

Building a More Inclusive and Sensitive Work Environment

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>> Welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio where every week we explore issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disabilities At Work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Hello. I'm Ray Zardetto and welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio here on the VoiceAmerica Business Network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities At Work explores the issues, ideas, initiatives and the innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and discusses them with the prominent members of the business, government and disability communities.

Disabilities At Work Radio is brought to you this week by two distinguished organizations dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled; the first is the Kessler Foundation, and the second, the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services and we will talk a little bit more about both of these institutions later in the program.

Today, I'm happy to say that we are joined on the program today by Lori Golden, the AccessAbilities Leader and Inclusiveness consultant at Ernst & Young, one of the big four accounting firms or auditing firms. And Lori, let me first welcome you to the program.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Thank you. Happy to be here.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Glad to have you with us. I was wondering, given the mouthful that that title represents, maybe you should tell us first exactly what that means.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Okay. Well, first of all, kudos, Ray, for pronouncing it correctly. It is a bit of a mouthful. And we were mindful of that when we gave ourselves the name

AccessAbilities. AccessAbilities and, by the way, to those of you who haven't seen it in writing, its one word and both A's are capitalized.

AccessAbilities is the name that we give to really two different, but aligned, entities, a set of initiatives and a set of networks. Networks that are sometimes referred to as affinity groups or employee resource groups and both, uh, the networks and the initiatives are aimed at achieving kind of two overarching goals, creating what we like to think of as an enabling environment for Ernst & Young people with disabilities and creating what we consider a supportive and a substantive culture for people with disabilities. The first bucket covering all of the practicalities, um, making sure that everybody gets the same access to tools and resources and communications as well as career building opportunities. Um, and so that really covers broad accessibility and individual accommodations and strategic career development support and coaching.

And then the second piece of it is really our educational efforts and we have a philosophy around how we approach educating our people.

But kind of back to the name, AccessAbilities, as you probably guessed, is meant to be a bit of a pun, and it's meant to make the statement that what is really important is accessing the full abilities of every one of our people,

whatever those people's physical attributes and cognitive attributes are.

So AccessAbilities was our attempt to be both specific about our subject area, which is differing abilities, and to put the emphasis on where we really want it, which is optimizing everyone's talents.

So that's AccessAbilities, um, and the other part of my role, inclusiveness consultant, which I understand sounds perhaps a little ambiguous, is, uh, a role to be an in-house consultant to our lines of business. So all our service lines, each of us in my team, and it's a team of about 16 people, uh, which we refer to as our diversity and inclusiveness team, we have individuals who are subject matter specialists, as I am in disabilities. And each of us also doubles as an overall consultant across, um, all disabilities and inclusiveness perspectives. So I work with our infrastructure groups, that is the line of business I support, and consult with them around ethnicity and gender and generations and sexual orientation, as well as disabilities related issues.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And are those the subject matter expert areas that you were referring to a minute ago?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yes. That's exactly right.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. And also just a point of clarification, when you say that you and your team are consultants to business units within the firm, you don't mean

consultant in the classic sense of the word I assume, because you are actually employees of the firm, right?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yes, we are employees of the firm. That's a good distinction. No, it's not in the legal sense that we are outside consultants; we are indeed full-time employees of the firm. It's consultants in the sense of we're not responsible for running programs or executing programs. For example, we are responsible for helping develop the strategies, uh, you know, and the overarching approaches that determine the need for specific kinds of programs.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm. And these kinds of programs all fall under this category, at least many of them do fall under this category that you talked before and you described at AccessAbilities, which I guess if I were to describe it, it's you put two words together, access and abilities.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And combine that together to make AccessAbilities to, as you say, to play off the word access abilities or the two words. This program, AccessAbilities, you started to talk a little bit about the philosophy behind it, and maybe you can expand on that a little bit?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Sure. Well, AccessAbilities is indeed my subject matter specialty and I'm the leader of those efforts. As inclusiveness consultant, the kinds of programs and approaches run across all areas of diversity and inclusiveness,

so, just to clarify. But back to AccessAbilities, our philosophy is that we want to do everything we can as a firm to make sure that each one of our people can work to the best of his or her ability, um, produce the best quality work and be as efficient and as productive as possible so that everyone in the firm is able to succeed to the degree that his or her talents and energies and desires allow. That's what it's all about.

So, AccessAbilities, um, is geared to ensure that people who have differing physical or cognitive abilities are able to be fully productive, um, and to fully succeed in our firm.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm wondering if you have -- do you have some idea of what percentage of the E & Y workforce has got a disability of one kind or another?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Not really. First of all, we don't ask that question.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: We don't even ask that question really on an optional basis. But, second of all, if we did ask the question, you know, historically people in the disabilities community know that the reporting is significantly under the incidents in the population. We tend to use the U.S. census data which suggests that one in five adults in the U.S. have a legally defined disability. And that is not a perfect extrapolation, but that's really the best we can do.

I can tell you, but not on the basis of hard data, on

the basis of experience, that we believe that most disabilities we have in the firm are non visible disabilities. So when you say disability to most people, an image is usually conjured of somebody in a wheelchair or somebody who is deaf or somebody who is blind, and those are probably a small sub segment, those and people with other, uh, impairments that either can be seen or are somehow obvious.

Um, probably most disabilities we have in the firm are individuals who are working with a serious illness or a chronic health condition or have a partial impairment that may not be immediately apparent. So people who might be significantly hard of hearing, but others may not be aware of that or people who have low vision or people who have mobility impairments then aren't obvious, um, or any other number of conditions that include some mental health issues and learning disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I assume that the under reporting that you talk about is mainly because people are reluctant to advertise the fact or to, you know, uh, let other folks know for whatever reason that they may have these disabilities?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yes. Yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And do you think that is still because people are concerned that if the company or the supervisor found out that they have these disabilities that it might somehow affect how they are seen at work or how they are treated at work?

>> LORI GOLDEN: I think that is a large part of it, but

individuals have very differing attitudes toward their own private information. And some individuals are very private with any information about themselves, particularly any information that is medical.

So it's also individuals have widely differing attitudes about disability or any other aspects of themselves. Some individuals who may be legally defined as having a disability don't consider having a disability a big part of who they are, don't, quote, identify that way.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: And not necessarily only because they want to keep the information private, they just may not think about it in those terms day-to-day.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Good. Okay. We have a lot more about AccessAbilities that I want to get into during the course of the program, but we are going to take our first break. And when we come back, Lori and I are going to talk a little bit about the recent U.S. Business Leadership Network meeting that occurred in Chicago and what was talked about there and what transpired there, but we are going to take this break first. So stay with us, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> You are listening to Disabilities At Work Radio. We welcome questions and comments from our listening audience, which you can send to us on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt or on our Facebook site, Disabilities At Work. Also visit disabilitiesatwork.org. Welcome back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica Business Network. The show this week is brought to you by the Kessler Foundation and also by the State of New Jersey's Division of Disabilities Services.

I'm Ray Zardetto and today we are speaking with Lori Golden of Ernst & Young about the many programs and initiatives that this big four firm has undertaken to support, uh, employees with disabilities and also members of their family and also within the community. And we are going to talk more about what Ernst & Young does specifically in that area very shortly, but I'd like to just change around the conversation for a couple of minutes, Lori, and talk about the U.S. Business Leadership Network which had its annual conference in Chicago just about a month ago.

The USBLN has a network membership, uh, which builds and provides support for people with disabilities in the workplace

and advocates for them, so I know that we both know they do very, very good work. And I know that you were at their conference last month. I was interested if you had any specific impressions of what things were talked about there, you know, what is the hottest topic at a conference like that these days?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Um, well, first of all, a little disclaimer, I actually am on the national board of the USBLN, so I'm a big supporter. I wasn't just at the conference; I, I conducted a couple of sessions and had board meetings. So I'm not just a disinterested party to all that is going on. And I'm happy to say that I really think we are at a watershed in terms of the Business Leadership Network movement and perhaps in terms of the disabilities movement itself.

We have seen a huge uptick in, in trust among employers, large and small, but particular growth among small -- of interest among smaller employers, uh, and learning how to go about hiring, so finding qualified candidates with disabilities, hiring people with disabilities and then supporting them, um, within their organizations.

I'd say a couple of the topics, and perhaps I'm biased here because these topics really intrigue me right now, are accessibility. I saw some of that at the Business Leadership Network and in other conferences and activities. And what I mean by in particular accessibility with regard to, um, online

channels and online information. So, ensuring that information that is transmitted electronically is accessible to anyone, um, who wants to take it in, excluding individuals who are using assistive technology.

So individuals who are using programs that read the text on a computer screen or who are using magnification software. In order for these technologies to be able to translate the information into forms that people say, um, who are blind or have significantly low vision, can get it, they need to be able to read it first. So the information has to be created, you know, in particular formats.

Um, and there is an increased emphasis now, a lot of it is regulatory, that the government is getting increasingly serious about ensuring that, uh, you know, any information that is put in the public space is accessible and companies, you know, are really getting pressure to make sure that, and it began with any information for job candidates that people could see, in our case, our careers pages, and actually apply online for jobs even if they were using assistive technology.

And there is a lot of movement in that space with the new regulations that have been passed mandating that federal agencies hire more workers with disabilities. We are seeing more being asked of government contractors in terms of reporting on who they hire with disabilities and what they do to support people with disabilities working in their

organizations.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Are those mandates in effect now?

>> LORI GOLDEN: The government mandates are, yeah, for the federal agencies, absolutely. The agencies are stepping up their efforts quite a bit. And those of us who are federal contractors are seeing the impact in our FP's when we want to bid on a piece of government work in the specifications, you know, increasingly there are questions around employing and supporting people with disabilities.

So there is a tremendous amount of new interest, um, in this whole topic in the business community. And we at the business leadership network, you know, are tremendously excited about it.

Another area that, that a lot of organizations are getting more excited about and putting more resources into is employee resource groups for people with disabilities. Many larger organizations are finding that disabilities networking groups, which, by the way, are usually not just composed of people with disabilities, but generally involve individuals with disabilities as well as people who might have friends or families with disabilities or other reasons to connect to disabilities issues.

Organizations are finding that the networks are incredibly valuable in terms identifying areas for improvement and advising on how those organizations can better support

people with disabilities in terms of advising on marketing to people with disabilities and on market facing activities.

PepsiCo's enable group was responsible for creating the Pepsi commercial that aired during the Super Bowl last year that featured individuals of their group who are deaf.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> LORI GOLDEN: There was quite a lot of media attention around that commercial and it came out of their group.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: That's interesting. You know, let me -- as long as you are on that subject, I wanted to get you to talk about this for the last couple of minutes of this segment since you are in a very good position to answer this question.

Um, how does a firm or any business, but certainly a firm like E & Y, since that is your experience here right now, how does a firm like E & Y work with an association like the BLN? On an operational business, I mean, how do you guys get together, and how does it work?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Well, the Business Leadership Network is, you know, a national -- the U.S. Business Leadership Network is the umbrella for Business Leadership Network chapters around the country.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: There are some 39 chapters around the country, and in our case and I think that is true of most of the major employers who are active, um, we participate on both a national

and a local level.

So I am on the advisory board for the corporate advisory board, was the vice chair for the New York City Business Leadership Network, and I'm on the national board for the U.S. BLN.

One of our local, what we call abilities champions, one of the ground leaders of our network is on the national certification committee for the new disabled owned business certification programs. So we have an individual who actually worked, she is an auditor for Ernst & Young, and as a volunteer she is one of the internal champions for AccessAbilities. She is based in Baltimore and does a lot in the mid Atlantic area, but she also nationally, um, actually was named volunteer of the year by the USBLN for her work in helping develop the certification standards and her work on the committee actually doing audits of and certifying disabled owned businesses.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so --

>> LORI GOLDEN: Did that help answer the question?

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yes, I think so. And then when businesses are certified this way, or certified, then that gives them a particular advantage, you think?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Oh, absolutely. Organizations, certainly Ernst & Young and many organizations like Ernst & Young, have quite robust supplier diversity programs.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> LORI GOLDEN: And we not only look at our diverse suppliers, that's not proper grammatically, but that's what we call them, um, we look at our diverse suppliers. You know, any time we are making major purchases we do go those lists first but we also work with those suppliers in a number of ways. We mentor them. We have educational efforts for them. There are a variety of outreach efforts to try to help them build their businesses and help our relationships in those communities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. Good. Alright, well, when we come back for the next segment of our program, we are going to back to talk some more about the AccessAbilities programs in E & Y that we opened the show discussing with Lori. So we are going to do that in just a few moments.

Before we do, let me invite all of you listening to today's program and our continuing listeners of Disabilities At Work Radio to join our tteam at DisabilitiesAt, and also please friend us the Facebook at Disabilities At Work Radio. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: We are back on VoiceAmerica Business Network and this is Disabilities At Work Radio and I'm Ray Zardetto. Today's show is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. It does so through the rehabilitation research done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through the work of the Kessler Program Center which prepares the disabled for the demands of the workplace. For more information, please visit www.kesslerinstitute.org.

Also sponsoring our show today is the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services, part of the State of New Jersey's Division of Human Services. The division focuses on helping people who have become disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their own communities. And Disabilities At Work Radio thanks both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show.

And we will get back to our discussion now with Lori

Golden of Ernst & Young. We opened the show talking about AccessAbilities, a firm wide program that Ernst & Young has instituted some years ago; I think five years ago you started this?

>> LORI GOLDEN: That's about right.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And there are some very specific parts of what is in AccessAbilities that I think would be very interesting to talk about. I notice on your website, for instance, there are some very specific guidelines in terms of suggestions that people can consider in both how to deal with people with disabilities, how to talk to them, how not to and whatever. And one of them I thought was very interesting was that one that talked about the little things?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Mm-hmm.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I was wondering if you might talk about that for a minute?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Well, we have a variety; I'm not sure which tool you are referring to. We have a variety of tools. And I guess I'll talk about them generally and perhaps you can swoop in and narrow down the tool that you have in mind.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Well, there was one that talked about, for instance, some of the things you would or would not say. For instance, the specific example on the website was of a woman who had a breathing disorder, had difficulty breathing sometimes and so she was almost always taking the elevator, as

you would expect, instead of the stairs going up to her office. And one day apparently somebody said something to her, like, oh, what are you feeling lazy today or not taking the stairs? And, you know, it's the kind of thing that they probably didn't specifically mean anything insulting by saying that, but it's kind of the little things like that that you need to be cognitive of.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Ah, okay. Now I know what you are referring to. You are referring to one of my favorite tools because, um, it's, I think, very unique and very flexible.

Um, one of the challenges we always face when we talk about being inclusive and being sensitive to people with disabilities is how to tell people what we are talking about. If you are talking about etiquette or words to use, not to use, word choice, that's, that's pretty clear. You can give people, you know, some actual words that are good and words that are not so good.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: And things to do and not to do around specific kinds of disabilities. But when you get beyond those areas, it begins to be pretty amorphous and people kind of get stuck saying, well, you know, I want to do the right thing, but I don't even know what you mean by the right thing.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Uh-huh.

>> LORI GOLDEN: So we kind of scratched our heads a little bit

and you know, one of the best ways to educate anybody and one of the best ways to get messages across in a way that sticks is by telling a story.

So we challenged ourselves, we turned back to our network and we said, can you give us some examples, some stories, of real things that happened in the office that were good or not so good? Examples when, um, and it could be about you, or it could be about a coworker or someone else with a disability, but we wanted examples of disabilities related situations where somebody handled something very well and kind of said and did the right thing, or when somebody handled something in a way that just wasn't so good.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> LORI GOLDEN: And the idea was to share with people what happened, and then -- so that people are not scratching their heads looking for the moral of the story, tell them what literally the moral of the story is. And we sought to do that in a very, very quick way.

So we call this series, and there are 23 different stories, AccessAbilities Minutes. And each story, if you will, is just a couple of sentences. Um, and my favorite one is the one that you read already, Ray, because it's something that happens all of the time. It's so every day and commonplace.

How many times, particularly if you know coworkers, you know, you think you know them well or you work with them a lot,

are you in a situation where you are teasing somebody about something in a good natured way? And this was a real example where an individual had a coworker who had a disability that made her really tired, really breathless a lot, but others really weren't aware of that. She has a non-visible condition that only this one coworker on her team is aware of. And this individual with the disability really struggles just to get through the day. And the coworker who was aware of the disability was very upset, um, on behalf of her friend with the disability when a coworker, in a very good-natured way, um, teased this person for being lazy.

We find that most people really want to do the right thing. We don't feel that we have real challenges around a lot of bias or negativity around disabilities. Our big challenge is people not knowing how to handle things, and particularly if you don't know someone has a disability. You are liable to do and say things, um, that can be really hurtful without having any idea that you are doing that.

So our challenge is how to sensitize people to the idea that you really don't know what someone else is dealing with at any given time. So think of all contingencies.

Another example that comes up, um, and, you know, I learn from our members with disabilities, is our organization, like many, have kind of teaming activities, office social event, perhaps in the summertime at the end of our busy season.

We have, you know, events and activities that are meant to be fun and for people to enjoy being with one another and to blow off steam. Some individuals are dealing with conditions where they are not able to do the same kinds of physical things. They are not able to do things where, say they are lifting or bending or running around or they aren't able to be out in the hot sun.

So we have learned over time, um, to counsel our people that when we are having activities, it's really important to provide a range of activities so that people with all kinds of physical demands and needs can choose what is appropriate for them.

So that's another example that comes up often. Um, and it's not just a question of being sensitive to one individual in one specific situation; it's really a question of changing your orientation so that you are inclusive, um, in your approach to everything.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. Good. Let me move on to another program that I noticed on your website that perhaps you can explain to us a little bit. It was called the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Sure.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I was wondering if you can tell us about that a little bit because I don't see much of that that any other company is talking about.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yeah, we - we for years had wanted to find a way that leveraged who we are and our skill sets, um, to be able to reach out to veterans with disabilities.

We hire primarily accountants, um, and so there isn't a huge opportunity to hire a lot of veterans with disabilities unless they happen to be accountants with the kinds of skill sets that we look for. And there isn't, you know, a natural fit there, so we were looking for creative ways.

And Billy Williamson who is our America's inclusiveness officer happened to come across an article in the Dallas Morning News about a program out of Texas A&M, um, where veterans who had come out of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with significant disabilities, um, could apply for what amounts to a crash course in entrepreneurship at a business school at the Mays School Of Management at Texas A&M, is where their program is. Where they would get all expenses paid, uh, week or two, I believe it's actually ten days, in residence at the business school learning about entrepreneurship.

They would get online preparation before, um, the on campus program and then they would get follow-up online material as well as a coaching and mentoring over a long period of time. In fact, they don't get one mentor, but they get several mentors for different topical areas.

And this year, starting actually next month, we will have the first class in a new program that is a companion

program to the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities, and it's a program specifically for the family members of veterans with disabilities.

This program, Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities, is at six business schools around the country. It's -- the schools are in a consortium, the program was actually founded at Syracuse at the Whitman School of Business, and this year, starting next month, Syracuse is going to be the first program. They are piloting a program, which we are the founders or the founding sponsors of, and that is this program specifically oriented for family members.

It's the same model as the program for the vets themselves, but it's specifically targeted at family members who act as part-time caregivers for the veterans and their families with disabilities. They are often spouses. Um, they might be the parents of a son or daughter coming back with disabilities. It could be another family member.

But the whole idea is that family members who act as caregivers often have the real challenge of bringing in an income while their veteran family member is recovering, um, as well as having to be available to coordinate care. And entrepreneurship provides a path to bringing in some income, but maintaining the flexibility that they need to adjust to the needs of the veteran who is recovering.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And is there -- is Ernst & Young's role in

this to provide financial support or content support for the training sessions or both? What's that?

>> LORI GOLDEN: Great, great question. It's actually across the board. We are providing financial support. We have created the bulk of the care giving components in our curriculum.

So our employee assistance program and a group that is allied with AccessAbilities called Our Caregivers Circle, which is specifically for Ernst & Young employees who act as caregivers to family members with disabilities, where adult family members with disabilities has a vast a lot of information on care giving and the specific care giving challenges when the person with disabilities is an adult. We have another group, another network to support the parents of children with disabilities, but this is adult oriented.

And so we have helped develop the curriculum. We provide funding. We are providing mentorship, so Ernst & Young people are acting as mentors for the family members. We will, on occasion, be teaching in the class. There are just a number of ways in which we are directly involved in it. We didn't want to just fund, we wanted to do more than that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. Very good. Alright. I'm talking with Lori Golden of Ernst & Young. We still have some more topics to cover in the last segment of our program, so stay with us. We are going to talk not only about some of Ernst &

Young's programs, but we are going to take a wider or higher level view of the workplace and people with disabilities. So there is more to come. Stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> You are listening to Disabilities At Work Radio. We welcome questions and comments from our listening audience, which you can send to us on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt or on our Facebook site, Disabilities At Work. Also visit disabilitiesatwork.org. Welcome back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio and remember that Disabilities At Work Radio can be heard each Wednesday at Noon Eastern Time on VoiceAmerica's Business

Network.

And I'm speaking now with Lori Golden of Ernst & Young and in a moment we are going to talk about some of the bigger picture issues regarding the workplace and people with disabilities, but there is just a couple of other things that I wanted to discuss with Lori relative to her work with Ernst & Young.

One of them, Lori, has to do with recruiting on college campuses. I know that all of the big four accounting firms are, you know, very actively engaged in trying to recruit new talent off of campuses, you know, new hires. And I'm just wondering if the kind of work, and I know students are very interested in what companies do these days to be greener, you know, what kind of sustainability initiatives they undertake. I'm wondering if you find that there is also interest in how companies deal with issues like people with disabilities and the workplace?

>> LORI GOLDEN: What we find is that when we begin talking to students about our inclusiveness efforts overall and our disabilities inclusiveness efforts, specifically, they really respond, and I think for several reasons.

One is we are now seeing among the first generations in the workplace of young workers, many of whom have come through the educational system with diagnosed and accommodated learning disabilities. We see, you know, many students in school with

diagnosed ADHD. And, you know, a lot of the younger people we have coming to our organizations have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, ADD, um, conditions on the autism spectrum like Asperger's, dyslexia. And if they were identified early and if they received accommodations, um, many of them have been very successful throughout their school years and they are bright and ambitious and employers like Ernst & Young will hire them. And they are accommodated through college, but when they get to an employer, um, they don't necessarily know what it is they need and even if they were open about the disability, don't necessarily know how the kinds of accommodations that they had in a school environment might translate into a working environment.

So, um, when we begin talking about disabilities inclusiveness, it signals to a young person that we are an organization that is caring about this, looking into it, apt to be a lot more flexible and a lot more supportive than an organization who hasn't flagged overall issues.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm wondering, based on the discussion we had earlier in the show about how people in the workplace tend to be still somewhat reluctant to discuss or to reveal the fact that they have a disability, can I infer from what you are saying about this generation of college students that because, perhaps, maybe because they have been diagnosed or as they have come up through school their disabilities have been, you know,

perhaps handled more openly than in past generations, that they may be more open when they get into the workplace about it?

>> LORI GOLDEN: You know, that would be a logical assumption and it's true and it's not true. What I find is that when it comes to learning disabilities, no, they are still not very open. They probably were open in college but they don't know what kind of a reception they are going to get when they get to an employer. And I find, in talking to the career placement offices, that they don't really know either how employers are going to regard any disabilities and certainly learning disabilities or mental health issues. And they counsel these students to be pretty judicious.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> LORI GOLDEN: On the other hand, when students have -- or young people have apparent disabilities, what I do find is a huge generational difference in that they are much more ready to ask for accommodations and much more matter of fact about disabilities that, you know, might require something from us.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Much more so than older people.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. I'd like to, as I said at the start of this segment, broaden the discussion for the last few minutes that we have to talk about people with disabilities in the workplace in a larger scale.

From the number of years that you have been involved in

this now, and from the unique position that you have both with Ernst & Young and with the BLN, um, would you say that it's better now in terms of how the workplace is more accommodating for people with disabilities than it was ten years ago?

>> LORI GOLDEN: I think it's getting better all of the time. Yes. I think it's absolutely getting better. We still have a long way to go.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah, I'm sure. What do you think would be the one or two main points of progression we have to make in this journey with the long way to go as you say? What are the next two main things that have to happen, do you think?

>> LORI GOLDEN: One of the main things we need to do is to raise awareness and educate people on the basics so that individuals are more comfortable interacting with people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Do you mean people, do you mean people within the workplace or just in general?

>> LORI GOLDEN: I mean both.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Uh-huh.

>> LORI GOLDEN: I mean in my generation. I do think the younger generation is getting much better because there is more mainstreaming in school than there was when I was, when, you know, I, who am baby boomer, was in school. My kids who are teenagers now went to school with kids with disabilities in the classroom who they interacted with freely and comfortably. And

they take the notion of varying physical abilities, I won't say for granted, but it's much more comfortable for them than it was in my generation.

When we grew up, the exposure, you know, we got to disabilities was, you know, the Jerry Lewis Telethon and the instruction from our parents, usually our mothers, to not stare. That was all we were given in the way of guidance. So people with disabilities were "other" to many of us unless we had close friends or family members with disabilities. And therefore dealing with, interacting with people with disabilities was uncomfortable and scary because we were not quite sure how to behave.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: That is getting better. But all of us need to get better educated and we find at Ernst & Young that by giving people some level of education on a really basic level, just telling people what words to use and not to use and giving people some etiquette rules. Although admittedly that very surface stuff, it gets people a little bit closer to being comfortable.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: It's part of the little things that we talked about earlier.

>> LORI GOLDEN: It's part of the little things.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> LORI GOLDEN: That's right. So that's one thing that is

really important. Another thing --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: We have one minute left, so.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Another thing that is really important is to look at accessibility and make sure that everyone gets access to the same tools and communications and information and opportunities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. So increase in accessibility, increase in awareness.

>> LORI GOLDEN: Yeah.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Needs to continue to happen.

>> LORI GOLDEN: And, and dedicating some resources. It's important to make sure that there are structures and processes in place so people with disabilities can get the support that they need.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Very good. I think that's a good place to end the discussion. I have been speaking today with Lori Golden of Ernst & Young and I think we covered an awful lot of ground, a lot of good information, Lori. Thank you very much for joining us today and imparting your experience and your wisdom in this area.

I also want to thank this week's sponsors, the Kessler Institute and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services.

Join us next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time, we will be back with another Disabilities At Work Radio program to explore more ideas, innovations and initiatives involving the workplace

and people with disabilities. Until then, have a good week.

I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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