an example that -- it's not just a singular experience in the disability space. So Kierstin, what I love about your story is, hey, it didn't come up at all as I was on my search. Here I am as a grad leaving with my master's degree, Oregon State University and guess what, I'm happy to get a job, and I was through my networking connections that I found that. I think that's powerful, right?

So this isn't -- when we talk about disability inclusion, it's not a one-size-fits-all or a one-need-fits-all. And I think that's important for all of us to be aware of as we continue.

So Kierstin, I want to stay with you for a moment and ask that you continue this notion to disclose or not disclose. So in your example, you didn't disclose your disability as an autistic person, but can you share what happened once you joined EA.

### **KIERSTIN MILLER**

As I said, disability never came up in the hiring process. In fact, sort of as an autistic person who is able to pass as not-autistic often, I've been told explicitly not to disclose. But in the past, that hasn't gone well for me. For example, in grad school, I sort of went into that experience with the mindset that I was going to make an extra effort to be social and be normal, and that worked for about nine weeks before I got completely burned out and could no longer keep up that facade. So, that was kind of the precipitating event to disclose to my graduate adviser, and when I did, my experience became so much better. We figured out how to communicate with each other. He was incredibly receptive of the way I do things. I like lists, I like scripts, I like routines. My research and my quality of work improved because I was no longer obsessed with keeping up this sort of facade of normalcy.

So when I got to work, I knew that I did want to disclose eventually for the same reasons, that I was kind of unsure of when to do it, how to do it correctly, and, you know, in grad school I had nothing to lose. I was paying them to be there, so there was no fear of disclosing. At this job, though, I didn't disclose initially. One thing, I was hired as an engineer and scientist but because of the nature of our very small office, I was initially doing a lot of administrative work, and one thing I say all the time is that for me the quote, "hard stuff is easy and easy stuff is hard" [applies], like I can do the math and analyze the data, but making phone calls, making small talk, understanding tone, stuff that has to do with admin is incredibly difficult, although by the nature of my office being very busy at the time, no one was there to give me the clarity and direction that I really needed to have.

Another thing is that I often wear headphones, like noise-canceling headphones. I fidget a lot and I was concerned how people would perceive that. So what I did end up doing is I disclosed to HR, my direct supervisor and some other project managers and it's only been, I guess, about a month, but everyone has been incredibly supportive and accommodating. I just -- before this call I mentioned to a PM that I was going to be late today and why and she was really interested in why I was participating in this conversation. So like I said, it's still pretty new, but I hope that they'll see that given sort of my accommodations, that they'll end up turning out really good work from me. Yeah.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Kierstin, again, I think that's another example, different experience but another powerful example of your story, and this notion of bringing our authentic selves to work is something that we talk a lot about in the diversity and inclusion space broadly, but what I think we're hearing here is, you know, Kierstin bring her authentic self to work may look very different than, Amanda, you bringing your authentic self to work. Even though both of you -- we like labels in this work, we both would say, okay, you're two employees with disabilities, it must be the same experience, and we're hearing different views on that. So Kierstin, thank you for that.

Brad, I want to make sure before we go any further, you mentioned the self-ID campaign, and the importance of this notion of self-disclosure and people, you know, really whether asking for an accommodation or promoting -- or participating formally in a self-ID campaign. Can you share with our audience a little more specifically about what that is?

### **BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Yes, I can, and I think it's important to kind of take a step back after listening to Kierstin and Amanda talk about their personal stories, it reminds me of historically one of the main goals with the change in the regulations at the Department of Labor to try to change workplace behavior as it relates to people with disabilities and reduce the fear of self-identifying and disclosing that one has a disability. And that's why when we look at the regulations that are for all companies to do business with the federal government, there's multiple ways to self-identify, and as you heard from Kierstin, she talked about she didn't do it immediately.

As a company that does business with the government, you're required to offer [self-identifying opportunities] at the pre-offer stage before an individual is offered a job and then after offered the job but also before they start working and once every five years, because as we heard from Amanda earlier, all of us in reality are one life event away from being a person with a disability. So there's no -- pre-offer and post-offer and once every five years.

And when it comes to a disability self-ID campaign, it's not rocket science. It's pretty

straightforward. You inform your employees why you need this information, what you're going to do with it, and if you are practicing inclusion from the top and you have an inclusive work environment and inclusive workplace policy, what I've seen in talking to countless employers is their self-identification rates go up when they do a campaign. There's information out there and information on our website at the Department of Labor how to do this and I would encourage companies to do a self-ID campaign.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Because it sends a signal if there's a self-ID campaign, it sends a signal at least across the enterprise or your organization that this is something that we view as important, and that we hear, see and respect. And I think that knowing--often we don't talk about it and we assume that we must be inclusive. But it's this notion of actually getting something out there and saying, here is a program that we can support.

### **BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Absolutely. Actions speak louder than words.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Absolutely. I want to put a notion out there for everyone. And we're talking -- you know, the two topics we hit on so far is the notion of companies being visible and vocal, and this notion of "do I disclose or not disclose?" Those are the two we circled around in the first 35 minutes of today's webinar. And I just want to encourage those of you who are calling in to think about utilizing organizations like AbilityLinks or others, which are national job banks. Because what that does, for national job banks, is when you post your jobs on disability-inclusive specific job boards, you're sending the signal to candidates who are looking for jobs that this is something you care about. And so, yes, it's important to do your general postings, but where candidates can often go and where the disability community will seek are specific organizations who are posting in these specific places like AbilityLinks.

So if you've not had an opportunity to check out the newly designed website, I would encourage you to do that, AbilityLinks.org. And I want to be clear. I sit on the steering committee and have a bit of an interest in that organization, [and] it's not the only one. We all support and believe there's ample opportunity for others at the table to support disability inclusion.

So I want to move us into our third topic area for discussion. And with this piece, I want, Amanda, to come back to you... and Shannon, I'll come to you next... but it's this notion of the personal case for disability inclusion. And I say that purposely because we often hear in this work, we need to establish the business case for it, and what are the 18 PowerPoint slides and the data and the research and, you know, show me all the pie charts and graphs and the engagement score, right? And, Brad, you're nodding your head and smiling here in the room. We often think we have to have this compelling volume or tome of work before we can move forward. And I want to challenge us a bit this morning and talk about the personal case for disability inclusion.

Amanda, I know in our work together, you believe that your disability actually adds value to the work that you have been assigned to perform. And that may not be a kind of intuitive thought process for folks. Tell us about that.

### **AMANDA FOWLER**

Thank you, Scott. You're definitely right about that. So what was obvious to me when I started the job is I would be able to use my experience to be able to speak about it in such opportunities

as these. What wasn't as obvious to me is how my identity has been such an advantage. So before I moved specifically into media relations, which is more of an outreach-type thing, I started in marketing. And the interesting thing with marketing is that you have to know your audience. So especially for a hospital, it's going to be people with disabilities that you're going to be reaching out to, but really for the entire world -- well, America, anyway -- I know that 20% of our population will at one point in their lives have a disability. That is one in five people. That's a lot of people.

So to be able to have someone on your marketing team who represents that part of the population who can say "hey, this campaign speaks to me" or "wow, this wording offends me, we should change that," because we don't want to offend anyone, of course-that's a huge asset. And going back to your employer being welcoming to that, that allows you to have the freedom to speak up. Again, really, I encourage people to see their experience as an asset, for sure.

Another way that my disability has been surprisingly helpful to me is it has changed my reading style. So I have always absolutely loved reading, always, always. And until my traumatic brain injury, I was a speed-reader. So I would plow through books, which was great, but in terms of editing, it's been such an advantage to me that my reading style has changed. So now I'm a slower reader, but a more deliberate reader. I no longer read in chunks. I read every single word, every single punctuation mark and that's such an advantage for an editor, because I'm able to catch -- so don't go check my work now [chuckles] -- but I'm able to catch a lot.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

High percentage.

### **AMANDA FOWLER**

High percentage. I'm able to catch things as they go out and get it as perfect as possible.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

So I think this notion, we often come at this, and for those who may not have a personal experience with a disability, right? Or be in the disability population ourselves, there's this view that is out there often of there's a deficit we must overcome, right? If that's the case. And what you're starting to tee up for us is, wait a minute, where is the value at as a result of our experience? And I think it's a paradigm shift that we can talk and should be talking more about.

So Shannon, with that I want to go to you. Share a little about your disability, if you would, with the callers, and how that is helping you make your workplace even better.

### **SHANNON WEBSTER**

Yeah, thanks. So unlike Amanda, I was born into the disability community. I have cerebral palsy, so it's -- I primarily use a wheelchair for mobility, and the recruiting space and in HR I've gotten to realize what a true value and the abilities I have within my disability and because of my disability, I think that's what companies are really trying to tap into.

I believe that the disability community is really the largest group of untapped talent out there and it transcends all the different minority groups that we try to reach out to become, really, that top-leading diverse and inclusive employer, but really from a perspective as someone who came in, I noticed from a wheelchair user how much accessibility really matters when it comes to being at the same level playing field as the other candidates, because we can tell ourselves that we're a diverse and inclusive employer and have all these awards on our website, but if we're not actually accessible to the community that we're trying to reach out to, there's a huge

discrepancy, you know, between actual accessibility and apparently accessibility from a website.

So I think that I was able to drive accessibility at ComEd and Exelon by increasing the amount of automatic doors that we have that open up. Obviously, security is a high priority, so when you badge the heavy glass doors would open automatically, so it was advocating for those changes to be made in the workplace and really being empowered as a person with a disability to speak up and say, you know, I can do what everyone else around me is doing, I just need help getting in that space and getting in the buildings to be at the same level as those around us. So I think accessibility plays a key part and role in allowing people with disabilities to work to their highest potential.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

So, Shannon, let me make sure I'm understanding. You're in the facilities department at Exelon, right?

### **SHANNON WEBSTER**

I'm in the recruiting department, specifically the corporate acquisition, but I have worked with facilities to make those changes happen in our building in terms of adding the automatic door buttons as well as increasing the amount of handicapped parking spaces available on the first floor of our parking garage. So it's just little changes that I think can go a long way when it comes to making sure that all of our employees can get to work safely.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

So what I -- and I knew you were in the recruiting organization at Exelon. I think the point I wanted to underscore there was you're adding value and providing an insight and a perspective outside of your core role of the recruiting specialist, right? So you've got your day job, but this is where employee resource groups and having avenues like that in your organization can make a difference. Because we have this talent and these perspectives often sitting right in our organization. Do we have avenues for them to have voice? So thank you for that.

You know, Brad, I'm wondering -- Shannon -- Brad, I'm wondering about something. Shannon hit on the untapped talent, and there's a notion that the disability population is one of the largest minority groups in this country. How are we at from an unemployment rate? What can you tell us a DOL perspective?

### **BRADLEY ANDERSON**

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for people with disability is double, oftentimes more than that of the general population, and talking to the point that Shannon made about untapped potential, also, if you look at the percentage of people with disabilities that participate in the workforce it's 20% compared to the general population, which is about 60% of the general population that participates in the workforce. There is data that says it's an untapped -- there's untapped potential for people with disabilities.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

So I think that gets us into our fourth topic that I want to explore, and final topic on this webinar, and that's -- we hear this all the time. I am supportive of disability inclusion, I'm supportive of D&I, diversity and inclusion. Where do I find these candidates? So if I'm on the call and, Brad, I'm going to start with you. If I'm on this call thinking, boy, I've heard these stories from Shannon and Kierstin and Amanda and heard others like them, I believe in this notion, but, boy, when I go out and look for candidates, I just don't know where they are or they're not applying for our jobs.

What would you say to folks on the call? Where can they go find candidates with disabilities?

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

If you're in recruiting, where there is a will, there is a way. It reminds me of the book that I believe Randy Lewis wrote "No Greatness Without Goodness" and he writes about how his life changed with his son with autism and building a distribution facility they set a goal of one-third of the workforce to constitute people with disabilities and met that goal. I'm not a math major but that's above the 7% aspirational goal.

So what is the way? What is a way companies can do this? And there's several. And I think it's fascinating on this call today we heard some of those. So one of the things is actually using good online recruitment sources and Amanda, how she got in her role by using an online recruitment service. That's one way. And there are career fairs where employers get together with community-based organizations and job placement providers and find out, do these organizations have the kind of candidates and skill sets we need and it's been an effective way of companies narrowing the focus to actually work with organizations that are going to have -- they're going to have candidates with the skills they need.

Another way is recruitment from universities and Kierstin got talked about hiring from the graduate program. One thing you can do is work with university programs to hire interns and the career centers in universities. It's a great way to bring talent to your organization. I would caution if you do that avenue make sure that you're talking to the career center to make sure that they're including students that have disabilities in that group.

Sometimes the diversity inclusion aspect of the university is not on the same page with the career center, so you want to make sure if you do work with a career center that they're including in that candidate pool students that have disabilities. So those are just some of the way -- finally I would say that a tour of your facilities. Actually having a company, having a job placement provider come out and look at the kind of jobs you have is a really effective way of tapping in to some talent.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Great examples. What I think you're underscoring for us yet again is we can have general broad recruiting practices and most every organization does, but it's when we overlay specific relationships, approaches, connections, for disability inclusion that we can have some of the break-throughs that you've seen.

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

I think that's important. It's one thing to have the broad thing and then another to have something specific as part of that.

Shannon, back to you for a quick moment. That is this notion of you're in the recruiting function, not the facilities function. What are you doing to source candidates for excellence? Here you are as an employee with a disability, in a recruiting function, what are you doing to seek and make sure candidates are applying for jobs at Exelon?

**SHANNON WEBSTER**

I think it's a matter of getting out into the community and reaching them where they're at. They

might not automatically seek out Exelon as the desired employer because they might not know about us or might think that we are the ComEd utility and we don't have space for people with disabilities, but that is far from the truth. We have every side of any business from marketing to accounting, and IT. So I think that there's a wide variety of opportunities for people to get involved and I think it's about going out into the community and being -- educating yourselves about what is out there for people with disabilities, whether it's disability-specific job fairs.

I know Chicago had a few events and panel seminars related to the ADA25 celebration. So that's a big gathering where a lot of different employers are gathering together to share best practices and really reach and educate themselves about how to reach out to this large group of untapped talent as well as I've participated in several virtual fairs through another disability hiring group called Getting Hired, as well as AbilityLinks. It offers a lot of opportunity to connect with a lot of people from across the nation virtually and really figure out what they're searching for in terms of the next right job fit for them.

### **SCOTT HOESMAN**

Excellent. Those are great examples. Again, it's about exposure and awareness. In a way that I hope you heard from Shannon, as a recruiter, it isn't about having to apply for a half-a-million dollars' budget act to recruit and get involved in some of these events and activities. These are processes, and even your examples, Brad, if I'm already going to a campus recruiting function, it's fairly easy for me to loop in the disability inclusion office while I'm on that trip or job fair. I want to remind folks we have another eight minutes or so left on today's webinar and we did get an interesting question that came in, and I'm going to -- I think, Brad, I'll start this one to you. This is from one of our HR leaders on the call who asks -- I'm going to paraphrase the question.

I have an employee who has a non-apparent disability who needs an accommodation but doesn't want it known or disclosed to their supervisor or others what the disability is. Given the accommodation -- I need to loop the supervisor in, but I can't tell them what it's for or what the reason is. Any guidance on that? I think it's one of the more complex scenarios. Thank you for the question.

### **BRADLEY ANDERSON**

Yes, that's a great question. A couple things to note. Depending on how apparent or unapparent a disability is, there could be accommodations that could be made without getting into details about whatever the disability is. So that's one thing. Depending what is asked for you may be able to make an accommodation easy. I would point out, according to the job accommodations network, half of requests cost zero dollars. And the rest of them, the average is about \$500.

When we talk about accommodations, in many cases we're talking about simple fixes that have no cost or have little cost in the overall scheme of a budget. When it comes to this kind of thorny issue here about an individual that doesn't want to disclose what the disability is, it could be -- if it's a -- if it's something that is readily applicable, depending on what the accommodation is, if it's a simple accommodation, you may be able to go ahead and make that.

If they're talking about something much more complicated and involve purchasing software or something like that, then what I would advocate for is talking to the employee about what -- really about what the law says on this, and what it says those that need to know, the supervisor or individuals handling that accommodation, there may be certain information that they need to have to be able to make that. So, for example, some of the things I've seen in our own workplace is we've had individuals that have challenges and they needed some kind of adaptive software to help them read text.

So we actually have our disability inclusion department and civil rights area that will actually work directly with the individual to try to take the supervisor out of the reviewing of records. So you can look at internal policies and try to limit who is actually going to access those medical records, but I think at the end of the day, if it's a very complicated disability and you're talking about having a potentially large cost, I would talk to the individual about need-to-know basis, and in your company, setting your policies, I would try to set policies that limit who handles medical records.

It doesn't have to be the supervisor. It could be human resources. The supervisor's responsibility is to be sure that with or without an accommodation that employee can do essential functions and it should be on the essential functions of the job. It's a hard question to answer.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Yeah, so I think you gave us a really -- I think something to underscore that is not a one-size-fits all. And having knowledge, awareness and skills on disability inclusion is beyond just the surface sometimes. And we need to go a little deeper and these nuances are important and are impactful. Yes, Amanda, you have a comment?

**AMANDA FOWLER**

I would like to jump in on something. I have the fortunate background that I've had this employer and I've never thought about disclosing or not, but I want to address the HR question--and it's perfect coming from HR--this message, is the company chose to hire that person for their skills. Having a disability is not going to take away from those skills, and a good company is going to want to provide those accommodations to help the best job get done. That's what business is, trying to make the best end product

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

That's great. Thank you for that. And as we go and I'm going to ask that -- I'm not seeing additional questions in the chat room, so I'm going to ask the panelists to close as we come to the conclusion of our call. And your takeaways you want folks to leave with.

I want to underscore Brad's comment that over half accommodations cost zero dollars. The average accommodation cost is \$500. When we ask this question at inQUEST, we often start with a program, what do you think the average accommodation cost is? The number that we get from participants in our programs is on average \$7,500, is what the perception of accommodations are versus the reality of half of them costing zero and on average \$500. I throw that out as a data point. We still have a lot of work to do even in HR and recruiting communities. So Shannon, I'm going to start with you. One thing you want the callers on today's webinar to take away, what your 15 to 20-second sound bite.

**SHANNON WEBSTER**

I think it's leveraging the disability and realizing this group of individuals have had to overcome a lot of challenging life experiences but it's made them an ideal candidate and asset to any corporation, and really it's about educating, advocating for people with disabilities in the business community and having the tools to empower them to succeed.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Love it. Thank you, Shannon. Kierstin, please your sound bite. Take away.

**KIERSTIN MILLER**

Mine is autism-specific because that's what I do, I talk about autism all the time. But for me, one major thing is there's this misconception that autistic people, because our communication style is often atypical, there's this misconception that we often have nothing to say and no desire to be included in the conversation, but we absolutely do. And we want you to listen to us. And try to, you know, communicate with us.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Thank you, Kierstin, and you've shown the value of that on today's call. Thank you. Amanda, your sound bite.

**AMANDA FOWLER**

It's hard to add to such commentary as that, but what I would say is to keep in mind for employers is that the disability population is one of the largest minorities in our country, so large you can't even call it a minority. So just remember that having a disability doesn't make you an outcast or just on your own. Remember that you are bringing to your company, you are bringing a huge representation of the population and that really is an asset.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Amanda, thank you. Brad, wrap us up.

**BRADLEY ANDERSON**

With a couple nuggets, I would say self-ID is the key to disability inclusion and the way to get there is from the top, train managers on disability awareness and consider holding managers accountable to meet inclusionary goals. This is a best practice from research conducted by the Conference Board study.

**SCOTT HOESMAN**

Excellent. On behalf of AbilityLinks, Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital, Kathleen, hats off for organizing and creating today's webinar.

We wish you a great day. Goodbye.

*\*This real-time summary was edited for clarity and is not a verbatim summary.*