

## From Breakdown to Breakthrough: A Story of Inclusion

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Expert Forum



Every year our firm sponsors a twelve person running team that takes part in a 200 mile relay from Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood to the beach in Seaside, OR. The course is divided into 36 “legs” ranging in length between four and seven miles; each team member runs a total of three legs. This was our 19th year sponsoring a team and we were a diverse group.

There were five men and seven women ranging in age from 23 to 69 years. Our individual speeds varied between 6.45 minutes/mile to 12 minutes/mile. It took us 29 hours and 44 minutes to accomplish our goal and out of 1002 participating teams we finished in 502nd place.

Though blind from birth, I was one of those runners. Holding a bungee cord between us, my running partner gives me both verbal and non-verbal signals warning me of pot holes, curbs, speed bumps, traffic and sometimes even squirrels.

So what’s the significance to this story? Inclusion! This is one of the few times I can bring my whole self to an experience and it has profoundly impacted my life. I am involved in the planning of the team’s participation (recruiting runners, reserving vans and hotel rooms, etc.); I take part in problem solving both before the race and on the course; I run my three legs. The Hood to Coast Relay leaves no room for me to feel excluded.

What can we as D&I practitioners do to help others feel included, to be full participants in the marketplace? A few examples include making sure that women have the same opportunities as men to be heard in a staff meeting. Off site locations for business functions need to be accessible to people with disabilities. Include the night shift in conversations that may affect their work. All too often people who feel left out on the job also experience being left out in their personal lives. While we might not be able to impact life outside the workplace let’s continue to strive for total inclusion where we can.