

Deloitte Canada Accessibility Strategy:

Lenore MacAdam

Speaking notes for Tuesday November 27th breakfast panel

My name is Lenore MacAdam, and I work at Deloitte Canada. I've held a number of roles in the firm, focused mostly in Talent, Diversity and Inclusion, but since February of this year, I've had the pleasure of working in a role focused entirely on Accessibility.

My role was created, in part, to help Deloitte achieve its stated goal of becoming the most accessible professional services firm in Canada.

This is based upon our belief that by doing so, we will be a more successful, and more profitable, organization where people are able to bring their whole, authentic selves to work and are able to do their best work possible.

I'd like to share a brief overview of our "accessibility journey" to date.

Some history....

Deloitte's history in this space goes back to the summer of 2012, Deloitte's General Counsel, Ken Fredeen, was appointed Chair of a Federal Government Panel which studied and reported on marketplace opportunities for people with disabilities in the private sector.

The Panel's report was tabled in January 2013 and it has received international attention. Since then, both Ken, and Deloitte, have been recognized for their leadership around persons with disabilities.

In December 2016, Ken was the keynote speaker at the first annual International Harkin Disability Summit in Washington DC, and his message was simple: hiring people with disabilities was not the "right thing to do", but that it made business sense. Furthermore, his message said that hiring people with disabilities has many social benefits. We all win. But it starts with truly understanding the business case.

In early 2017, Ken became the Executive Sponsor of Deloitte's disability initiative. His first step was to bring on a senior resource to help him design and implement this vision, and that resource was me!....so needless to say I think that his first step was the right one.

So starting in February of this year, we had to design the program from scratch, which was an interesting challenge.

Three Pillars

The terms "Disability" and "Accessibility" are broad, and we realized quickly that some segmentation was needed in order to focus our thinking.

So in addition to the more relatively well-known topic of visible disability, we added mental health and neurodiversity (i.e. the autism/Asperger's spectrum and cognitive disability).

And what guided our thinking at all times was that we need to focus on abilities, not disabilities.

AccessAbility Community

One of our first priorities was to re-launch our employee resource group.

Deloitte currently has a number of employee resource groups (also called ERG's, different companies use different names such as business affinity groups or business resource groups, at Deloitte we call them Communities), focused on a number of employee identities such as LGBT, visible minorities, women and aboriginal employees. The group that focuses on disabilities is called AccessAbility.

It was originally formed in 2014, but like many employee resource groups, had a hard time getting off the ground.

So part of my job was to relaunch and reinvigorate this group.

We decided to expand the group's mandate to include mental health and neurodiversity (which aligned with our three pillars). So far this has worked very well – especially adding in mental health, which is a topic that many of our firm members, in fact I'd say most, are eager to talk about. In fact, rarely does a day go by that I don't have someone reaching out to me to get involved.

On the Road Again

Our first major AccessAbility Community event took place in September – we called it “On the Road Again”, and it was a national panel event, (taking place in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal), which focused on the relationship between work travel and mental health.

Facilitated by Ken Fredeen, my boss and the person I , three senior executives participated in a panel discussion on unique mental health issues associated with business travel.

The panelists, our Chief Talent Officer, our Toronto Risk Advisory leader, and a VP from Morneau Shepell (who is also an expert in mental health) provided personal examples and systemic solutions.

The event was extremely well received and the first of many sessions we plan to do on this topic.

Psychological Health and Safety Standard (“The Standard”)

Another key initiative in the area of mental health is the implementation of the national psychological health and safety standard.

For those of you unfamiliar with it, the psychological health and safety standard (or “the standard”) was developed in January 2013 with the Canadian Mental Health Commission. It is a set of voluntary guidelines and processes intended to guide organizations promote mental health and prevent psychological harm in the workplace. We've started the process and will be implementing the standard over the next year.

The first step to implementing the Standard is to do a firm-wide survey to collect the necessary data to determine risks and priorities. We just launched the survey on Friday the 17th, and despite us not making it a mandatory task, already over a thousand employees have completed it.

Impact Day: Giving back to our disabilities communities (Ready, Willing and Able)

Once a year, Deloitte firms around the world have a day that focuses on giving back to the community – we do projects with various non-profit organizations and charities across the country. This year, we decided to run an Impact Day project that focused on our Neurodiversity pillar, with an organization called Ready, Willing and Able - a national non-profit organization that reaches out to, and engages, employers in order to increase their understanding of the value and economic benefits to hiring people with intellectual disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We ran a national Impact Day project in 4 cities (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto), with one more to come in January (Montreal), where we engaged with local chapters, learned about autism and workplace inclusion, and gave feedback on their business outreach strategy.

External Marketplace

We are trying to share our story as we go along, as much as possible. Our hope is to engage with others in corporate Canada, and hopefully, if we're lucky, lead. Trying to reverse an historical pattern of high unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities is a complex problem that requires a different way of thinking and collaboration.

Some of our work has been shared as articles – and we like to start conversations that approach the topic in a fresh way.

August 2017

The “Curb Cut Effect” is a term used to describe how designs that were intended to benefit people with disabilities often end up benefiting everyone. The curb cut (i.e. a wedge cut into an elevated curb), was originally designed to make sidewalks accessible to wheelchair users. However people quickly realized that this innovation made many activities easier – pushing strollers, making deliveries, using bicycles or crutches, etc.

This article dives into this concept as it relates to improving workplace productivity.

September 2017

The business case for hiring people with disabilities is supposed to be irrefutable...yet we're not seeing the progress that would be expected from an irrefutable case. Certainly we can attribute some of that to a lack of communication and awareness, and perhaps to cognitive dissonance.

In this article we outline our theory that the business case is not irrefutable to all types of businesses. In the “B2B sector” (a significant portion of the economy), the business case has not yet been well proven or communicated.

October 2017

Everyone is talking about mental health in 2017, yet the language we use to communicate about it (“stigma”, “disclosure”), suggests a topic that is negative and marginal. The way we talk about mental health is holding us back.

In this article, our most popular to date, we talk about the importance of focusing on an inclusive and accessible culture, rather than stigma, to improve an organization's mental health and resilience.

Talent Acquisition Strategy

Any corporate accessibility strategy should ultimately lead to a better hiring experience and greater retention of people with disabilities.

Our current strategy is focused on building internal capabilities through initiatives such as AccessAbility and Impact Day, however our ultimate goal is talent acquisition. We've started to work with our Talent Acquisition teams – sharing what we've learned so far, and building a network across the country of champions connected to the sources of talent within their regions.

Going forward

I want to stress that by no means do we think we have all the answers to the full inclusion of people with disabilities.

But we do believe that as Canada's largest professional services firm, working with our many clients in the private and public sector, we can be a catalyst and thought leader, and work together to bring about change.