



## The Cost of Fear and Stigma

“Diversity” and “inclusion” may seem like buzzwords—appearing in human resource forums, training sessions, business magazines, social media articles and more—but the reality is that these concepts have been around for decades. The way that companies interpret and apply diversity and inclusion changes according to business trends, and as better data supports ever-evolving practices for diversity and inclusion. “Diversity” is defined as the spectrum of human differences, including but not limited to race, culture, religion, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, ability and so on. “Inclusion” is the intentional engagement with diversity with the ultimate goal of creating a culture of collaboration and recognition of the value that individual differences bring to the workplace.

HR leaders extol the virtues of diversity and inclusion, but as many professionals know, putting diversity and inclusion into action can be challenging. Enter “unconscious bias.” Even companies with the best of intentions when it comes to diversity and inclusion may fall prey to unconscious bias, which is just part of being human. This idea has been a hot topic recently as businesses begin to recognize that understanding oneself is an important part of understanding others who may be different from us. Unconscious bias training is an effective way to raise awareness about implicit biases and give employees the tools they need to identify and combat them.

Problem solved, right? Unconscious bias is a hurdle to successful diversity and inclusion, so you take it out of the equation with training.

Not quite. Although unconscious bias training covers many diversity groups in the workplace, ability is seldom represented. Through our experience in providing disability inclusion training to businesses, [Tangram](#) discovered that disability is regularly overlooked as a diversity focus group in favor of things like race and gender. Addressing disabilities and learning about all disabilities, both visible and invisible, is essential to building a culture of inclusion.

When it comes to unconscious bias training, why should businesses include disability? Employment statistics for people with disabilities suggest that fear and stigma about disabilities may play a larger role in barriers to employment for this group than any other group. As of August 2021, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was more than double that of people without disabilities at 10.9 percent, according to the [U.S. Department of Labor](#). Indiana ranks 24<sup>th</sup> in the nation when it comes to employing people with disabilities. With thousands of open positions here in the Hoosier state, we should be asking ourselves why we are not taking a hard look at the talent pool comprised of individuals with disabilities. Could it be that fear and stigma are holding us back? What is that mindset costing our businesses?



Let's first examine some of the most common fears and misconceptions that businesses have about disabilities:

1. **Accommodations are expensive.** Actually, a high percentage (59 percent) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost only \$500 per employee with a disability, as reported by the [Job Accommodation Network](#).
2. **Employees with disabilities will have attendance issues.** A study by [DePaul University](#) found that people with disabilities had low absenteeism rates and long tenures.
3. **High turnover and loss of productivity.** Turnover for those who disclosed their disability was 48 percent less than the remaining population in an independent [study](#) of Walgreens distribution centers. Additional studies have shown that people with disabilities have the same or higher productivity than others.
4. **The fear of interviewing someone with a disability.** Be yourself, but also learn about different disabilities to prepare yourself for interviewing. Education and awareness is critical.
5. **Someone with a disability won't be able to perform the position requirements.** Don't make assumptions about what someone can or cannot do. The best way to find out if someone can do the job is to ask them.

What opportunities do companies miss by not seeking to build a workforce inclusive of people with disabilities?

1. **Economic impact.** A 2018 study from [Accenture](#) shows the strong business case for robust disability inclusion, both for companies and the gross domestic product. The GDP could get a boost up to \$25 billion if just one percent more of persons with disabilities joined the labor force.
2. **Diversity.** It may seem redundant, but disability cuts across all diversity groups—age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, culture, etc. By intentionally creating a culture and practices inclusive of disability, you may find that you are able connect with multiple diverse populations.
3. **A skilled talent pipeline.** Misunderstanding about the wide range of disabilities leads employers to make assumptions about disability as a whole. The truth is that disabilities can be visible, invisible, physical, intellectual or a combination. Just because someone uses a wheelchair or is Deaf does not mean that they are uneducated or unskilled.
4. **Access to new markets.** Americans with disabilities represent \$175 billion in discretionary spending, according to the [U.S. Department of Justice](#). When companies are intentional in hiring and marketing to the disability population, businesses can open doors to a larger market of consumers, thereby benefitting their bottom line.
5. **Improved morale.** Studies of companies with disability inclusion initiatives have shown that overall morale is improved with a more diverse workforce. When you hire someone



with a disability, the positive effects ripple through your workforce, your company and the community.

Tangram can help companies take the first step in bringing disability inclusion to the forefront of a business strategy. The importance of finding resources like Tangram is essential, as Indiana needs to begin to embrace disability as a vital component of diversity. The cost of our fear and stigma is too high – not only for businesses, but for our citizens and for the greater Indianapolis community.