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Ability to Action: Building an Inclusive Workforce

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Ability to Action: Building an Inclusive Workforce

Sian Bevans,
*Director, Human
Resources,
Nassau Airport
Development Company*

Kevin Kline,
*Community Engagement
Representative,
GoodMaps*

Anita Cobb,
*Market Leader – Aviation
Civic Strategies,
Mead & Hunt*

Jil Greene,
*Chief Human
Resources Officer,
Paradies Lagardère*

Transforming Challenge Into Purpose: Kevin's Journeys

Kevin Kline
Community Engagement Rep
GoodMaps



Beyond Compliance: Technology as Universal Accommodation

- Screen reader compatibility
- Multi-modal communication
- Inclusive and cognitive access





Ability Dignity – Empowering Abilities in the Workplace

Anita Cobb

Market Leader – Civic Strategies

June 12, 2025



A large, light green ampersand graphic is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the title text.

Identifying Disabilities

Test 1

What do you see?

- Loving mother of 3 kids
- Champion for diversity and inclusion
- Life of the party
- Rollercoaster enthusiast
- Food fanatic



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Identifying Disabilities

Test 2

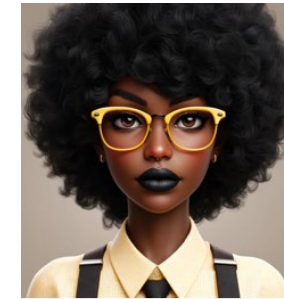
What do you see?

- Depressed and anxious
- Attention deficit disorder
- 3+ stints in behavioral health
- Former addict
- Countless hours of therapy



How to Help (and When)

- ✓ Let work be a normal place
- ✓ Refrain from any comments about a person's appearance
- ✓ Make genuine connections if you've been through something similar



**Nita's
Nuggets**

Communication Rules the Nation!

**Ask what we
need...**

- At work
- In the world
(Thank you, Angela!)

Getting Started

Strategize

- Be proactive by designing inclusion into policies, spaces, and operations. Put people first and also think beyond the person you see to the people in their lives.

Emphasize

- Emphasize efforts to be inclusive. People may not have disabilities in this moment, but will likely need some form of advocacy for themselves or a loved one.

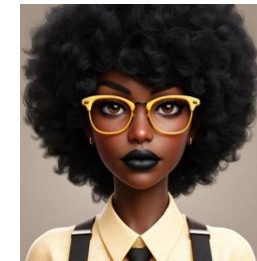
Empathize

- Take care of people. Do the right thing. Do what makes sense.

Empowerment through Empathy



- Avoid ableism
- Maintain the individual's dignity
- Design organically
- Plan for the future



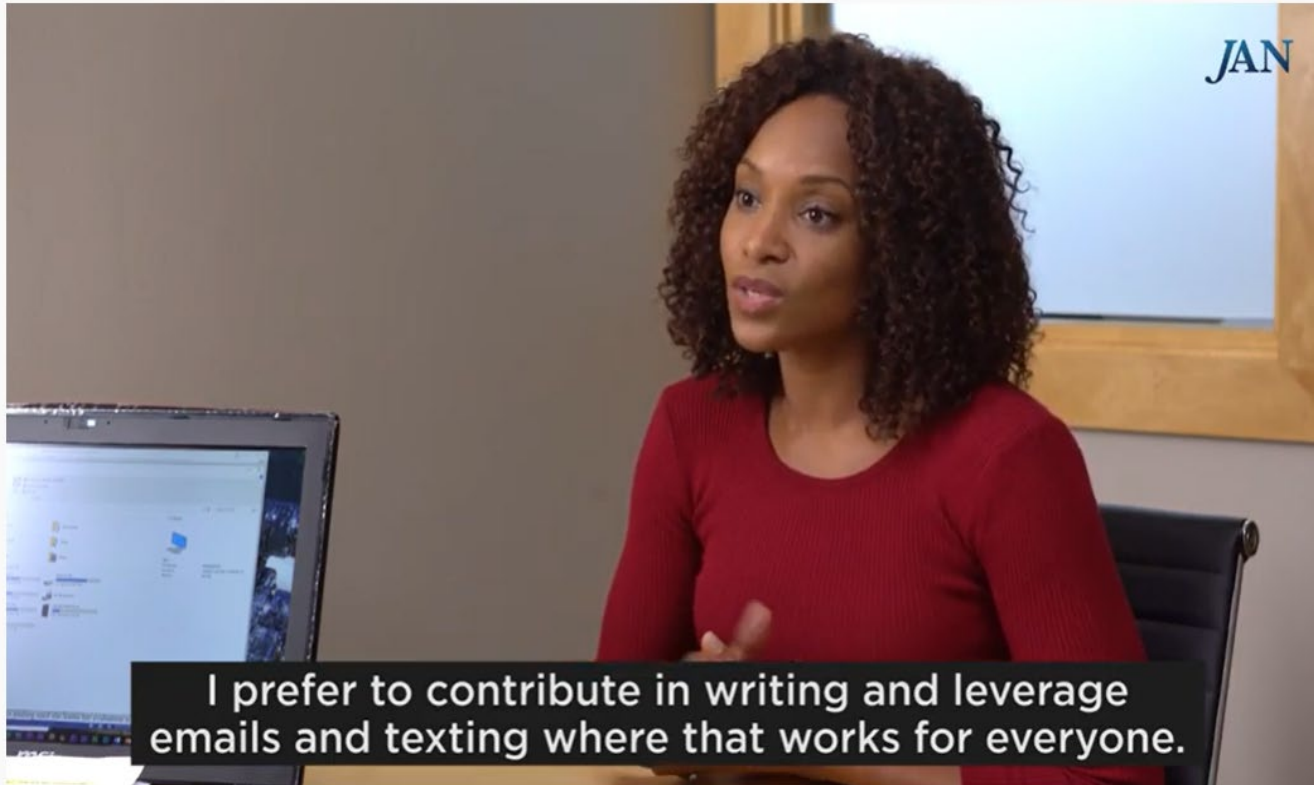
Workplace Inclusion Innovations



- Assistive technology
- Remote work
- Resources available on company intranet
- Designed office spaces (lactation/meditation room/medication room)

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/5-tips-for-using-teams-when-you-re-deaf-or-hard-of-hearing-21132160-bc6a-4838-9eff-583e2df2becb>

Disability Employment Resources



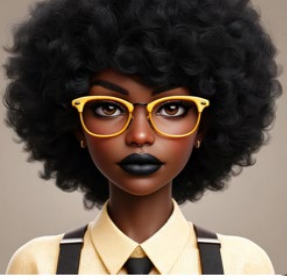
Hiring an Individual with an Anxiety and Stuttering Disorder

- JAN (Job Accommodation Network)
<https://askjan.org/index.cfm>
- EARN (Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability)
<https://askearn.org/>
- RespectAbility
<https://www.respectability.org>



EQUITY LEARNING SERIES





Allow the tests to become the testimony.



Be the change you want to see!



**People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did.
But people will never forget how you made them feel. – Maya
Angelou**

Let's keep in touch...



Anita Cobb

Mead & Hunt, Inc.

Market Leader – Aviation Civic Strategies

Anita.Cobb@meadhunt.com

Office: 517-908-3100

Cell: 517-377-5410



Ability in Action:
Building an Inclusive Workforce

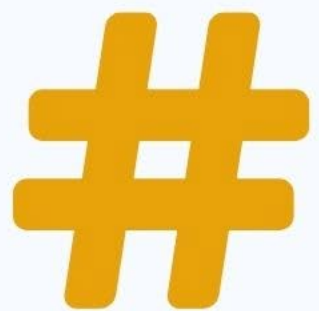
INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Jil Jordan Greene

Chief Human Resources Officer
Senior Vice President HR & CSR

Paradies Lagardère
jil.greene@paradies-na.com





INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Disabilities that cannot be easily seen or detected are often discounted or not respected.

14%

Learning
Disabilities

15%

Mental
Health Challenges

58%

Chronic Illness

WHAT ARE INVISIBLE DISABILITIES?



90% of
disabilities
are **invisible**

DISABILITIES: RECOGNITION IN WORKPLACE



1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted, prohibiting discrimination based on disability.

2008

The ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) broadened the definition of disability, explicitly including conditions like depression, anxiety, and ADHD.

2010s

There was a notable increase in corporate initiatives addressing mental health and neurodiversity, integrating these aspects into DEI strategies.

2020s

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness of mental health challenges and long COVID, leading to more robust support systems for employees with invisible disabilities.

THE **WORKFORCE** MOST IMPACTED



MILLENNIALS & GEN-Z:
OVER 60% OF THE U.S.
LABOR FORCE

53%

Neurodiverse

65%

Mental Health

Make up the majority of employees in mid- to early-career roles, frontline leadership, and high-turnover industries

BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF **INVISIBLE** DISABILITIES

Talent Engagement & Retention

- High disengagement
- Turnover impact:
- Untapped potential

Implication:

Lack of inclusion= increased attrition, decreased loyalty, and loss of institutional knowledge.

Productivity & Performance

- Presenteeism is costly
- Misinterpreted behavior
- Increased burnout

Implication:

Productivity losses from mental health-related issues cost employers over \$1 trillion globally per year.

Compliance & Legal Risk

- ADA obligations
- Disclosure risks

Implication:

Inadequate training or response can create ADA violations and erode trust in leadership

Culture, Brand, and Employer Reputation

- Psychological safety as culture currency
- DEI & ESG alignment
- Recruitment edge

Implication:

Culture is competitive currency—especially among top Gen Z and Millennial talent.



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: LANGUAGE AND SAFE SPACES

Say This (Do)

“Thanks for sharing that with me. How can I support you?”

“Everyone’s brain works differently—what works best for you to stay focused?”

“Is there anything you need to do your best work?”

“I appreciate you bringing your perspective—it’s valuable.”

“Let’s find a system or tool that works best for your workflow.”

“It’s okay to take breaks when you need to recharge.”

“Mental health is part of health. We take that seriously here.”

“Thanks for letting me know—confidentiality is important.”

“You’re not alone. Many people experience similar challenges.”

“Let’s keep communication clear and check in regularly.”

Avoid Saying (Don’t)

“You don’t look like you have a disability.”

“We all get distracted sometimes. Just try harder.”

“Must be nice to get special treatment.”

“You’re just being sensitive.”

“Why do you need accommodations for that?”

“You’re lucky—some of us don’t get to take breaks.”

“Everyone gets stressed. Just toughen up.”

“Don’t tell anyone, but I heard you have anxiety.”

“Isn’t that just an excuse to slack off?”

“You’re overthinking everything.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERS



Manager Enablement

Train leaders to recognize and respond to cognitive or health-based needs

Accommodations

- Normalize informal and formal adjustments without stigma

Culture

- Publicly support ERGs
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

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