

Transcript “Disability Inclusion Introduction” & “Establishing Affinity Groups and Programming”

Welcome to Diversity Labs Disability Inclusion Knowledge Sharing Series. We are thrilled that you've chosen to join us to learn more about this important and often overlooked aspect of DEI. In this four-part series, you will hear from incredible speakers about their lived experiences and what organizations can do to create more inclusive cultures and spaces for people with disabilities.

Thank you to all of those who shared their insights and stories with us to enrich our learning about disability inclusion, including Diversity Labs Disability Inclusion Advisory Group, who helped us to create the disability inclusion commitments list, a list of 10 actions that organizations can take to advance disability inclusion.

Visit Diversity Lab's website for more information on the disability inclusion commitments list. And find out which legal organizations have already committed to taking action. We hope that you enjoy this discussion and share these insights across your organization.

As a reminder, this call is recorded. So before we get into this discussion, I wanted to remind you about our disability inclusion commitments that we are really excited about. More than 90 law firms in the US, UK, and Canada are partnering with Diversity Labs to continue building a culture of inclusion for people with disabilities by implementing one or more of the actions listed on the recently launched disability inclusion commitments.

Firms were already taking some of the steps outlined by the commitments. But each firm has selected additional actions to take in 2024 to build on its current efforts. And so we're really thankful and excited for all of the organizations who have signed up. And if you're interested in joining this cause, please reach out to Kavita at kavita@diversitylab.com and get more information.

So today's topic is Disability Inclusion 3, Establishing Affinity Groups and Programming. And we have really great panelists that I'm excited to introduce. First, we have Karen Burgio Hoy from Reed Smith, who is senior manager DEI client relationships. We also have Nosa Iyoha from McDonald's Corporation, a field finance officer and disability inclusion group national chair.

We have Cricket Middleton from Accenture, managing director, North America contract management; Rosevelie Marquez Morales from Hoval Lovells, Hogan Lovells, chief diversity officer of the Americas; and Carolyn Pepper from Reed Smith, a partner and co- chair of leaders. So thank you so much to all of you for joining us. We've heard great things about the work that you're doing. And we can't wait to have this discussion.

So the first question I'll ask is just for you to please describe your background and your connection to disability inclusion. And I'll start with you, Karen.

Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, wherever you are. Happy New Year to everyone. So I work specifically with our clients and across our clients on opportunities to connect them with us on all of our diversity initiatives, including disability and also issues around pro bono where we may have a similar agenda, similar interests. And we can collaborate with them.

So it's not only on the teams that are serving our clients, but also on the ways that we can connect. And I'm the mother of a neurodiverse daughter.

Thank you. Nosa?

Hey, everyone. Good morning, good evening, good afternoon, wherever you are in the world. As Courtney mentioned, my name is Nosa Iyoha, field finance officer for McDonald's Corporation. I'm also the national chair for our Disability Inclusion Group. And so really, it's an ERG or EBN where the whole idea is, how do we foster camaraderie, community, amongst individuals with disabilities, but also allies.

I think for me, personally, this is an important thing with my background in disability, someone who's suffered from anxiety and depression and things like that, so some of the things that aren't as easy to see on the surface and being a Black male, right? Just making sure that there is that community, that support system. And we really focus a lot of our energy on education across the company. We do a lot of advocacy work.

And then finally, I think a big part of it is going to be career development, right? Making sure that we are enabling one another to reach our full potential within our jobs

Awesome. Thank you.

Cricket, can we have your background and connection to disability inclusion?

Thank you. Certainly, hello, everybody. My name is Cricket Middleton. And as Courtney mentioned, I am part of our North America team at Accenture. And I look after our contract management group. And I say specifically North America because we have three markets. And North America is one of the largest. So it's an exciting place to be. My personal connection, I actually have two nexuses.

And I loved hearing, Karen, your personal connection to it. My best friend in college, she and her husband adopted four children from China, each with a disability. And I have personally watched what resources and environment and accessibility and empowerment have done in the lives of those four children.

The oldest, my goddaughter, just got married three weeks ago. And then I too, Karen, have a grandson and a nephew that is neurodiverse. So it is near and dear to my heart. It is a passion. It is purpose. And you'll probably hear that often in our conversation in the next 45 minutes or so.

Thank you, Cricket. Rosevelie.

Thanks, Courtney. As Courtney indicated, I am Rosevelie Marquez Morales. I'm the Chief Diversity Officer for the Americas at Hogan Lovells and in my role it's to work with the organization and our leaders in terms of implementing and developing our strategy around DEI and that includes disability inclusion it's one of our main strands that we focus on.

And in doing so, we have our GAIN, which is our Global Ability Inclusion Network. And we work very closely with them, just to make sure that we are providing the support, not only in terms of recruiting, but also making sure that people are able to succeed within the firm. And that means understanding what may be the challenges in order to be able to retain them, in order to be able to advance them.

And I would say personally, I think as Cricket said, as a parent, you see what's happening in your children's schools. And you become their advocate. And I think that's really an important piece. And I would say many members of our global ability and inclusion network happen to be parents who want to learn more. I think as Nosa said, a lot of this is about education and support because we are very much aware of the talent that exists in our community. And we just want to make sure that we're creating inclusive environments for them to thrive.

Awesome. Thank you, And Carolyn.

Thank you. So I'm the co-founder of our leaders group here at Reed Smith. And we founded this I think 13 years ago now. So we've got a lot of longevity there. And our ERG has been working very hard right from the beginning, from starting from nowhere really to start to hire people with disabilities. And when I say starting from nowhere, we probably already had people with disabilities. And in fact, we definitely will have done. But they simply weren't talking about it.

So I have a number of neurodiverse people and people with disabilities in my very close family as well. And also, as a result of some of the work that we've done, we've also been very, very lucky to hire some fantastic-- a large cohort of people who've become role models and leaders in this space, including the

main associate that I work with in my field of specialty entertainment media law and my last assistant as well.

So I work very closely with a lot of people with disabilities. And I have to say I've learned a great deal from them, probably a lot lot lot more I've learned from them than the other way around. So yeah, so that's my connection really.

Awesome, so I'll start with the next question with you, Carolyn. What motivated your organization to establish a disability affinity group or ERG? And what steps were taken to establish it?

So I would say it was a very definite point actually for us because it was 2012 when the Paralympics was in London. And I think a lot of us went to that. And we just suddenly thought-- it just suddenly dawned on us, as if we shouldn't have known it already.

But we just hadn't given it enough thought. There are all these people with disabilities who are so fantastically talented in sport for a start. And there must be a very big community of extremely talented people who would be lawyers or who are lawyers. And why aren't we seeing those people? We found ourselves talking a lot about gender equality and other areas of diversity.

But we just didn't see-- we just suddenly dawned on us that wasn't something that we were thinking about enough and that we were really missing out on a big talent pool. And that wasn't right. So we just decided to do something about it. And that's really how we started. And as I say, we've been very, very lucky, having done it for a long time, to have learnt a great deal as an organization and been able to bring more and more people with disabilities in. And we've just benefited so much from that.

Awesome. Rosevelie, what motivated your firm to establish a disability-related affinity group? And what steps were taken to establish the group?

Well, as Carolyn was saying, I think as an organization, thinking about disability just over the years, it's been very thinking about physical disabilities. And over the last few years, the definition of disability has broadened, right? We've had more conversations about the importance of acknowledging the challenges of our neurodiverse individuals, the role of mental health.

And so I would say about three years ago, our network launched in 2021. It started with just steering committee, a group of different people coming in to talk about, how can we service individuals that we know are here, maybe not in terms of self-identify, because if we look at our self-identification, they are usually extremely less, right? But we're having one-on-one conversations with people explaining their challenges.

And so it started with just conversations around, what are the needs? How can we best support? We identified a partner champion, which is usually what we do when we first start with a group to work with leadership. And it was pretty easy to bring it up and to say, this is something that we think we need. The buy in was easily there. But we identified a group of folks that would be willing to identify, what are our goals?

Some of them are around education. Who should be part of our ERG group? We have affinity groups and law firms. And our groups are open-- this group in particular is everyone because it is not limited to our lawyers, but also our business services professionals.

But we wanted to make sure that we were hearing everyone's perspectives across the various groups. And so we have a partner lead as well as an associate lead as well as a business services lead recognizing that the challenges, the needs are going to be different, depending on where you're at within the organization.

And that's how we kicked off. And we kicked off by sending out notification to everyone across the firm and inviting topics, inviting suggestions, inviting ideas, and hearing from them, and then from there, formalizing a structure that we have now.

Thank you. So starting with the partner champion is a great idea. Cricket, can you give us some insight into how this went at Accenture?

Yes. And I think that it's a similar journey. It needs a sponsor. It needs somebody to drive it. But for us, from a global perspective, legal is only a small part of our Accenture family. From a global perspective, we have a very large, very robust inclusion and diversity program. And disability inclusion was part of that.

So in our legal group, we established a legal diversity ERG to make sure that we were-- and we also have other ERGs as well-- but to make sure we're focused on empowering, enabling, educating, and employing people with disabilities. So for us, it was an extension of our global program that we felt very strongly within our legal community that we needed to provide focus. We needed to provide support. We needed to advocate in that space, Courtney.

Awesome. Thank you so much. Nosa.

Yeah, and think a lot of what's been said is very much applicable to how our group got started as well and probably similar time frame as well. We were just starting to double down on making sure that we had the right kind of representation from a leadership perspective across various underrepresented groups. And the one thing that stood out was there wasn't really anything dedicated to two persons with disabilities.

And so that wasn't officially in places that work or ERG. And so the interesting story that I would like to share is it actually started out very, very grassroots. I was not a part of the founding of it. But there were two founders of the group. One was a manager at the time. The other one was a supervisor. They were part of the digital accessibility team.

And they just created this group of people that would meet monthly for thought groups. They did a ton of education work. They created this community really on its own. And I think that got a lot of attention from our leadership. Eventually, they were like, hey, we should formalize something like this, right? I think we have eight or nine EBNs within the organization. And so it was like, this needs to become an official EBN and have a sponsor and all that good stuff.

And what I think is unique about this is like the universality of it. There's something about how disability impacts everyone that gives it more passion and more drive. I had never worked with a group of more dedicated people. And this is on top of their day job. So they're doing all this extra work on top of their day job, advocating and educating.

So it's been a labor of love. And it's been very, very grassroots. And we're trying to keep that kind of mentality and startup mentality, making sure that we're staying focused on the community itself and the content and moving things forward.

Thank you. Disability is often one of the later focuses of people's efforts. But it does touch everyone. And most of us do expect, even if we don't currently have disabilities, we do expect to have longer lives and experience disability. So it is something that we should all be thinking about and paying attention to. Thank you.

So for our third question. I'm going to start with you, Karen. Can you share insights into the composition of your group's membership? Is it limited to lawyers? Does it include allies? How has participation evolved over time?

So great question. As Carolyn said, this is one of our earlier-- we call them BIGs, Business Inclusion Groups, but affinity groups, whatever. So it's one of the longer-lived ones. But about five years ago, we came to the idea that community is community within any organization. And so this was an opportunity for everyone to join.

So we think we were one of the earlier law firms to open up any of our affinity groups to everyone in the firm. So executive assistant up to chief for chair of the firm can join any of our affinity groups. That really created, I think, a dynamic change across the firm.

It created community. It created, I think, an awareness of all of the different issues that everyone faces, not just the lawyer timekeepers. But what also happen then is we created some structure. So you have the partner chair or co-chair, as Carolyn is. We have associate members who serve in a role. And this is part of our core leadership team for each of our affinity groups.

So we also have a chief sponsor, so one of our chief executives. In the case of our disability group, it's our chief operating officer. And we also have a senior management team member, who is a member of each of our different affinity groups.

What's unique about the disability group with leaders is that we also have an assistive technology person, a liaison. And think that was Carolyn's notion to bring him in. It's our chief information officer who obviously sits in a really important role to make accessibility for all of our technology happen. So he's part of the core team as well. It's an opportunity for everybody to join in.

Awesome. So appreciate the intentionality behind the structure. And I also understand that takes time to build up to. And so people who are trying to get started now, maybe that's not how yours is going to look right away. But it is a great inspiration.

Nosa, can you talk about the composition and maybe the evolution of your group?

Yeah, so as we became a more formal employee business network, we started to do all the different things that Karen was mentioning. So we have two executive sponsors. And this actually coincided with a little bit of a broader EBN overhaul for the company. And so making sure that there was so much structure across each employee business network, making sure that the executive sponsor we're at the right level.

So we have one is our digital products lead VP or senior vice president. And then the other one is the chief strategist. So she works on corporate strategy perspective. So those are two executive sponsors. We then go into the national chair, which is the position that I currently hold. We have two co-chairs that kind of support me. And then we have a broader team that all have different roles.

So from community to education to career development, we have groups-- because given the size of the company-- we have groups that are specifically supporting different field offices across the country, making sure that we're engaging with the field. We have groups that are focused more so on the restaurant side, so making sure that, how are we engaging them? How are we advocating for disability inclusion and whatnot and making sure that we're resources for support in that area as well?

So yeah. And then from an ally perspective, I think that's been the coolest part about seeing all of this come to light is, I mean, again, because not all disabilities are visible. But then because it also hits

everyone in a different way, whether it be a loved one or a friend, whomever. We haven't had an issue with just making sure that it's kind of like inclusive of everyone, right? It's meant to be a community, support community.

It's something that we're actually pushing pretty hard within our other employee business networks to make sure that there's a more welcoming feeling for allies, right? You don't have to necessarily identify with the group to be part of the group. And that's actually how some of the best education and awareness comes to fruition. So that's a little bit about how we're set up and the composition of the team.

Awesome Thank you. Rosevelie, can you talk about the composition and maybe evolution of your group over time?

Yeah, I mean, I think our compositions are pretty similar in the sense that we have people that identify as part of the community. And then we also have people who identify as allies. I think, I said earlier, lots of parents that coming to learn. I think what has evolved over time is understanding that in order to meet the various needs, we need to do things differently.

So we have broad education topics that we usually try to identify at the beginning of the year where we'll host a series of educations on the topics for across the company. And this is a global group. So we have our global group that meets. And then we have regional groups. And within the regional groups, the regional groups are addressing the nuances of their regions. Or it could be their offices. There are different challenges in different spaces.

And so the broader steering committee really identifies our broad agenda for the year, the priorities. And then the implementation happens in those regions and within those local offices. Part of that structure is to recognize that sometimes, people of the community want to be with individuals from the community because there is a certain engagement that's different where you don't want to feel the pressure of having everyone else be in those smaller groups. So we have opportunity for that to happen.

And then we have opportunity for everyone else to join in, especially around education which, is generally where we see more parents and allies. And then the other piece that I would add, which I think is really important, is really working very closely with our HR in terms of making sure that we're actually putting into place what's been identified with respect to the resources that might be needed with our head of benefits and making sure that our benefits are aligned to meet the needs.

And so it's really one of those groups that works really closely across many of our business functions in order to make sure that we are actually implementing and not just talking about these things, but really being able to be a resource to the members of the community within our organization.

Awesome. Thank you. So I like that you're there are some in-group kind of discussions or opportunities for the people who do identify as having disabilities. But everyone has an opportunity to be engaged. And also, there are actual people making sure that they're not just part of this group but that the accommodation side or any support that is needed is also happening and being asked about. Cricket, can you talk about your group's membership?

Absolutely. I think I mentioned during one of the comments that we are the legal disability inclusion team. So for us, it is 100% legal team members, whether they're lawyers working in our contracting space or the business side of it. We are part of our legal organization and focused on our community. But we work so incredibly close with our global team.

And one of the things we've learned-- and it has been a journey. I will tell you, it has been a learning journey-- is don't reinvent the wheel. Like, if we saw a gap in education, we would develop some education and serve our team and serve our people. And what we've learned, I would say over the last 24 months, is let's really work together from a global perspective, understand what is happening at the global level, and then shore that up or socialize it down. How can we work together?

Yeah, we were spinning quite a bit, developing content, developing education as opposed to working more closely with our team. And we have learned. We have learned in the last 24 months that it is a village that drives this.

Awesome. Thank you. So there is a follow up question about this. So some of you have mentioned sponsors or executive sponsors. Are the sponsors typically nominated? Or do they choose to get involved? And do they typically identify with the ERG? Or are they held up as allies?

So I think all of the above, Courtney. That's what I would say, all of the above.
OK.

Thank you.

So I want to start with Karen on this one. What strategies have--

So I wasn't able to hear the entire question. I think I know where you want to go. So we have a couple of different strategies in terms of how membership happens. And I think what we've also said earlier is it's OK to start small. Start with your toe in the water.

The day that anyone joins the firm, at orientation, you are able to sign up for any of our business inclusion groups. And you can be a member or an ally. It's the same. So that's day one. And that invitation happens throughout the year through different emails and also through the programming.

The issue of the programming, we have quite a lot of programming for each of our business inclusion groups. And that's an opportunity to be front and center. We have so much programming. We have a schedule. So for example, in the US, when it's Black History Month, OK, that's our African-American group. And veterans, which is one of the groups I'm involved in, is November because it's not only Armistice Day in the UK, but it's Veterans Day in the US.

So we do that programming. And that's an opportunity for people to connect and to join in and to self-identify if they would like to. And then also, at Reed Smith, we have an office DEI liaison in each of our offices. And they really are doing a lot of the intersectional work so all the groups are members-- if you're a member of an office, which everyone is, even if you're a virtual employee, you're able to join in on initiatives.

So that's another way that we expand our relationships, expand our reach, and create more of a community. So you're always a member of the office DEI community as well as any of the other business inclusion groups, affinity groups.

Awesome. Thank you. And that's a good point. You can create the programming and have the schedules and do the things. And then the people will come. And then you can get more engagement and ask people to self ID. You don't necessarily have to wait until who the group is to start doing things that is geared toward them. Thank you for that.

Nosa, what strategies have successfully engaged members?

Yes, think just piggybacking off of some of the points that Karen made and maybe referring back to my comments around how more broadly we've been looking at EBNs and engagement and membership and all that kind of stuff and seeing how we can maybe be a little bit more inclusive across the board. So one of the things we've been trying to do is it's programming, but partnership between employee business networks.

So the disability group will partner with the veterans group. The youth group will partner with the African-American group and so on and so forth. Because to your point, Karen, there can be so much programming that at a certain point, it's overwhelming. What do you go to? What don't you go to? How do you make sure that people feel welcome to going?

So what we found is when we do partner with other groups, we end up gaining new audiences, people that maybe haven't had the kind of exposure that we're talking about with regard to disability or any of the other groups. And part of what we're also trying to achieve I think is we all want to be allies of each other.

We're in it together in so many different ways. And the more that we can come off as a united front the better.

There was a time where you only attended the African-American EBN group events. You didn't you didn't attend the other ones. We're trying to change that. We're trying to make it so that if the veterans group has an event, all of us are attending that, especially those of us who are members of other EBNS and certainly, the leadership.

So I think that's actually resonated quite a bit. The other thing I'll say is-- and this gets back to, Cricket, you mentioned that the content creation and education in general, especially when you take this kind of work on as an affinity group, this is on top of your day job. And it can be exhausting. I mean, you're being requested to attend all these meetings to talk about disability inclusion.

We've established really good relationships with our workplace solutions group, so making sure that within our headquarters itself, it's as accessible as possible. There's things from a digital perspective, both customer facing as well as internally that we have to concern ourselves with. And so giving to the company has been a priority for us, the education piece and making sure that we're advocating.

But think something that we're trying to maybe transition to-- and again, this is where we're early days in our growth-- but can we focus more on our members themselves? Can we focus more on their development from career perspective?

Can we make sure that if individuals are-- there's certain things they want to be focusing on, maybe it's public speaking, maybe it's time management, maybe it's just simply navigating the corporate environment, how are we making sure that we are serving as a resource to them is a little bit of a pivot that we're trying to make, again, not to necessarily take away from the programming we do or the education that we do, but maybe to create the content or partner in creating the content but then kind of leave that as work in and of itself.

That might be a different group that needs to do that. Or maybe we provide the information. We're not necessarily the one doing it because, again, you got to find a balance between giving and then also what we're doing for our people. And think that's the one big, I'll say, the leadership pivot that I've been trying to introduce during my tenure.

Awesome. Thank you. So as members give to the organization by participating and raising their hands to self-identify, making sure you're investing in them and developing them as part of that exchange because that it is a service to identify as part of the community. Thank you. Cricket, on successfully engaging members.

I think I was listening to Nosa and just agreeing vehemently to everything he said. I think for us, there's two strategies. And I think we can't underestimate the power of our allies. I really don't. Think we have to lean in as much as possible. And that's been very powerful for us within the last 18 to 24 month.

And to Nosa's point, showing up, whether it's your ERG-- we call them Employee Resource Group. I know Karen's calling them a Business Group, BIG, but we're affinity group-- whether it's for your group or somebody else's group, you show up as an ally. And you're there. And your support, you educate. We're serving as mentors across the affinity group, which is also very powerful and a compelling story.

The other strategy that has been tremendous for us-- and I think Carolyn and Karen talked about it a minute ago-- was the personal impact stories. And we did a campaign last May in Mental Health Awareness Month. And every day, we posted some personal impact story, whether it was just research we had done as mental health impacts on attorneys or our own personal closeness with something going on-- Rose really talked about parents.

It was probably one of the most pivotal moments in our organization because people could see their own journey, could see their own story, could see, oh, my goodness. Here's so and so. And they had something very similar. I think we cannot underestimate personal impact stories and how that reaches people and pulls people into our orbit.

Awesome. Thank you. Rosevelie.

I'll start by I agree with all the strategies that have been shared. I'll say one of the things that popped out to me is we recognize that we are pretty much all intersectional individuals. And so disability is probably only one of our identities. We have multiple identities. And so we want to make sure that people don't feel the need to choose and be overwhelmed with everything that's available to them.

So we do have a designated DEI senior coordinator on our team, Alana Hudley, and she basically is the liaison to all of our affinity groups. And what that allows us to do is to have one person who has that big picture as to, what are the commonalities, what are the challenges so that we can elaborate on that partnership and build and see where there are similarities where can we do programming.

The other piece that I would say has been really beneficial is that we do have a DEI marketing and comms specialist, Maddie Cannon, on our team, who her job is she works on our newsletter. And she makes sure that we're not only sending out one education session during a particular Heritage Month, but we'll send out what's happening for that entire month and so that people can pick and choose. And we try to give them-- someone learns better from a podcast.

We try to give them educational opportunities. That they learn better by coming into a Zoom and hearing someone speak on a topic. They can do that. We may give articles that are of interest. We may give book recommendations. And we see externally what other partners were working with that are similarly aligned. So one, it takes away some of the work from the group because we recognize everybody has a day job. And this is something that we do because we're passionate about it, and we're interested in it.

So we want to be as much of a resource to our ERGs as possible so that they can come in and ideate with us. And we tell them all the time, we'll ideate with you. Tell us what you think. And let us help you by being the resource in order to get that implementation.

So our newsletter has been really well received. We have an annual report where we share all of our information. And we have links. And our intranet site also is another resource where we upload either any readings, any recordings from sessions so that people can tune in later on.

And the other strategy, at least for some of the law firms, is also making sure that we're valuing people's time by giving credit for the time that's spent. And so we do have a DEI billable hours policy so people that are working on this can you bill their time to that policy. And even people that are attending and coming in to learn and become educated and as allies, that they can also bill their time because we're in law firms and most people are billing time. So we want to acknowledge that work by giving it the same amount of credit that we would in some of the work that they'd be doing on some of our client matters.

Awesome. Thank you. Excellent points about being thoughtful about overlapping interests or intersectional identities and different ways of learning. Some people want to listen to podcasts. Some people want to read. And some people want to talk to other people. Some people won't ever talk to other people. So keep them in mind when you're programming. Thank you very much. And billable credit is important.

I want to start with you, Carolyn, on this next question. In what ways has the disability affinity group positively impacted the workplace culture, recruitment, retention, and professional development of individuals with disabilities?

I think one of the interesting things we found in the first place, and something we hadn't really thought about really, was in terms of when we were looking at accommodations for different people, and every person that we've hired or that's joined us or identified as having a disability needs a different accommodation. And we've just found that oftentimes, we've learned a lot about how we can all work better just generally.

So for instance, some people who are neurodiverse, and everybody is individual, like to have very clear instructions about what it is that they're being asked to do. And we could all improve how we explain to

somebody what a task is. And I think it's made a lot of people much more mindful about how they do things and thoughtful. And I think that actually really impacts how effective we are, just generally.

So I think that that's been a really big benefit that I've seen anyway and we've seen positively coming from this. And just in general, I think there are a lot of people, again, and it's very general, but people with disabilities have had to overcome-- many of them have had to overcome obstacles and to think around things. And show rate resilience to get to where they are.

I mean, we have one attorney who's blind who tells the story about how hard she had to fight to get through law school. And when you listen to that, you think, my goodness. And she was one of our most fantastic attorneys. She's absolutely fantastic. And I think that resilience and that those problem solving skills that she's developed have been hugely beneficial. And listening to her also makes us all think we could all do better at problem solving and being more resilient.

So I think that there's a lot that we-- I think I said this at the beginning. There's really a lot that we've learned as a firm as to how we can do things better and be more inclusive generally and just think more about the effect of everything that we are doing.

I mean, one of the issues that we've come across, which I think happens again in the example of people who are visually impaired, is sometimes, there's ways of sending pictures which allow people to have a description-- and AI has been very helpful with this-- to have a description of the visual image. And there are ways that you can do it, which doesn't allow them to do that.

So sometimes, if you just screenshot something, it doesn't come with a description of what's there. So just thinking about all of those things which a few years ago, we hadn't thought about at all, and now, we think, gosh, we think about that in all of our comms. We don't always get it right.

But we think about all those things much more. And I think that has been a huge benefit for the people working in our firm with disabilities and everyone generally I would say. So I think that's a really important thing that we have is learning I think.

Thank you. Rosevelie, any insight into the positive impacts that come from having these groups?

I agree with Carolyn said. I would say for me, personally, it's just that one thank you because it's sort of an acknowledgment from an individual that really felt touched by what was shared and connected and seen. And so I'd say from a recruiting perspective it's just having the ERG is a tool for recruiting. I think sometimes, you speak to law students. And their eyes light up when they hear that you actually have a group because it acknowledges that it's important to the firm.

And it's a very powerful tool to be seen. And sometimes, many times, that's what people want. They want an acknowledgment. They want to be seen. And they want to know that there's a space for them. And that's a simple way by just having the ERG. To Cricket's point earlier, the power of storytelling-- I think we get the most participation is when people are willing to see to share and be vulnerable because so many people are experiencing similar things but maybe thinking that it's only happening to me.

And just, again, we are giving an acknowledgment to their story. So that's been powerful. And I will say all of this has helped us just in terms of increasing self-identification.

If we look at how self-identification has increased where people feel like, I can share part of my self here within my organization, and I can be more authentic because these resources exist, because there is a voice behind me and an advocate. And we have champions. And we have resources. So just seeing how that has increased I think is another great way to determine, are we being successful with what we're doing?

Thank you. So the programming itself, again, drives that self-identification because otherwise, some people will just think it's really not worth it to just be counted. But when there's another thing happening that they can see and understand, then you're more likely to get that self ID. Cricket, on the positive impact of the groups at your company.

I have to agree with Carolyn's point. And learning and education, I think from a recruiting perspective, we've enabled our hiring team to have the right information be able to ask the right questions, be able to support team members coming in. I think that has been significant for us in our past.

And it really is about education. It's about teaching. It's about making people aware. Thank you. Nosa. Yeah, no, I think everyone's pretty much hit on all the main items. The one thing I will just kind of add is there's an inclusion aspect when it comes to taking on different types of endeavors, whether it be business projects, maybe it's something about workspace. We just end up bringing our innovation or lab into our headquarters.

And so just people stopping and saying, hey, hang on a second. Instead of us of moving forward with our plans and then kind of figuring out where have we messed up, where have we not been as good as we can be from an accessibility standpoint and all that kind of stuff, can we get perspectives upfront? Can we build with more people in mind that solves some of these problems initially as opposed to having going go back and retrofit things and whatnot?

I think thinking about it-- and this one is really a cultural element-- but thinking about disability as the obstacles that actually stop people from actually being able to participate as opposed to in and of itself a thing. We're all able until something stops us from being able. So something disables us. So how do we

get ahead of that? How do we make sure that we're simply enabling from the start? I think that that's been a huge culture change for us as a company.

Thank you, Nosa. I always love to bring up that social model of disability, and we're all just as we are. And then sometimes, we get to a place that only has stairs and no elevator. And then there's a problem. Like, I didn't wake up as the problem.

And so continuing to spread that message makes people understand where you're coming from and makes them maybe want to identify because they might not know how your organization even thinks about disability to be quick to raise their hand to identify themselves.

And it humanizes the entire-- there's a certain level of connection that you create when you really start to think about it in those terms. So it's a lovely social model, something that we are constantly talking about. It just humanizes the entire conversation. So we're not talking about this disembodied disability, right?

It's like, what is this thing over here? It's not this thing. We are people. We all have abilities. It's not until we reach these barriers that we start to really get this disability situation. So yeah, couldn't agree more. Love it. Something we're championing hard over here.

Thank you. Karen, I want to start with you with this next question. What advice would you give to other organizations who are looking to establish or strengthen their disability affinity groups to create a more inclusive workplace.

So I agree with everything that's been said. But so much of this and the theme here is communication. But it's also-- and Nosa, you just spoke about this-- I think when you get people together and when you know people, when they're people, when you have an interpersonal relationship with them rather than just the statistics or the ideas, then you can look at the situation at work or in life and say, all right. What's the impact?

So we all use technology a lot. But the idea, especially in social media-- and Carolyn mentioned this about visual images-- but the idea that we push so much content for our lawyers out in social media, but is it accessible? Have we been really thinking about everyone and how everyone is going to be able to use it or can everyone use it?

So it comes down a lot to communication. I think it comes down to the idea of knowing people, knowing people, liking people, introducing one another and understanding, sitting in somebody else's shoes and what that feels like, and then in the impact to all of the different ways that our organization touches any individual. So HR has an important role. What are the benefits?

And you mentioned this before, but the benefits and how has that impacted? How is the office structure? We discovered I guess during COVID that some of the structure within the office was really isolating. And especially because there weren't that many people there, there were some security issues that we wouldn't ever have looked at before.

But so office, operations, IT, marketing, how do all these functions impact our people? And then how can we all advocate to make the place a better place? I think that's really what it comes down to, so communications and liking the people that you are working with.

Awesome. Thank you. Does anyone else have any advice for other organizations who are trying to get these groups or more programming for disability-related issues?

If it's OK, I'll just jump on what Karen was saying because when we very first-- just a couple of thoughts, I suppose. Is that when we started, we four or five people. We've now got, I think, 8% of the firm. We could do more. But 8% of the firm in our disability inclusion group, which is pretty good. So don't be afraid to start small, I suppose. If there are only two of you, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if there are only two of you, three of you, because you have to start somewhere.

And when you get the conversation going, things tend to move along. And if you are starting small, try to bring in-- and I think everyone-- I've heard Nosa say this and I think Rosevelie as well-- but just bring in the influential people to start off with. And the influential people, I would say, are the senior sponsors.

You need a senior sponsor. Bring in a senior sponsor. If you've got a senior sponsor, other people will come, for starters, and then also thinking about who the other influential people are.

And going off the back of what Karen was saying about communication, people who are the communicators within internally and externally are really important to start getting the messaging out. So in the beginning, we had our internal members of our comms team in our very beginning group of a handful of people and also HR, because in order to grow your group, you need to hire people. And you need to recruit.

So if you've only got one or two people to start with, then try to bring in some of those influential people who can make a difference into your small group to start with. And then you can start to see things move outwards. So I suppose that's how we started with a handful of people. But those influential people helped us to start getting our messaging out and grow the group and get more people involved.

And I'm going to add, I think it's also important to understand where you're at as an organization. It's going to be different for each of your organizations. And so one is definitely survey and get input of as many people as possible. Don't assume that you know what the needs are for individuals. So solicit that

input. And then I would also say, do an audit. It's kind of the same thing when I say we got to understand our biases. And then we can work on them.

We kind understand as an organization, what do we have in place? And actually, are we implementing it? Something as simple as closed captions and technology, there's a lot that's available to us. But are we actually using it in our daily practices? Because it's great if we get on a Zoom. But then no one uses the closed caption. Then that was a missed opportunity. So I would say we need to audit ourselves as an organization and see what policies already exist. Are they actually being implemented? And then test them out.

I think one of the lessons I learned recently in talking to one of our associates is yes, we had automatic door openers. But the timing was not enough time. And so we had a conversation about the fact. We had to talk to the building to adjust the amount of time because where the automatic door opener was located, it still didn't give the person sufficient time to then walk over to enter.

And it happened to be just after hours. And so I guess the policy from the building itself, it wasn't us, but it was still impacting our people, was at the doors sort of closed automatically, which was just quickly for someone with a mobility impairment. So even if you have a policy in place, just make sure that it actually is working. And if you have to make adjustments, then start there because these are the small-- it's kind of that low-hanging fruit.

It's there. It's easy. And then you continue to build. And don't be afraid to move slowly. You don't have to do 10 things right away.

If it's one thing, and you get it done, and you do it well, it will go a lot further than if you try to do too many things at the same time. So I would say survey, audit, test. And make sure you're inclusive in the people that are doing the planning and implementation.

Thank you.

I would add to it, Courtney, and give you all a shout out at Diversity Lab. I mean, I think the idea that you are encouraging us-- and put the underscore under encouraging-- to take on and take and tackle an issue that we haven't identified is a good thing. It's a good way, planning time of year. It's a good idea in terms of do something hard.

Yes. Thank you. So any thoughts on how to do some of these great things that you all have brought up with limited resources?

I don't think that you necessarily need to spend a lot of money. I mean, there is a bit of a myth I think sometimes that the accommodations and things like that for people with disabilities are very expensive. And I don't remember what the figure is. But it's a pretty low figure, if anything. A lot of the accommodations are really just listening to people's needs and trying to make sure that you are aware of how you might best support them. And sometimes, they are more tangible things.

But it's a really low figure that it costs to try and get the accommodations for people with disabilities in place. So I would say it's more about building communities. I feel like our big group is a community. And I think that's the important thing. And that doesn't cost-- it costs time. But it doesn't cost anything else. It just costs people the time and the investment. And people who are passionate about this want to do that.

So for me, I don't think you need a lot of money to make a really big impact. I think it's about effort and community, really, personally.

I would agree. I think Nosa mentioned many of our team members are doing this on top of their day job. So it is people with passion. It's people with purpose. It's people that want to be part of this organization. And they will use their-- whatever free time we have as attorneys to do it.

In think it's a great point. This reminds me of-- I'll try not to be too long. I know we're bumping up against time here. But it reminds me of how I first got involved with the disability inclusion group several years ago. I had been a part of other groups in the past.

But this group was just starting out, again, grass roots. And we have this internal kind messaging board. And we had the then national chair who was constantly posting, constantly, just so much passion.

For that reason alone, I was like, all right, sign me up, right? If there's anyone this passionate, I want to be a part of it, I think it's passion, passion, passion, especially if you think about starting small, focusing on a single thing, you don't need a ton of resources. You really don't. And also, a lot of the times, even some of the big changes you make, they're things that everyone benefits from.

For instance, we have this new wayfinding system that was instigated from our disability inclusion group that gives better direction around, hey, this is north, east, south of the building. Here's where the restrooms are, just more practical, common sense wayfinding elements that everyone is super happy about. But that was something that was brought up. And it doesn't cost a lot of money.

So I think that really, again, it goes back to building the community. And I think passion-- you want to make sure that any one of you on this call are capable of moving mountains. You just got to get started. You start with the passion. And people will come.

Thank you so much. One last question. Are there any policies or strategies that have come out of these ERGs that you would like to mention?

Well, we're in the process of looking at a website redesign. And there are a lot of issues in terms of technology and accessibility that the marketing team in and of itself would not have identified. Carolyn mentioned some.

But the fact that we also have a CIO who is an advocate who is pushing our vendors, pushing the adoption of technology, and giving us opportunities to think about things differently, I think there's been a lot of accessibility issues, especially when we look at new acquisition of either real estate or leasing new office space and how it functions.

Nosa, I really love that example of directions because gosh, how many times have you been anywhere and you're, well, where am I supposed to go now? And how hard can it be to put out information that you could read or figure out? So those are just a couple of examples.

Thank you very much. Yeah, Oh, Carolyn.

I was just going to say, it was interesting. We were talking about space. And Rosevelie was talking about the doors, et cetera. And we've actually managed-- we're having a New London office. And what we've been able to do is to involve our disability BIG in the design of that office so that from the start, it's accessible.

So we've been thinking-- things that are being thought about, such as quiet spaces, office allocation not based upon-- because in the UK, we don't always have an office for everybody. And some people share, but thinking about how neurodiverse people might need quieter spaces or places to just go and just relax a little bit before they go back and the doors as well, the physical accessibility, the routes to the bathroom.

We've been able to input into all of those things, which if there was not a group, I suppose, we wouldn't have been able to do, at least not with such impact covering so many different disabilities. So I think that that's been something that's been really beneficial.

Thank you very much. So we know those legal minimums for accessibility definitely don't cover everything that people need. So having those conversations is great. Rosevelie, you came off mute.

Yeah, no, I was going to agree with Carolyn. I think office build outs are a great opportunity definitely include your groups. And I would say some of those rooms can be dual function. I mean, we have similar kind of quiet rooms. But it could also be a prayer room where people need time and are able to use those rooms for multi-functions.

I think part of the conversation, building off of the mobility limitations, we recently implemented a mobile delivery of lunches for some individuals that have mobility issues, just to recognize that their time and the time it would take them to get to the cafeteria. And so we offer that now.

And just continuing that dialogue of conversation with members of the community is important so that you're constantly evaluating what accommodations do we have in place, and where do we need to expand? And I think that's important because the evolution, like I said at the beginning, of disability and what that looks like has changed. And it's a lot more than what is sort of prescribed under the ADA, and especially when we start to incorporate the aspects of mental health. And so I think it's really important.

And look at your benefits and make sure that people are aware, if you have counselors that are available to them, making sure that that's constantly communicated so that people know that these services. Because many of those services go under utilized, even though they might already exist. And so just simply that communication piece and getting that information out there, I think, is a very easy strategy to implement.

Thank you so much, Rosevelie. There's a saying, nothing about us without us. And so you really shouldn't be making policies and doing all this work to affect people with disabilities without their input. And so having these groups can help get you that information and how to speak about things in a way that is inclusive.

So Thank you so, so much to all of our guests and the attendees today. We had a really great conversation. And I think people got a lot out of it. We really, really appreciate you all. Thank you. Sorry for going over time. But thank you so much for being here. And we will see you all next time. Bye.

Thank you for having us. Thank you.