

Building an inclusive workplace: Strategies for attracting and retaining disabled talent

15 November 2024

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This year, UK Disability History Month (14 November to 20 December) highlights the critical themes of disability, livelihood and employment. Its aim is to raise awareness about the challenges disabled people face in the workplace, particularly the issue of underemployment.

By focusing on these barriers, the month encourages organisations and communities to address them, promote inclusivity, and create equal opportunities for all.

As the employment landscape evolves, forward-thinking employers are recognising the value that diversity and inclusion bring to their organisations. Yet, despite progress, the disability employment gap remains persistently wide. Government data shows that only 54.2% of working-age disabled people in the UK are employed, compared to 82% of non-disabled individuals. Tackling this disparity presents a significant opportunity for employers, particularly those struggling to attract and retain talent.

By implementing tailored strategies to support disabled employees, employers can tap into a valuable pool of diverse skills and experience. Not only does this benefit individuals, but it also gives organisations a strategic edge in a competitive job market. So, what steps can employers take to attract and retain disabled talent?

Accessibility from the start

For disabled candidates, their experience with a potential employer starts long before they submit an application. The hiring process must be accessible from the outset, signalling the organisation's commitment to inclusion. Employers can take practical steps to make this happen, such as:

- Offering clear information about adjustments available and ideally including examples.
- Encouraging applicants to share any mitigating circumstances that may affect their applications.
- Guaranteeing interviews for disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria.

These steps send a strong message that the organisation is committed to accessibility and supporting candidates at every stage. However, the recruitment process is just the beginning. Ensuring that disabled employees feel welcomed, valued, and supported in the workplace is essential for long-term success.

Open communication and inclusive leadership

Creating an inclusive environment requires open and ongoing communication. Regularly engaging with disabled employees and listening to their experiences without assumptions is key to identifying areas for improvement. It's important to view feedback as a way to foster positive change, ensuring employees feel heard and valued.

Managers play a pivotal role in this process. Inclusive leadership involves more than just listening; it's about leading with empathy and respect. Well-trained managers who understand the importance of supporting all team members can help create a workplace culture that celebrates diversity and encourages open dialogue. They should model positive behaviours, promote healthy work habits, and address any inappropriate language or behaviours when they arise.

Flexibility and tailored support

Flexibility is essential for an inclusive workplace. Providing flexible working arrangements allows disabled employees to manage their conditions and perform at their best. Regularly reviewing and adapting these arrangements ensures they remain effective and aligned with individual needs. This could include offering remote work options, flexible hours, or modified duties.

Employees should feel empowered to discuss adjustments, knowing their well-being and career development are priorities for the business. Proactively addressing any potential barriers to success through tailored support makes the workplace more accessible to all employees, not just those with disabilities.

Building a culture of belonging

A truly inclusive workplace goes beyond just making adjustments. It's about fostering a culture that celebrates diversity and makes everyone feel they belong. Employee resource groups—such as communities specifically for disabled employees—are an excellent way to build a sense of belonging and provide a supportive space where individuals with shared experiences can connect. These groups can also be a valuable resource for the organisation, offering insights on improving policies and practices.

Collecting regular feedback from disabled employees, and using this data to refine and improve practices, ensures the organisation is continually moving towards greater inclusivity. Setting clear goals for inclusion and monitoring progress helps maintain accountability, ensuring that the company doesn't just talk about inclusion but actively demonstrates it in all areas of its work.

Creating a truly inclusive workplace is an ongoing journey that requires commitment, openness, and a willingness to adapt.

At Browne Jacobson, our commitment to inclusivity reflects our belief that every individual deserves the opportunity to succeed in an environment where they feel valued and empowered. We are proud to have been awarded Disability Confident Leader (Level 3) status, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to promoting disability inclusion in the workplace.

We encourage other organisations to join us in championing disability confidence this Disability History Month and building workplaces that reflect the diverse communities we serve.

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