

Why Accessibility Matters

Cultural Competence



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I recently traveled with my kid. As a caregiver to a pushchair/wheelchair user, we were automatically asked to use the wheelchair line. While waiting in line for our turn, I could not help but notice that our check-in counter was lower than all the other counters. As a newbie to the disability community who has become accustomed to many things being inaccessible for people like my kid, I asked the security officer if the lower counter was intentional.

> “Yes. We want everyone to be equal. They need a lower counter so they can communicate with the security officer with confidence, ease, and comfort. Their experience should be a pleasant one.”
>
> Security officer at check-in counter

The incident triggered many thoughts and emotions. That something so simple can make a whole community visible blew my mind. More than diversity and equity matters: Inclusion matters too.

Consider the entire experience

And accessibility needs special attention. Because even though people who have disabilities may

want to participate in the world fully and independently, they struggle when they undertake simple services, shop, dine out, go to cultural and sports events, and maintain vehicles. They can't always find accessible offices and workstations that enable them to hold jobs. Education may be out of reach too. Even when accessibility is addressed, it's not always adequate and yet, it often could be easily. Much is designed without people with disabilities being taken in consideration.

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Although it sounds so simple while writing it, including everyone is more than just the right thing to do. It is a smart business decision, and will eventually provide you with a larger pool of customers and employees.

Most of us will at some time will deal with a temporary or situational disability (e.g., broken wrist, sprained neck, etc.). Accessibility, keep in mind, is much more than building wheelchair ramps and posting signs in braille. It is about the entire experience of how something is designed to be used — to assure someone dealing with any kind of impairment can participate as fully as possible and glean what is wanted to be gleaned for what they are doing.

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Lead by example

There are many ways that we can nudge the status quo and encourage employers or shops or service providers to make services, products, or premises more accessible. Go beyond the law and beyond ideal environmental, social and governance (ESG) recommendations. Help your organization shine and lead as an example. Prove to your disabled employees and customers, and the world at large, that all are valued, and that you are making conscious effort to ensure they can benefit from an ideal experience, like the one I and my kid had.

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And always remember: It often takes just one person to make a change.

Check out ACC?s Resource Library.

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Yosr Hamza is a known champion of DEI, women empowerment, and creating opportunities for others who come from under-represented backgrounds (especially for those who are most marginalized and cast aside) to thrive throughout their career journey through mentorship, sponsorship, and authentic storytelling. She co-leads Gartner Legal and Compliance DEI Council and serves on Gartner's Middle East CSR Board Committee, the Board of Mosaic at Gartner, and Women at Gartner Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). She serves on the leadership of Small Law Department Network, New to In-House Network, and International Legal Affairs Network.