

Research Report

Disabilities in the Workplace

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Dear Friends,

I'm proud to present the results of our new Working Mother Research Institute study, *Disabilities in the Workplace: The Working Mother Report*.

Nineteen percent of Americans have disabilities, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. While some disabilities are obvious, others are hidden—and many workers tell us that they try their best to keep their disabilities hidden for fear that misperceptions and stigma will keep them from getting a job or will limit their options once they are hired.

To find out what truly holds working people with disabilities back and where clear opportunity for improvement lies, we surveyed 1,882 employees in the United States, 1,368 of whom identify themselves as having a disability. We asked about the recruiting process they experienced; whether, how and why they requested an accommodation and what happened next; and how satisfied they are with their current employer and their opportunities to advance.

I want to thank our survey sponsor PwC for supporting this important study.

We invite you to study and share this Working Mother Research Institute report for vital insights into the current status of American employees with disabilities. Please visit workingmother.com/wmri to download this and all of the Working Mother Research Institute's important studies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Owens".

Jennifer Owens
Director
Working Mother Research Institute

Disabilities in the Workplace

The Working Mother Report

Whether it's difficulty seeing or hearing, a struggle with chronic anxiety or depression, limitations in learning, or difficulty with social behavior, disability is part of millions of Americans' lives. It crosses all age, income, religious, ethnic, racial and cultural lines. Little wonder, then, that the number of people with disabilities has surpassed the Hispanic population to make them the largest minority in this country, according to Nadine Vogel, CEO of Springboard Consulting LLC, which specializes in corporate disability training and inclusion. Today, one-in-five people will experience some form of disability in their lifetime, according to Rebecca Cokley, executive director of the Washington, DC-based National Council on Disability.

Not only are people with disabilities the biggest minority in the country, they're also the fastest growing, according to Vogel. Why? A few answers can be found in our nation's changing demographics: Older adults are working and living longer, developing disabilities as they age. Young adults are struggling in increasing numbers with autism spectrum disorders, ADHD and anxiety/depression. (Today, 11 percent of entering college freshmen report having a disability, an estimate that is considered

low because it's based on self-awareness and voluntary disclosure, Vogel says.) Also a factor: Military personnel are surviving injuries that decades ago would have been fatal, returning home from combat with physical and psychological scars.

Considering the sheer number of disorders that can affect humans—genetic conditions, injuries and accidents, disease, mental illness—it doesn't seem so odd that so many of us cope with disabilities. What is troubling, however, is how rarely it is discussed or addressed, especially in the workplace.

Today, eight-in-ten people with disabilities do not have jobs, despite their efforts and desire to work. "That's not only an historic injustice, it's a huge waste of talent," says Carol Glazer, president of the National Organization on Disability (NOD), a New York-based nonprofit that helps corporations meet high standards in disability hiring and inclusion, and which served as a knowledge partner on this survey project.

How can employers do better? Federal regulations that went into effect in 2014 to set a target for government contractors to have people with disabilities represent at least 7 percent of their workforces have prompted new visibility of this issue. But inclusion must go

beyond legislative compliance—and beyond being seen as the moral right that it is. Glazer, for one, says recruiting and retaining people with disabilities should be seen as a competitive advantage as well as a committed goal of traditional corporate diversity efforts.

Jennifer Allyn, diversity strategy leader for the global professional services firm PwC, which sponsored this report, notes that people with disabilities are an "important community for businesses like PwC to connect with in order to attract, retain and develop talented professionals. Research is critical for employers to better understand the needs of this demographic group."

For while studies show that diversity benefits a company's agility, innovation and bottom line, attention to disability inclusion has lagged. "Disability inclusion at work is at an early stage in its evolution, and companies need help—just as they did in the early days of affirmative action for women and racial and ethnic minorities," says Glazer. To further this conversation and focus the next steps for employers, the Working Mother Research Institute (WMRI) surveyed more than 1,300 people with disabilities who have or are looking for jobs to investigate how disability affects workplace experiences, employee engagement and

overall career satisfaction. In this research, we reveal what's working and not working in terms of getting people with disabilities hired, accommodated (if necessary), developed and promoted—and what work remains to be done.

Further, we explore the differences between having a visible disability (for instance, walking with a cane) and having a non-visible disability (chronic joint pain). Our results find that respondents who have a disability that cannot be seen have a less positive experience in the workplace than those with a visible disability. We also find the burden is heavier for women with disabilities, who also grapple at the same time with traditional gender bias in the workplace. Indeed, female respondents with disabilities who requested accommodations at work that were not approved were twice as likely as men to say it was because their employer did not think the accommodations were necessary.

Ultimately, employers committed to hiring and developing people with disabilities need to create a culture of investigation and collaboration, says David Michael Mank, PhD, director emeritus of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and a professor at Indiana University. That means focusing not on what someone *can't* do but what they *can* do, he says. Every human (with or without a disability) is a patchwork of aptitudes and limitations. "We all have jobs where we'd thrive, and roles where we'd be ill-fit," says Mank. "This dialogue is ongoing for most of us as our career progresses, but people with disabilities are less often invited into these conversations."

Which is a loss, says Vogel. "People with disabilities are innovators. They have to be. When they can't do something the way everyone else does, they have to figure out another option."

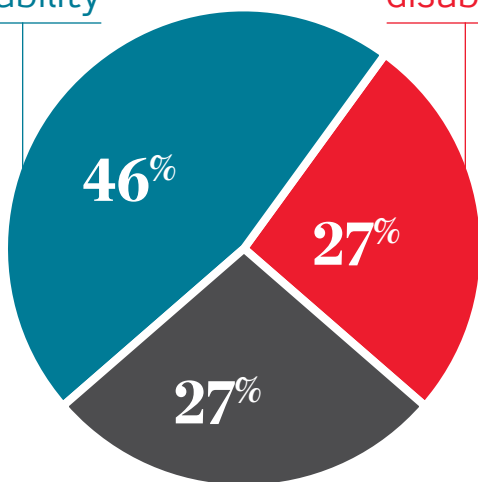
About Our Survey

We surveyed 1,882 employed people (51% men and 49% women), 1,368 who had a disability and 514 who did not. More than three-quarters of participants work full-time and were hired at their current job with the disability they have now. Vision problems were the most common form of visible disability, affecting a quarter of respondents. Other common disabilities included back and spine impairments, hearing loss, diabetes and cognitive impairments.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Non-visible disability

Visible disability



No disability

Average age is **39 years**

61% are married or partnered

55% have children under 18 at home

88% are employed full-time

10% are employed part-time

Have been with their current employer for an average of **5.5 years**

80% of those who are disabled developed their disability before taking their current job

52% have a bachelor's degree

32% have a graduate degree

Average individual income is **\$63,000**

Visible Disabilities: Getting Hired

If your disability is visually obvious, chances are high that you're "out" about it too. In our survey, 86 percent of people with visible disabilities say they have discussed their condition with their employer. Indeed, says the National Council on Disability's Rebecca Cokley, who is a little person, people with visible disabilities tend to have no choice: They have to face down the stereotypes that linger in our culture.

"There's a general assumption that disability means inability," says David Michael Mank, of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. "The unconscious assumption is that because one thing is difficult or impossible for someone, then lots of other things must be as well."

Today, for most people who have a visible disability, "the big challenge is getting hired," says attorney Robyn Powell, who has a genetic condition that means she is in a wheelchair, with no use of her legs and limited use of her arms. Before she became a lawyer, Powell struggled to find work as a social worker. She remembers how hiring managers treated her differently when they had only read her resume (honors degree, internships) than when she arrived for the interview in her wheelchair.

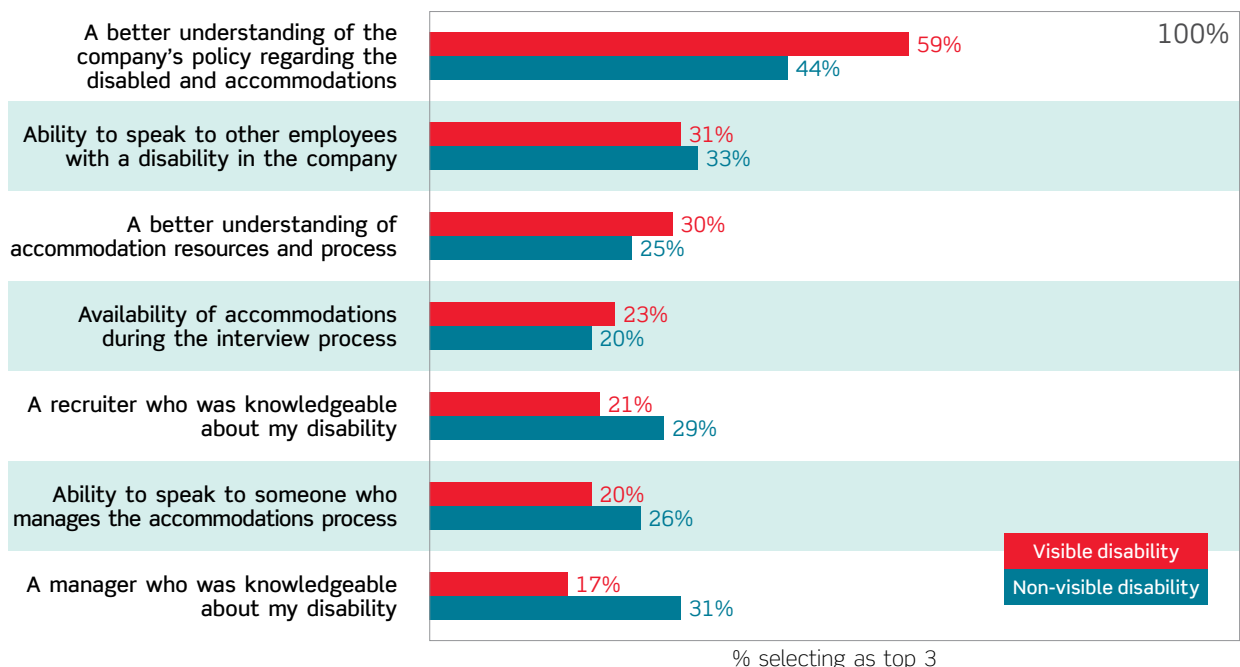
The people with visible disabilities who took our survey had already overcome this barrier by finding a job (all respondents were employed or looking for work). Within this specific group, most respondents say the hiring

process went well, with 89 percent noting that the initial job recruiter discussed their disability respectfully with them. More than three-quarters also say the hiring manager they dealt with was briefed in advance about their disability, that the company was knowledgeable about how to accommodate them during the interview process, and that supports were in place when they started their job. Overall, say 85 percent of respondents, "my transition to the workplace went smoothly."

In its 2016 Disability Employment Tracker, a free online survey that helps companies confidentially assess their hiring practices for people with disabilities, the National Organization on Disability found that three-quarters of

WHAT WOULD MOST IMPROVE THE RECRUITING PROCESS?

Survey respondents who disclosed a disability to their employer when applying for a job say a better understanding of the company's disability policies would have improved the recruitment process most.



the companies assessed featured employees with visible disabilities in recruiting materials. That number has risen quickly—it was just half in 2013. NOD also noted that the percentage of recruiters trained on disability employment issues ticked up 21 percentage points between 2013 and 2016. An improvement, for sure, but there’s still room to do better: When WMRI asked survey respondents what they thought would further improve the hiring process, more than half of all people with a visible disability surveyed (59 percent) said they wish they had received a better understanding of the company’s policies regarding accommodations (See “What Would Most Improve the Recruiting Process?” on page 6).

Disability and the Law

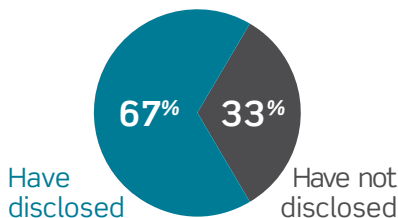
“When you talk about social stigma and disability, you have to start with the fact that for decades it was codified into law,” says Rebecca Cokley, executive director of the Washington, DC-based National Council on Disability. Until the mid-1970s, many states had so-called “ugly laws,” which stated that if you were “unsightly”—had a disfiguring scar, a crippled gait or a genetic condition such as achondroplasia (dwarfism) like Cokley does—it was illegal to be out in public.

Today, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it’s illegal to ask about disability in a job interview. Employees with disabilities are protected on the job so long as they are qualified and can perform the essential tasks of a position with “reasonable accommodation.” Accommodations can include flexible schedules, special equipment, interpreters and other assistance.

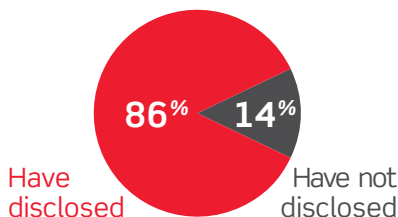
Despite these protections, disability advocates say laws need to go further to protect people with disabilities. In 37 states, according to Cokley, parents with disabilities can lose custody of their children on the basis of disability alone, not because of abuse or neglect. Disability advocates are also working to repeal the subminimum-wage law, a stigmatizing regulation that allows people with disabilities to be paid less than the federal minimum wage, according to David Michael Mank, director emeritus of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

DISCLOSING DISABILITIES TO EMPLOYERS

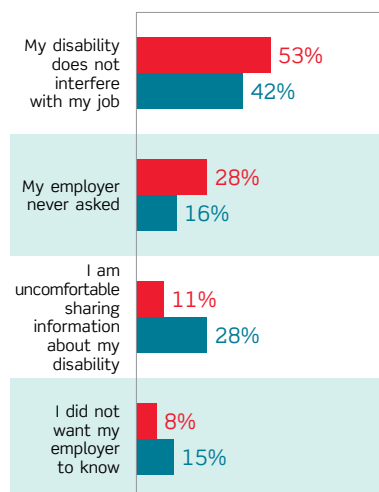
Employees with non-visible disabilities



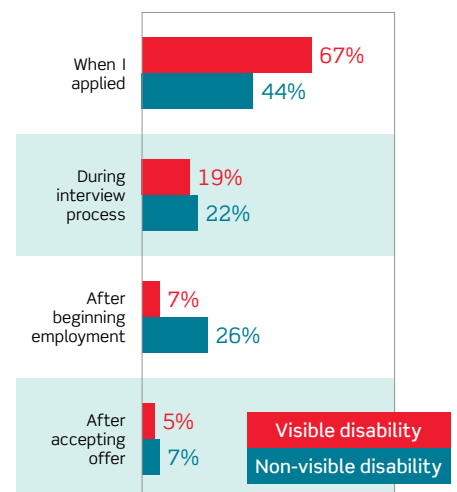
Employees with visible disabilities



Among respondents who have not disclosed disabilities to employers, here are their reasons:



Among respondents who have disclosed disabilities to their employers, most did so when they applied for their current jobs.



Men are more likely to have disclosed (80% did so) than women (68%).

People with cognitive and mental impairments are least likely to disclose their disability to employers.

Visible Disabilities: On the Job

In our survey, people with visible disabilities seem overall to be faring well on the job. More than three-quarters of people with visible disabilities say their work is rewarding, collaborative and well-suited to their talents, while three-quarters say they are excited to go to work every day. When we asked how helpful 15 types of workplace supports are—everything from skill development to getting a mentor—we saw only tiny gaps between the help people wanted and what they actually received. (In fact, compared to people without any

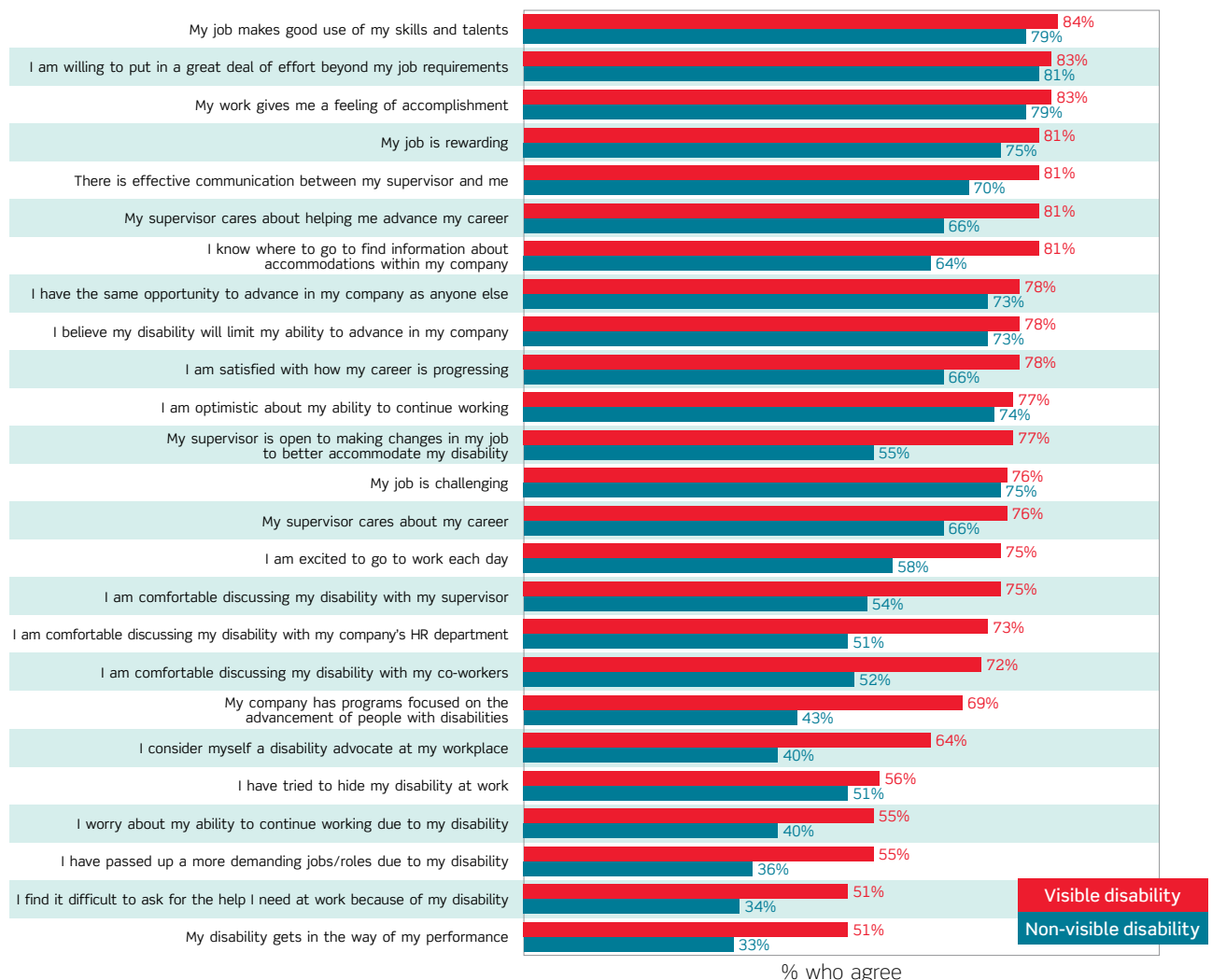
disabilities, people with visible disabilities in our survey say they are more satisfied at work.)

But there's a less positive thread worth noting: Slightly more than half of all people with visible disabilities surveyed (56 percent) say they've tried to hide their disability at work. Twelve percent of people with visible disabilities have not requested an accommodation—either because they do not want to attract attention to their disability, aren't comfortable discussing it or don't think their company would

approve the request. (It's worth noting, at least in our survey, that these fears may be more perception than reality: When people with disabilities have asked for help, the vast majority—95 percent—had some or all of what they requested approved.) Three-quarters (76 percent) of people with visible disabilities are optimistic about their careers, but 17 percent feel that stereotypes have hindered their prospects, and more than half (58 percent) say they feel excluded from their company's informal networks.

DISABILITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Whether employees' disabilities are visible or not can dramatically affect how they feel about their careers, managers and employers.



Visible Disabilities: Advancement

In our survey, fewer than 20 percent of respondents with visible disabilities say they're satisfied at their current level; nearly half of those respondents (47 percent) say they want to progress at least to mid-level manager in their careers. Notably, these same respondents are significantly more likely to have a career plan (69 percent) versus those without a disability (42 percent). Having a mentor (which 56 percent of people with visible disabilities say they do) helps drive overall satisfaction and

engagement at work. Respondents (including those with both visible and non-visible disabilities) who have mentors are 22 percentage points more likely to say they are satisfied with their career progress than respondents without mentors.

However, respondents with visible disabilities express reservations about their potential for advancement. For example, slightly more than half of them (55 percent) worry about their ability to continue working, while an

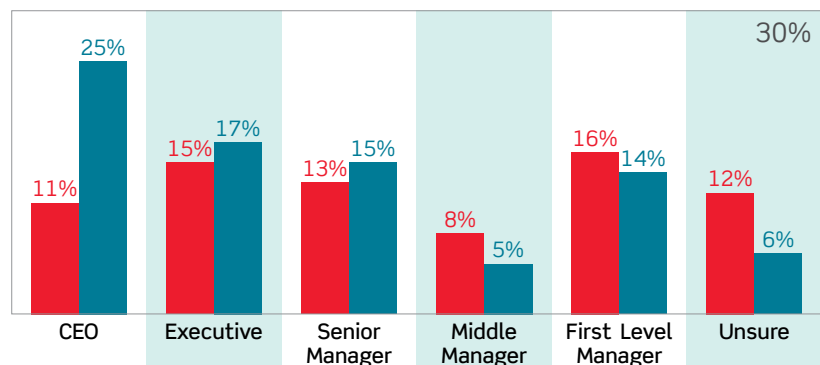
equal percentage say they have passed up more demanding roles because of their disability. The dichotomy in this data (optimism and ambition on one hand, caution about the future on the other) may reflect the difficult reality of life with certain disabilities, such as progressive diseases.

Half of all people with visible disabilities say they have regular trouble managing the demands of work and personal life, while only 20 percent say that they rarely or never have a problem.

AMBITION AND DISABILITY

What is the highest level you wish to advance to in your company?

Visible disability
Non-visible disability



MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Employees with disabilities who have a mentor are significantly happier at work than those without.



Accommodations

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers must provide “reasonable accommodations” so workers with disabilities can perform the essential tasks of their jobs. On this front, our survey shows positive news: About three-quarters of the people with disabilities we surveyed sought an accommodation. Of these, the vast majority (95 percent) say they had some or all of what they requested approved. Indeed, 72 percent received everything they’d asked for.

Of the 22 percent who did not ask for accommodation, roughly half say they didn’t ask because they didn’t need anything. But for those who needed an accommodation but did not ask, the most common reasons include not wanting to draw attention to their limitations (22 percent) and not feeling comfortable discussing it with their employer (9 percent).

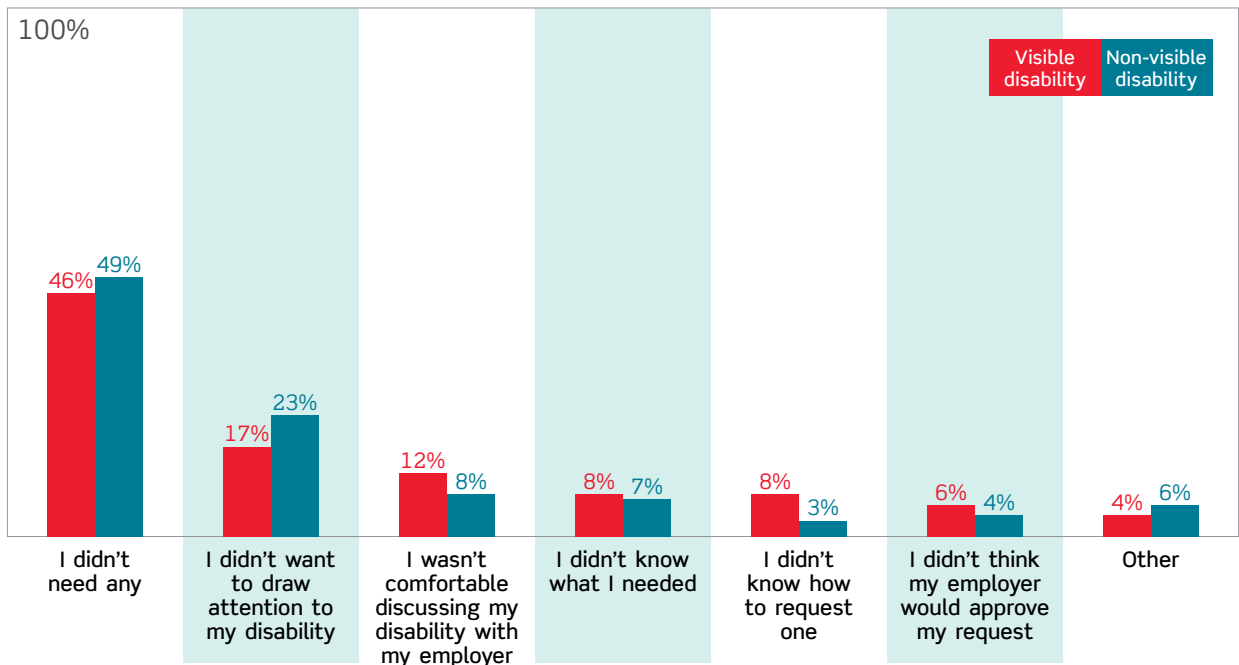
People with visible disabilities say they are most commonly denied accommodations for financial reasons. That’s no surprise to Nadine Vogel, CEO

of Springboard Consulting LLC, who notes a widespread and faulty perception among employers that accommodations are expensive and difficult to execute. In fact, she says, studies show the average cost is less than \$500 per person.

To that end, companies should view accommodation requests as opportunities to learn, says David Michael Mank, director emeritus of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and a professor at Indiana University. He argues that accommodations can often have universal benefit, citing an example of a manufacturing plant where people were building circuit boards for computers. One person with a disability needed a modified pair of pliers, so the company brought in a spring-loaded pair. “Within a week, every person was using them,” he recalls. “It was a much easier, efficient motion for everyone. It’s a perfect example of universal design, which means designed in a way that everyone can use it and everyone benefits.”

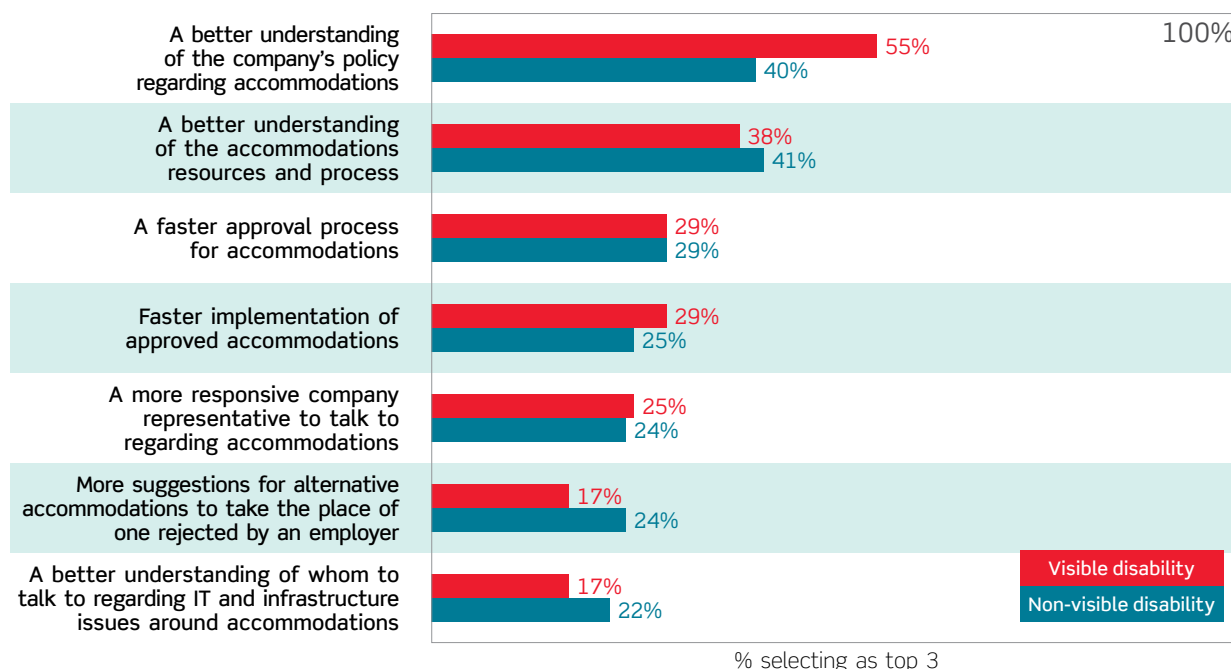
WHY DIDN'T YOU REQUEST AN ACCOMMODATION?

While half who did not request an accommodation say it is because they don’t need one, almost a quarter of respondents with non-visible disabilities say it is because they don’t want to draw attention to their disability.



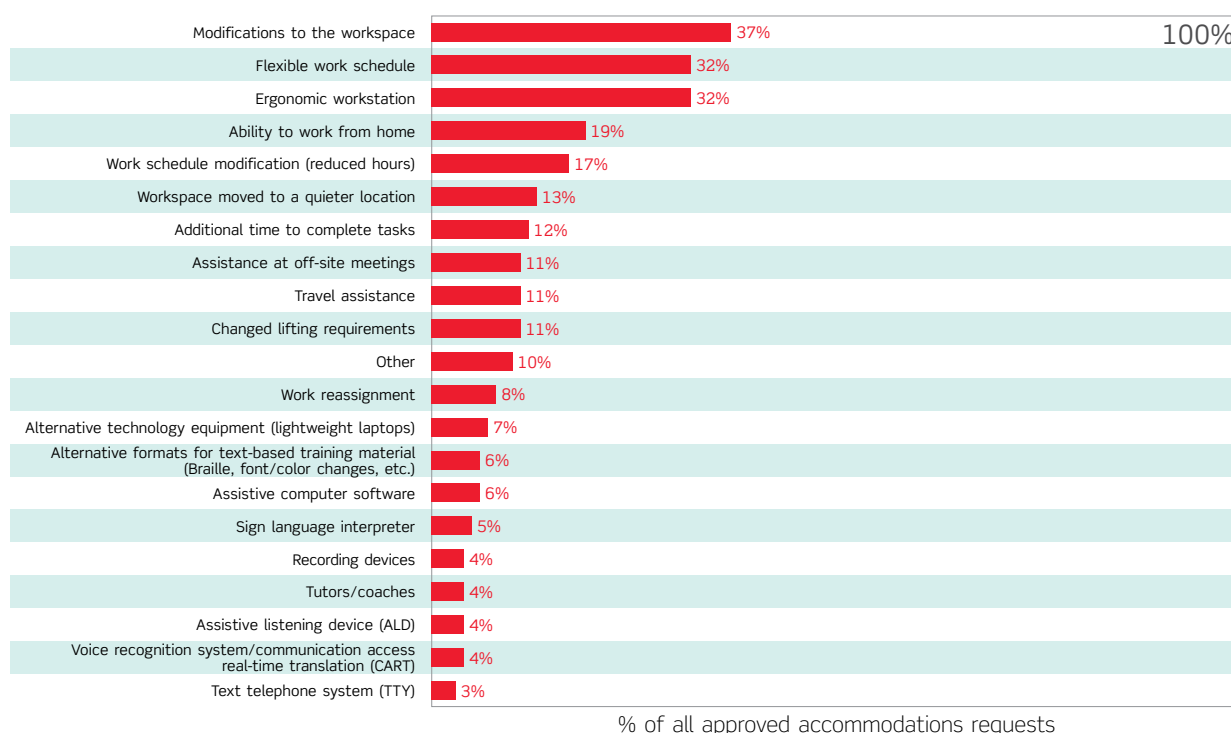
WHAT WOULD HAVE MADE REQUESTING AN ACCOMMODATION EASIER?

A better understanding of accommodation resources and processes, as well as of company accommodation policies, tops the list of what employees with disabilities wish for.



MOST COMMON ACCOMMODATIONS

Employees with disabilities request and receive workspace modifications and flex schedules more often than any other accommodations.



Non-visible Disabilities: Hidden and Hurting?

Throughout our survey, it seems employers are less responsive when the disability is one they can't see. (In our survey, the most common non-visible disabilities were post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], cognitive impairments, back and spine impairments, and difficulties with hearing and vision.) The insidious tendency with non-visible disabilities, says Vogel, is to think, "If we can't see it, it's not real."

In fact, we see signs that, from the first moment of the recruitment process, non-visible disabilities are not handled as skillfully as visible ones. For instance, our survey finds a gap of

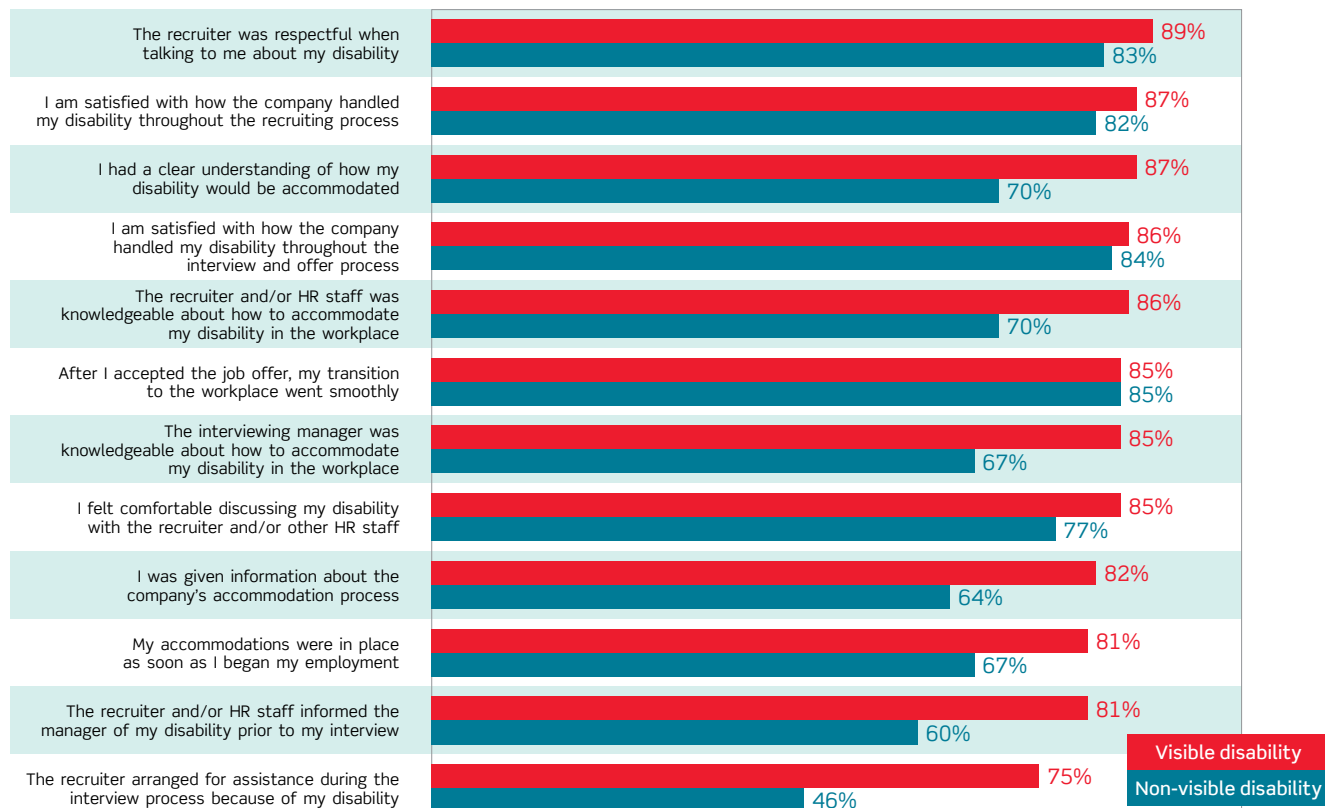
roughly 20 percentage points between people with visible and non-visible disabilities when it comes to informing a hiring manager about the candidate's disability prior to a job interview, the candidate receiving assistance during an interview, and the candidate being given information about company accommodation policies.

Once hired, employees with a non-visible disability are more reluctant to disclose it than those with a visible disability. One-third of respondents with a non-visible disability choose not to tell their employer. Of those who do not disclose, nearly half (43 percent)

say they keep their disability a secret because they want to hide it and/or do not feel comfortable bringing it up to their employer. Large segments of people with cognitive impairments (41 percent) and mental illness (37 percent), areas where there are too often significant stigmas, also choose not to disclose. However, we also see hints that more women may want to disclose, but are waiting for cultural signals from their employer that it's safe to do so: In our survey, 22 percent of women say they opted to disclose their disability *after* beginning their job versus only 13 percent of men.

THE RECRUITING PROCESS

Hiring managers are more likely to discuss disability and accommodations proactively with employees who have visible disabilities versus non-visible ones.



% who agree (among people with disabilities who disclosed to employers when applying for their jobs or during the interview process)

Non-visible Disabilities: On the Job

Compared to respondents with visible disabilities, people with non-visible disabilities say they are less likely to have accommodations in place when they start their jobs—a 14-percentage-point difference versus people with visible disabilities—and are more likely to have their requests for accommodations rejected. In one signal of how gender bias intersects with disability, 31 percent of women with disabilities report that they have been told their accommodation was “not necessary,” versus only 18 percent of men. People with non-visible disabilities are most frequently turned down on requests for flexible work schedules, schedule modifications and workspace modifications.

“There is definitely additional stigma facing women with hidden

disabilities,” says the National Council on Disability’s Rebecca Cokley. “We have these longtime biases about so-called ‘women’s conditions’ as being not as valid.” (See: “Gender and Disability,” page 16.)

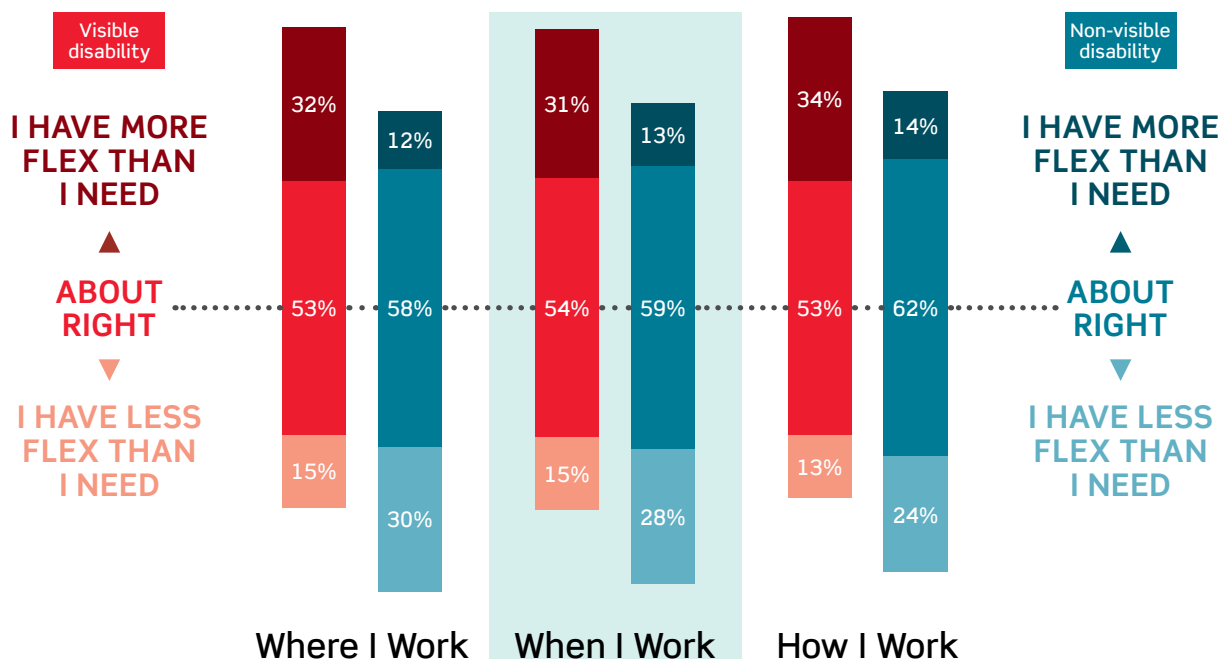
In our survey, people with non-visible disabilities expressed less happiness and ease in the workplace, posting an overall satisfaction index (measured across 13 indices) that lags behind people with visible disabilities by 13 percentage points overall. Broken out, for example, slightly more than half (58 percent) of all people with non-visible disabilities are excited to go to work every day, versus three-quarters of people with visible disabilities. People with non-visible disabilities are also less likely to be satisfied with how their career is progressing, less likely to

believe their supervisor cares about advancing them and less likely to believe job changes are possible to accommodate their disability. Though they are more likely to say they could be more productive at home, people with non-visible disabilities are far less likely than those with visible disabilities to be allowed to work from home. (Only half of all people with non-visible disabilities surveyed have that flexibility versus nearly three-quarters of people with visible disabilities.)

Yet lower satisfaction doesn’t mean lower ambition or commitment: In our survey, one-in-four people with non-visible disabilities say they aspire to be a CEO, while more than half (57 percent) want to progress to senior manager or above positions.

WHO HAS WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY?

People with non-visible disabilities are less likely to say they have as much flex as they need.



Non-visible Disabilities: Why Disclosure, Candor Matter

What's lost when employees with disabilities don't feel comfortable disclosing? Creativity, productivity and sometimes talent itself. Stacia Guzzo, who has a non-visible disability (see "Stacia's Non-visible Story," below), left a profession she loved and excelled at (teaching) because she was at an impasse—she felt too guilt-ridden to ask for help for her fibromyalgia and, further, believed she was the only one who needed accommodation. And yet doing her job as she'd always done it amid her body's "unpredictable schedule" was untenable, so she left and started her own company, Handcrafted HoneyBee, which makes educational kits for girls. Today she's open about her disability with her employees and her children, which has made an enormous difference.

But in hindsight, Stacia believes that had she been candid with her principal about the relatively simple accommodations she needed—such as scheduling her classes with a mid-day break, teaching multiple sections of a class to

reduce prep time, swapping out lunch and hall monitoring for seated tasks—it would have allowed her to continue teaching. A role model, someone at her school who also had a modified schedule or class load, also would have been helpful. (When a disability is non-visible, it can be harder to see who else faces the challenges you face, and easier to feel isolated.)

"We find anecdotally that disclosing a disability at work can free up a huge amount of 'emotional real estate.' Energy that had been directed to not disclosing can be redirected toward productivity and innovation at work," observes NOD's Glazer. "Being one's full self at work, by disclosing a disability at a disability-friendly employer, can increase productivity by increasing trust with co-workers, bosses and others, lessening the stress that can come with hiding a disability, and allowing the individual to freely access a needed accommodation."

The opportunity for employers is big when it comes to making non-visible

disabilities a greater part of the conversation at work: In our survey, only half (52 percent) of people with non-visible disabilities say they are comfortable discussing their disability with their co-workers or human resources. Yet data show that more companies are trying to encourage candor. (This is partly a result of the recent U.S. Department of Labor rules requiring that federal contractors meet specific hiring goals.) More than 90 percent of companies that completed NOD's self-assessment survey this year say they invite employees to self-identify as having a disability, versus less than half that did so in 2013.

"Being comfortable in your own story helps create a more productive, creative, supportive culture" for everyone, says the National Council on Disability's Cokley. "The person who is out about her disability creates more room for the mom who needs to leave the office because her son has autism and she needs to review his IEP [individualized education plan.]"

Stacia's Non-visible Story: Is She Really Sick?

Afraid she'd be seen as lazy or unprofessional, Stacia Guzzo told none of her co-workers she had a chronic illness. When the high school teacher's fibromyalgia would flare up, her body would ache with such intense, flu-like pain that she'd have difficulty concentrating. Some days, she'd lie down in the faculty room (she'd pass it off as having slept poorly the night before) or crawl into bed as soon as she got home.

"I think a lot of women are so afraid to be seen as shirking responsibility in any area of their life that they suffer silently," says Stacia, who lives with her husband and two kids near Bakersfield, CA. "We worry so much about our commitment being questioned." Like Stacia, nearly a quarter of survey

participants say they won't ask for workplace accommodations because they don't want to draw attention to their disability.

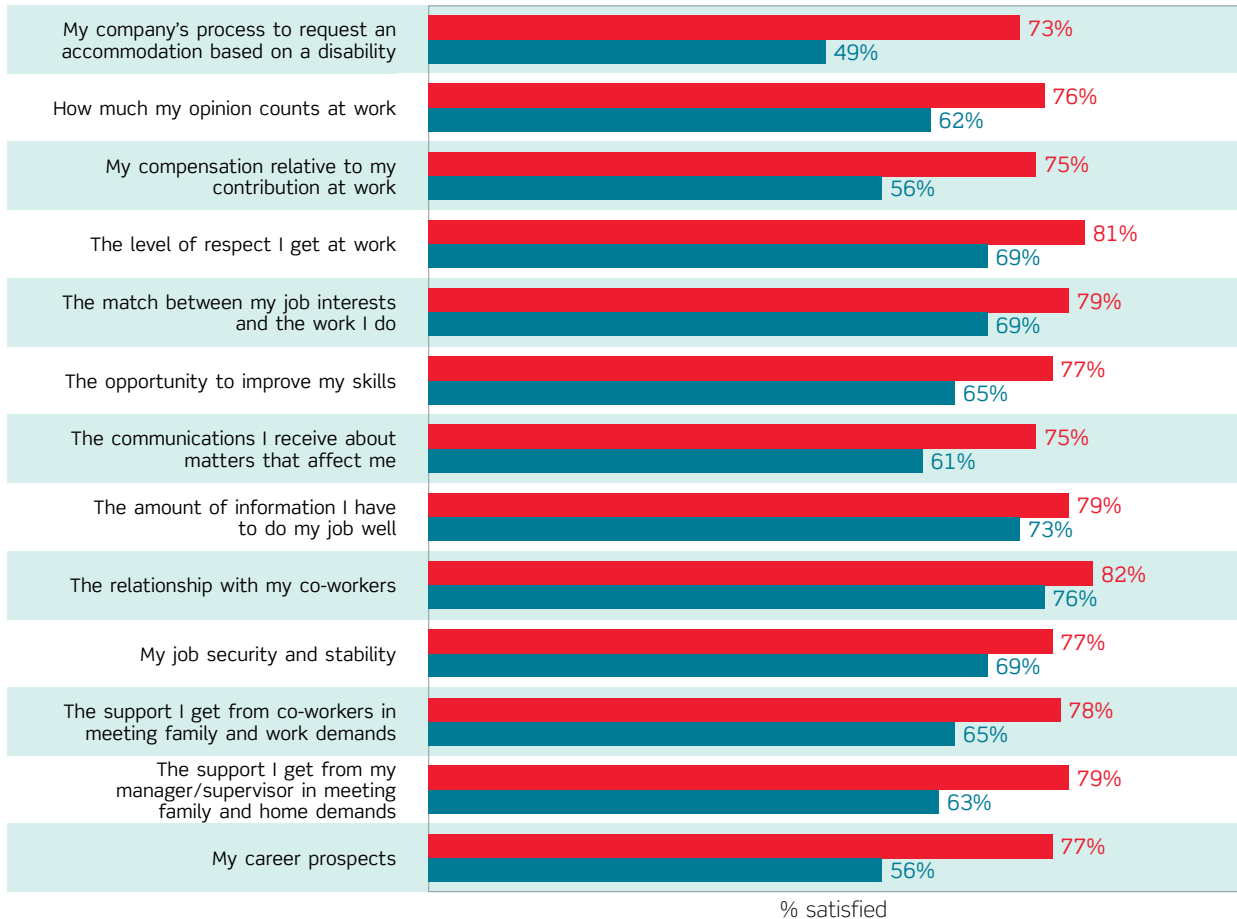
Fibromyalgia, which affects women much more often than men, can cause musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep disturbances and mood problems. Little is known about the causes, and there are few effective treatments. To outward appearances, it can be confusing—is she really sick?

Women like Stacia walk a tightrope wondering if (or when) they should disclose a disability to their employer. In our survey, we find that many women are so afraid they'll be seen as incompetent or not fully committed to their career, they suffer in silence.

JOB SATISFACTION: VISIBLE VERSUS NON-VISIBLE DISABILITIES

Employees with visible disabilities tend to be more satisfied on more engagement metrics than those with non-visible disabilities.

Visible disability
Non-visible disability



“We find anecdotally that disclosing a disability at work can free up a huge amount of ‘emotional real estate.’ Energy that had been directed to not disclosing can be redirected toward productivity and innovation at work.”

CAROL GLAZER, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY

Gender and Disability

Throughout our survey, we see women struggling harder with disability than men. “If you are a woman you face bias, and if you’re disabled you face bias, so to be both is to have two strikes against you,” says Cokley. Interestingly, in our survey, more participants cite “stereotypes about my gender” as a barrier to advancement than stereotypes about disability.

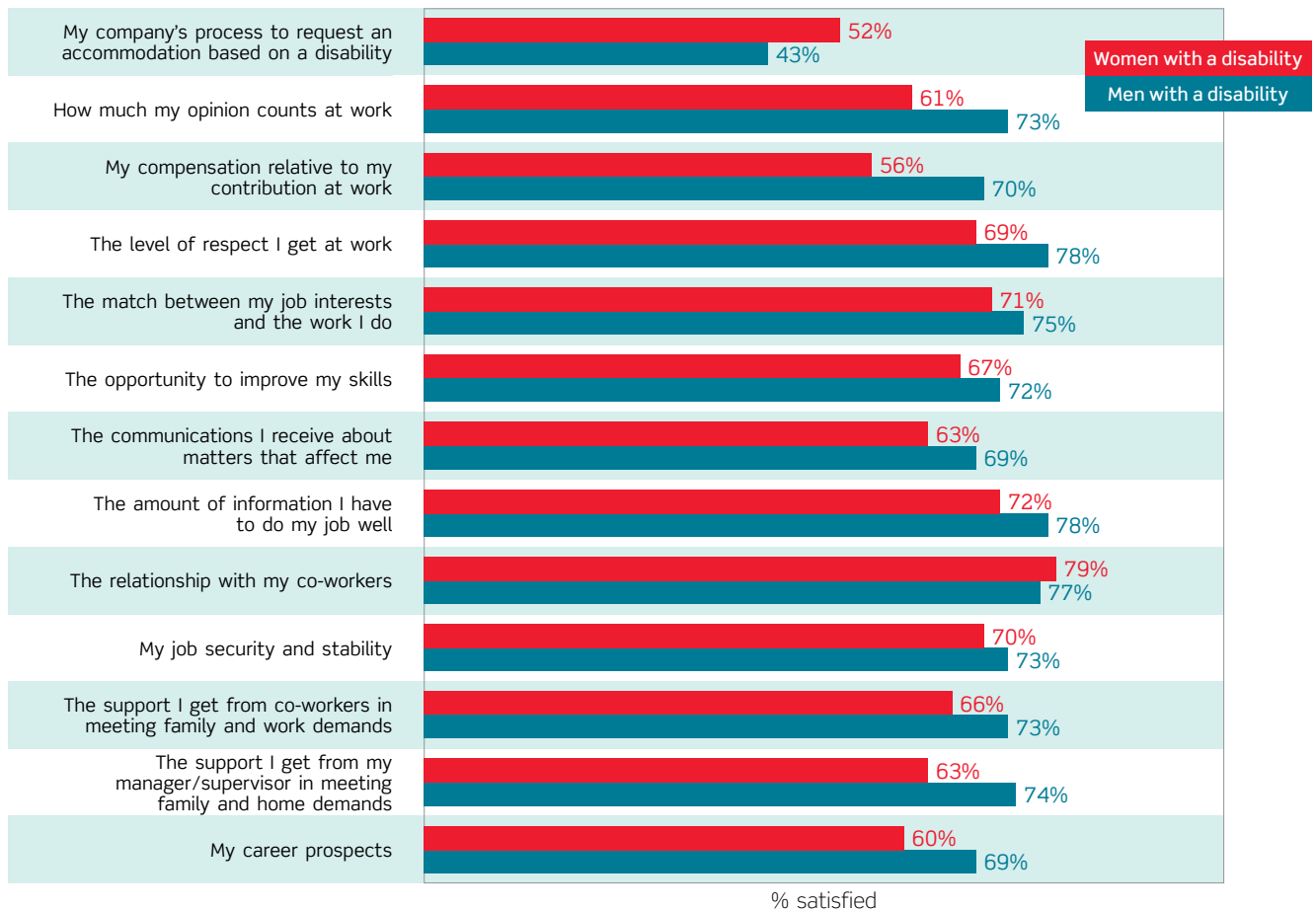
Indeed, when we look at the workplace supports people with disabilities

want versus what they get, we find women have “satisfaction gaps” that are three-fold larger than men. In particular, women are significantly less likely to say their compensation is fair, their opinion counts, their co-workers respect them, and/or their supervisor supports them in work life balance. Beyond potential gender bias, why do women with disabilities appear to fare worse? One answer may be found at home: 79 percent of our

respondents report having a spouse who also has a disability. As studies have shown, women typically take on a greater share of household and childcare responsibilities, so having a disabled spouse (along with one’s own disability) may magnify a woman’s burden. In our survey, nearly half (45 percent) of all disabled working mothers say they frequently or occasionally struggle to balance work and personal life demands.

JOB SATISFACTION: MEN VERSUS WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Men with disabilities are more satisfied on a number of metrics than women.



Next Steps for Employers

Today, eight-in-ten people with disabilities don't have jobs, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Clearly, there is a wide-open opportunity for all of us to do better, particularly among employees whose disabilities are not visible. In doing so, companies can tap a huge pool of unemployed and underemployed talent. "People with disabilities tend to be more creative, persistent and flexible," says attorney Robyn Powell, who uses a wheelchair because of a genetic condition. "That's what life has taught us to be."

PwC's Jennifer Allyn agrees: "One of the biggest things we've done at PwC is communicate openly about the value individuals with disabilities bring to the firm to help foster an inclusive environment. For example, last fall we introduced an internal 'Neurodiversity at PwC' video series to help raise awareness among all our people about different ways of thinking." Additionally, PwC's internal Ability Reveals Itself website profiles its own professionals with disabilities and offers resources such as a document about what to consider when disclosing a non-visible disability.

Here are some best practices to adopt to attract and serve workers with disabilities, based on our survey findings and expert advice:

Train on disability awareness/etiquette

Sometimes people don't know what to do or say and, because of this discomfort, avoid people with disabilities. In our survey, more than half of people with visible disabilities (58 percent) say they feel excluded from their company's informal networks. Employee and manager training that offers practical advice can help close the gap, says disabilities consultant Nadine Vogel, who routinely discusses how-to's for both visible and non-visible disabilities. For instance, with an amputee who has lost a right hand, do you shake hands with the left, or with the prosthetic? (Answer: The prosthetic, which serves as a hand.) What do you do if you suspect someone has an auditory processing disorder, which can make understanding speech difficult? (Answer: Instead of assigning them something verbally, write a task description.)

Foster an Inclusive Culture Include disability in your recruiting materials, social media and company intranet. Ask about it on company surveys. Create employee resource groups (ERGs). (In our survey, only one-third of participants say their employer has an ERG focused on disabilities.) Make it part of the culture so it's commonplace for people to disclose their disabilities and seek help. People cannot be fully productive if they are wasting energy hiding or compensating, says Vogel. Make sure your outreach specifically targets women, people with cognitive or mental illness and people with non-visible disabilities. In our survey, these

are the groups least likely to disclose their situation and who seem to struggle the most.

Provide flexibility Whenever possible, focus on results achieved, not where people work or the hours they put in. Our survey shows companies must do better on flexibility. Some of the largest "satisfaction gaps" we see are with flexible hours and the ability to work from home, particularly for people with non-visible disabilities. Though few accommodations were denied overall, requests for flexibility were disproportionately rejected: In our survey, almost 30 percent of requests for flexible work schedules were denied. That's despite more than three-quarters of people (79 percent) ranking flexibility as important.

Adopt universal design By definition, universal design focuses on making the world accessible to the broadest range of people. Sidewalk curb cuts are an example. Though designed for people in wheelchairs, they are now used by everyone: older people, parents pushing strollers, joggers, skateboarders. As a start, apply universal design to your company website and intranet (through video, captioning and voice-activated functions) so everyone can access the same information.

Provide mentors In our survey, people with disabilities who have a mentor report significantly more positive workplace experiences. (They are, for example, 22 percentage points more likely to say they are satisfied with their career progress than those without a mentor.) Having a mentor also means they are more likely to feel their company is inclusive (a 25-percentage-point boost) and to recommend their employer to others (a 26-percentage-point boost). Having a sponsor also increases people's feelings of well-being and commitment, but not as dramatically as having a mentor.

Centralize and streamline accommodation funding This helps the process be as quick and efficient as possible. It adds to the sense of stigma and being an "outsider" if you cannot start work immediately or cannot be fully effective. Only one-third of all survey respondents say their company has a centralized fund for accommodations. When asked what would improve the accommodations process, people with disabilities say they would like more clarity on company policies and processes, as well as a faster method for approvals.

Travel assistance Being able to travel—to meet with customers, suppliers and co-workers—can be an important part of growing one's career. Survey respondents cite the inability to travel as a top barrier to advancement. Nearly a third of people with visible disabilities who requested travel assistance as an accommodation say it was not approved.



The Working Mother Research Institute, a division of Working Mother Media, is home to the Working Mother 100 Best Companies, the Best Companies for Multicultural Women and the National Association for Female Executives Top Companies for Executive Women, among other initiatives. WMRI produces insightful benchmarking reports and important research papers on work life, the advancement of women and diversity. It also conducts surveys, such as ***Disabilities in the Workplace: The Working Mother Report***, to further culture change nationwide.

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The National Organization on Disability (NOD) is a private, non-profit organization that seeks to increase employment opportunities for the 80 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities who are not employed. To achieve this goal, NOD works with leading employers, partners with educational and philanthropic institutions to pilot innovative approaches to disability inclusion, and offers a suite of employment solutions, individually tailored to meet leading companies' workforce needs. NOD has helped some of the world's most recognized brands be more competitive by building or enriching their disability inclusion programs. For more information about NOD and how its Corporate Leadership Council and Professional Services can help your business, visit www.NOD.org.

Methodology

The Working Mother Research Institute developed a survey and fielded it nationally through a series of email blasts sent by Survey Sampling International in March and April 2016 to its opt-in database of individuals who have agreed to participate in surveys. The email blast contained a link to an online survey questionnaire hosted by Bonnier Custom Insights (a division of Bonnier Corporation).

A total of 1,882 qualified individuals submitted complete online questionnaires. All qualified respondents were men or women who were employed or looking for employment, and had completed at least an associate's degree.

Bonnier Custom Insights received and tabulated the responses, which were then analyzed by Maria S. Ferris Consulting LLC. The final results are documented in this report, which was written by the Working Mother Research Institute.



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