



Inclusive  
Career  
Advancement  
and Your  
Business



The **Inclusive**  
Workplace

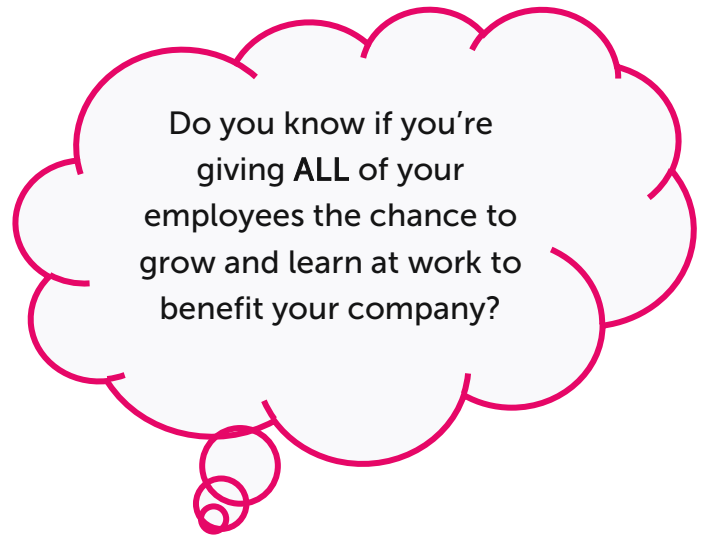
## Show up for your staff and business by using smart career advancement supports in an inclusive workplace.

You want your employees to be happy and your company to do well. You can make this a reality by helping your employees develop in their roles and learn new skills, so they grow as the company grows! Employee **career advancement** is one of the keys to employee retention and business growth.

Because every workforce is made up of a diverse group of people with different needs and abilities, it is important that career advancement is inclusive.

You might have employees on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability. In fact, it's highly likely!

Designing career advancement in a way that recognizes the diversity of your employees is the best way to bring out the hidden talent and innovation in your company.



### To get there, try this two-step approach:

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**1** Build a supportive workplace.

Create an environment where people are happy to grow and learn in an inclusive workplace.
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**2** Know and use your employees' strengths.

Take your time to learn more about where your employees want to go and how to help them get there.

## Step 1: BUILD A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

### Build support for full participation:

- Foster mentorship opportunities among employees.
- Design employee resource groups (ERGs) to bring together like-minded people.
- Use assistive technologies for meetings to remove barriers to participation.
- Foster open-mindedness and collaboration, and model both. It may not come easily to some employees, but you can encourage it, allow room for growth, and coach as needed.

“Having a great team helped—someone is always there to assist with skills I wasn’t familiar with. We supported each other. We tap into other expertise—it’s helpful that they’re able to suggest items [to support] me along the way.”  
— *Employee interviewee (FERENCE & Co., 2022, p. 10)*

### Create a healthy workplace:

- Offer disability awareness training.
- Offer non-judgmental feedback and support to supervisors and managers about making career advancement inclusive. This can be empowering if they have discomfort or lack of experience with people with disabilities.
- Gauge if employees feel psychologically safe.
- Make diversity an organizational value.
- Use authentic leadership.



“Leadership style was... a significant factor for employee work satisfaction, retention, and quality of life that led to a successful work environment for employees with ASD. In this study, 54 employees... who held a position for over one year described what type of leadership contributed to their success and how it did so. Authentic leadership was one style that led to success.”  
*(Dudley, 2015, p. 18)*

## Make roles and relationships clear:

- Make roles clear, and the relationships between roles clear.
- Show a career progression plan to employees so they have a model, and think about using different written or visual forms to build understanding.
- Conduct an analysis (organizational, job, of the supports you have in place for people on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability.
- Use simple, straightforward language.



“ Training materials are not adapted to people of all ability—neurodiverse or not. Heavy manuals with lots of jargon—even folks who are English second language would struggle. Not a lot that’s easy to follow. [...] Some job roles don’t even have manuals.”

—Employer interviewee (FERENCE & Co., 2022, p. 13)

## Step 2: KNOW AND USE YOUR EMPLOYEES’ STRENGTHS

### See your employees’ skills and interests:

- Provide job rotation opportunities to practise using skills in new ways.
- Offer training and regular feedback to develop transferable skills.
- Allow more chances for feedback through observation and job coaching.

“ When [one of my employees with an intellectual disability] started... [e]ven tying a garbage bag was hard at the beginning. And then we started “trying” things together... and then I realized she has a lot of skills she wasn’t showing by the skillsets I had laid out for her.... [I] realized she was underutilized.... So then, after we got her working on things she was good at, the communication started flowing.... So really watching her strengths and where she was thriving allowed us to build on her strengths.... now it’s 9 years later and she’s an assistant manager.”

Employer interviewee (FERENCE & Co., 2022, p. 5)

## Hear about your employees' skills and interests:

- Sit down with your employees and make a career plan together, based on their goals and interests, and the career paths available.
- Include everyone in regular performance reviews (more than annually).
- Consult this Guide for Career Discovery for career planning tasks on page 40–59 (by Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities).
- Include your employees in planning decisions where appropriate, for diverse and relevant input. Explain why certain planning decisions are being made, from the beginning.

“ I wish I could take more of this on in the beginning—the [objectives] were already planned but still—I had to ask for them to let me in the planning. I would have liked to be involved earlier. I felt like a third wheel for part of the time at the beginning.”  
— *Employee interviewee (FERENCE & Co., 2022, p. 6)*

## Provide opportunities that fit:

- Use individualized training, and include hands-on activities, visuals, and repetition, or what works with the learning style of an individual.
- Allow different kinds of advancement opportunities (think about using a career lattice or other structure).
- Give support in soft skills (how to speak up and advocate for their workplace needs and goals in the workplace).

“ I pulled one of our employees with an intellectual disability aside and said, ‘Okay, today we’re going to learn this new skill.’ He told me he didn’t think he could ever learn anything new, let alone this particular skill. So, I gave him a 3-month plan about what we’re going to do to learn the skill and how—and said that we were going to touch base in 3 months to assess how it’s going.”  
— *Employee interviewee (FERENCE & Co., 2022, p. 8)*



**Keep growing your inclusive network to build new career advancement opportunities into your business.**



## Links



Focus Professional Services Neurodiversity Talent Agency. [Unconscious Biases – Career Progression for People on the Autism Spectrum.](#)



The Inclusive Workplace. Disclosure for Employers. [ADD LINK WHEN FINALIZED]



The Inclusive Workplace. [Advocate for Accommodations.](#)



The Inclusive Workplace. Building an Inclusive Workplace [ADD LINK WHEN FINALIZED]

## Sources

1. Dudley, Carolyn, et. al. (2015). *What do we know about improving employment outcomes for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder?* SPP Research Papers, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary. Retrieved September 29, 2022, from <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Autism-Employment-Dudley-Nicholas-Zwicker.pdf>
2. Ference & Company Consulting. (2022). *Career Development and Advancement for Persons with Disabilities (Draft Report)*. Ready, Willing and Able and Inclusion Canada.
3. Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. (2019, October). *Inclusive hiring works: The business benefits of hiring people with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder*. Ready, Willing & Able. Retrieved September 29, 2022, from [https://readywillingable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/RWA-Business-Case\\_EN\\_October-2019.pdf](https://readywillingable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/RWA-Business-Case_EN_October-2019.pdf)
4. Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities through the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. (2019, July). *Career Discovery Guide*. Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council. Retrieved September 22, 2022, from <https://moddcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Career-Discovery-Guide.pdf>

