

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Catherine Hyde Townsend, Senior Advisor for Disability Inclusion at Ford Foundation.

CATHERINE TOWNSEND:

I think that one of the most important things we've learned is the importance of leadership. Of leadership, not only talking about why this is an important priority, but also all of us have a role to play. I think sometimes we say leadership and we think only senior leaders. And what I think has been the most powerful at Ford is the way different people in different roles, whether or not they're the security staff or a program officer, has a role to play in changing the culture and shifting the norms. And I think one of the things that has been most powerful are people self-disclosing. And as hard as that can be, I've seen the ways that when one person self discloses, it provides an opening for others to do so. And it provides a community that already exists, but then we often don't feel. We don't feel that collective support sometimes because we don't talk about it, we might feel more isolated.

And I would just highly stress for you, over the course of my career, I have not always self-identified. And when I began doing so, I had many people say to me that they started identifying because I did, and I remembered being kind of shocked by this. I was like, "Really?" And I think we sometimes underestimate our own power and the ways that vulnerability actually can be very powerful. The second lesson is much more practical I suppose, and very philanthropy related, which is resource it. I often hear people say, "Oh, we're committed to disability, we care about this, we care about that." But I say that budgets are value documents, how does your budget actually demonstrate that commitment? And we do need specific money for disability, and disability is part of all of the social justice and human rights work that we do, and so there's ways that we can do both.

And then I guess the third lesson is really what we're doing today, which is talk about it often and in many different ways. There is so much hesitation to speak about disability and providing opportunities for staff and yourself to meet different disabled people. If you meet one disabled person, you've met one disabled person. It's a very diverse community, there are really different access needs for different people. And it's just an incredible opportunity, I think to better understand our human condition and really engage in the kind of political analysis that we need as philanthropic institutions to understand the ways that ableism links with other systematic forms of oppression such as racism, patriarchy, et cetera.

NARRATOR:

To continue your learning journey, visit DisabilityPhilanthropy.org.