



UNIFIED LEADERSHIP



Untapped Potential

People with intellectual disabilities (ID), epitomized by the athletes of Special Olympics, teach everyone the true value of inclusion and have the potential to shape a new understanding of what it means to contribute and lead in today's world.

Despite significant advances in recent years, the skills and experiences of people with ID can still be utilized and valued more within Special Olympics. They are often unable to achieve their leadership potential because of the attitudes, behaviors and low expectations of people without disabilities. In order to overcome this barrier, the thoughts and actions of leaders without disabilities – often the greatest challenge faced by people with ID – need to change. This requires a new approach to leadership development and a sustained shift in behavior.



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 is critical. The key to unlocking real change in organizations and local communities is when leaders without disabilities:

value

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

include

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

enable

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



How are we implementing the approach?

The Unified Leadership approach is relevant to anyone who is a leader, from sports coaches, mentors and local Program coordinators to Program leaders. It is not a standalone “program” – it is being integrated into all of our existing programmatic areas of work at various leadership levels. All Special Olympics leaders without disabilities will be educated about Unified Leadership, so that they understand their role in creating meaningful leadership opportunities for athletes. Special Olympics athlete leaders will co-lead or independently lead education of leaders without disabilities, using their experiences to inspire everyone towards a new perspective on potential, leadership and inclusion.

As examples of how integration of Unified Leadership education works in practice, it is now part of key large-scale Special Olympics training programs such as sports coach training and governance training for Program Boards.

Special Olympics partners can also benefit from education sessions with Athlete Leaders who talk about the barriers they have experienced, and from opportunities to engage directly with Unified Leadership in practice, for example at community-based Special Olympics sports events. This empowers external leaders without disabilities to think about how to improve their own behaviors, practices and workplaces, adapt from the "norm", and include people with ID in their organizations.

The Unified Leadership approach is **not** a standalone 'program' – it is an approach that integrates with our existing programmatic areas of work at all leadership levels.



What outcomes does the Unified Leadership approach achieve?

- Leaders without a disability experience a powerful mindset change from having the opportunity to listen, interact with and learn from the achievements, grit and resilience of athletes. In this way, we create communities where people with ID are able to be productive and respected, the ultimate goal of Special Olympics.
- Within Special Olympics, the Unified Leadership approach is aimed at ensuring meaningful roles and jobs for athletes, a key target in the 2021 – 2024 Special Olympics Global Strategic Plan.
- The Unified Leadership approach can also help with inclusion of all diverse groups in communities and in the workplace. Partner companies and organizations benefit through increased creativity, open-mindedness and empathetic leadership that reconciles and celebrates all differences.



Is the Unified Leadership approach an employment program?

For many years Special Olympics has worked with people with ID to develop skills that enhance their lives. Special Olympics' Unified Leadership approach educates leaders in partner organizations to better understand how to increase inclusivity and benefit from diversity.

However, neither of these two activities is an employment service. In many parts of the world, there are third parties who specialize in providing employment services for people with disabilities. Programs are encouraged to partner with these organizations where possible. If specialist third parties do not exist, organizations interested in hiring people with ID will need to take the lead in job-specific training and placement.

In summary, Special Olympics' mission does not extend to solving the chronic issue of low employment of people with ID; however, we encourage organizations and businesses to include people with ID, using our reach and influence to highlight the benefits of diversity and inclusion for everyone.



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