>> Kevin McCloskey: All right, welcome everybody to our next webinar for NDEAM 2024. This is a wonderful employer panel from an old friend and a new friend. So I'm very excited to hear more about this program. It's "How H-E-B and the Texas Workforce Commission Created Access to Good Jobs for People with Disabilities." So before we begin, we'll introduce our panelists. Again, I am Kevin McCloskey. I'll be hosting today. I'm the Senior Director of Leadership and Workforce Development here at Disability Belongs™. I'm excited to be here with you today again talk about a wonderful wonderful program based out of Texas that we'll learn about so before we begin let's do a quick introduction to our wonderful guest today and we'll start with Benigno. Go ahead, provide us with a visual description of yourself, tell us about TWC and your role of working with employers, and also a little bit about the We Hire Ability program.

>> Benigno Aceves: Absolutely. Well first off, thank you Kevin for the invitation to share a little bit about what the Texas Workforce Commission is doing to promote disability inclusion in the workplace. A visual description of myself is I am a medium complex Latino male -- short black hair, black frame glasses, and a mustache and side beard with a gray suit on. Again, my name is Benigno Aceves, and I am the State Office Program Specialist for Business Relations with Texas Workforce Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation division. Yes, that is a mouthful. In a nutshell, I support the state's team that is responsible for employer engagement, and yes, meeting the needs of businesses across the state. Our agency supports the dual customer philosophy, and what that basically means is our agency has two customers. First are Texans with disabilities seeking employment, and yes, those who are also currently working, requiring additional supports. And then our second customer is the business community. First Texas VR assists individual with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, retain, and yes, advance in their employment. The VR division offers a wide range of comprehensive services, including but definitely not limited to vocational counseling and guidance, medical and psychological assessments, training and education, and assistive technology services, and yes, job placement assistance. Our agency also offers a variety of services to help businesses create more inclusive and accessible workplaces. A few of these services as well can include anything from disability awareness, education, and training, which really does help employers and staff build a more inclusive workplace culture. But also, we can also offer referrals for qualified applicants helping to connect businesses with skilled candidates who are ready to contribute and, yes, diversify the workforce. We also can provide hiring and retention assistance, accommodation consultations, work site analysis for both physical on-site brick and mortar, as well as assistive technology testing for your virtual platforms and software. And really Kevin, all of these services enable businesses to successfully hire, accommodate, and retain talented individuals with disabilities.

>> Kevin McCloskey: That's awesome and again -- and wonderful opportunities and wonderful resources to connect with employers, again, to help create some access to some good jobs. Thank you for that. Our other panelist today is Samantha. Samantha, also, please provide us with a visual description, introduction of yourself, tell us a little bit about H-E-B, your connection to disability, and how you first got into the role as the Disability Bridges program manager.

>> Samantha Moreno: Thank you. Well good afternoon everyone, and thank you Kevin for having me here. My name's Samantha Moreno. And just to give you a visual description today, I do have an actual background, it does say disability employment awareness month, it does have our logo, "be the change." And me specifically today, I'm actually wearing an black blazer with a patterned shirt, a little bit striped, a little bit vertical, I don't think I have anything horizontal going on, so it's just vertical. I'm also a Hispanic woman. I do have my hair tied back -- I also have long hair, but I'm not wearing my hair loose today. And I'm also wearing my screen glasses today, just to kind of give me some visibility, not to engage or hurt my eyes. So just to give you that description of who I am. And overall, what I do here specifically at H-E-B is very unique. One is really engaging with disability candidates. That's really how my role really initiated was -- how do we engage better with disability candidates? How do we provide the correct accommodation? And I really like the way that Benigno said there's two parts to your job, because there's always two parts to your job -- is one, how do we engage on the candidates coming in in a competitive workforce, and two, how do we accommodate best? And so I think that's really the initiative that I'm really competing with other employers on is what are the best resources that we're providing. How I really came into the role was specifically from my background. I was in HR before, and I pretty much had already initiated this program, and had partnered with Texas Workforce and subcontractors, and really initiated it to the point where some of our stores were already engaging in disability hires. However, at the time, we didn't have centralized recruiting. So therefore, that gave us an opportunity to enhance better programs. And this was created. This was pretty much, you know, an initiative that we had to kind of create on the go as we did centralized recruiting and said there's an opportunity here, not only for us to engage better with disability candidates, but also to provide an inclusive environment for all. And we are a model of each and every person counts. And it wouldn't be like H-E-B if we didn't do something about it. And so that's where I was created. And that's pretty much our program.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Awesome, thanks Samantha. So you know, I work with a lot of employers and I always hear, you know, my advice is go out into the community, make -- develop relationships with community-based organizations like voc rehab and TWC. And a lot of HR managers or leaders really don't know about some of the services or some of those organizations out there. So if you wouldn't mind, tell us a little bit about how that relationship with H-E-B and TWC VRD came to be, and how that partnership really does support your mission as a company?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah I can touch on it a little bit. So Texas Workforce has always brought a lot of initiative specifically to H-E-B. I know initially we started with, like, the summer earn and learn program. That's really kind of the initiative where we really wanted to engage better as an employer -- what else can we offer? What are some of the things that we're missing as an employer to define that internship? So we started with a summer earn and learn, probably I want to say four years ago. We integrated that into our business. After that, we really took a pause because we said there's -- this is bigger. Like, we definitely want to do something a little bit differently. We want to engage better with the resources that Texas Workforce has. So we went back into the planning table, and we said, we got to do something a little bit differently. We're currently working on producing paid work internships, but for actual positions that are hard to fill, such as cake decorator. Because no one wakes up and says hey, I want to be a cake decorator, or is that an actual career, or even meat cutter. So we really went back into the planning table and said how do we utilize Texas Workforce a little bit differently, and how do we engage in coming back with better programs that are going to provide not only careers, but better opportunities for candidates in the future.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. Benigno, would you like to add anything about how the relationship with H-E-B really has branched out throughout the state?

>> Benigno Aceves: Yeah, no, absolutely. So it really started in the San Antonio area, and what -- a big part of what I do at State office is I love making connections, right? I love making those connections that are really going to, you know, bear fruit. And so you know, when we heard about the connection in San Antonio, what we did was then connect H-E-B and Samantha to our entire business relations team members who covers all markets throughout the state. And so what we're doing now is trying to identify how we can not only support the San Antonio market, but also the different cities throughout the -- Lone Star State. I have to admit -- I have to drop also a plug for our National Employment Team. Our agency not only believes in supporting Texans, but we also have what is called the National Employment Team, otherwise known as the NET. So for any callers or for any members on the call who aren't only in Texas, but through other states, contact me. And what we can do is connect you with the VR agency that's in your state, because what the NET is is we focus on creating a coordinated approach, right? And so it's one representative representing each agency throughout the United States that can help connect with a business in their area to be able to cultivate a relationship, not only in Texas, but throughout the country. And so Kevin, you know, since the initial partnership that Samantha is referring to launched, we really are excited, and the team is excited, and the agency is excited to branch out this partnership with H-E-B, not only in the San Antonio area, but really throughout the Lone Star State. I mean at the end of the day, who doesn't want to work for H-E-B? H-E-B is definitely a great corporation to work with, loads of benefits, loads of supports that Samantha has always shared with us. And so definitely, it's going to be a great cultivating relationship.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. Samantha, can you tell us a little bit about -- dive a little bit deeper into the Disability Bridges program itself?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah so I know, and briefly I had mentioned right now, where we currently started -- we currently started in our recruiting process where we were accommodating each candidate as they were coming into our application process. We quickly had to develop that into the interview process as well. And then after that, well, they were getting onboarded into H-E-B. So now we've expanded to go further into providing internal resources for all of our stores. So it's really coexisting in every single platform. And if you're not familiar with you know H-E-B engagements, we also have a manufacturing warehouse and transportation, we do have other platforms such as Central Market, Joe V's, Mi Tienda, and we also have a corporate office. But on top of that we also have an actual tech office as well. So we really had to do different types of engagements of how we were providing those specific accommodations, getting with our resource teams, and getting with our HR teams as to how do we specifically engage and consult with disability accommodations. What does a reasonable accommodation look like? But also that has given us a little bit more value coming back into you know connecting with Texas Workforce and having Texas Workforce you know one call away, and saying hey, I'm having a bit of an issue, or, can you consult me into kind of getting better resources for a specific internal partner for us, or an employee and so -- I'm sorry didn't clarify that but we call our employees here at H-E-B partners. And so really my role today is really to serve as a consultant for disabilities for our businesses, but also to engage in better accommodations -- to finding the correct vendors for us and providing those specific needs, not only from a candidate perspective, but also from an employee standpoint. And the engagement back with Texas Workforce has been amazing, because I think one thing is that they're already internally connected with a lot of resources. They might not have the answer for everything, but at least they can guide me, or they can give me a a different avenue for me to seek and also consult the business a little bit differently.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. And then the Disability Bridges program itself, it was -- initiated by a parent in the beginning? Is that correct?

>> Samantha Moreno: Correct. So one thing is that how we first started -- I didn't really capture the specific question that you were engaged me, I was trying to give you an overall feel as to what we do specifically, and what I do, right, and my role today. But a backstory as to how we actually were created. We were actually an internship before. So that's why people identify us as an actual program, but we're not a program anymore. We're an actual department. And so the definition of that back then was actually created by a Chief People Officer, where she saw an opportunity for the business in engaging with college graduates who probably were not going to have the same opportunity of other interns coming into the workforce. And so she saw an opportunity specifically for neurodiverse individuals, and so that's where we started with our neurodivergent internship. We no longer have that because we're inclusive to all, and we quickly realized that excluding and labeling probably was not going to be the best bet for any employer out there, right? It is probably advertising -- it is something that, you know, looks with good intention, but at the end of the day, it probably is not a good intention for the applicant for them to apply to an exclusive internship. So we initially started specifically with an actual program, but now we've, you know, elaborated to more of a department of accommodations.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. And then Samantha, when you first started what did you kind of see as the biggest challenge internally with H-E-B?

>> Samantha Moreno: Resources. [laughs] I think that's for any employer. I think honestly, you're coming into the unknown. Every single person that is applying to your business is very unique of the ask. You know, just hiring one person with autism is just that one person with autism. They're not -- not everyone's going to have the same need. And -- or hiring that deaf individual. Even though we have interpreters, there's going to be specific interpreters that they're going to need, because a lot of the times it could be -- either they speak French, right, so they're going to need a French sign language interpreter. We had certain situations like that, not everyone is fluent in ASL. So those were the specific things that we were identifying that we couldn't really filter in through specific resources. We needed to be of course, you know, dissecting the correct resources but we also needed to, you know, not really narrow down, like, this is what every deaf person's going to need, this is what every person that has a visual, you know, ask is going to need, or this is what every person with autism will need, and, you know, or physical limitations. So we really couldn't filter anyone in a box, we quickly realized that. And we're definitely not a business of perfection, but we're always in the business of, you know, getting it right.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Yeah, great. And I know when we first talked, you talked about the importance of really aiming for accessibility, really fair opportunities, and a voice for candidates with disabilities. So part of that was, you know, working with your hiring managers and HR managers and leaders to really create those inclusive environments. So let's kind of, you know, on Tuesday we did a wonderful webinar with the Job Accommodation Network and talking about, you know, how to -- on the jobseeker or employee side, how to request those accommodations and really working with employers to have that interactive process when you're -- you do get one of those requests for an accommodation. So talk to me a little bit about how that worked as far as accommodations and, you know, those different partners, as you call them.

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah, I think one of the things is that our partners do have access to the same filtering, right, they would have to go through their leaders and they have to go back into their HR representative. But once it really gets into the table, we can kind of level set in how do we best support. What is it specifically that they need? An actual interpreter, a translator, job coach -- we have to identify what exactly the need and the ask of the business is first. And like you said, we pretty much filter -- we have a lot of partnering internally that we work with HR, we work with our leadership team, and so we also even work with our benefits team as well, right, because there could be certain aspects that we might have to look at and re-evaluate of what other resources, you know, down the line would be accessible for other partners as well. And then we have to kind of come back into the playing field and look into compensation as well, like, what could that futuristically look like for an individual growing their career? So we do a lot of partnering, and then we also have to do education and training so we come back -- and we come back to the planning table, and we look at our training and development. Are our leaders ready for those ask when a partner comes and asks them, you know, an actual question like hey, I need this. I need a stool because, you know, for whatever reason, my physical limitation does not allow me to actually be standing for eight hours, like what does that request look like? So we have to come back and educate our leaders as well.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Okay, that's awesome. And then Benigno, tell us, you know, how did TWC work with H-E-B to find jobseekers for these roles?

>> Benigno Aceves: Yeah no absolutely. Well you know, first thing Kevin is, you know, we listen, right? We definitely want to listen to the needs of what the company are because in many cases, recruitment may not be the first thing that the company wants to start to do. And so that's the first thing we do. It may be disability awareness and education. It may be a sit down conversation. So that's always the first thing we do is listen to what the company is needing and trying to meet the company where they're at. So after we do find out that, for example, H-E-B or any other company is starting to, okay, now we want to recruit, how can we create something? Well the first thing we do is we listen to what the hiring needs are, right? Samantha mentioned that, you know, we're working on trying to recruit for a high in demand, hard-to-fill position, and that's the need. And so then what we do is we find out what the qualifications are, we listen to what the job description is, and also the application and/or the referral process. Next what we do, the business relations team, is then the pre-screening phase starts, right? And that's where the business relations team is meeting with the VR staff who have the caseloads of all of these qualified applicants to obtain interest to receive the applicants, the resume, let them know what the application process is, and then that is when we start to create a talent pipeline. Our business relations team really is there, Kevin, to support the company every step of the way, right, from starting from the recruitment process, to the interviewing process, to the hiring, to the onboarding, and even through the training if the customer definitely needs it, right? Our job is to work in partnership with both the business to provide them whatever needs they may need, the resources that Samantha is talking about, right, it's not always about what you know, but it's about who you know. So if there services that we may not be able to provide as a VR agency, we're very fortunate to be under the Texas Workforce Commission umbrella, where we can pull in additional resources or maybe community stakeholders to be able to provide wraparound services for our business partners. But then of course is ensuring that we're also supporting our VR customers with disabilities every step of the way as well, whether it's providing them with accommodations or maybe some job readiness or maybe some interviewing preparation to ensure that the process is as smooth for them, just as it is for the business as well.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. You mentioned, you know, possible accommodation supports from TWC. Do you have kind of, again, accommodations is something that comes up all the time when talking to employers, there's kind of a fear of it, of accommodations when, you know, you got to remember it's got to be reasonable, but it also it shouldn't be something to fear, it should be something that you always support your employee to be successful, just like Samantha said earlier. So does TWC -- do you have any like you know things you can highlight as far as you know what kind of accommodation support you guys provide?

>> Benigno Aceves: Yeah, no absolutely. And you hit it dead on, Kevin. I think a lot of times when companies hear about accommodations, they automatically go to like the worst worries, right, or the most expensive car, and they think, oh, it's going to cost thousands of dollars for an accommodation. When -- when in actuality, the average accommodation costs anywhere from zero to no more than $500. It could be a simple -- a light bulb switch out for someone who has glare. Or it could be perhaps a adjustable chair for someone who has back issues. It could be working with a individual who maybe has some type of severe fatigue due to the disability they may have. So it's working with the company to understand, hey, let's try to work in partnership with your employee, or maybe some flexible hours, or if your company provides hybrid options, let's explore that, right? As far as accommodations that our agency can provide, really it runs the gamut. It could go from anything from a low cost handheld magnifier for someone who is low vision, all the way to some type of programming or software that allows someone who is blind to be able to access the computer. So what we do is we first want to meet with the company to find out what supports they can provide to the employee. So that's when we come in, and we could provide consultation or recommendations. And if the business does require some type of additional support, our agency can go in there to be able to provide those worksite accommodations for our VR customers. Not only that, we actually also provide -- we look at our customers holistically, right? We not only can provide them assistive technology and accommodations for the work, but in many cases, we provide accommodations for the home. We promote Independence -- true independence. You have to be able to be successful in the home, because then if you're not ,it's going to travel to the workplace, right? And we all know that companies aren't able to provide those home type of accommodations. Our agency can come in and provide those additional supports that the employer cannot. So it truly is a collaboration and partnership between VR, the business, as well as the employee with the disability.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Right. And Samantha, you mentioned -- I know we talked, you mentioned, you know, we talked a little bit about accommodations and how H-E-B operates, but can you provide some examples of some of those best options for employees around accommodations and some success stories?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah, no, I think we -- one of the things, just kind of going back to what Benigno mentioned, you know -- thank you Benigno, because honestly, the partnership that we've been able to develop has really enhanced our business to do better. Because I think a lot of the times, like, there is that fear like you mentioned, Kevin, the unknown. So one of the success stories that I can tell you that has been more inclusive to all -- so you know, I think back then there was a lot more ask for an actual like, you know, pretty much -- I'm not sure how to define this, but more like the desk that actually rising up. I know probably has a proper name, but I just remember that it could go up and down, specifically just kind of, like, raising your desk and raising down your desk to kind of provide that level of accessibility. So we provided that for every single person in the office. Like, there was no need for you to ask because of a back problem. There was no need for you to ask because, you know, a different format of accessibility. So even for a person that probably couldn't reach because, you know, the normal standard desk probably could be a little bit higher, this pretty much had accessibility to go all the way down. And it has accessibility to go all the way down, probably up to 2 feet. So really just kind of defining accessibility for all, where there was no ask for you to ask for that anymore. So we went back into the playing field and said, okay, what can we do company-wide so every single person in corporate office today has, you know, a standing up desk -- there you go, it just came to me, that's what they're called. [laughs] I was like, wait, I know there's a proper name but I just can't get it into it. So a standing desk. So every single employee today has that. And I define that as a success because, you know, one thing is that we don't have that request anymore from, you know, a person needing it, or, you know, a person being too embarrassed -- maybe it's not specifically on a disability per-se, but maybe it's pretty much accessibility for even ourselves, right? We get tired at times. Like, we can't be sitting down all day. So there's that accessibility also for self.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. And then -- you touched on this a little bit, but I just want to ask this question as it came in through the chat. Does H-E-B utilize a centralized accommodations fund to pay for reasonable accommodations for employees and applicants with disabilities?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yes we do. We have a centralized accommodation fund. And that has, you know, pretty much been a great success. I can pretty much guide any other employer to really create one, because I think that's probably going to be your best bet in order for you to provide, you know, the right accommodations for your employee.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. And a lot -- I think what I hear comes from, like, lack of education, lack of knowledge, and again, that fear a little bit. So you know, how does your -- how do you share that with your hiring managers and your supervisors to use that fund? Like, how do they know that internally that it's there?

>> Samantha Moreno: So we have different formats in the way that we communicate. A lot of the times, like I said, we really engage with our HR partners, because they're going to be the first ones to receive the accommodation first. So really engaging with our HR partnerships and letting them know what resources are available, because a lot of the times, you know, we have new managers, we also have new leaders, like, we need to make sure that our HR team is fully educated on the resources that the company has. And so those are people that we go to first. And then our leaders, you know, once they do the outreach for whatever reason that their employee needs something, then at that point they will do the outreach back to us. So that's kind of like the chain of command, I would say. You know, we don't really do a lot of engagement with leaders today, because one, I'm one person for 120,000 employees. So that's probably not feasible for me to go engaging with every single leader. And we probably have over, I want to say, you know, 500 [laughs] over 500 leaders in different areas, and that's just too many [laughs].

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. Yep, I understand that. Another question came in, and you might not be able to talk on the specifics of this, but have you ever had -- and again, we just came off on a whole webinar about accommodations, so this is kind of some answers or questions trickling in from this -- but have you ever had a request for an accommodation that was found unreasonable? And can you kind of explain why, if possible?

>> Samantha Moreno: You know, quite honestly, we haven't really encountered on many specific ones that we can't really, you know, kind of find a different format. So I think a lot of the times the ask is big, I would say first. For any other employer listening, right, the ask is always going to be big, but it's how do you filter down to the specific need, because I think when this -- when you filter down to the specific need, then you're able to kind of have a happy medium. So I could think of one specific scenario. There was an actual manager, right, a manager, actually wanting to use certain devices, but they are in a customer facing role. And so a lot of the times it could look as, you know, utilizing certain devices could look as disengagement. And so for the customer, right, because the customer would not be able to understand why those certain devices are being utilized. And so at that point -- and I'll just give this example, more like headsets, right? So if I'm wearing headsets, and you're in an actual store environment, the customer probably at that time could look at, you know, maybe they're not going to be able to listen to me, they're disengaged, or they can't hear me specifically, right? Those are the three things that will come into the customer's mind. However we have to dissect that. Okay, does it have to be, like, the over feel, right? We have different formats of headsets today, thankfully we have AirPods. We can, you know, the AirPods can engage in one ear. So we really had to filter down to what does that look like, what is that specific ask that you're asking us, and how do we help facilitate your need? And we did, right? We pretty much went to AirPods, and one person could just utilize it in one ear, that looks a little bit more engaging for the customer to approach you, and also it's not looking like a disengagement that you're automatically trying to, you know, avoid the customer as well. So those are -- that's what I mean, like, not that we didn't, you know, accommodate that specific need. We just went around it to say, how do we help? How do we help, you know, benefit both, right? Benefit the customer and also benefit the business.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Yeah absolutely. I think that's smart. That's all part of the interactive process, right? The request comes in, you have a conversation about what's going to be the best fit for this role, the person, the employer, and also in this case the customer, which is something to think about too in some cases with some businesses. Great. Benigno, any examples you've heard or seen for unreasonable accommodations that you can share?

>> Benigno Aceves: Yeah, no absolutely. You know, I think it definitely falls back to what the ADA says which is, you know, unreasonable accommodation provides any type of undue hardship for the company, depending on what the -- how big or large size the company is, But I love how Samantha worded it, right? It's coming to a mutual understanding. Are we meeting the needs of the employee that allows them to be able to complete the essential job duties that require them on the job, right? I think it's definitely a 50-50 relationship. And then also, you know, it's coming to an understanding of what is being required, what is being requested, and then looking at some alternatives out there, and even bringing out, you know, some different consultations or subject matter experts to be able to also provide recommendations if need be. But I'm not aware of any type of unreasonable -- but it could be anything from, for example, it could be for the legally blind, you know, for the totally blind, they could require some type of glasses that are pretty high ticketed, but the question is, is it going to assist you to be able to complete the task, that something else that's, I guess less costly, that can also help that individual complete the task. But I wanna -- bring back up what Samantha talked about as well with the standing desk, if you don't mind, Kevin. What Samantha was talking about also -- and I love how she brought it up -- is universal design, right? Universal design really refers to creating environments and products and services that are really accessible to anyone, regardless if you have a disability or not. So I definitely didn't want that slide to slide by in case someone hadn't heard of that terminology. Universal design -- a really really neat example, Kevin, are curb cuts. We all love curb cuts, right? If you go to the grocery store and you're pushing your golf cart -- or -- your basket of grocery items, if you didn't have that curb cut, you would have to go off and on the curb right? Well that curb cut was initially created for persons in wheelchairs, but everyone benefits for them, regardless if you're a mother, or a parent that has a stroller, if you're someone who utilizes a bike. So whenever we're working with companies, we always promote universal design, so that way, perhaps someone may not need an accommodation, because the way that the infrastructure and some of the features that the company has really could be beneficial to anyone, regardless if you have a disability or not. But again, going back to the accommodations -- all about trying to find out what the needs are, and trying to come to an understanding of how we can meet those needs.

>> Kevin McCloskey: That's great, yeah. And a question again from the chat. Job coaching was briefly mentioned. How does H-E-B accommodate job coaches, and -- I have a little kind of something I can add on here as well at the end, but I'll throw it over to Samantha.

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah, so the ask for job coaching mostly comes into onboarding specifically, understanding the roles, the expectations. So if we didn't have that partnership with Texas Workforce, then at that point, we will take on the job coaching. I know Texas Workforce does help us in that aspect, and you know, a lot of the clients bringing in their actual job coach, where they already feel comfortable, we definitely, you know, allow them to come into our business. But if that person does not have a partnership with Texas Workforce today, we will, you know, advise them of what resources are available for them. But at the same point we're not going to turn them away and not provide their needs. And so we will do an actual job coach for, you know, the onboarding, which includes, you know, new hire paperwork, understanding the roles and expectation. At no point today does job coaching cover the behavioral aspect, because I know that's probably one of the biggest things that we probably have seen and many other probably employers have also seen is the behavior job coaching. At -- at this point we haven't expanded to behavior job coaching.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Gotcha. And then I know in my experience with -- especially down in Texas, working with a few employers, was a good thing to do with the job coaches -- make sure that there's a plan in place, right, so how long was a job coach going to be there for? What's the goal? What are those goals? What's the timeline? All that would really help with that accommodation as well. And again, after that Job Accommodation Network presentation we did this week, we had a nice internal discussion with some of the individuals I work with here at Disability Belongs™ talking about, you know, that process, talking about requesting an accommodation. One thing is as a person with a disability, when you're going to request an accommodation, really kind of do as much research as possible, understanding what those supports and accommodations could be to be successful. Sometimes you might not know, you don't know what job you're getting yourself into sometimes. But just having a kind of good understanding of what accommodations work best for you, because every person's different, whether you have the same disability or a different disability or not, making sure you understand that and go in, that helps with that interactive process as well. Great, thank you. All right, let's talk about some -- I know-- we kind of touched on a little success stories before, but Samantha, you shared a lot of great success stories. I've watched a lot of your videos online and stuff, and I love that you have all these different roles of, you know, H-E-B is -- you know, you are what you are but there's, you know -- when you think of a company, you don't think of all the roles that are out there within a company. So tell me about some of those successes.

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah and I think -- thank you Kevin. I think one of the many videos that you probably have seen, one that we probably could discuss is Georgina. And so Georgina has pretty much been very famous, not only through the video aspect, but also of the creation that she's been able to create here, a career here at H-E-B. She's a cashier with us today. And so she actually started as a bagger. She does have a physical limitation and is deaf. And at the moment of employment, you know, she said I think you might have a bigger question for me in terms of do you think that I can actually do the job, or I have the actual ability, but I'm going to give you two things that -- the reason why I can do that. I dress myself every single day, and I dress my daughter. And at that point, you know, there was no discussion to say we needed further indication of her specific abilities as to why she couldn't be a bagger with us here at H-E-B. Her only request of accommodation was for an interpreter to be on site for onboarding. And you know, from there, she really defined her success. Where she's at specifically today, she went from a bagger. She got promoted to a cashier. She's probably our best cashier, because I tell you, she probably has the longest line, and a lot of the times I'm getting probably good complaints, right, I'm getting good complaints to say "is Georgina working?" Because a lot of the times the store, you know, calls me and says like, hey, they're calling because they want to know if Georgina's working a day, and she has the longest line. So I think for Georgina, it's probably, you know, not only a prideful moment, but also just kind of an honor for her to, you know, be looking at her career here at H-E-B.

>> Kevin McCloskey: It's great, a lot of great personality as well. And then tell us more about the other roles that you have at the company, if you don't mind.

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah, so we also have, like I mentioned to you earlier, we did start with internships. So we do have cyber security. We also have, you know, software engineers, we have advertising, we have different formats, which, as a matter of fact, our internships are still open, and Friday is the last day. So if you are a person, you know, pursuing your studies or a four-year degree, you can definitely look at what, you know, your studies and your skill sets apply, and, you know, apply for a specific internship that you actually qualify for. So with that, you know, we have different formats. We have store settings. Of course we have entry level roles. We also have warehouse and transportation. We have drivers. We have order selectors. So there's a lot of, you know, variety of different, you know -- we always say we are one company with multiple careers, and that is true. I didn't start, you know, where I am today. I actually probably have been in five different roles in my 11 years here at H-E-B, so I can really attest that we are that one company with multiple careers.

>> Kevin McCloskey: That's great. And Samantha, you mind talking about how you increased -- your focus on increasing accessibility for the deaf and -- deaf applicants?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah. So one of the things that we went and we started looking at our application process specifically, right, here in Texas, we have Texas school of the deaf in Austin. And we looked at our accessibility to reach deaf applicants. What are some of the things that we can do in our application process to really facilitate the needs, not only of a person who's deaf, but also a person who speaks a different language, right? Because not everyone has the native language of English. So we really went into the accessibilities of everyone being able to do the actual digital interview in their preferred native language, whether that was ASL, you can conduct your digital interview in American Sign Language, or if you speak Arabic, French, Persian, Ukraine -- we've seen every single language. We have 250 languages that are available for us to translate to include American Sign Language as well.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. That's great and I know in our previous conversation, we talked about, like, potential costs and the benefits of accommodating employees with disabilities. So again, I know there's like the fear, the cost but, you know, I think we both talked about how much it costs to actually turn over an employee, and those benefits of investing in an employee -- it can -- obviously can be very successful, right?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah. And I could tell you that, you know, if you're a small employer, really partner with Texas Workforce. Because I think that at that point it's really going to benefit you to really define those specific reasonable accommodations. Yes of course, you know, there could be some accommodations that could seem very costly, right? An interpreter also has a price and so -- a translator does have a price, but I can tell you that in the long run you are creating loyalty, not only from a customer base, but also from an employee. You're going to gain a 15 20 year employee. That's what you're going to gain out of providing the correct accommodations since the beginning. You know, we always say we're in the business of creating name brands, and we created our own name brand here at H-E-B, but we also create names. Because every single one of our employees wears an actual badge, and we create a specific name. And so when they walk into the store, people recognize them by name, and so that's what I -- I always tell Benigno we're creating names, and that's what we're doing here at H-E-B. We're creating name brands, and we're creating that specific person, you know? As I mentioned to you earlier, Georgina, you know, she has a true name here at H-E-B. And every single customer knows her not only by her name, but also the representation that she signifies here at H-E-B.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. Samantha, it's really great to hear that H-E-B is being proactive and looking at the accommodation process, looking at the application process, and seeing how it can be more inclusive to everyone who's applying, so that's great to hear. Benigno, the We Hire Ability program, you touched on a little bit, and H-E-B has, you know, been a part of that program. Can you talk to us a little bit of more successes you've seen around the wonderful state of Texas?

>> Benigno Aceves: Yeah, no, absolutely. Well, TWC definitely acknowledges Texas- based businesses that, you know, go over and beyond, right, in their commitment to disability inclusion. And really the We Hire Ability was birthed out of the We Hire Vets program, and I'll touch on the We Hire Vets in just a second. The We Hire Ability program really is a way for Texas Workforce Commission to recognize businesses who are hiring at least 10% of their workforce of employees with disabilities. Businesses can either self-nominate, or they could be nominated by a community partner. But nevertheless, we want to make sure that we're spotlighting these businesses who are going over and beyond. There's no business too small, or there's no business too large that we would -- definitely wouldn't welcome. And then, you know, there is a vetting process, and they can find out this information on the -- on our Texas Workforce Commission web page. But in a nutshell, once they're vetted and once they're approved, they then will receive a We Hire Ability decal, both physical and also digital, that they can place in their brick and mortar and/or their, you know, their website. And what that decal really says, Kevin, is that it signifies that they're dedicated to disability inclusion in the workplace. And you're absolutely right, H-E-B is a past recipient of the We Hire Ability employer recognition program, and we definitely want to ensure that we're doing our part to recognize those Texas-based businesses who are going over and beyond in their hiring practices. I did mention a little bit about the We Hire Vets, and again, the We Hire Ability program was birthed out of that particular program. And the We Hire Vets is also managed by the Texas Workforce Commission, and it also recognizes businesses who hire at least 10% of their workforce made up of veterans. And so yes, a business can definitely apply for both, and so nevertheless, we want to make sure that we're spotlighting those companies who are going over and beyond.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Yeah that's great. I know it's 10% of your Texas-based workforce must be a veteran or a person with disability. That's great and, you know, what I've seen and this might be a question for you is -- employers, you know, especially since the last couple of years or so, are very happy sharing all their diversity metrics of hiring and managers, and all this stuff, but you rarely see disability, if at all, on those metrics. Is there any employers out there that -- you've seen are actually sharing these metrics publicly?

>> Benigno Aceves: Sure, you know. And there definitely -- and you're absolutely right, and there could be a multitude of reasons, right? Well first of all businesses are coming to us once they buy in. They're like, hey, I want to, you know, I want to share what we're doing, I want to share the successes. And so how do we encourage our employees to self-ID as having a disability? And so that's a whole other conversation where we're talking to employers to let them know, hey, make sure that you're promoting disability inclusion. Make sure that your employees feel inclusive and a sense of belonging with the company, and are comfortable to be able to disclose they have a disability. And so there's a multitude of ways and strategies that businesses can take to encourage their employees to disclose they have a disability if they need to, especially if they need an accommodation. I think you touched a little bit on job retention. Let's make sure, companies and businesses, that you're not only hiring the best, but you're keeping the best. And so that's a whole, you know, we definitely got to make sure that we're encouraging our employees to feel comfortable and disclose if they do need an accommodation. But to your point, yes, you know, Disability:IN is an -- a great organization that businesses can go to to be able to share their metrics, and they have a whole other category where businesses can definitely highlight that. But yeah, I mean I think -- at the end of the day, businesses are there to just showcase what they're doing in the space of disability inclusion, and we welcome that, right? And that also encourages applicants with disabilities to even want to apply for companies such as H-E-B.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Yep, yeah. And I've seen with my experience of work with employers, when you're hiring people with disabilities, more people with disabilities are okay self-identifying, they're more welcoming to apply and get hired at those roles as well. So the more you do, the more you'll get, and again, the more you can support. So thanks for that, appreciate that. We do have a question in the chat: does H-E-B have a disability focused employee resource group or an ERG?

>> Samantha Moreno: Yes we do. We have a partner resource group called disability PRG here at H-E-B specifically. Currently we do have, you know, partners across the company, whether they could be an actual ally or, you know, a member specifically who is truly affected by a disability. And so we actually are in the same team, it's called, you know, talent connection team, and so we live under that specific umbrella with all of our PRGs. But not only do we have one specifically for disability, we have military, we have bold, we have our Hispanic also PRG -- so we have multiple PRGs that are really enhancing the lives of our H-E-B Texans.

>> Kevin McCloskey: That's great, awesome. And one more question for you. So you know we're in NDEAM right now in, you know, October, we have awareness month for every day every month, but we really want to focus on, you know, reaching out, attracting, and hiring people with disabilities all year round, including that in what you do already. So -- to both of you, what is your advice for employers across the country looking to really start initiatives to go out there and hire disabled talent or increase those efforts that you're doing now?

>> Samantha Moreno: Okay. So I would say for us specifically, just coming from, you know, an employer standpoint, you know, don't be afraid of the unknowns. There's a lot of outreach that you can do specifically to businesses. And in this type of category, in the business of disability, there's a lot more employers that are willing to share their successes in order for you to have an actual true model that represents for your specific line of business. H-E-B probably is very unique because of the platform that we're in. We're in a retail space. So I know maybe there could be other employers out here, nonprofits that probably are not under the retail umbrella. But at the end of the day, you do have Texas Workforce, which is another guiding tool that can give you that facilitation and help you model what disability resources are available, not only for your future, you know, applicants, but also your internal specific employees that you may have today. Don't be afraid. If you're afraid of, you know, just saying hey, this is probably not going to be good for me right now, I would tell you that, you know, really level-set that. What is it that I'm actually, you know, fearing? Is it the fear that it's going to be costly? Is it the fear that I may not know how to interact with that specific disability? There's so much education, you know, YouTube, there's a lot of other engagement apps as well. You know, if you never interacted with a deaf person, there's multiple apps, right? ASL Bloom, you know, BigNote, there's just different formats. Today we even have a captioner and we have an interpreter with us here in the webinar. So those are just different accessibility points that you can really start to filter, like, what would that look like for me and my business?

>> Benigno Aceves: All great Samantha. Yeah, so I mean, a couple tips that we can suggest to companies is, I think the first one is ensuring that we're fostering an inclusive workplace culture, right? The biggest barrier to employment for person with disabilities above anything -- above accommodations, above accessibility, is implicit biases. So -- until we start to knock down some of those invisible barriers that we're not -- we may not be aware of, change really isn't going to happen. And so let's, you know, continue the conversation, let's start to have disability awareness and education training for our top leadership down to our frontline staff, and let's try to tackle some of those implicit biases, so we can start to have a conversation. Another one is definitely ensure that your hiring and recruitment processes are fully inclusive, ranging all the way to your online application, making sure they're accessible for people who use screen readers, all the way to your brick and mortar. Making sure that there's equal access especially for those who utilize wheelchairs. I've heard stories where persons in wheelchairs go for an interview on the second floor of a building, and there was no elevator. And so let's ensure that our hiring and recruitment process, our interviewing process, our onboarding processes are truly inclusive for anyone, regardless if you have a disability or not. And looking at universal design can really really help out with that. Another one is is having regular reviews on your company policies and procedures. For some cases, policies within your establishment have been around for decades, and there might be some unintentional barriers that we may not be aware of. So having those annual reviews of your policies could definitely help out and tackle some of those unintentional barriers that you might not be aware of. I love how, you know, Samantha did answer the question of H-E-B having an ERG group. Starting one within your company definitely can help out, not just for people with disabilities, but for multiple groups, right? Because you're getting your employees to provide consultation and recommendations for the company that they're working at. What better way of hearing advice but from the employees within your own organization? Another one is learning from other companies who are doing it, right? I receive inquiries all the time from businesses who say, hey, can you help connect me with a company that was the recipient of We Hire Ability program, I want to learn about their inclusive practices. So you know, don't be afraid or shy away from learning from other companies who are doing it again. You know, it's all a learning curve and we may not get it right every time, but at least you're talking to someone who's been doing it for a while. And then of course, last but not least, is partner with community organizations and stakeholders and agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation division, where we can provide consultation and awareness and resources and supports that you as a business may require, you know, in order to help you in your endeavors. And last but not least, you know, I always like to say start off with with immediate actions that you can do today, and then maybe set some long-term goals that you want to tackle in a year. It all really really does start, Kevin, with just having a conversation like we're having today.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Just take that first step, start doing some education. I know my history is really looking at these, you talked about systems and, you know, application process, your accommodation process -- have someone externally do that. You know -- you can't find what you're not looking for. So, you know, work with Disability Belongs™ -- is a wonderful organization full of people with disabilities who have that experience going through those application processes, going through that accommodation process. So you know, reach out to external partners to support that. We are all here to help and continue to get better every day. So we're about three minutes out. I don't see anything else, let's see. So yeah, I think that is it. Again, thank you so much to our wonderful panelists. Would you like to share any more information -- contact information, where we could find more success stories, where we could apply to jobs, all that good stuff? Let's start with Samantha.

>> Samantha Moreno: Yeah, Kevin I just wanted to do, you know, just a specific call out. If there's any question or there's a need for a specific accommodation, or if an applicant is applying to H-E-B, where is the outreach going to be? At Bridges@HEB.com. Now if you forget the email address, it is in our career site as well. And so it will say, "need a disability accommodation?" And it will directly go into our email as well.

>> Benigno Aceves: And then for us, you know, we definitely welcome anyone, regardless if you're a Texan with a disabilities who's trying to obtain and advance in their careers, or if you're a business, please contact us, reach us out at www.TWC.Texas.Gov, and search Vocational Rehabilitation Division. We want to hear from you and we want to collaborate with you.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Great. Alright, thank you again. I appreciate all the support and all the work you're doing. Happy NDEAM, and we'll see you next time, thank you.

>> Benigno Aceves: Thank you everyone, bye bye.

>> Kevin McCloskey: Bye bye.