

RESPECT Disability in the workplace

Top tips for a respectful work environment for all abilities

▶▶ Don't put labels on people - see the person not the disability

Disability is an impairment that can be physical, cognitive, sensory, developmental or emotional. The impact of a disability can range from relatively minor to major, creating significant challenges in day-to-day life. Living with a disability does not mean an individual can't be an important contributor as an employee. More than 600,000 New Zealanders live with some form of disability.

▶▶ Beware unconscious bias

Unconscious bias is a hidden obstacle for people living with disabilities. It is something that is hard to address because an individual may not even realise it about themselves. Unconscious bias is an inflexible positive or negative belief that can impact their thoughts and actions. A clear, EEO-based employment process can help eliminate bias but it is a good idea for key staff involved in recruitment to undergo training so they can identify and address unconscious bias - and remove the obstacles to a respectful workplace. Visit "Events & Training" at diversityworks.nz

▶▶ Consider what abilities are needed for the role

Get into the habit of thinking about the abilities that are needed - and the ones that aren't - when the company is looking to fill a position. Is 20/20 eyesight a requirement for the role? Do they need to run around like an Olympian or is it an entirely desk-bound job? Is it a relatively straightforward and repetitive role that requires a very basic skill-set? Thinking about the core abilities for the role can broaden the potential list of candidates and help employers see past the perceived ability to perform a role.

▶▶ The right to work

Diversity Works NZ encourages diversity by promoting the recruitment and development of people on the basis of merit. Disability does not need to be a barrier to fulfilling employment and under the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Employment Relations Act 2000 employers are legally prohibited from discriminating on the basis of disability. For a refresher on the legal guidelines visit www.legislation.co.nz

▶▶ Take positive action - today

Don't just add 'respectful workplace for all abilities' to the to-do list and forget about it. Book in for a Diversity Works NZ training session on working with diverse abilities or get in touch with an organisation who can find a great employee with a good fit for your business. For example, Workbridge is a free service working to match employers and jobseekers, administering the Ministry of Social Development's special funds which employers can apply to for any necessary modifications to the workplace www.workbridge.co.nz.

▶▶ All things being equal - or fair?

Sometimes workplaces invest too much energy in providing the same experience for all their employees. We're all very different and delivering a carbon-copy employee experience across the company doesn't necessarily equate to a fair work environment. Simple modifications can make a huge difference to an employee's day-to-day experience and motivation at work - and this is especially true for an employee living with a disability. Modifications that could create a truly supportive, 'fair' work environment could be as basic as providing software that delivers larger print or audio cues, additional lighting, a work station closer to the exit or flexibility to start an hour later.