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SANDY HO:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the Disability & Philanthropy Forum Disability Equity Series. My name is Sandy Ho and I use she/her pronouns. And I'm also the executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I am zooming to you today from the unceded territory, also known- the land of the Ohlone, also known as Oakland, California.

As part of our commitment to accessibility, each of our panelists and myself will provide an audio description of ourselves. I am an Asian American woman with short, dark, wavy hair, and I'm wearing a black and white T-shirt with stripes. In my background, there's some pink and yellow furniture in the background, but it is Zoom blurred out. And my access needs are being met today with the support of the caption.

In a conversation on equity and inclusive hiring, we really would be remiss to not acknowledge that right now for millions of people in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and other places in the southeastern region or rural country, many are not able to show up to their workplaces due to the devastation from Hurricane Helene and Milton. And so while it's important that we all remember equity requires policies, it requires practices and accountability, taking care of our basic needs must also be part of our analysis to disability justice, to disability rights and inclusion. The question of who belongs, and how can we foster that belonging in our workplaces and organization? is just one part of showing up for each other. And I'm really excited to learn more from our panelists today.

I want to also offer just a collective deep breath in to all of you in our audience who joined us, to each of our presenters, and extend my thanks to each of you for taking the time to join us today. I'm also going to drop into the chat the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies. It's a disability-led organization that has been on the front lines of providing support for disability communities and people with disabilities who have been negatively impacted by many of the natural disasters and storms. That is going to be dropped into the chat momentarily. Thank you, Olivia.

Getting back to a few housekeeping items for today, there are a few ways to access our live captions. You are welcome to use the CC button at the bottom of your screen. Or to access the captions in a separate window, please click on the screen text link. Today, since we are in a webinar mode, only our moderators and panelists will be on camera and our audience members will be muted throughout the event. This webinar is being recorded and you'll all receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. And we highly encourage you to share it with your networks.

And so we will be using chat to share a links with you. It will not be available for audience members to communicate out. Instead, we ask you to please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to share a question at any time during the session. We will do our best to integrate them throughout the panel of discussion as they come in, and we'll try to make time for a question at the end as well. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, feel free to send your question to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org.

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Now, before we delve in, we do have a poll question just to help set the context for our conversation today. Please answer the question that had popped up in the poll now by the box. And so I'm going to continue talking for a bit. And if the poll is not accessible to you, please feel free to email communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org as well. But the poll question is, what percentage of US employees self-identify as a person with a disability to their employer? The options are 16%, 4.6%, 23.1% or 25%.

Now I have the honor and deep pleasure of introducing our brilliant panelists. And to kick us off, I'm delighted to introduce Kym Eisner who's the executive director of the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation and also a member of the President's Council. And Kym is joined on the panel by two disabled leaders in diversity, equity, inclusion, Eman Rimawi-Doster and Dr. Zakiya Mabery. And you can learn more about both of them from their bios.

KYM EISNER:

Thank you so much, Sandy. I'm really looking forward to this conversation today. My name is Kym Eisner. I use she/her pronouns. And as Sandy mentioned, I'm the executive director of the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation. I am coming to you today from the land of the Chumash, otherwise known as Los Angeles, California. I have dark brown hair, little longer than shoulder length, navy blouse on. And behind me there is a mural with some sort of flower detail on it. One sentence about myself that I really want to share with you professionally is over the last 10 years working with all the colleagues and individuals that I have come to know when I've been at the Neilsen Foundation, I've become a better person because I have a deeper understanding of the needs of the disability community. I learn more every day. And I hope that it makes me a kinder person.

And speaking of kind, generous, wonderful people, beautiful women inside and out, I want to introduce you to our two panelists. Sandy mentioned Zakiya and Eman. I don't want to butcher their last names because I just might, so I'm going to pass it on to them to do an introduction. And let's start, if you don't mind, with Zakiya.

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening from wherever you're tuning in from. Thank you for that introduction, Kym and Sandy. I'm Dr. Zakiya Mabery. My pronouns are she and her. I'm wearing a bold apple green blazer with pink trim, a warm smile, I'm African American, and my hair is pulled back into a bun. And I'm so thankful to be here with you today. Just a brief fun fact about me is I'm neurodivergent. And I'm a DEIA leader. I've been doing this work for almost 20 years. And I'm an advocate, I'm an author, international speaker. And more so than anything else, I am passionate about moving the needle on inclusion for everyone. Thank you so much for having me.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Hi, everyone.

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KYM EISNER:

Okay.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Oh, sorry. Yeah, my name is Eman Rimawi-Doster. I am a light-skinned Black and Palestinian woman. I'm wearing a yellow sweater and an African print dress under it. And I've got some Instagram paintings that I found online a couple of years ago in my background. I have a lot of fun facts, but one fun fact is I love learning new things. And because I'm an advocate and also an artist, I like to take up new fun artistic projects. And I've been teaching myself how to DJ and produce music and all that, which I think is so fun because I've always loved remixed music. And I'm like, "I want to learn how to remix music," so I'm teaching myself that. And I had my first DJ gig a few weeks ago, which was so, so fun and so exciting. And I just want everyone to live their best lives in any which way they can. And all kinds of things make us happy, and DJing makes me happy. I'm glad to be here, so thank you for having me.

KYM EISNER:

I love that. Can we insert a dance party into the middle of this?

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Oh, we sure can.

KYM EISNER:

I would love it. We do them at the Neilsen Foundation, no joke. If we could have a dance party today, I'll feel right at home.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Yes. Yes.

KYM EISNER:

Okay. We're about to have a great conversation about inclusive hiring and what that might look like. When the Neilsen Foundation became a member of the President's Council, we're focused on spinal cord injury. And that's the community that we serve both in research but also education and programming, so I thought... We all thought we knew a lot about the disability community. Boy, were we wrong. We knew a little bit about a section of the community. And so this process for us, where we started and how we're growing, has been our journey. And there's so much we didn't know. And I'm looking forward to learning more today. And so wherever you are in this process, it's the right place for you to start. And I look forward to you taking steps at a time. And I know everyone at the Forum will be anxious to hear how things are evolving for you.

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I guess what I would like to ask our panelists first, how has your personal story impacted or shaped how you navigate the workplace? Well, who wants to start? You guys can choose. Zakiya, why don't you start? It's the green blazer. I keep being drawn to it.

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Thank you. And I wore green because today is World Mental Health Awareness Day, so I had to shout that out. And that's also part of my story. When I was in high school, I had a traumatic experience, and that really changed the trajectory of my life.

Briefly, a little bit of background. I had a high school teacher a little bit after this experience who told me that he did not think I was college material. And that really hurt my feelings, and I had to lean on my parents who were my advocates at that time. Because of the traumatic experience, I was in special education class because the emotional toll that it took on me as an individual. And I did have one teacher who was my advocate, Mrs. Cuffee. And we stay in contact to this day even though she's now a retired educator. And having that trauma, having a label of having a mental health impairment, it changed my self-concept, my self-esteem. We did not let that change us. I say we because it was a unit: my parents, my teachers, the people who are part of my tribe. And I think having a tribe that believes in you is very important. I continue on and went to college, undergrad at HBCU called Virginia State University. And even then I began to get in a little more comfortable and with embracing that I learn differently and I have these diagnoses that does not change who I am as person.

And leaving undergraduate school going to the workforce, that was a totally different situation because I no longer had my parents there necessarily to advocate for me. I had to step up and utilize my voice and ask for accommodations, disclose my disability, deal with more stigma, because back then there was more stigma than it is now. And it was very tough. I want to say several jobs later, I began to find my footing when I began a position with the federal government working in the EEO office.

To answer your question how has it changed me? Because I not only have the lived experience, the education, but I also have the practical experiences in the workplace with experiencing discrimination as a practitioner when people come into my office, because I work in a room of HR, and also the lived experiences as it happening to me. And I feel because of these experiences, it has made me the thought leader that I am today when I'm able to advise senior leadership when they're willing to listen and add to the conversation.

And I can say truly, it's not enough to have someone invited to the table, because I've been to a lot of meetings that I've been invited to and then asked to sit on the perimeter wall. The chair is not literally at the table. And, "Shh, don't say anything because you don't have X, Y, Z title." It's not enough to be invited, to be in the room, you actually need to be able to voice your thoughts, your opinions and recommendations and be listened to, understanding not all of them will be adopted, but also have a voice where people actually want to listen to you. That's how, in a nutshell, it's affected me throughout the trajectory of my career starting from high school. Thank you.

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KYM EISNER:

Thank you for sharing that and your willingness to be vulnerable and share the stories about when you were a little girl. Although I appreciate they have shaped you, the mom and me wishes that never happened to you. Eman, when you think about the workplace, something that we are fairly active with is talking about how getting a job can mean you lose your benefits, which has a significant effect on people with a disability. You're in a place where you've got subminimum wages to do a job from someone else. When we talk about sitting on the side and not being active participants, of course you need to be active participants involved in the conversation, but you also need to be paid the same as your other colleagues. Can you talk a little bit about that for us?

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Absolutely. I have done a lot of different work as an organizer, as an educator, as a facilitator, as a curriculum development person. And oftentimes, disability's completely left out the conversation. And a lot of people don't even understand that the subminimum wage thing is still going on and it's still very legal.

And when years ago I was grinding real hard, working 80, 90 hours a week, and it nearly killed me because my lupus was like, "What are you doing? What are you doing? Why are you staying up night and day working all these jobs?" And I was doing all that because... I'm so grateful that Zakiya, you had all that support from your family. I did not have that support from my family, and so I had to make sure that my sister went to college; and I paid for all that. And I had to pay for my own bills and I had to pay for my own medication and my own medical stuff while my chronic illness was trying to tear my body apart. And this was before I became an amputee. I've had four heart attacks; before I had my second and third, before I had my massive stroke. I've had a bunch of mini strokes. Before my paralysis, before my nerve damage. And I still got no support.

And so that is key with a lot of the trainings and information that I've put out there. We need to support people. And that's not a handout. That's not a, oh, we're giving people special treatment. No. That's making sure that everyone has equal footing. Because if I don't have legs, if I have no legs and one knee, how the heck am I supposed to walk up some steps? But if you make a building accessible, that means we can all go in there. And that's just a little example of the curb cut effect that I use to show that making things fully accessible for people is not only incredibly important, but makes it equal for everyone. And not just equal but equitable.

And I think that sometimes in a lot of these spaces, people are very focused on equality but not equity. And they don't even understand the equity portion and they don't even think that they're a problem in it. That's another thing that I talk about in my trainings. If we don't look at ourselves and look at the impact that we have personally been involved in, whether it's gate keeping, whether it's whatever opportunities, whether it's bullying, whether it's toxicity, whatever the case is, if we're not willing to look at ourselves and take full accountability and responsibility for our actions, then I don't know what we're doing.

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And I've encountered that so many times. And you put a mirror in front of people, and suddenly they're like... And it's like, "Why are you so opposed to looking inward and making sure that you're accountable to yourself so that you can then show up for other people?" And I think it's honestly because... And I love that it's Mental Health Awareness. I think it's because people don't want to actually deal with their own internal issues, and therefore they bleed all their trauma onto everyone else; and consistently do it and in the workplace. And that happens all the time.

And so unfortunately, I think that disabled folks are the scapegoats of the working world. And we're given menial positions. We're given low paying gigs. We're fired for things that are not legal to fire us for. We're bullied for things that are not legal to talk about. And it's wild to me that in the year of our Lord 2024 that this is still happening. But it's still happening because the higher ups don't want it to change. And unfortunately, there are people who benefit from certain groups being marginalized. And that is just the way unfortunately capitalism works.

And I didn't mean to go on a capitalism rant, but it's very much connected. And I wish more folks made that connection. Why is there so much racism, classism, sexism, and ableism? Control and power. Why do people want to control and power you and take away your power? White supremacy. Most of us in this room, we would not be the ideals of white supremacy. That shows that there's a lot of us on the bottom and a few on the top, and that we need to dismantle that completely and make it more equitable. Yeah.

KYM EISNER:

No, I appreciate all of that and your willingness to share your story. And be so passionate about what you believe can impact all of us but also affect change. I want to talk about gatekeepers, but before we move on, I just want to say for everyone out there that is on this journey and trying to become more inclusive, please remember that although I have tremendous respect for everyone that worked hard to get the ADA passed and appreciate what it has done for our communities, it's the floor, not the ceiling. We can do more than the bare minimum accommodations that are required of us. And truly, disability inclusive practices go much further. And so we have to be willing, no matter where we are in the organizational chart of our organizations, be able to ask questions and learn. Because if you're not at the top and you just ask why or you make a suggestion, you are actually teaching others through the process. You are all empowered. Whether or not you are at the top, the middle, or perceive yourself at the bottom, you can still exert leadership. But if you're a gatekeeper or if you perceive gatekeepers around you, we want long-term support. We need long term support both in hiring and in the philanthropic sector so that disabled people in the workplace can thrive. The othering is yesterday.

Can the two of you talk, and Eman, I'm going to go right back to you, about how leaders can be more than just performative? Oh, we meet the minimum requirements. How do we implement genuine engagement so we actually have a culture shift? I'm assuming you have some ideas and thoughts there.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

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Oh, I sure do. And I love that question. That's so great. And I was actually talking to some folks yesterday about this very thing. I'm going to be on their panel later on in the year. And I think it's because some folks really do not want to give up power.

And we were talking specifically about a lot of the elders in the community that want to hold onto the information, hold onto the contacts, don't want to share anything, don't want to share facilitation of meetings, don't want to share the contact stuff that they have because they think they're going to live forever. You're not going to live forever. I'm not going to live forever. I just turned 40 a few months ago. I know that I'm here for however long I'm here. And that means that anything that I learn, I share it with everybody because it's not just about me, it's about we. And some people do not like that. They do not want to include everyone. And again, it's because they benefit from the marginalization of certain communities.

And so one really great proactive thing I would say is go out there and look for people. If you're looking for folks to fill whatever jobs you're looking at, whatever the job is, don't just go to the places that you always go to; go to some different places. Work with your local independent living centers, for example. Go to your local community board meetings. There's a lot of elders and a lot of disabled folks who go to community board meetings. I know that because I've been to every single one in New York, including Staten Island. And make sure that you're meeting people where they're at. Don't just say, "Hey, we want to hire people with disabilities," and then hire them to clean the bathroom. And then granted, there's nothing absolutely wrong with that at all. At the same time, those are not the only jobs that we're qualified to do.

When I went through a whole bunch of wild stuff with my health about 15 years ago and I stopped working full time and went to do the freelance stuff to survive, it was incredibly difficult. And then when I rejoined the workforce, y'all, when I tell you that was so difficult, I got no support to do that, and I had to basically do it all on my own. I don't want to shout on anyone and get disability or philanthropy and trouble, but the folks who take care of returning back to work, they didn't like that I found my own job. They didn't like that I had resources already that I could say, "Hey, you guys, I'm rejoining the workforce. Want to look at my resume? Got some things." They didn't like that.

And so I would say for folks to make sure that they, again, meet people where they're at. Go where the people are. Make sure that you're not just going to some big wig Ivy League University looking for folks to apply for your jobs. Make sure it's diverse. And also don't just hire a white guy in a wheelchair. There are so many other folks with disabilities out there like myself, like Zakiya, like anyone else in the world who can work for you and do an amazing job. Don't discount us for whatever weird reason you're discounting us. Yeah.

KYM EISNER:

Thank you for that. I think hiring from a diverse population for sure. And that means we need to meet people where they're at. Part of this, once we hire, we need to retain. We need to have an environment that is supportive during the hiring process but also after the hiring process. Zakiya, I know from your professional position you see a lot of this. How can employers make themselves more inviting, more supportive throughout their engagement?

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DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Thank you for the question, Kym. And I just want to give a shout out. We have over 100 people online. Thank you for being here. And please, if you have any questions, drop them in the chat.

How can we ensure that the environments are more inclusive? Well, it starts with making sure you have an organizational culture that is inviting because you may do all that work, spend all that money to do the recruiting, bring them on board, what does your onboarding look like? When you're developing your onboarding strategy, do you have individuals with different types of to get feedback to be part of that group? Maybe you might want to have a buddy, a onboarding buddy to make sure that someone goes with that person through the 60, 90 day, 120 day mark to make sure that their needs are being met.

Even we talk about a lot of times physical accessibility, but also are we looking at, are your systems 508 compliant? Is there a culture where people actually understand what disability inclusion is, reasonable accommodations? Is it on your intranet and internet what the process is? Is it a process that, oh, well, you didn't fill out this form, so we're not going to process your reasonable accommodation? You need to know the laws.

And if you're told by someone and you're in a power of authority that should know what to do, take action. And it's not about just checking the box when we're having these trainings. The trainings is actually about shifting mindsets. And you want to have multiple throughout the year. You want to have a robust catalog of trainings that's actually going to change and shape the mindset of your individuals within your culture. And there are a lot of ways to do that. There are a lot of people who have the lived experience and the practical knowledge to come in as consultants to help you with that work.

Are you ensuring that you are transparent with your policies? Are your policies updated? I worked with one organization, and it was 25 years since one of their policies was updated. Your position description. Why does someone need to type 40 words per minute or be able to lift 25 pounds? We need to look at them with an inclusive eye to see if it's excluding or including more people. There are a laundry list of things that we can do to make sure the environment is inclusive and welcome to all people, but first thing is to take a look, like Eman said early, at yourself. We have to look at emotional intelligence. How many of our leaders and our middle managers actually have a high level of emotional intelligence? They may have the title, they may be on the top of the, quote, unquote "food chain," but do they really get it? What is their why for being in it? Are they being vulnerable in storytelling?

Storytelling is a catalyst for change. I'm going to say that again. Storytelling is a catalyst for change. I share my stories not because I'm trying to impress or because I want some sympathy, I'm sharing it because maybe you may know someone or you listening may know yourself, "Hey, I went through something like that. I didn't know it was okay to share it." It is. There's someone going through something right now, and maybe they didn't know who or what to do about it. You can share your story, even a micro. The mustard seed is the smallest thing. Taking steps each day as small as a mustard seed with yourself can change a lot of outcomes. And then with others, sharing the information.

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I know I said a lot, but one thing I want to emphasize is emotional intelligence, doing the work, looking at yourself and taking action steps. Small steps they may be in the beginning, but those small steps over time turns into a change outcome for other people. The environment within your organization is very important. How do your employees truly feel?

KYM EISNER:

Yeah, thank you for that. I think as leaders, we have a responsibility to lead by example. And if I can't be vulnerable with my staff, then how can they be vulnerable with me and within my organization and the culture, that starts with me. And I think it can start, again, with anybody from within the organization creating a supportive environment. And I will say self-disclosure is a great way to start. Whether you have a physical disability, an intellectual disability, it may not be visible, sharing that with your team is a step. It might be a hard step, but once it's out in the open, it opens so many conversations.

Admitting what we don't know is not a sign of weakness. I will say when I joined the Neilsen Foundation, I was not aware that starting a meeting at 8:00 AM could be hard for someone with a spinal cord injury because of what they need to do prior to coming in the door, so we don't start meetings at 8:00 AM. A five minute break over the course of a morning for a quick bio break, that's not inclusive. And I didn't know that. Of course now we make sure that we extend those breaks because they're necessary. And even if they're not in the moment, it sends a story. It's a message to the group that we see you and acknowledge your needs.

Even things, a reception after an event, if you roll into the room and all of the tables are high cocktail tables, how do you feel included? You don't. And so those, to your point, are very small, little steps that there can be a long list of that we can all do to make our environments inclusive. And none of that's ADA compliance; that's being an aware human. And again, I didn't know these things 11 years ago, that's where I was on my journey, but I know them now. Wherever you are, that's the place to start going forward.

Given the Disability Inclusion Fund and the President's Council, which started with a call to action in philanthropy to be more inclusive and more aware and supporting the disability community, I'd love to hear from your both, what would that call to action be? And we have some great questions coming in from the attendees and the audience members, so we will get to them. But prior to that, I want to hear from both of you, maybe starting with Zakiya, what's your big call to action? If you had your magic wand, what would you like to see?

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

I would like to see collaboration with other organizations. That's one. Number two, make sure that when you're having these strategy sessions and developing your strategic plan, you have a diverse group of people that are giving their thoughts about what could be possibly a part of that plan that you're giving. And number three, I would say a commitment from leadership; the top-down approach. That the leadership has buy-in, and they also want to be a part of the effort.

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One thing I can say, I'm here right now in Augusta, Georgia. I was affected by Hurricane Helene. And it was great to see people who were part of local governmental leadership, rolling up their sleeves passing out water, having the administration come down and literally pass things out. And I want to take that analogy over to your organization. The same thing as when it comes to disability inclusion, which is a part of DEI overall picture. Just put that because sometimes we like to put that as a separate entity. It's all the same, so we're clear, but rolling up your sleeves and helping in whatever these initiatives are, they are not check the box. I'm going to repeat that. This should not be just check the box. You should have a strategy. You should be having sessions to see what milestones have been met. Where are some deficiencies? Do a barrier analysis to find out why and try to address these things. Those are the three things that I would say. Thank you.

KYM EISNER:

That's great. I love it. Making a list here.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

I love that too.

KYM EISNER:

Yeah, right?

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Yes, I absolutely love that too. I'm all about strategic planning and making sure that we have a plan in place, so I'm going to steal that and put it on my list. But I would also say I feel like some folks really need to get over their egos and get over themselves in the community. If we can't fix the things in-house, then it doesn't matter what non-disabled people are doing because we can't get it together here. You got one community that doesn't want to work with another community. You got this other community that hates working with that other community. You got some folks that have just disabilities but don't have a chronic illness and don't care about those of us with chronic illnesses. What is that? I think if we get over our egos, get over ourselves and learn that we need to be a community that works together, then we could actually get some true social change and true systemic change to improve as many lives as we can. And until we get over ourselves, it's not going to happen. And it doesn't matter what non-disabled people are doing. I think that's that; get over ourselves and have a strategic plan.

And also just work with people who are different from yourselves. I talk to elders all the time, and I can't tell you how many times they've been like, "I've never talked to anyone like you." And I'm like, "Well, what do you mean by that?" And they're like, "Oh, well, by your name, you don't sound like you're American." And I'm like, "I was born in Queens, New York, but okay, thank you." Meet some people different from yourself, y'all. I was born right here in the United States, but I'm different to older white folks because they've never met anyone like me. And that's not okay.

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Again, as I said earlier, in the year of our Lord of 2024, you need to meet people who are different from yourself. Meet someone who came from a background like me. I grew up in Jamaica, Queens. I was on public assistance. We were poor growing up. And there's so many people who do not have that experience and think that, oh, you're just lazy. Oh, you can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Well, at this point, I don't have feet so I don't have bootstraps anymore and I got to pull myself up another way. And the way I do that is by building community and helping other folks out so that we can help each other out. Get over yourself, strategic planning, and meet some people that are different from yourself.

KYM EISNER:

I'm going to double down on that question to both of you, and whoever wants to answer, and there's something similar to this question coming in the chat as well, but as philanthropists, and we're looking to support the disability community, how should we go about getting more applicants?

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Get involved in your community; community engagement. It's not necessarily what you know, it's who you know. Because I can understand; I have social anxiety. I know people find it hard to believe, but I do. And you might want to find someone who has a robust network and partner with them so they can help people and connect you with other people. Might not have to physically go into a building, it could be done... LinkedIn is one of my best friends. Oh my goodness, I love LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a very powerful tool. But get with someone who has a robust network and then someone else and then someone else. And then you're going to have a robust network who when you have an opportunity, they can share it to their network and, boom, you'll have a whole list of qualified people who are going to excel at your position. Start growing your network.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

I absolutely agree with that. And I would also say that there are tons of free resources online as well. There's meetup.com. There's also luma.com that has events all over the country where you can meet funders, meet founders, meet people who just started their businesses or want to start a business. Again, like I mentioned earlier, independent living centers. Although some of them are terrible, but you should reach out anyway because they're a good way to get some more resources and more access to folks who you might not get to otherwise. Your community boards, your local elected officials even. I work with a lot of local elected officials, city council members, senators, Congress folks, and some of them are really actually great. I'm not going to lie. Some electives are actually about it. And reach out to them. They want to help. Not all of them. Some of them want to help, so reach out to them as well. Make sure that you diversify how you're doing it so that you can get the best outcome possible. And just make sure that you're not just staying in your own little silo and in your own little group because you're never going to grow that way and you're never going to meet anyone different from yourself to get a job anywhere or even do volunteer work or whatever it is that you're passionate about. Yeah.

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KYM EISNER:

Basically one of the ways I'm hearing this, and of course this doesn't apply to anybody on this call, but we take our ego to the side and we go and we meet people where they're at. We don't expect, as funders and philanthropists, that the applicants are going to come to us. We need to make the effort to go to the community. All right, I love that. That is a call to action. It's exactly what I was looking for.

I'm going to go to a couple of the questions coming in, and you decide who picks it up, because I have no doubt both of you will have passionate answers. I want to go back to the issue that we struggle with sometimes, and that's protecting benefits for disabled individuals, individuals with disability. Depending on who you are, you want to use that individual language first, person first. How do we protect those benefits and access to those benefits that want opportunities within our organizations as employees getting paid what their colleagues are getting paid? Do you have resources or ideas for how we can go about that as employers but also as employees? And I know you're not giving legal advice, but-

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

I guess I could jump in. Yeah, when I rejoined the workforce about, full-time, nine-ish years ago, I didn't know anything about rejoining. And I was on SSDI, had Medicare and Medicaid. And I was very afraid of losing all of that because I was like, "Oh, what am I going to do? I've got some expensive care that I take care of." And the resources were not as easy to find as I would've liked. But there are independent living centers that are supposed to help people do that. And so if anyone wants to find out more information about that, find out where your local independent living center is, and they should have that information. And if they don't, you might want to contact someone and figure out how they can get it because that information is actually integral to independent living centers and how they're run.

Another thing is get as much information as you can from the SSDI folks and the Medicaid folks because they were giving it to me in drips and drabs, and by the time I got all the information, I was already working, and then I got kicked off. And I was like, "But you guys, I'm not making that much money." And they're like, "Well, yeah, but you're making a little bit more than the SSDI is allotted." I'm like, "Oh, great. What am I supposed to do now?" And so I got on my work insurance, which is awful, but it's better than no insurance.

And I've been actually working with ILCs now to make sure that that's actually a seamless transition for people instead of being difficult. And apparently there is a program now where you can make more money and keep your benefits and not get penalized simply because you're working. I'm not sure yet if they've gotten to the marriage portion yet, because folks who have Medicare and Medicaid and SSDI can't get married. And there are some folks who argue with me about that. And it's wild that they'll argue with me about that even though I've lived it. And one of the things that I was able actually to do was to get married once I got kicked off. I was like, "Well, fine. I'll take that as a win. Whatever." Even though I've got awful insurance now, but I digress.

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But the point is make sure that the resources are available. And so again, ILCs are supposed to have those resources. They're available to make sure that you don't get the short end of the stick with it, because will try to take your money if you are on Medicare and Medicaid and SSDI and then have another job where you're making more than \$15,000. And it's wild because you can't survive on that little bit of money, so of course you're going to be making a little bit more. Just find those resources and it should be less painful.

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

I will add to that that there's a program through Social Security called Ticket to Work. And it may have changed since about 10 years ago when you were going through this, but with Ticket to Work, you can work. Let's say for the first nine months if you secure a job and you're stable in that position, I believe you will be able to keep your benefits and you will still get your same amount of your check. And after that, for another three years you can still keep your benefits as far as health insurance.

But another resource that you can utilize is the Department of Rehabilitative Services in your state. They're called different in every state. Virginia, which I'm most familiar, is called DARS. I'm not even sure what it's called in Georgia because I've only been here a short amount of time. But reach out to the Department of Rehabilitative Services and also check out Ticket to Work with Social Security Administration. Because you have to be educated in a form to make the right decisions that's best for you. Not anybody else, but what's best for you.

KYM EISNER:

Great advice. And Olivia's putting all of these resources and links to them in the chat. If they're new to you, please by all means, go to the chat and pick those up. And not representing the Neilsen Foundation or the Disability Inclusion Fund, but if you haven't seen, a couple weeks ago, John Oliver's Last Week Tonight did a really great story that explained all of the issues for lay folk that may not be aware or knowledgeable about the problems that are associated with your benefits and being fully employed and what that looks like and what the conflicts are. If you haven't seen it and this is all sounding new to you, it's a really approachable way into the conversation. It's not the whole conversation, but it's a way to begin to understand the complexities there. And there is progress being made, but not nearly enough.

We talked before about ways to ensure we have an accessible work environment. One of the questions that just came in, is there a way to do an accessibility audit of our hiring practices? Can either one of you speak to that? Although I think I might be ADA compliant and we have a DEI policy at the Neilsen Foundation, we have DEIA for accessibility, how do we do that audit to ensure we're really on the path to inclusivity?

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

You can do it yourself by maybe looking at some organizations that might have a toolkit. One of the ones that just came to mind for me that I love is JAN, Job Accommodation Network. They might have some information there. I'll say it again, jan.org. It's a robust list of various disabilities

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and a lot of different information not just for the employee but also for the employer. If it doesn't have it, you can definitely reach out to a consultant. Eman and myself are both consultants. Again, my background is in human resources, but I will look to Department of Labor as well to see what they have on the ODEP website of Department of Labor and see if they have any information. If they don't, you can definitely reach out to a disability inclusion consultant who can help you go through that.

And that's a great question because oftentimes people do not ask the same questions to applicants. It's not intentional. Just like when we say bias, sometimes it's unconscious bias, sometimes it's conscious. We got to keep that real. But during the interview process, sometimes someone may say something and it cause you to think of a secondary question. But I would caution you to not follow up because that might not be given the same opportunity to applicant number B, or letter B per se. You want to have a structured interview in which you're asking the same questions. And before the interviews, are you asking, "Does anyone need accommodation?" A reasonable accommodation? What does that look like? I'm glad that you're thinking about this and the motion is turning in your head. How can we have inclusive practices even when it comes down to hiring?

And then you want to start looking about onboarding. As I mentioned before, what does your onboarding look like? Do you even have someone representative of HR or your EEO come in to talk about disability inclusion and a reasonable accommodation and disclosure? Because someone may read that little blurb, and some people are afraid to answer some of those questions when they're applying for positions. And I want you to know it's not attributed to your name. The information, when they're asking you about your disability, is going to a whole separate division and your name is not attached so please do not be afraid to answer those questions for applicants. It's just to see the data on who's applying for what position and who actually gets the interview and who ultimately gets the position. Thank you for that question.

KYM EISNER:

Yeah, thank you. Eman?

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Yeah, I would also add I've done a lot of trainings for folks actually for the last couple of years, and every single organization that I met with, because I do a pre-workshop call with them and do a whole bunch of check-in calls with them, they always say, "Oh." Because I ask, "Do you have anyone with a disability that works there?" And they always 100% of the time say, "No, we don't." And then when I do the workshop and, again, do the story telling and story sharing, then people are disclosing. And so please make sure that you build a culture where people can share these very vulnerable stories about themselves so that they feel safe and they don't just feel safe when some outside person comes in and facilitates a workshop, but that they feel safe to do it in person with the people that they're working with every single day.

I've seen that, and I can't wrap my mind around it that it has happened so many times that so many different nonprofits, corporations that think they're already doing the work but they're not

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doing the work. And I see that, and then I say that, and they're offended that I did my job. That's what you hired me for, y'all. I don't know what to tell you. Make sure that you're actually doing these types of things and you're bringing in trainers like myself and like Zakiya who are diverse, who can help your staff and help your workplace, help your organization be better in the world. Because I'm not sure what these folks have been doing prior to reaching out to me, I don't know, but it makes me concerned for the staff. No wonder you guys have so much staff turnover. And people think, oh, that's normal, that's natural. No, sometimes it's normal and natural, but sometimes it's because you guys have some serious issues.

KYM EISNER:

And thank you for that. And it's not just doing it once because times change, people change, your employees change, your perspectives change both as a leader, as an employee, and as a potential applicant. These trainings, the ongoing growth is necessary. Again, it's not a checkbox, to what you both said. It's not one and done. We have to keep doing, keep learning, keep expanding.

Okay, I'm going to go back to the chat. Let's see. I now work from home. Prior to the pandemic, I went into an office every day. Are there ways that we can ensure that online job applications or remote working environments are as inclusive that we think, not just posting it online with some alt text and you get to work at home so you're fine? How do you suggest going about that to an employer looking to hire, but also even making the application itself accessible?

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

I will again go back to making sure the tools they're using are 508 compliant, even down to Microsoft. I don't know if you're familiar, Microsoft Suite has a lot of different tools to make sure that the font is accessible to individuals using JAWS, which is for people who are visually impaired. And again, you might have to hire a professional to help or a tutorial through the beginning process.

But sometimes people think, oh, I have a flyer or I have this PDF, and it looks so great; the colors are vibrant. However, if you do a test... And they have individuals who use JAWS all the time who you can hire to go over it with their tool, and they can't see this stuff in the text box maybe because of how the font is presented, even if it's on a Word document, PDF or PowerPoint. You want to maybe invest in hiring someone to go through, show you how to make it accessible, and then you can do train the trainer for your rest of your workforce. And I just did a conference not too long ago, and I held up a blank sheet of paper. I said, "What do you all see?" They said, "Nothing." I said, "That's exactly what happens when you don't have information that's accessible to someone who needs it to be in this format."

And I will give you a kudos for actually having positions that are work from home or hybrid because a lot of organizations are having a big push to return to work and they don't understand the challenges that that presents to someone that has a list of disabilities. Working from home is an environment that you can control the aesthetics around you. For me, speaking for self, you can concentrate a lot better. And I understand traveling occasionally. But you might want to

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consider the benefits of a remote workforce. And what are the benefits besides just that's your leadership style and that's just what you want to have, someone in the office? I had to throw that in there right then. Thank you for your question. And again, there's some resources that you can reach out to so you can learn how to do it within your environment.

KYM EISNER:

Great.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Yeah. And-

KYM EISNER:

Eman, do you want to add?

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Yeah. I'd also say aside from making sure that you have whatever tech you need, the programs and stuff, make sure you can get people whatever computers they need. Make sure you can get them whatever set up that they need in the home office. Make sure that you can get a seat that they might need that helps or a specific kind of desk. I have all those things that I work from home with, which is really, really great.

I've encountered so many issues with other organizations over the years that were so anti work from home, and then COVID hit and they were like, "Psych, we could do it now." And I'm just like, "But I've been telling y'all for all this time." It's doable. And honestly, especially in New York, they're more worried about the landlords and the office spaces and that being rented over the quality of life for the people that they're actually employing. And it's wild to me that there's still so many people that are like, "Yeah, we got to think of the landlord." Why am I thinking about the landlords, y'all? Great. They're wonderful. They're people too. Also, if I'm working for you, you should care more about me than whatever rent you want to pay for somebody or whatever lease you have with them to make sure that the office is still open.

And unfortunately, folks are very self-serving and they don't really want to deal with making things more accessible for people because they don't need it. Again, they're not thinking about the we, they're thinking about the me. And it's just like, okay, fine, but make sure it's as accessible as possible, and not just for physical disabilities, but all disabilities so that we can do it in a seamless way. I've been working from home mostly for four years; none of my work has suffered; not any of it. And so it's like, what is the purpose, you guys, of... You want to see me walk in my metal legs and see me in person just to make sure I'm do... I'm doing the same thing I'm doing at home that I'm doing at work. Yeah.

KYM EISNER:

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We're going to have to wrap soon. And there's so many great questions coming in. There's something about being afraid to disclose, which I can appreciate, and how we get past that. But something you just said made me think we haven't really talked about a workplace environment where someone has a condition where their energy is limited or the stimulus in the room is too much and it makes for cognitive issues. How would you help an employer make that work environment easier? What are some strategies you might suggest so that an individual that can contribute to your team has the capacity to do so because the environment is supportive?

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Again, that... Oh, go ahead.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Oh no, go ahead.

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

Okay.

EMAN RIMAWI-DOSTER

Whoopsie. Well, would say that that goes back to the portion of meeting people where they're at. Talk to them about what they do to mellow down their anxiety, calm down whatever flair is going on, calm down the noise outside, whether it's sound or colors. See where they're at and figure out a way to get that in the office if that supports them. But also make sure that you're supporting them whether they're in the office or in the house. Just having an honest conversation and an honest dialogue about the needs of the staff is incredibly important. But just make sure that it's done in a way that's not like, "Oh, tisk, tisk," or, "Shame on you," or, "Why do you need..."

Because I've had a lot of people say to me, "Oh man, we don't want to give you special treatment," as if I'm getting something extra. And it's just like, no, I'm not getting something extra. And although I'm not a lawyer, I bring up the legal portion of that constantly since I've worked with lawyers for decades. And I'm like, "First of all, you can't say that. And do you want to get sued?" And so it's meeting people where they're at, but in a respectful way where you can make sure that their needs are met but they're also performing for you. Which is a delicate balance, but I think that we can get there as long as the folks are willing, again, to become more emotionally mature, as we've brought up a bunch of times. But some people aren't.

KYM EISNER:

And I think invisible disabilities are a place that it can be harder to disclose because you don't see it. As a leader in an organization, whether you're talking to an individual, "How can I help make this environment more supportive?" Or just in general, "We strive to do this. Our culture is this. I know that the noise just overwhelms me, especially when I'm tired or I've had an anxious

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day, and I need that... If anyone else needs that..." You make yourself just a little bit vulnerable but actually open the conversation to the group to allow people the opportunity to have that path. And again, that's the responsibility back on us. I don't want to take Zakiya's opportunity to answer that question away before we have to close.

DR. ZAKIYA MABERY:

No, Eman answered it beautiful. The only thing I would add to that is make sure it's an interactive conversation. It doesn't have to be so structured and hard and make it feels so uncomfortable to either an employee or the employer. It's going back and forth and making sure that the key goal is that the person could be successful and thrive in the position. And the second I would add is that's where going to jan.org, and you can hop on a call, you can read through the resources, that might be beneficial when you're trying to figure out how to establish that conversation.

KYM EISNER:

Thank you so much. I have learned so much in this conversation. I feel like I'm coming out of it a better collaborator and partner than I was coming in. Thank you, thank you, thank you for sharing of yourselves, your experiences, your willing to be open with this group. And you will make us all better so the disability inclusive hiring can actually be the norm. Thank you both, ladies. And I turn it back to the beautiful team at the Disability Philanthropy Fund.

Olivia Williams:

Thank you all so much for joining us today. We will wrap now. We will make space to make sure that any questions that weren't answered can be answered in a follow-up email. You will receive a survey link after this webinar. And we hope you'll join us on November 14th for Disability in Indigenous Communities. Thank you all so much, and have a great rest of your day.