



UNIFIED LEADERSHIP



Untapped Potential

The gifts and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) are routinely underestimated and undervalued, and they are often unable to achieve their potential. Special Olympics is committed to continuously developing a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by people with ID. Research has shown that:

- People with ID report that “lack of skills created difficulties for them, which further reduced their confidence and motivation.”
- When corporate employees were asked about diversity and inclusion, “very few mentioned physical disability, and no one mentioned intellectual disability.”
- People with ID experience chronically low levels of employment, for example averaging 19% in the US, reflecting the attitudes, behaviors and low expectations of people without disabilities.

Simply expecting people with ID to “fit in” is not the answer. The thoughts and actions of leaders without disabilities – often the greatest challenge faced by people with ID – need to change. In an effort to shape, drive and sustain that change, Special Olympics has developed the Unified Leadership approach.



What is the Unified Leadership approach?

Building from sport, Unified Leadership teaches leaders without disabilities to value and learn from people with ID, and make changes that create environments where people with ID get opportunities to have meaningful jobs and roles.

Focusing on leaders without disabilities – the dominant group – is critical. The key to unlocking real change in organizations and local communities is when leaders without disabilities:

value
include
enable

See people with ID as contributors, leaders, people to learn from

Adapt behaviors and processes to create environments where people with ID have meaningful roles and jobs

Let go – share or transfer power to people with ID and let them lead

Unified Leadership works because it turns the norm on its head – people with ID are the teachers, inspiring everyone towards a new perspective on what is possible through truly inclusive leadership.

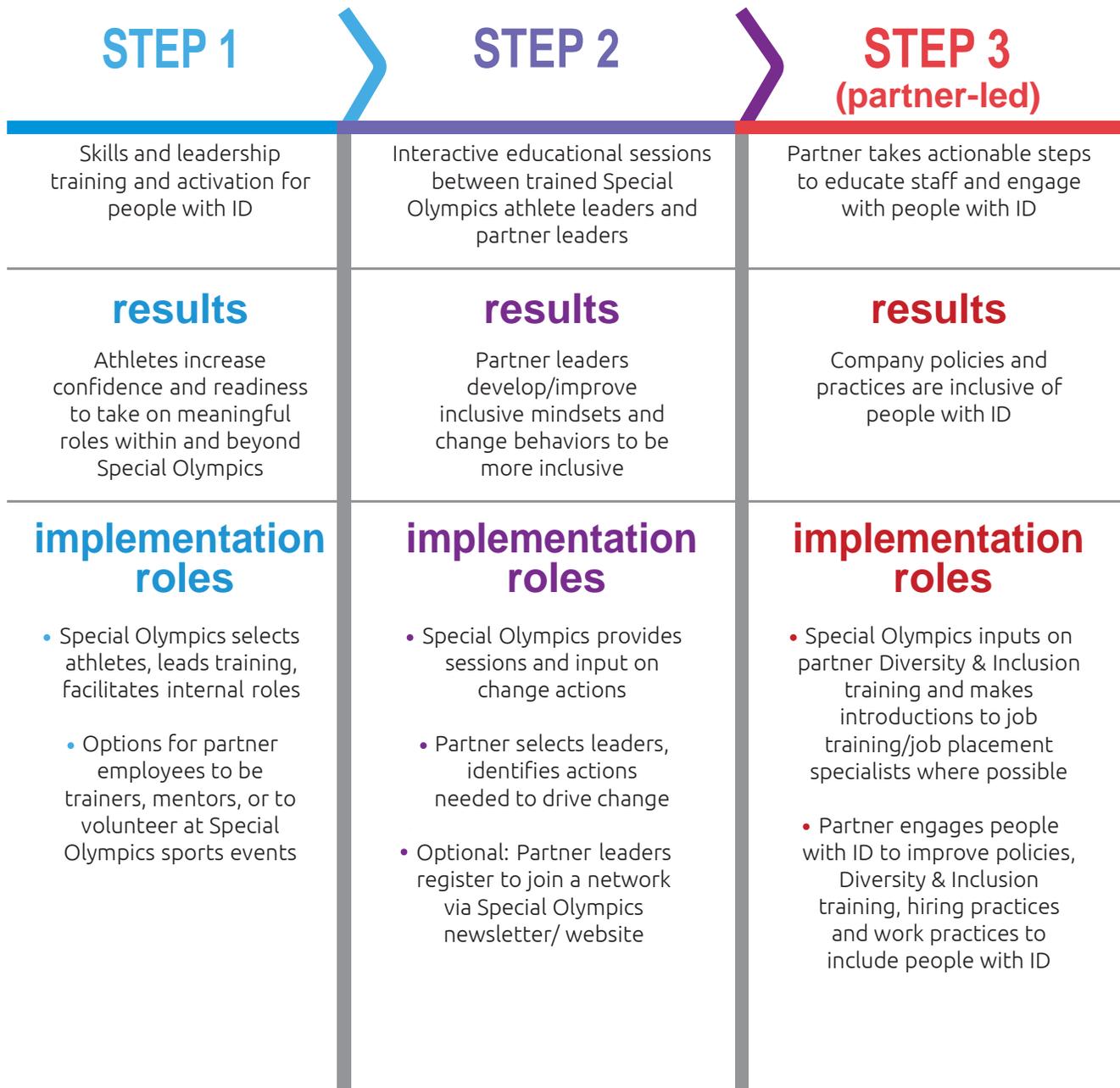


How is the approach implemented?

The Unified Leadership approach can be applied by anyone in a leadership role, from sports coaches to business leaders. Within Special Olympics, it starts with building the leadership capacity of people with ID through sport:

skills like discipline and teamwork, and opportunities such as team captaincy. This provides a foundation for additional leadership and learning opportunities in health, education and youth programming, and for development of 'athlete leaders' who learn and utilize new skills.

Special Olympics provides opportunities for leaders in partner organizations to learn about Unified Leadership and implement the approach through the following steps:



Partners benefit from education sessions with athlete leaders who speak candidly about the barriers they have experienced. Through these sessions and additional engagements, for example at Special Olympics sports events, leaders without disabilities are inspired to think about their own assumptions and practices. This self-reflection motivates them to re-assess the "norm" and to create organizational environments that are not only more inclusive of people with ID but of people from all diverse or marginalized groups.

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