

Greater Vancouver Board of Trade - Building an Inclusive and Accessible Workplace - May 31, 2021.

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BRIDGITTE: Good afternoon. And thank you for joining us. I'm Bridgitte Anderson, president and CEO of the greater Vancouver board of trade. Today we are gathered and the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples. The Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh nations. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade wants to acknowledge the devastating discovery of a burial site of 215 Indigenous children on the grounds after residential school. Our hearts go out to the families and communities who lost their children, and to all of those who are grieving and affected by this tragedy. We must acknowledge this terrible truth and do better to advance truth and reconciliation. Every year we will hold our annual indigenous opportunities forum and we are working with our indigenous partners to determine how best to continue this important conversation, and how to support our Indigenous friends.

Welcome to building an Inclusive and Accessible workplace a special event brought by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade's Diversity and Inclusion Council in partnership with the Presidents Group. Based on the Canadian survey and disability from 2017 one in 5 Canadians aged 15 years or older or about 6.2 million people have one or more disabilities. Whether the disability is permanent or temporary. Existed from birth or caused by an accident, or the aging process those with disabilities have always had to overcome many obstacles. To advance an organization's wellness bottom line and growth there is a need to tap into a wider talent pool reflective of the customer base inclusive of disabled people.

The reality is that people living with disabilities bring high potential and a diverse range of skills and abilities to various occupations and industries. But are often trapped in low-skill jobs. Therefore, it is imperative our diversity equity and inclusion goals commit to eliminating barriers to employment and advancement for people with disabilities.

If you would like to utilize our closed captioning feature during today's event do so exiting the full screen view and the closed captions will be directly below the screen.

We have a full and engaging agenda today. We will kick-off with opening remarks with the Honorable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion for the government of Canada. Followed by remarks by the co-chair of the Presidents Group, Robin Silvester. Then we will be joined by a panel of industry experts to discuss more about today's theme. And as always, we want you to take part in this discussion. Simply access Slido on the page you are watching right now or go to Slido.com and submit a vote for questions. The password is accessibility.

Before we get under way it takes a lot of support to

put together an event like this and this event is presented in partnership with the Presidents Group. We would like to acknowledge our signature support source RBC Royal Bank and Deloitte. Our community sponsors Electronic Arts. And Pacific Blue Cross. Our production partner Oh Boy productions and our preferred media partner daily hive. We also want to thank our long standing sponsors called our pillar partners and they include Telus, CN, YVR, BCIT School of Business and Media and Air Canada.

We are very grateful for the support of these 5 organizations whose annual partnerships and commitments enable the work of the Board of trade. I would like to thank our Board of Directors for their continuous support. Thank you, Kirsten Sutton and Robin Dhir for joining us today.

I have the pleasure to introducing the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion for the Government of Canada - The Honourable Carla Qualtrough for opening remarks. Welcome, Minister, it is nice to see you virtually at least.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Thanks, Bridgitte, and I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking to you from the territory of the Tsawwassen and Musqueam First Nations. It's great to take part in this event. And, of course, the Presidents Group and you know what a big fan I am of that organization. For the 5th annual national AccessAbility Week.

As you know each year during the last week in may we celebrate the contributions of persons with disabilities and highlight the work done by individuals communities and workplaces to remove barriers to accessibility and to foster disability inclusion in Canada. This year our theme is disability inclusion 2021 leaving no one behind. As part of our pandemic response we worked really hard to put a disability lens on decision making. Ensuring supports and relief measures were disability inclusive and we positioned all workers including workers with disabilities as best as possible when we hit economic recovery.

So in June of last year we announced the new national workplace accessibility stream under the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities. This 15 million dollar investment is supporting persons with disabilities and employers seeking to improve workplace inclusion and access to jobs.

Additionally budget 2021 included targeted environments like 100 million dollars under the enabling accessibility fund to remove barriers in the built environment. Along with broad-based investments like a commitment to a child care system that is disability inclusive from the start. Now these investments with helping to make a real difference as communities and workplaces across Canada are working for more disability inclusive and accessible for all. And as we continue to battle the pandemic and focus on an inclusive economic recovery. We are more committed than ever to a disability inclusive economic recovery that really and truly leaves no one behind.

One way we intend to do this is true Canada's first ever disability inclusion action plan. That includes a new

disability benefit. A robust employment strategy and best processes for government to access -- assess eligibility for disability programs and benefits.

As business and community leaders you can continue to play an important role in our efforts to make our country more disability inclusive. Our employment strategy will have a strong employer component and I will lean on leaders such as you to champion disability conclusion. Employer confidence and the business case for inclusion.

And the importance and benefits of having a worse force that reflects the diversity of the communities you serve and that includes persons with disabilities.

I hope you all enjoy this week. And wish you all a happy national AccessAbility Week. Over to you Bridgitte.

BRIDGITTE: Thank you, Minister. I would like to introduce Robin Silvester the co-chair of the Presidents Group. The president and CEO of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority responsible for the stewardship of the Port of Vancouver and GO of the greater Vancouver board of trade for remarks as well. Over to you Robin.

ROBIN: Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge we are gathered on the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh ancestral lands, and to extend our thanks. I would like to thank you Minister Qualtrough for joining us and all your work to make AccessAbility Week an annual opportunity to celebrate our progress and to evaluate where we can continue to improve. I appreciate the opportunity to be part of today's event. As the co-chair of the Presidents Group I am pleased to be here to recognize the beginning of national AccessAbility Week. And its great that the greater Vancouver board of trade is holding this event to mark the occasion.

Today's event gives the business community a chance to consider what role our organizations can play in building more inclusive workplaces. And removing barriers that have historically prevented people with disabilities from contributing equally in the workplaces.

At the Presidents Group we have set an ambition goal to make B.C. the province with the highest employment for persons with disabilities Canada. We need all businesses in B.C. to join us on the journey.

At the Presidents Group we know that many of the barriers people with disabilities encounter at work with within our control as employers to remove. By making adjustments to our policies. And our physical environments, and by educating ourselves on what persons with disabilities can do. We can reap huge rewards. Some of the barriers we need to address take time and significant resources. But it's also the case many of the barriers are really about shifting our mind set and imbedding consideration for inclusion up front.

Here is a timely example. Today's event was designed to be accessible. The ASL interpreter you see in the corner of the screen means that deaf individuals can receive the information alongside hearing attendees. The captions at the bottom of the screen remove barriers to participation for harder hearing individuals. People with

cognitive impairments. And even those working in noisy environments. And the panelists you hear from have been invited because of expertise as professionals and people with disabilities. They are uniquely qualified to speak about barrier free workplaces.

Since 2013 the Presidents Group member organizations have been working as champions and practitioners of accessibility, aiming to remove barriers, improve practices and share our learnings with our peers in the business community.

In January we launched a new on-line course called creating accessible workplaces. Which is free for B.C. businesses. And serves as a great tangible guide on removing barriers in businesses of any size. In my organization the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority we've got 100 employees. Nearly a quarter of our work force who will be going through the course and completing the certificate. And, of course, we have a range of other inclusivity initiatives we've embarked on including establishing focus groups for people with disabilities. Workplace surveys to gain insights. And training on unconscious bias for members of our equity committee. Human resources annex executive leadership team. I believe that creating an accessible workplace is important. And benefits any organization.

It's achieved through leadership. Commitment, and through continually focussing on tangible steps forward. AccessAbility Week is the start of that journey or a reinforcement of a. With all this said I know everybody is looking forward to the panel so I will microphone back to Bridgitte. Thank you, again.

BRIDGITTE: Thanks, Robin. I have the pleasure of introducing our panelists for the discussion. First, we have the executive founding member of SFU DNA Serena Bains. Next the founder of farmers meal Nicholas Haddad. Then we welcome back the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion for the Government of Canada - The Honourable Carla Qualtrough and we have the Regional Operating Officer of RBC Royal bank Scott Tomlin and moderating we have the Executive Director of the Disability Foundation and a member of the DLC Ruby Ng and a reminder to go onto slide he to submit or vote for your questions. Over you to Ruby.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you, Bridgitte, and to the panellists. I hope we will raise ... workplace. I thought what might be helpful for our panel and also for the many participating participants attending the event virtually it SO frame the discussion as a shared experience. For more than a year we've all been navigating a pandemic together. And we've seen the possibility of more flexible ways of working. Something people with disabilities have been calling for long before the pandemic. Now that we're moving into reopening and recovery. I'd like to ask the panel members to share something they'd like employers to remember from this experience. And why inclusive and accessible workplaces is important to you. Nick, I'd like to start with you welcome.

NICOLAS: Thank you. As a person with a did Is disability myself working from home or remotely was very important especially you know going to the office, the commute with the Skytrain or by bus is sometimes a little bit challenging. And you know, walking and -- around the office and all this was also challenging. So working from home was always a good option. But during the pandemic everyone was forced to work from home. So it was you know, that was the new the new normal for work. Which was very important to me, and to other people at the same time. I think during this year we learn a lot. As an employer, and you know, I think we have good opportunity and good productivity from people working at home as well so it changed. We have now more accessible tools and more you know, communication tools to be connected with the people, with the employees and other stakeholders as well.

MODERATOR RUBY: Serena, you offer a wonderful perspective as a post-secondary student and also as a member of a special initiative to help identify and address barriers facing youth entering the work force. What are your thoughts.

SERENA: Yes, thank you, Ruby. I think building an inclusive and accessible workplace is important because in my experience as a youth when we enter the work force we experience this intersection of ageism but also ableism in being a youth with a disability, and that kind of shapes our perception of our self, and our attitudes towards employment in the future and it's really critical point in one's life is when you're going into the work force for the first time, and you're experiencing all these attitudes and maybe perceived barriers, it's really important to recognize what that can result in in.

I know for myself that's resulted in internalized ableism where I'm not sure if my employer views me a certain way or if I'm doing my best work in the eyes of my employer so I think COVID-19 has really provided us an opportunity to look at employment through the lens of accessibility because we've been so adaptable during the pandemic. That it's really important to continue this lens of accessibility, and disability inclusion, throughout the pandemic, and afterwards too as we are approach our into you normal. And continuing that on into the future.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you Serena.

And Scott, we hear a lot about the importance of the dialogue and the respect between employer and employee. Could you share your experience.

SCOTT: Yeah, I often quickly start to telling my story because forums like this people often wonder okay what's his story? What's his disability but I was born with bilateral clubbed feet and my kids affectionately refer to it as dad having his feet sort of put on backwards but I spent much of my youth in and out of hospitals with operations, and as a result of my disability I would argue and likely for the rest of this partner here that the resilience. Perseverance muscles grew faster and larger

than most. So I think what COVID provided organizations and I think of RBC being one of them -- it's opened up the conversation. It's opened up the conversation around what will work for you.

So disabled or not, it's created this dialogue around flexibility, it's created this dialogue around resilience, it's created this dialogue around mental health, mental wellness and what's also been great. ....

(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY).

BRIDGITTE: We had a technical difficulty. Which often happens in virtual event so our apologies. We do seem to have everything back on-line. And our guests are back on-line. I understand. So I'm going to bring Ruby back into the conversation who is so capably handling the conversation and moderating that. And Ruby take it away and I'm standing by here to have a conversation in case our panelists are not back on-line.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful, thank you so much, Bridgette. I appreciate the support as always and Scott, I'm very sorry. We lost you right in the middle of your remarks. Would you mind picking up where you left off?

SCOTT: Sure. Not sure where I left off. But I just wanted to kind of reiterate that you know as a result of my disability, it really has and like so many helped build the muscle of resilience and perseverance and many other skills, and resilience has been a common word through the pandemic. And I think for many disabled folks it's something they could lean into.

As far as this conversation goes I think one of the silver linings of the pandemic has been this conversation between employer and employee. Whether it's as a result of at disability or not, this whole conversation around flexibility, and what will work for you from you know a work environment, do you need to be in the office? Can you work from home? So yes the disability discussions is very very important and the customize into need the best we can you go without a doubt the benefit has been the broader conversation around flexibility. And my last point is just around at least for us at RBC how technology has fueled that flexibility.

We've been able to do more in the last kind of 15 months technology wise than we would have been able to do in ten years. So I'm really hopeful that that acceleration of technology will further this accessibility opportunity for disabled folks.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful thank you so much, Scott. And Minister Qualtrough, we see a lot more organizations taking an active role in creating more inclusive and accessible workplaces. From your perspective and your personal experience, what would you like employers to keep in mind, and why is this important to you.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Wow. Well first of all thanks again for having me. Everyone we do have the shared experience

of disability I'm legally blind. I only have around 10% vision with my glasses corrected. And I think what I would say to employers is you will never find a more innovative creative problem solvers to think out of box and get things done than your employees or your potential labour pool of people with disabilities because quite frankly, we were born into a world that wasn't built for us and we've never been able to think inside the box because the box doesn't work for us.

And so there's really neat opportunity here I think as we move forward to recognize that an innovation and creativity and as Scott said resilience. Because that's how we live our lives. And that's how we've managed to get where we are. And the employer that realizes that, will benefit immensely from having an employee a worker with a disability in their midst and not only will that be good for business and reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. But it will send a clear message to our citizens with disabilities that we value you. We see you as a contributing member of society who has something to offer and it's actually something quite unique, and that's really important.

MODERATOR RUBY: Fantastic. Thank you so much, minister. We'll get things started with first question. I think that Robin touched upon this in his opening remarks. Certainly Scott you mentioned conversations, and minister you talked about the many different opportunities. And innovations from lived experience.

In the interests of helping raise awareness and supporting those conversations, could you share with us what you would suggest is a unique value that people with disabilities bring either from lived experience or from a perspective and if you have a personal example that would be great. Serena I see you nodding your head. Shall we start with you?

SERENA: So I think in my experience whatnot only myself but fellow members of disability and diversity alliance as SFU we bring forward this forethought and vision for the future because as Minister Qualtrough said we've had to break out of the mold and create our own solutions to things so I think a unique quality is that vision for the future. Not being afraid to start from scratch, and building is completely new. And as has been mentioned already, a lot of these things that we build from the perspective of disabled folks also helps able bodied people immensely as well.

I know closed captioning a lot of my able-bodied friends had had mentioned to me that they never realized how helpful that is. And it's really interesting to see that this pandemic has resulted in not only disabled focus but able bodied focus realizing the importance of accommodation, and having that vision for the future.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful thanks Serena.  
Scott? Nick?

NICOLAS: I'd love to add. I think the list is long for employers as far as the benefits of attracting and

retaining more disabled talent. We talked about resilience and preserves and building their own box but also not being boxed in. Critical that this group doesn't allow for that.

My bias is obviously that I think you know disabled folks have a mental toughness about them. They've endured an experience unlike others. I think any one who's kind of been fighting a bit of an inclusion fight, if you will, that that's usually an outcome that I see so this mental toughness, this willingness to persevere. But I think for me if I think of the number one -- I think thing I bring to my employer is I am, relentlessly focussed on inclusion. So I think most companies would welcome that. Most companies would welcome you know having different voices at the table. Collaboration to get to better outcomes. You know non-siloed work so my team would probably tell me to their detriment I focus on inclusion but it is the verb right. Diversity is the noun and those numbers. Inclusion is the work that we have to do and need to do this bring all those voices to the table.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you Scott. And Nick, I noticed your hand up as well.

NICHOLAS: I would like to add to that you know. Disability in this society there's TAB, temporary abled bodied, and the people with disability. So you know in my work environment, I always mention this. Each person with a physical disability would always think outside the box because we need to live the normal life of TAB people but in a different way. We need to find our own solution constantly every day to the small task that we need to have you know every day.

Like you know opening for example a bottle of waterer with one hand, or you know, commuting or any small task, we always need to find a solution and it should be fast solution because we are in this circumstances. So that being said, if we bring work environment to the organization and businesses, it has tonnes of value. All it needs to be -- all need to create is an environment and safe environment for people with disability to express you know, to share their experience, and knowledge, and it's always a 2 way of solutions. It's about education from the person with the disability themselves, and you know the other people on the side, it could be the team, the manager, or any organization.

So it's a two way of communication and there is a lot of value. One actual example is there was application for transit. The first version of it it was just you know, meeting the requirement to go live and the customer experience was too low. When they launched the second version and the third version where they made the accessibility. It has very high customer experience not because it was accessible to people with disabilities but it is easier now more everyone else which means any product or service that considered to be accessible and to reach all the audience it will serve everyone.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you, thank you very much Nick. And Minister Qualtrough we have a question that's related to

this discussion right now from Slido. Do you have something you want to add before I move to that question.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: No let's move on. I kind of gave my spiel, so thank you.

MODERATOR RUBY: Fantastic. With regards to collaboration, and understanding and conversation, one question from Slido is what advice do you have for how employees and employers talk about accessibility needs during a job interview?

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Good question. And a tough one, and it is always a topic of conversation amongst people with disabilities, how comfortable you feel kind of disclosing, or kind of admitting to -- and I use that in quotes because it's sometimes how it feels. I say, be proud of who you are. An employer will respect a confident you know explanation of who you are and what you bring to the table.

But you don't owe anybody any excuses or any anything other than a clear demonstration of your ability. And what you do and why you think the way you think might end up be talking about the fact that you have a particular disability, but that's not why they're hiring you. They're hiring you because you bring certain skills which may have been informed by your lived experience but that's not always -- it's not who you are. It's part of your identity of course but talk about the skills. And talk about what you bring to the table and how what you've learned is transferrable to the job you're interviewing for. There's so much to talk about in terms of the transferrable skills that you're lived experience can bring to think job and just be unapologetically proud of who you are and that confidence will come through

MODERATOR RUBY: Fantastic. Thank you very much. And you raise a really good point and about that self awareness. And owning your experience, and having confidence in what you bring to the table.

I'd like to ask Serena and Nick and Scott to weigh in from the youth perspective Serena at the beginning of a career, at the beginning of a journey. It's great to have support and to be in an environment where you feel that your skills development and your leadership development can be supported. And so Serena from a youth perspective, in those job interviews, what would be good indicators or what would be important for you to see in an employer to feel that it's a safe environment?

SERENA: I think a lot of things can be done from the employers' perspective to make youth feel comfortable. Even in disclosing or not disclosing. I think that asking for access needs is a huge signifier to me that an employer cares about what I need to be successful within a job within a company, within whatever initiative I'm working on. Honestly.

And even just bringing up access needs or is there anything I can do to make you feel for comfortable and more casual language is powerful. I know I've mentioned this to Ruby before but I've had jobs where I have a he left off my disability experience because I didn't feel comfortable

disclosing that, and having the opportunity to show that as a strength, just from something as simple as asking if someone needs closed captioning or if someone needs notes for a meeting, it can really make a world of difference in showing up as our true selves as youth with disabilities.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you, Serena. And Scott and Nick either from your personal experience or workplaces are there any other examples you would suggest to be able to show an openness to greater inclusion and accessibility?

SCOTT: I'll jump in. Yeah, I'll jump many in. I think there's lots of things we can do. I would agree with the minister that you know from a potential employee perspective, you know the disability is a bonus right. Because I think you are bringing you know, a whole host of other skills and a lived experience you know some of these amazing attributes that a disabled person brings to the table. So I say the best you can.

I mean, share your story but share specifically how that story is manifest into skill sets that that employer is looking for. I think from an employer perspective, you know asking those good questions around you know, accommodations or needs is great but I think you know, most organizations, as they begin to bake you know diversity and inclusion where their values or their mission statement. I think being open and talking about that is really important. Or also giving examples of how they are living their values of diversity and inclusion.

And again, from a potential employee perspective asking those questions. Can you tell me sort of a situation you know, potential employer where you've lived up to your values of diversity and inclusion? So I think it is a better dialogue and we are at a very -- we are in a great point in time where you know across multiple spectrums we are proud to talk about our differences or becoming more proud to talk about our differentials so I think that goes for disabled folks as well.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you, Scott. Nick did you have a comment as well in.

NICHOLAS: Yes, I want to to comment. Yes we have multiple organizations they have accessible environment. When I say accessible it's like physically accessible environment but what's important is to have a change in the mind set right. So where we have manager colleagues stakeholder even, any company or -- they are open to see people with disability you know, working and producing and give them equal opportunity like everyone else. So I think that is where it's important from a person with a disability because in the open remark I believe it has been mentioned that you know we have a lot of skilled people with disabilities. But they are stuck in the you know. The low skilled jobs.

So it's very important to have accessible environment in terms of physical, and the mind set of organization  
 MODERATOR RUBY: That's a great point Nick thank you. And minister, I'd like to ask you shift a little bit that

conversation to accommodations. And using technology as an example, we saw the power of technology through the pandemic. And I think we're seeing a lot more clearly the possibility for more inclusive and accessible workplace because of technology.

Would you care to speak a little bit more about the accommodations that -- and technology and those kind of conversations with employees

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Yeah, in fact, I'd challenge the premise of that question even because what I think we need to -- employers know what they want is to get the most productivity out of of each and every single worker or employee and to do that they need to know in what environment this particular individual works best. And so I think if we had a more inclusive intake process and inclusive interview process, that could dig in in without worrying about if in this is a special accommodation that somebody needs. How best do you work? Is do you into he had to stand up? Do you like low light or highlight? How am I going to bring the most productivity out of you to the benefit of my workplace and go from there.

I personally think and I say this as a human rights lawyer, which I was before I went into politics, that we've leaned heavily on the duty to accommodate. We say we are going to design or building is or do something that we know it doesn't include. But we understand that legally we have an obligation to fix that at some point watch we need to back that up and at that you can about a need to be inclusive by design. Inclusive from are the start so we don't wait until somebody is excluded or discriminated against before we accommodate or adapt the work environment. I also have moved my own language to adaptation like they do in the U.K. and Australia. Where the thing that we're changing or fixes is the environment. We're not accommodate ago person or what may or may not be their strength or weakness.

We are focussing on the environment and adapting it to the benefit of whoever is in that particular role because I -- as myself interest as an employer to get the most productivity out of of every single employee

MODERATOR RUBY: That's a great point. Thank you so much minister.

And there's a question in Slido that I think is really relevant to this. A lot of times we don't know what we don't know. But one individual asked how do companies tailor accessibility needs of their employees without disclosure of disabilities from the employees? How does that conversation even begin? Minister, did you want to follow up

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Yeah. The conversation that I just talked about having. It's not about whether somebody has a particular access need or a particular accommodation require. It's about approaching your work force inclusively. What's the best environment for you to work to be happy. To be productive as an employee. What can I do to you know -- and that's what we've seen during COVID is we've gone employee to employee and said how can I help?

What do you need? What is going to make you more productive? What do you need an extra hour in the morning or in the afternoon much it's been fantastic the way employers have been individualizing the he are environmental. S it's how we best create a welcoming and productive work force within our employer. You know if I don't think -- for me as somebody who can't see very well. My ability to do the job is completely unrelated to how I'm going to do the job. Okay, to do the job well I'm going to need a large screen and enlarging software and maybe lower light but that has nothing to do with -- how I do the job has nothing to do with my ability to do the job. And I think it's understanding for every single worker how they can best do their job and in what environment works for them and taking out the notion of we'll figure this out down the road. Prove to us that you can work for us. No that's not how to works.

MODERATOR RUBY: Great point. Thank you, minister. I notice another question in Slido related to this. And I'd like to ask Scott from from the perspective of a large organization and then also Nick from the perspective of a small to medium-sized business what are the high level steps that a company should be taking to promote accessibility, and I think an important question too does this need to be a separate role, or department? Scott could we start with you.

SCOTT: Yeah. It's a great question. And I'll just sort of I think lean into the minister's comments. I think the high level steps that we need to be doing are things like this. And it's really about asking questions, and active listening. So I think we have to look had and what we are doing is looking at the whole sort of continuum of how we recruit. How we hire. How we on board. How we sort of retain employees. And we need -- we have to have those discussions. Those accommodations, those adapt ability discussions along the route because we also know that you know, not all disabilities happen at birth. They're not all these employees I arrive to RBC with their disability. They arise through injury and over time so those conversations need to be fluid and consistent and absolutely you need to dedicate resources, I would argue in any company around these types of discussions.

And the action behind them you know. It's one thing to actively ask and listen but there's so what matters behind the scenes. I would add too Ruby. I mean accessibility we sometimes get caught up in the physical accessibility and more meaning more the traditional thinking around that but you know, you think of a pandemic times here, you know accessibility might be accessibility to an on-line mental health provider. Or a resource, or you know, a colleague so accessibility comes in all forms and I think we've seen, those forms accelerator be needed in different ways through the pandemic.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful, thank you. And Nick?

NICOLAS: Yes. Thank you. So, yeah, I used to work in a

very large organization, and I used to always you know, be vocal about accessibility and how we promote it. One of the things I did is that you know, I asked few of the people just to try to do one of the tasks pretending that they have one or a different sort of disability, and the outcome was very interesting.

Then I decided to you know start my own company to promote more you know the accessibility and the disability aspect of it. So one of the main things we focussed now first we offer discount if someone has a physical disability. One, 2 we hire more people with physical disability because that is the core of you know, my values. In this, and the third one we try to have you know we have different organization like Neil Squire and other organization that is they support the physical environment to be accessible enough and with the technology today to have people working, and being productive and showing skills and the ability.

So we are doing those 3 things. And we going to continue to do any promotion or you know, awareness about the disability and accessibility at the same time.

MODERATOR RUBY: Great. Thanks Nick. That's a great point about showing skills and ability. And I see in in Slido there's a question as the economy reopens. What are some barriers people with disabilities face that organizations should be mindful of? Minister could.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: I don't always jump in because I love these conversations but listen. I mean before the pandemic people with disabilities were the most precariously employed they were the most we were the most unemployed and highest levels of unemployment for working-age Canadians. Those jobs are going to be the last that come back post pandemic because of the nature of the type of work that was being done.

And the barriers that the pandemic has added on top of all of this include things like the physical distancing requirements that for some people with disabilities especially sight impairments, for example, has been really a struggle with. For deaf Canadian it's people who wear masks. For people with companion dogs who were trained to be afraid of people with masks it's been really hard to adapt their companion animals to that. So I think that there are -- there's risks here in terms of the first people you hire back. Not perpetuating the hierarchy of who's hired back first. Really challenging that. I think there's the worry that comes along with the uncertainty of COVID in terms of I don't know if I can handle hiring this person and their needs, which is this this idea I don't actually understand -- but it just all feels burdensome so I think we have to be very intentional, and if, if you want to succeed, you know, there's an untapped labor pool of innovative people that we've just talked about like go for it. Take what you might think is a risk but it's really not. It's calculated decision to include that will pay off and benefit your bottom line.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you a, minister. The idea of intention is so partner and having conversations and environments where dialogue can happen is so important for that.

For Serena, Scott or Nick any other thoughts about

some barriers in the reopening and recovery that employers should be mindful of?

SCOTT: I mean I would just add I mean I think the minister has covered it well. Of course, there's some tangible real barriers that have resulted from the pandemic, and I'm sure there will be ones we haven't thought about at reemerge. I would suggest you know if you flip the question around it's more about what do employers have to gain. And I think the one -- the notion of setting a tone early as you're hiring back talent or hiring -- or staffing up you know. If you're looking to gain that verb of inclusion. If you're looking to send a clearer message within your organization or company that you're living diversity and inclusion it would be to look at this labor force. Look at these superheroes to some extent that could propel your business forward. So, so hopefully for most it's more about the opportunity versus the barriers that they might be facing.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you. Nick and Serena was there -- Nick go ahead.

NICHOLAS: Yes. I -- you know after more than one year at being physically disconnected as a person with a physical disability I think different disability have different cases, and circumstances.

I would recommend -- this is with we are doing now to touch base with the personal physical disability individual, and understand their new needs if there is any right, and explain what is the new physical environment now in the office. So to try to accommodate any you know, facilities or any new accommodation we need to do

MODERATOR RUBY: Great thank you, Nick. I see in Slido that there's question. It says to shift the burden off individuals with disabilities, how can fellow employees advocate for people with differing abilities, and I think that speaks to that shared experience and that shared work environment that everyone is participating in. I think it speaks minister to your comment about intention. There's organizational intention and there is there can be individual intention. Serena, I'm going to though that and ask you what are your thoughts about how colleagues can support each other.

SERENA: I think it's really great question and something we try to focus on as youth within disability and diversity alliances. How can we create allies that are able bodied, that can help take some of that burden off of us, and I think one really important concept is universal design. Creating an environment where it's accessible to all, and you don't -- like it's been mentioned so many times before you don't have to adapt to one specific person's accessibility needs because the environment is already accessible because all of the accommodations are already existing. And you already have this environment that is inclusive, and that promotes diversity because it allows for folks who are disabled to participate to their fullest extent.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful. Thank you. Scott?

SCOTT: Yeah.

MODERATOR RUBY: How might we support employees in their dynamic with each other.

SCOTT: One thing we do at RBC and other companies do it too we have something called the employee resource groups and really, these are groups of like-minded folks, so for example we have an employee resource group called reach which is focussed on enabling supporting, creating dialogue, around folks with disabilities. You don't have to be disabled to join the group. But it's a group of colleagues from across Canada, and essentially across B.C. that get together, and talk about like-minded things. How do we push this agenda forward. How do we influence the organization? So you would have a group you know supporting those with disabilities, you'd have you know our Mosaic group. People of color or the... community.

You'd have one dedicated towards youth. You know sort of those GEN Z folks so it's creating the stewardship. This ability to have dialogue and this is all done, outside of work time.

This is on the side of your desk but we've just seen the power of this conversation. The power of allyship. The power of kind of trying to hone in on one or two things to help influence the organization. Has been powerful and these having around decade plus. And we rely on these groups of employees to help set the stage for things like accessibility, things like we are talking about today.

MODERATOR RUBY: Great. Thank you. And I see we have an active Slido. That's great to see too because there's engagement in if the conversation today. And one that I see is the question about how can we balance ringing out productivity from employees with not creating new disabilities through prolonged work stress and again we've all through this pandemic gone through change, and a lot of intense change in different ways and varying ways. How do we find that gray area and that balance? Minister would you take this one on.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Yeah. I think and listen the I think that was my term and I was going a bit cheeky but I was trying to emphasize the needs to understand the business kales of being inclusive in the way you hire and retain and promote employees. We we understand to stand boundaries and the right to disconnect we've learned in the pandemic is not necessarily an apparent right all workers have and we have to challenge that. We have ooh see the long game here. The long game is we want a healthy productive work force and we can't put stress in the short term for what may be perceived and obviously in accurately at short-term gain. We have to understand the long-term interest of any particular company or workplace is low turn over or no turn over. Or really understanding that we want our people flourish when the company is happy and contributing meaningfully to the company and that's the big win.

MODERATOR RUBY: Right, multiple perspectives. I'm mindful of the time and want to make sure we can conclude this conversation, which could go on for hours more, and days more, but I'd like to ask each of our panel members in light of this being the kick-off for national AccessAbility Week, a nutrition the interests of our participants today and the members for the greater Vancouver board of trade. Do each of you -- would each of you share a suggestion for one actionable thing that an employer can do to help create a more inclusive and accessible workplace? Nick I'm going to start with you.

NICHOLAS: Well, you know, what we are actually doing now. We are seeking to hire more people with disabilities one. And you know, and asking our team members like the employees we have to share their story of the need or they have a friend with a physical disability what they did during this last year with them. Did they see them? Did they you know go out for dinner or whatever? So this is internal things that we are doing to promote more disability.

Also we have a promotion of on top of the discounts that we have you know for people with disabilities, this this week we going to have a discount for everyone for our regular customers to know that this is an accessible week discount.

MODERATOR RUBY: Wonderful thank you. And Serena your thoughts.

SERENA: I think that one actionable item that employers can take away is finding vulnerability -- finding strength through vulnerability and being proactive in promoting that vulnerability. I think it will be interesting when we move back to more in person work when you see someone in the shoulders up you can't realize if they are disabled or not, and trying to determine if your workplace, if your vision. The culture within one's workplace is accessible for people with disabilities. Youth with disability, and how you can be proactive. Do you need to learn more about accessibility needs? Do you need to learn about universal design or how to promote disclosure if that's something that you want people to do?

He think it's important to be proactive, and promote vulnerability within a workplace.

MODERATOR RUBY: That's great thanks. Strength and vulnerability. Scott how about your thoughts.

SCOTT: Yeah, I'm going to sneak 2 quick ones in. One I hope that stays is starting every conversation whether you're disabled or not with how are you doing? How are things going? What can I do to help? At least in corporate culture that's opened up a new window for us to have those accessibility type need across multiple facets. The other onen and I think Serena just said it. Storytelling. It's so powerful. Getting people to share stories. Big, small doesn't matter but being vulnerable. Being transparent. Being open. It's what will accelerate

what we are talking about today.

MODERATOR RUBY: Thank you Scott. Minister Qualtrough, your thoughts.

MINISTER QUALTROUGH: Thank you. I'll be super quick because we are short for time, but I would say a really actionable item employers can do leaving this conversation is check the unconscious bias that exists within your organization and if you have a separate diversity initiative or policy or committee that doesn't include disability, then you are not promoting diversity. So don't think of accessibility as covering whatever people with disabilities need. Really that's the barrier removal part. You know to Scott's point earlier diversity is the who. Who is reflected in your work force? And inclusion is the how. It's the verb. It's the hard work but many, many companies have these robust diversity plans and actions and for some reason do not include people with disabilities in their diversity conversations and we have to, or we're not being diverse.

MODERATOR RUBY: Great reminder. Thank you very much. And thank you to all the panel members for your time, your energy. And your insights. Back to you Bridgitte.

BRIDGITTE: Well thank you so much Ruby and thank you to Serena Nicolas Minister Qualtrough. Scott, Ruby and Amanda who is our sign language interpreter today. It was a fabulous conversation. And you know another take away is one I've learned through many of the conversations of the diversity and inclusion leadership council or the DLC since we established this group over a year ago. And one is about intention and impact so noting the conversation around inclusive by design is so important because that is impactful and it is meaningful change. So thank you. For a great conversation, and a special thank you to all of our sponsors again for making today's event possible.

If you're looking ahead on your calendar, true allyship involves candid conversations, accepting our imperfections -- curiosity and learning to take action. July 6 the diversity and inclusion leadership council is hosting a discussion on embracing difficult conversations. The event will provide tips and strategies how to advance equity diversity and inclusion. To register go to [boardoftrade.com/conversations2021](https://boardoftrade.com/conversations2021). And thank you to all of you for being part of today's virtual event I we look forward to connecting again soon. Have a great day.