



DE&I SPOTLIGHT

Fostering a Culture of Awareness and Equality

Reflecting on Mental Health Awareness Month: Neurodiversity in the Workplace

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The Australian sociologist Judy Singer is credited with coining the term “neurodiversity” in a thesis she published in 1998. She had come to realize that there was an unknown genetic condition impacting the women in her family. Therapy had not worked, and she saw the field of neuroscience eclipsing that of psychiatry. Her intent was to create a term that would characterize a movement for political and civil rights for those like her, her mother, and her daughter, who all now know that they are on the autistic spectrum. The term is used not just as a reference for autism, but also for many others, including ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Well-supported articles arguing that an embrace of neurodiversity gives organizations a competitive advantage are legion. Earlier this year, in *Deloitte Insights*, four Deloitte employees published an article entitled “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats,” and noted that teams with neurologically diverse professionals can be more productive and operate with higher morale. These traits were included among those that support diverse teams generally—a difference of perspective and what it adds to “approaches to work, innovation and creativity.” Such employees can also have great strengths in visual thinking, attention to detail, pattern recognition, visual memory and creative thinking.

The Deloitte co-authors also road-map how companies can employ tactics that integrate and maximize the benefits of diversity. These include revisiting the hiring process, creating a conducive work environment and providing unique career pathways. Writing in *Forbes*, one human resources expert encouraged employers to become educated about the different ways in which people work and communicate and foster open discussions about how to eliminate barriers and stigmas. And, of course, the Americans with Disabilities Act plays a critical role in guiding employers as they fashion diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

The movement to improve the opportunities available to those with mental health challenges has grown and blossomed in three short decades and has improved awareness of opportunities for inclusion that couple with opportunities for competitive advantage in business. As we spend the month of May reflecting on mental health awareness generally, we all gain from a specific look at how we can improve the lives of others through enhanced employment opportunities.

Sources:

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