

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/active-inclusion-is-also-good-business>

Microsoft Chief Accessibility Officer Jenny Lay-Flurrie observes that whether companies know it or not, people with disabilities are their customers and employees, and companies should purposefully include them. She gives examples from her experiences as a supervisor and a customer to emphasize the importance of inclusion and making people with disabilities feel psychologically safe.



Transcript

- Let me play devil's advocate.. 00:00:04,230 Because I think some people would say, Jenny, this is great and I wish I could, but I have limited resources as an organization and disabilities are a minority ultimately, of the state of my customers.. And so I need to prioritize my resources for the mainstream.. I'm playing devil's advocate.. How would you respond to a CEO that responds with that or an organization that acts with that motivation? - Well, first I'd have to control my eyebrows, 00:00:34,190 'cause they give away my thoughts.. But it's not a minority.. One, in the CDC actually has it at 26% of the population in the states has a disability.. I don't think we can call that a minority.. And if you're not purposefully including people with disabilities, you are actively, intentionally excluding.. And those are your customers, your peers, your employees, again, whether you know it or not..

And I think that's one of the key things.. I have a lot of comments I've had in the years is, we don't have anyone in our company that has a disability.. And again, I have to watch my eyebrows and my giggles, 'cause I'm like, that you know of.. And that's because you haven't created a psychologically safe environment for somebody to come in and tell them who they are, inclusive of their human, inclusive of their disability.. When I hired this team several years ago, first hired with a blank slate, which is a gift that you very rarely get in a career.. I knew coming in that I had 50% disability.. A year later, I knew it was over 90%.. Why is that? Because the 40% in the meantime, felt safe enough to tell me or their manager that they had a disability and how their manager could help best support their environment.. That disability could have been a mental health condition, could have been autism, could have been dyslexia, whatever it may be.. Didn't disclose it previously..

Now, that's what's happening in most environments.. But I'll tell you now, they're your customers.. And I'll give you your one quick example of that.. I went to a restaurant recently on the many travels.. It was an environment, it was very open 'cause, you know, we are still in a pandemic and it was outdoors.. But I asked if they wanted to verbally give me the menu.. And I said, well, do you mind if I have a written copy? And they turned to the person with me and said, "Would you mind telling her what I say?" And you know, writing it down for me 'cause I can't be bothered with that.. And my colleague very kindly said, "As she said, she's deaf and she just needs a little bit of, she needs a written copy".. I said, well, this maybe isn't the restaurant for you.. And we walked out..

What we also did was cancel the event that we had the day following at that same restaurant.. They lost my business.. They

lost a bigger business as a result.. We spend money, a lot of it.. And so I would, any person who says to me that, you know, why should I? I'm like, if you're not already, you are excluding people.. You're losing money, you're incurring risk and you are creating societal damage.. Move on...