

inclusive communication:
how abled employees
can be more inclusive
towards colleagues
with disabilities



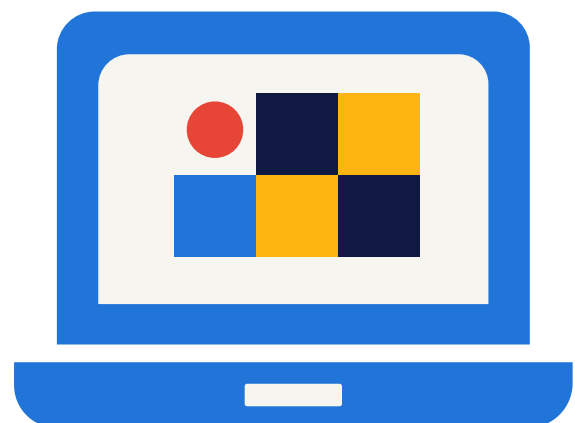
While communication is about expressing effectively, people with visible or invisible disabilities may struggle to express themselves. How can abled people be more inclusive towards people with disabilities?

Ramps. Screen readers. Easy access to washrooms. These are among the first things we think of when we think about including people with disabilities at work. No doubt, all of these are important, but there's an important aspect that often goes unnoticed - Communication.

In our country, even today, we tend to exclude people with disabilities - either because mainstream society knows very little about disability, or we've never been taught to communicate well with people who are not exactly like us. In recent

years, however, workplaces are taking a closer look at such exclusion. Investment in sensitization and training modules is helping organizations create more empathetic teams, and using inclusive communication is a big part of such collaborative workplaces.

'Embracing All Abilities: Including People With Disabilities At Work', a study by Randstad India, in association with Vocallea Networks looks at how organizations are using communication as an inclusion strategy.



keys to inclusive and accessible communication

Payal (a participant in the study cited earlier) shared how despite being an easy person to talk to, her colleagues found it difficult to communicate with her. Why? Because she is partially deaf and completely blind! In fact, she shared that her manager and guide had “no clue” how to communicate with her.

When it comes to gaps in communication, employees like Payal are not alone. Often, effective communication, which is the cornerstone of an inclusive workplace, remains unnoticed in everyday functioning. Engaging in conversation with a person with disability is not a mammoth task nor does it require a special mode of communication.

However, here are a few things abled individuals can take care of while engaging with their colleagues with disabilities.

- Empathetic communication - Imagine being addressed using outdated terms or constantly being asked about your disability, even in a professional setup. This is the truth for many people with disabilities. Empathy is a prerequisite to inclusive communication and should be practiced by abled individuals actively. Do not ask probing questions about someone’s disability or show excessive pity towards them. Treat

them with respect and dignity just as you would any other colleague. Focus on their skills and abilities to perform the task instead of their disability. Maintain professional behavior, which does not offend them

- Accessible fonts - Use readable fonts such as Times New Roman, Calibri, and Arial for official communication like emails or documents. Accessible fonts make consumption and comprehension of text easy for everyone including those who have visual impairments and dyslexia
- Personal communication - Learn sign language to enhance communication in the workplace
- Offer assistance - Offering assistance to people with disabilities, upon obtaining their consent is helpful. In case they feel they are in control, do not keep probing them
- Active learning and listening - As an abled person, understanding the challenges of people with disabilities should be a continuous practice. Engaging with diverse people on a daily basis will help widen your perspective on effective, inclusive communication. Learn, listen, and use the feedback to improve your

communication skills further. It will help you create an environment of support, which moves away from bias, stigma, and discrimination

- **Inclusive language** - Address people with disabilities using the correct terms (you can also ask for their preferred terms), which do not reduce them to their disability. Avoid using terms like 'disabled people', 'the disabled', 'physically-challenged' that further stigmatize and reduce the person's identity to their disability. When you put people first, it shows a sense of empathy and respect for the individual that comes before their disability. As per a document by Handicap International, 'People with disabilities' or 'person with disability' are two of the widely accepted terms internationally. Some prefer to be addressed as 'specially-abled' or 'differently-abled'
- **Share the learnings** - Share articles or resources like these with your colleagues and friends to help other abled individuals navigate inclusive communication strategies.

While workplace policies can maintain decorum around the language used, it is the responsibility of every individual to ensure that their communication, whether written, oral or gesture-based, is not exclusive to a particular group. Inclusive communication enables more active engagement with people with disabilities. It also gives employees with disabilities the opportunity to express themselves better because of the accessible environment around them.

It is true that change happens in small but significant ways, and each individual contribution is part of a larger movement. We should look upon each of these ways as our personal but significant contribution towards a bigger movement for change and inclusion.



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