

# The ADA at 25: Minnesota Moving Forward

## AN EMPLOYMENT DIALOGUE

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

*An **EMPLOYMENT DIALOGUE** among people with disabilities, employers and policy makers to discuss recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining employees with disabilities.*

Join the discussion throughout Minnesota. “What can WE do TOGETHER to address the unemployment crisis facing people with disabilities?”

Tune in to Twin Cities Public Television’s (*tpt*) LIVE televised noon hour Brown Bag Lunch featuring Former U.S. Senator Tom Harkin, Senate sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Lex Freiden, Professor, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Director, ILRU program at TIRR Memorial Hermann and Civilian Architect of the ADA.

Thank you for being part of this Employment Dialogue, for asking real questions with us and for being part of the answer. Together, as a community, we will address the unemployment crisis of people with disabilities. Just like we made curb cuts, and access to buildings a reality, we now must make employment for everyone a reality.

*The Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD) is a state agency, providing leadership to strengthen the civil rights of Minnesotans and empower people with disabilities.*

**For more information about MSCOD, please visit  
[www.msco25ada.com](http://www.msco25ada.com) or [www.disability.state.mn.us](http://www.disability.state.mn.us)**



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After the *tpt* live broadcast of **The ADA at 25: Moving Minnesota Forward**, please engage in a short informal **Employment Dialogue**, touching on some or all of the points below. This should be a candid discussion about (but not limited to) hiring practices, benefits of hiring and working with people with disabilities, and dispelling some of the misconceptions that surround people who have a disability.

## Introduction

**(feel free to improvise or write your own depending on time constraints, audience, personal preference, etc.)**

**Facilitator:** We're here today to talk about the importance of welcoming the talents and skills of all people in the workplace, including people with disabilities. Every day, people with disabilities add significant value to America's workplaces and economy. Their skills and talents benefit businesses of all sizes and in all industries. They are entrepreneurs, innovators and community leaders. However, in good economic times or bad, people with disabilities still have far fewer job opportunities than those without.

Before we get too involved in our discussion, I would like to make it clear that this is not a formal training exercise and there are no wrong answers to any questions I might ask. Rather, we're going to discuss some important issues about work and the way we think about and treat others. In this spirit, please use respect and listen to others. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to our discussion by taking turns and listening respectfully to what each member of the group has to say.

Now, as I mentioned, we're here to talk about the importance of having a workplace that is open to all qualified individuals – including people with disabilities. Disability is part of the natural diversity of life and touches all of us, whether through our own individual experience or that of a family member, neighbor, friend or colleague. As a result, we all have a role in – and benefit to gain from – advancing equality for people with disabilities in all sectors of society. As with other forms of diversity, experience with disability can offer varied perspectives on how to confront challenges and achieve success, whether at home, school or work.

## Dialogue

**INSERT QUESTIONS HERE (Facilitator options for this section on pages 3 and 4)  
Question set 1 or 2 depending on audience and facilitator preference**

## Conclusion

**Facilitator:** As an organization or business, we need to focus on how people's talents and skills come together to help us all succeed at work. Work is important to everyone, not just a business or employer, and means more than just a paycheck. Having a job or a career means being able to make your own choices about how you want to live your life. The right to work and be recognized for your accomplishments is an important aspect of America's ideal of equality and opportunity for all.

I hope today's discussion will help you think more about the many things YOU can do, not just in your everyday life and activities, but also in the way you treat and interact with other people. By recognizing, respecting and welcoming the skills and talents each person has, YOU can play an important role in sharing the message that it's what people CAN do that matters.

## Question Set 1:

**Suggestion:** This question set might work best in a more informal setting such as a Center for Independent Living or organizations that provide services for people with disabilities.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** “My disability is only one part of who I am.”

- How would you describe who you are?
- How do you think it benefits employers to have people with different attributes/ identities working for them?

**Expectations:** “I was given a chance.”

- What wouldn't people know about you, your skills and abilities just by looking at you?
- Have another person's expectations about what you can achieve ever affected what you accomplished? If so, how?
- How do you let people know what you're capable of achieving? How do you get to know those same things about them?

**Disclosure:** “I am comfortable talking with people about my disability”

- How do you decide when—and with whom—to share things about yourself?
- Why would someone choose to disclose his/her disability?
- Is it important to share one's disability with an employer or prospective employer? If so, what factors at your workplace would help you feel comfortable disclosing?

**Productivity Tools:** “I contribute my skills and talent.”

- What tools do you rely on at work to be productive?
- Have you ever had to request equipment, software or a flexible schedule to help get your work done?
- What made it easier/harder to make the request?
- How do you think employers benefit by providing accommodations?

**Empowerment:** “At work, it's what people can do that matters.”

- What does the term “empowerment” mean to you? What makes you feel empowered?
- How might disclosure in the workplace be empowering?
- How does empowerment lead to employment, and how does employment lead to empowerment?

## Question Set 2:

**Suggestion:** This question set might work best for more formal settings, employer-heavy groups, and groups with few to no people with disabilities.

**Employer facilitated group**

- I'd like you to think for a minute about someone you know who has a disability. Do they work? Do they go to school? Do you think about their opportunities for employment differently than you may others' opportunities? Do you think others do? I'm not asking you to share this information, but just to think about it for a moment.

- What do you think happens when people make assumptions about what a person can or can't do? Again, I'm not asking you to share this out loud, but just write down a few ideas.
  - Every day, people with disabilities CAN and DO add significant value to America's workplaces and economy. Their skills and talents benefit businesses of all sizes and in all industries. But despite the achievements of many talented individuals with disabilities, negative stereotypes about disability and employment persist. Many of these stereotypes exist because some people focus only on what someone with a disability can't do. But at work, it's really what people CAN do that matters.
  - Before we move on, let's talk a little about what each of us "can do." Specifically, I'd like to invite you to share one of your skills. This skill could be related to your current job or your previous work experience, or maybe a skill you hope to use in a job. I'll start.
  - **Group Leader:** Share a skill or talent. The types of statements that might be appropriate include: I can manage a staff. I can help customers. I can meet deadlines. I can multi-task. I can write. I can use computers. I can help people stay healthy.
- What are some of the ways you think organizations can benefit from the talents and perspectives of people with disabilities? Allow a few minutes for general responses. You could mention that people with disabilities often have new and creative approaches to solving problems and accomplishing tasks.
  - People say they can't put their skills to work: If I'm not given the opportunity, If you don't recognize my talents and ability, If you don't hire me, If you don't have an open mind and a workplace that is open to everyone, If you don't realize that America works best when EVERYBODY works
- Why do you think someone might not give a person with a disability an opportunity – whether that opportunity is a job or anything else? **Group Leader:** Allow a few minutes for responses.
- What do you think happens when people make assumptions about what a person can or can't do? **Group Leader:** Allow a few minutes for responses.
  - In some circumstances, denying someone with a disability an opportunity may be illegal. There are laws in place to protect people from discrimination based on disability. One of the most well-known and wide-reaching of these laws is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA was enacted to make America's communities and workplaces fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- Can you think of people with known disabilities who are in careers or jobs that you might not expect? **Group Leader:** For example, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States, was a polio survivor and used a wheelchair; Stevie Wonder, award winning singer-songwriter, is blind; former Major League Baseball pitcher Jim Abbott, who pitched for several Major League teams, has one hand; Aimee Mullins, athlete, actress and model, had both legs amputated below the knees when she was a child; Steve Jobs, co-founder and chief executive officer of Apple and previously Pixar Animation Studios, had dyslexia; Patty Duke, Academy Award and Emmy winning actress, Former President of the Screen Actors Guild, has bi-polar disorder; and Robert David Hall, an actor known for his role as Dr. Albert Robbins on the show CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, has two prosthetic legs.
- How can changing what we assume about what people CAN do impact others' successes and failures? **Group Leader:** Allow a few minutes for responses.
- What can you do independently or individually to increase employment for people with disabilities. For example, is anyone here a member of a board or organization?

**Source:** <http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/blog/index.php/what-can-you-do-toolkit/>