

Living Your Values & Disability

Rebecca Cokley is director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress as well as a Ford grantee. Here, she lays out key steps any organization can take to become more accessible to people with disabilities.

Transcript begins.

[Rebecca Cokley, a white woman who is a second-generation little person, arrives for an interview in a sparsely furnished industrial studio. She is wearing a purple dress and black blazer.]

REBECCA COKLEY: One in five people in this country is a person with a disability. It's interesting to walk down the street and count off every five people that you see—that's one of my people, that's one of my people, there's another one of my people—and to realize how broad the definition of disability is. There is not a civil rights issue today, there is not a community, there is not a demographic, there is not an issue impacting marginalized communities that does not have a disproportionate impact on the 57 million people with disabilities in this country.

[on-screen graphic: Living Your Values & Disability]

COKLEY: My name is Rebecca Cokley. I welcome you to join us, to be truly inclusive and center the voices of marginalized people with disabilities.

Here would be a couple of my suggestions about how to live your values. Hiring people with disabilities in roles that are not just disability specific. People are policy. It really matters who's at the table, and when you have a diversity of thought at the table—when you have a group of people that represent as wide a definition of the American experience as you can—it changes things.

Ensuring that as you're doing events and activities, that you're including statements around accessibility and who to contact for reasonable accommodations at your events. Making sure that you plan events at accessible locations. One of the things I continue to hear is that people are like, well, disabled people never come to our events. Well, if there's four steps and no elevator, we're not going to come. Or if you don't have a sign language interpreter, we're not going to come.

Including us in your imaging, you know, on your website. There's a lot of potential around communication strategies and branding that could have a significant role in increasing the inclusion of people with disabilities across the board. And it really is about moving beyond just the traditional images of people with physical disabilities. The real key is talking to folks and asking, "What accommodations does your community use? How do we reflect that?"

This is not a call-out. This is a call-in. It definitely is about saying specifically, “As we’re doing social justice work, how is disability included?”

[on-screen graphic: There Is No Justice without Disability]

End of transcript.