

Webinar: Employers as Partners and Mental Health Wellness at Work, November 15, 2017

Joan Rapp: Welcome everyone to Boston University in our series on Partnering for Employment. We're thrilled to have you all with us today, and we're also pleased to welcome our speaker this afternoon, Beth Butler, who was the executive director of the North Carolina Business Leadership Network. And if you're not familiar with that organization as a national organization, she's going to give you a little introduction to that. And she'll tell us a little bit about the work that she's been doing nationally to bring employers into the proper culture that enables them to hire, train, and promote and retain people with disabilities, including people with mental health conditions. So without further ado, Beth, please proceed.

Beth Butler: Thank you so much, Joan. And it is a pleasure to be with all of you today. Thank you for joining. And as Joan said, my name is Beth Butler, and I am the Executive Director of the North Carolina Business Leadership Network. And the first slide just indicates a little bit about our organization. We are a business-to-business nonprofit organization, and our goal is to help North Carolina businesses leverage disability inclusion in the workplace, in the supply chain, and in the marketplace; and that does include all types of disabilities. I know so often when we talk about disability, people think about physical and visual disabilities, but we certainly appreciate the value and contributions of all individuals and that includes all types of disabilities, including those with mental health issues, which is really the focus of our conversation today. The North Carolina Business Leadership Network joins the collective voice of over 50 affiliate leadership, the business leadership networks across the country, and we represent over 5,000 businesses at the national level. The NCBLN also supports the nation's leading third party certification program or a certification program for disability-owned business enterprises, and that includes businesses that are owned and operated by service disabled veterans as well. So that is something that we are very excited about and proud to support, certainly here in North Carolina.

Beth: The next slide, just talks, it speaks to the sponsors and members that we have on the businesses that are part of our organization, that really share our common goal and that is to increase the awareness of inclusion of people with disabilities into their workforce, into their supply chains, and into the marketplace as well.

Beth: The next slide will talk about the objectives for today. So we really want to focus on culture and how do we foster a work environment that is really supportive and promote and improves mental health wellness. You know, so often we spend time talking about culture and the type of culture that is inclusive from a diversity perspective, but there are really some unique things that we can do as companies and businesses to really improve that mental health wellness in our organizations. So we're going to talk a bit about that today. We also want to spend some time on the stigma, right? How supporting mental health wellness at work will begin to silence that stigma that is still so prevalent in the mental health space, and as we

talked about those issues. And finally accommodations, looking to identify and discuss the support that can really maximize the success of individuals with mental health issues in the workplace. So let's get started and as any good attorney would do, right? I'm going to start with my disclaimer slide that just reminds everybody that this Webinar is intended solely to provide a general information and does not constitute legal advice. You should not take any action based upon any information in this presentation without first consulting your organization's legal counsel.

Beth: The next slide is very basic, but again, very, very important information because it's important for us to understand how disability is defined and in the employment space, as many of you know, the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act really broadened the definition of disability. But the definition that we use is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Either you have a record of an impairment, or you're regarded as having that impairment. And the statistics tell us that one in five American has a disability in the United States today, right? Approximately 56.7 million people. 75% of disabilities are not obvious. And so again, as we think about the definition of disability, so often people envision a wheelchair or someone that's walking with a service animal that they are carrying a cane, and that's something that we understand and we see. But statistically, again, 75% of disabilities are not obvious, so that tells us, right, as employers in our workplaces that we can't simply walk in and judge the workplace in terms of the number of people with disabilities by simply looking around. And again, mental health wellness ties into that, right? Because it's a nonvisible disability. In the spirit of full disclosure, I, too, have a disability, and I have low vision. So looking at me, you would not know that I have a disability. And so I often share that because I think it's important for a couple of reasons. One is, when we talk about the whole idea of self-identification, there is something uniquely difference, right? About having that ability to either disclose or not disclose that you have a disability. And so, I can appreciate the importance of self-disclosure, right? And feeling safe enough to come out and disclose that you have a disability. The other thing I will say is that I think what is most important, and for me, I know I could not contribute fully to my workplace if I did not disclose because I need an accommodation. Now you can't see my screen now, but I have magnification software on my computer. And so if I went into a workplace today and didn't fully disclose my disability and request an accommodation, I'm not sure how long I would last in that position because I think the first 5-10 emails that went without a response, you know, I might get a call from my manager. But I share that with you to say that, you know, often you get a question about self-identification. And I often share with folks that it is an individual decision to self-identify. At the same time if you need an accommodation to perform the essential functions of your position, I encourage disclosure for that purpose because again, in order to really effectively do your job, which is really why we're there in the first place, right, that you need to have that disclosure.

Beth: So the next slide, specifically though today we're talking about mental illness, and I'm sure many of are aware that one in five Americans are living with a mental illness today. Treatment for most common conditions is really 80% effective, right? So with one in five Americans that are living with a mental illness, the impact to our workforce is significant as these conditions affect people during the prime of their working years and impact their ability

to fully participate, not only at home but at work. So treatment for the most common condition is effective 80% of the time, yet only 33% of the people who need help will actually get it. And again, you know, research tells us that because of the societal stigma, or the fear of being treated differently at work or adversely be an impacted at work or even a lack of access to quality affordable treatment, keeps people from getting the treatment that they don't, they still need. So mental illnesses can directly affect an employee's ability again, to perform effectively at work, and can be associated with absenteeism, loss of productivity. So it's important for employers to foster a work environment that supports education and awareness of mental health issues, training employees and managers on how to identify issues when they are present right in the workplace, and encourage employees to get the help that's available to them often through benefits or employee assistance programs and get that help in a timely manner.

Joan: That's the next challenge. We have a couple of questions. One is, do you find that disclosure of a mental illness negatively impacts employment?

Beth: So again, I can't speak directly to that, right, because my disability is not mental illness. What I can speak from is my experience in working with companies. And I would absolutely say that it shouldn't, and it doesn't in terms of one's ability to, again, request accommodation. That question is one where, yeah, and again, this is the attorney in me, right? So I'm thinking about at the point of disclosure, you know. And let me give you an example of this. And I bring this up sometimes when folks ask me about disclosure. There are times where an individual is employed and there is an attendance issue, right? And that attendance issue has gone on for a long period of time. The individual has been warned, maybe has been written up, and now it's at the point where that individual is getting ready to be terminated for attendance, right?, or for tardiness. At the point that they are ready to be terminated, the employee raises their hand and says, I need to let you know something, right? Again, at that point, it may in some instances be too late, right? Because they had opportunities to disclose up unto this point. Again, that's a call, that's a HR call, an individual basis call, policy call. But what I recommend is that in the event that that happens, err on the side of caution. Step back, engage with that employee, get the accommodation in place, talk about what it is that person needs, evaluate the situation before moving forward with that termination, and give them an opportunity to be equipped with the accommodations that they may need. That doesn't mean that they aren't going to lose their job in another month or two months because of an attendance issue, or whatever. But, that to me is an example of how it kind of plays out in the workplace at times. So, I would encourage individuals that, as I said, need accommodation certainly to disclose and that in doing so, get the support that they need from their manager or their supervisor at that time.

Joan: I just want to make a comment here. This is Joan again. That typically people would disclose for one of two reasons. One as Beth said, they need an accommodation, and that's a reason to disclose. The other is they working in a mental health agency, where, you know, they're serving, working as a peer, in which case, being a mental health peer is to their advantage. In other cases, it's sort of an individual situation, and you know, Beth will talk about

the kind of employers that have a whole culture that would facilitate people disclosing, but it is an individual private matter, but I think accommodations is the biggest reason to disclose.

Beth: I would agree. Did you say there was another question, Joan?

Joan: I think, oh, this person is asking the same question, but identifying the mental illness by name, which I don't know what you're feeling is, but I would say I would never disclose the mental illness by name. That would be a "No."

Beth: Yes,

Joan: I would have no idea what that means to the employer.

Beth: Yeah, that's right. And I have no idea what the value would be in that. You know what I'm saying? I don't know that that would contribute in any way, so I would agree.

Beth: Okay, so if there aren't any other questions, we'll move forward to the next slide, which is really just a quote, which I think is really important. That according to the director of the U.S. National Institute on Mental Health, the economic costs of mental illness will be more than cancer, diabetes, and respiratory ailments put together. So that is huge. That is huge. And if that economic costs of mental illness is truly so high, why do we not encourage and celebrate early detection that can lead to successful outcomes and treatments, just like we do with breast cancer or colon cancer, right? So again, in the spirit of full disclosure, I turned 50 last year, and don't you know, one of the first conversations that I have with my doctor at my physicals each year was that, oh so lovely experience of the colonoscopy, right? So why is that? Well, because that's a way to detect early any issues that might be of concern. And again, the medical statistics tell us that early detection is so important in situations like that. So again, I think if we could just shift our minds and begin to really encourage those to identify early so that we can get the treatment that is needed through counseling and keep people productive. I think that would be a huge step in the space of mental health. You know, we encourage people with diabetes to take breaks, as they need to. We don't hesitate eat a snack or check your sugar level, do what you need to do to take care of yourself during the day. So why don't we encourage employees to take mental health breaks during the day, right? The ROI on that seems very, very clear to me.

Beth: Okay, next slide. So, here are a few tips. Five tips here to consider in creating a healthy culture. Start by looking inside your organization. Your organization should reflect what is important and valued by your leadership and by your employees. You know, we all spend a lot of time creating mission statements and value statements, and what are our goals and priorities as a company. Making sure again that our organization truly reflects what's important and values. An organization culture then should be reflective of a healthy culture. That's important. Employees need to feel connected and valued. Listening seems very basic, but I think listening is a very important part of creating that healthy culture. Listening again, is critical because in order for employees to feel safe enough to tell you what's going on with them, you have to

have someone willing to listen. Are you inviting that type of conversation, and are you as a leader or a manager willing to share your own mind of what's going on with you? That's important as well because again, as we know, if the managers and the supervisors are not on board, it's very difficult to transform a culture,

Beth: Model, being a model. Healthy workplaces are one with a reasonable workload and demand. Now, we recognize that we are all, you know, this has been around for a long time, are asked to do more with less always, but a healthy work environment has healthy work demands. So ask yourself, do managers model that healthy work demand attitude? Do they take time off? I mean, we're getting ready to take to, to celebrate Thanksgiving and other holidays. You have vacation and leave policies and sick time. Are managers taking those that time off, right? Are they truly, I'm modeling the type of behavior that work/life balance that we're looking for, and that we want our employees to demonstrate. Are we, as managers, reflective of that?

Beth: Growing. Are managers and employees educated and trained on the importance of maintaining their mental health? So promoting personal growth and development is very, very important in this space. Again, are managers and employees educated and trained on the importance of maintaining their mental health?

Beth: And then recognizing. Do you notice people at work, I mean really noticed them, right? Can you recognize when someone's having a really great day, when things are going well, or maybe when they're under stress? I think it's difficult depending on the type of culture we're in, sometimes it is hard to engage at that level where you truly recognize someone in the workplace. And if that's not the case, it's very difficult to pick up on those key indicators, and be able to step in, and direct an individual to get the care that they need, if we're not engaged at that level.

Beth: Next slide, please.

Joan: I just have a comment to make. I hope that people are listening with two sets of ears because maybe when you traditionally talk with employers, these are big companies in the business world, but many of the people who are with us today work in mental health agencies or rehabilitation agencies. And I think we need to have a set of ears for our own workplaces as well, mental health agencies and rehabilitation places are not always the best at being a good employer. So I think we all have to look with two sets of ears and eyes here.

Beth: Absolutely. And that's a great point to bring up because the reality is it's a work environment, and I may be saying businesses or employers. But organizations overall, you know, can benefit from this information. And isn't it true though, right? I mean, we're in the practice of supporting people with disabilities or people with mental health issues, yet sometimes it's maybe the most difficult. Right? So, that's a great point to bring up. Thank you for that.

Beth: So, in creating a healthy culture, one of the things, there are actually several items here listed that I'd like us to kind of walk through. Sometimes transitioning to a new job can create stress in and of itself. And so as you begin a new job, or you make a new hire, that can be a trigger for some that have mental health issues. And, often what may happen is that because they are a new employee, they don't qualify for any type of medical leave of absence or any of those supports that might be available through Family Medical Leave Act, or some of these other leave policies. And so sometimes it may be that one needs to consider allowing some flexibility in leave policies to support employees that may not qualify for a leave or need, you know, some additional days following a leave of absence. Now again, all companies and organizations, their policies kind of dictate or specify when someone becomes eligible for a particular leave. But the point here is that sometimes a leave of absence or you know, we know that we can't predict when a crisis may occur. And so again, if we know that there's a mental health issue that's occurring, building in some flexibility into those policies that can support those employees who again, may or may not be eligible for certain leaves of absence.

Beth: Consider allowing an employee to transition back to work, maybe gradually. And here I'm talking about either a return to work situation or even in a bereavement policy, on a bereavement leave. So, historically organizations may have bereavement policies that support, depending on the type of loss, whether it's an immediate family member or an extended family member, it may be a 3-day period of time or a 5-day period of time. Now I am speaking on the side of corporate America right now, when I say this because I'm not sure about other agencies and that type thing, but I think it's fairly, fairly consistent there. That may not be enough time, right? I mean to lose a loved one, whether it's a mother or a spouse or certainly a child; building into those policies flexibility in terms of the amount of time that someone may be out, I think is really important. You know, the ADA is really clear when it talks about accommodations. And if we're evaluating a leave of absence as an accommodation in some of those situations, evaluating them on a case-by-case basis is always the best practice. So, encouraging and giving time off and encouraging, especially after a loss, like a death in the family, really encouraging them to go through and benefit, leverage any of the services that are provided by the employer in terms of grief counseling and those types of things is really, really important because as you guys know, the loss of a loved one can be a significant trigger for depression and anxiety and those other things. So keeping that in mind, I think is really important

Beth: When we talk about vacation or sick time, more and more companies are moving away from kind of the designation of vacation or sick days, and issuing what we call kind of a full bank of hours. They might be labeled, just paid time off, for example, but they're all kind of thrown into one big bucket, and this really allows employees to take time off without the need to designate it, a medical leave due to a mental health issue, for example. Sometimes that's a benefit and can really contribute to just removing that, the stigma associated with saying, "Oh well, she's out sick again today." There are some companies as well that have actually said, "You know, what, we're just going to entitle a certain number of mental health a day, and really that's such a, I think a positive way to say we've all used that term before, "I just need a mental health day." Well, yeah, that promote self-care, that promotes the idea that it's okay to take a

day off every once in a while to regroup and kind of exhale a little bit and in detox off of work, right? That's never a bad thing.

Beth: The other thing, the item that I have here is benefits and employee assistance programs. So one of the things that I think is really beneficial to businesses and organizations that have an open enrollment period for their benefits program is to be sure and use that opportunity to communicate to all your employees the company's commitment to their healthy lifestyle, that includes mental health, wellness. We do so much promote healthy living, healthy lifestyle, get out and exercise, and get your Fitbit on and count your steps, and do all those things. Well, we don't always here about the importance including mental health wellness in that exercise practice, it's really, really important. I know a lot of companies that will also do, they'll have like health fairs, and on campus where they'll bring in their vendors and have a number of different types of classes offered or specific training on maybe relaxation techniques or yoga classes, for example. Eating healthy, encouraging individuals to eat healthy. And, I've even seen some where it's specific in terms of maybe low sugar or gluten free for those that have medical conditions, where a special diet is something that can benefit. Again, perfect opportunity for an organization to bring in the idea of mental wellness, right? And I'm supporting their commitment to that healthy lifestyle focus.

Beth: Work with your corporate communication. Okay, yes?

Joan: Oh, sorry to interrupt you. James has a question where he works for a strictly employment agency and they don't have mental health records per se. I'm not sure if that means that they have records from other organizations or doctors or hospitals or whatever is part of their file. Some do, some don't. But he's wants to know how to HIPPA regulations apply to them? If you don't have this answer, just had this training at our office about a week ago and I could, I don't have it in my head, but I could find it and send it out to people with the recording. But if you have it on the top of your lips, go ahead and answer.

Beth: Okay. Well, let me tell you my thought on that as it relates though to accommodations. So HIPPA really falls outside of the accommodations process. So if the individual is providing medical documentation to support a request for an accommodation, that's why #1, we're offering that, we're getting that information from the employee themselves. We're not getting that from a benefits program, or a benefits provider. So that's typically, my answer to that in terms of the HIPPA regulations are in the ADA space.

Joan: Okay. Their licensed clinicians signs it, but it isn't per se a medical record.

Beth: Okay.

Joan: But they're, what I remember from the training that we had, is there's some other companion regulation that applied, but not HIPPA, but then again, if you're one of those rehab agencies that collects records in order to substantiate somebody's disability, then the HIPPA

might apply. But let me research it, Beth, then that information out when we send out the recording, if that's okay.

Beth: Yeah, that would be great because it sounds like from Linda.

Joan: It's from Linda, but yeah, I'm quite sure that's in Beth's upcoming slides about how the Business Leadership Network comes to be inclusive and treat people with disabilities.

Beth: Ok, great. So in keeping with this thought though, again, in kind of growing this conversation within your organization, sometimes the good opportunity is available when working with your corporate communications department. Again, I'm talking more specifically now probably to the business side, right? But again, in your organization you're always, you should have someone that's responsible for communication, so that could be in an agency type setting as well. So get them to send information out, even as a reminder during the holidays, for example. I mean as we come up on the holidays, a reminder of what services are available through the benefits program that your company or your organization has. Do you have Employee Assistance Programs? You know, it just reminding individuals that the services are there and available, if or when they need them. Because as you all know, holidays can be a trigger, right? Getting back there together with family and just memories and all, I mean this is the time of year that can be very, very challenging for individuals in the mental health space. So again, reminders of the types of supports that are available might be a very positive thing.

Beth: Instead of highlighting success stories from employees that are willing to share how positive their experiences were when they used the services, whether it's an Employee Assistance Program or some other type a benefit that was offered by the organization as the business. Sometimes that's a great way to create a culture that is kind of removing that stigma is to have more open conversation about the successes and the support that an employee has had. And it may not even be for the direct employee, maybe it's the support of a family member with a mental health issue as well. That's an important thing to consider.

Beth: And then many companies as well, you see our offering space to their Employee Assistance Program vendors that offer counseling services right there on campus. I don't know if that is something within the organizations that are represented on today's call that can be an option. My, my guess is that perhaps that is, but that has really been a very beneficial thing for companies to do for a number of reasons. One is obviously you're making those services easily accessible, and when you do that, you're increasing the usage of those services, which is exactly why you have them in the first place. So I'm creating that ease of access is really important. And then it also helps the employee because sometimes taking time off work where you have to get in your car and drive to an appointment and you're in traffic and maybe you're trying to make it to and from over a lunch break or whatever, and you're uptight about getting back on time and there's just a number of reasons why it just may be too difficult. So, it really eliminates that when you offer those services directly at the office location or on campus. So ease of access really does encourage self-care.

Beth: Next slide. So when we talk about the stigma of mental illness, when employers open up the conversation on mental health, to me the very nature of doing that sends a strong message to employees that it's okay to get help. Overall, the response from employees when businesses or organizations do that, the overall response is extremely positive because they feel valued and they feel cared for by their employers. Given the stigma associated with mental illness, employers can send a powerful message that getting help is a sign of strength. So by opening this conversation up, it really does help to emphasize the importance that message, that it is a sign of strength by reaching out and getting the help that you need. And when employees get the help, well, the economic impact for that employer is significant.

Beth: And knowing, I think this, and again, this is trying to be mindful to Joan because as you said, the audience today may or may not be business or employers, but that economic impact is really important for a business or an organization to fully understand and know how that economic impact plays such a key role in leveraging the support of leadership to promote that mental health wellness at work idea. So, and again, I'm talking about the business entities now. But you know, you're always, especially in the space of benefits and diversity is, you have to find that internal champion that gets it, quite frankly. And when you are able to demonstrate that economic impact, well that is very important in being able to leverage the support of leadership to promote this type of work. So things to consider when that happens are to take a look at the data that is available to you through your benefits program, like the frequency of use. Are employees actually using the benefits available to them for substance use disorders or for mental health? I mean, you should have that data through your insurance provider. See what that, what that looks like. Because if we remember one in five Americans are living with a mental illness and you look at the size of your population or your organization, statistics can tell you how you compare in terms of that statistic and whether or not those benefits are being leveraged and used. Take a look at your pharmacy spend is the other thing that some companies are doing as well. And that information, because medications are used to treat mental illness, are often the most frequently prescribed. So this can tell you something about the health and wellness of your employee population as well. Some of those prescriptions, or many, may have refill rates as well. What does that look like? Are folks comfortable? Are they taking care of themselves in that way? This is data that you should have access to because it's obviously, a spend, and having this type of information can really be beneficial when you're trying to make the case of focus and improving the mental health wellness of your organization.

Beth: A great way for a manager, and I'm jumping around here, but we've got the different types of accommodations, and I know I'm jumping around on this list here, but creating a quiet room that's conveniently located on campus or in the office space that you're in can be a great way to support individuals with mental health issues. Having low lighting is often a great way to add comfort in that room. Have comfortable seating, quiet music maybe, or a white noise machine. Sometimes having a window for natural light with pleasant view to the outside might be soothing for some individuals. And just having a place where someone can go to just sit quietly and just regroup. You know, sometime it's 5, 10 minutes just to go and get away. I'm from the hustle and bustle of an office, the phone's ringing, whatever it is. But creating that space can be a real value added for individuals that just need that mental break during the day.

Beth: I have WRAP toolkits there as well. And a friend of mine shared with me recently the value of having one of these toolkits. But really encouraging employees who have mental illnesses to consider creating what's called a Wellness Recovery Action Plan. And some of you, many of you on the phone, may know exactly what I'm talking about. But, this is something for you when you need it at work. Taking ownership of your self-care, and it could have items in it as simple as a coloring book and crayons. It could have a photograph of your dog or your cat, or maybe a bottle of your favorite lotion, something that just helps you feel better, uniquely you. It's not a big deal, but it can be something that one, that has mental health issues, can pull out at work and take a few minutes to just kind of refocus and again engage in kind of that self-care/ Sometimes it's the simplest things that make the biggest difference.

Beth: Other items, in terms of supports and accommodations, of course, natural lighting or non-fluorescent lighting is a big one, or allowing someone to just bring it in a lamp to place on their desk as opposed to a fluorescent light; use of white noise machines or even those headphones that kind of eliminate all noise, sometimes that's helpful. Allowing support animals in the workplace is also, we're seeing more and more of that, and that is certainly something that can support individuals with mental health issues. Allowing phone call to peers. I know you mentioned peer support earlier, and that's something that's really important. And depending on the type of job you're in, it may be difficult to make phone calls during the day. So again, that's why it is so important to reach out, find out what the accommodation request process is with your organization and really engage in that formal process to open up the conversation and engage in that interactive discussion with your supervisor or your manager and really develop an accommodation plan that's going to be right for you and give you the support that you need.

Beth: A flexible schedule. That might include flexibility in your start time or your stop time, your right of work. And this is probably most important in the area of mental health because so often medication may have an impact on an individual's ability to wake up in the morning depending on the type of medication that they're on and when that's actually taken. Sometimes it is a challenge and so having some flexibility in terms of a start time can really be a value add. And again, that is something that is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and has to be managed. As an attorney, and my over 20 years in human resources as an employee relations consultant, I was never that concerned about being the most liked and the most popular among managers and supervisors because when someone was calling me and they were frustrated about a situation, I was always the one to kind of dissect it and step back, and I would often say, "No, let's not move forward with this disciplinary action again because of x, and err on the side of caution." And that said, that doesn't mean, and hear me when I say this, right? That doesn't mean that simply because someone has a disability, that they get a free 'get out of jail free card'. That's not my philosophy and it shouldn't be, that's not the purpose of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We're held accountable for the same performance standards and all of those things. But what's important is to ensure that we have engaged in the interactive process, that we're doing the best we can to accommodate that individual. And once that accommodation is in place, being held to that same standard of performance. Yes?

Beth: Did someone have a question?

Joan: No, I think that was okay.

Beth: And then, finally a new employee survey, and this is kind of a neat idea, but it's really a great way for a manager to engage a new employee, and their input very early on in that, in the relationship, is opening that communication right out of the gate and asking the employee, as the manager, how do you like to be managed? Right? What is the best way for me to communicate with you? And that way again, the conversation is open to you, do you like to just be given a task and some direction and then just let to proceed and have a deadline and get it done? Do I need to check in with you? periodically or daily? You know, having those conversations early can really help to set the tone for positive communication and managing that person going forward. It's a great when to truly create a healthy plan from the beginning, and it also sends a message to that employee that that manager or supervisor does care and is committed to ensuring that that employee has what they need to be successful from day one. So those are just, again, some, of course not an exhaustive list, of the types of accommodations or support, but certainly those that we see quite often, in dealing with mental health issues at work. And I know I covered a lot in that slide. So are there any questions at this point?

Beth: Okay. The next slide is really just a list of resources that you can reference. Of course, the Job Accommodation Network is it super great resource that I know a lot of organizations and certainly employers would use on a regular basis because it's so easy to use. And it's got just, again, a very quick way to reference both the types of disabilities and then more specifically the accommodation that one might consider and supporting that particular disability.

In closing, I guess when we talk about building a culture of wellbeing within your organization, you're truly investing really in your business, your biggest asset, right? Which is your people, your workforce, and the results are measurable with increased employee engagement and loyalty, productivity improves. Statistics show us that when your employees feel cared for, they're better in sales, they're more innovative and creative, and they're less likely to leave and go across the street and work for somebody else, right? They want to come to work because they know and they trust that your commitment to a healthy workplace goes beyond their BMI. Right? And the Fitbit that we may wear around our wrists, that drive us to stay physically active and healthy, but that employee that truly focuses on a mental health, wellness, and healthy a workplace or mental health issues cares about that nonvisible Fitbit that forever remains around our head. You know, when we talk about the North Carolina Business Leadership Network, one of the spring events that we just hosted last year centered specifically around mental health wellness. So we had a thought leaders' luncheon in May, and as you all are probably fully aware of, May is mental health awareness month. And as we started to talk about a topic of disability and what to focus on, I was reminded that as we come off of the winter months, and February, March, and April can still be a little chilly. We move into May and things start to warm up and we all start to get a bit more focused on kind of what our eating habits have been over the winter months. We started to get out and want to move a little bit

more. And you start hearing, particularly within benefits programs about healthy lifestyles, and everybody's got their Fitbit's on, and walking. And we think we're all about what looks good on the inside, right? Taking care of the, I mean, I'm sorry, taking care of the outside. How our clothes are fitting, what we look like. We focus so much on the physical aspects of our bodies' outside, and what others see. But it really dawned on me, and I think that's really what drove the decision to focus more on the mental health issue, is the idea that there is no Fitbit yet for our heads. And so often, we can look fantastic on the outside, but on the inside we're a mess. And so how can we begin to foster the kind of work environment, and really promote places where individuals, it's okay to raise your hand and say, you know what, I'm not having such a good day, and get the support that they need again around early intervention, and making it okay to raise your hand. Our event in the spring was centered again around mental health and wellness, and one of our businesses, EY, had launched an "Are You Okay?" campaign, and there's a lot of different campaigns and programs that companies are engaging in to open this conversation and kind of neutralize that stigma associated with mental health. And so they launched it in October, so May was an opportunity for them to come and really share an update on how that was going. And I will just say that EY is really one of the companies out there that are leading the way in this space, and really making it ok. And they do small vignettes where individuals within the company share their stories and the power when individuals share kind of on their own and disclose their mental health issues and the benefits of being able to, to share and come fully to work, and share who you are and the challenges that exists sometimes has been huge for that company, and has grabbed me,

Joan: What kind of a company?

Beth: Well, they go by EY, Ernst Young. So they were formally Ernst and Young. So it's the CPA firm, an accounting firm, but they go by EY now, so I apologize. Yeah, so they again, really doing some tremendous work in this space. And as I said, there's a lot of organizations that are looking for ways to uniquely open up this conversation because they recognize the need is there. Statistics tell us the need is there, the media tells us that the need is there. We just look back on the last month and look at the headlines, that the mental health topic is certainly out there, and we need to be sure that we are doing everything we can to communicate the resources that are available and make those easily accessible to those that are seeking them.

Joan: So I have a question. Could you give an example of how your organization, for example, or you, would work with a big company to help them deal with policies or procedures or different ways that they can make their company more suitable for people with disabilities in particularly mental health conditions?

Beth: So, one of the, I mean, certainly meeting companies where they are, I think is a big part of what we do. So, I think one of the things that businesses look for is come in and help us get better in this space. Sometimes that can be from, there are different reasons, and sometimes it can be because of an EOC charge that was filed. So that's not always the best way to have to come into this work. But one of the things that I would say, is it is an opportunity to learn right from mistakes or whether that's because they didn't have an accommodation policy, or they

had a policy, but they didn't follow it. Perhaps they didn't, the employee may have had a performance issue, for example, and while the employee may not have raised their hand to disclose, there was enough evidence that there may be something wrong, that there may be an issue. And so, that again, what would prompt one to step back and offer the accommodation process to that individual. And again, it's still the individual's right to say Yes or No and engage in that process, but if we miss that opportunity, and we move forward given the circumstances, sometimes that can be an issue. So, I think that employers overall, when they step into this space of disability inclusion, it's really not an add-on, in terms of mental health. I think disabilities for most employers now, is inclusive of both physical and mental health issues. And does it look different? Yes. But if you have a culture where you're really trying to drive change and full inclusion of people with disabilities, then it really is about a full shift in mindset of acceptance, of just opening the organization up to different ideas, recognizing that everybody's got a contribution to make. And ensuring that the innovativeness that's out there in every employee is, you're maximizing your resources, right. I think that's an important message for employers to truly understand. So, I think it's important for that, I will say this, I know as well there's different types of mental health issues. And we talked about a little bit about depression and anxiety, but posttraumatic stress is a big one, especially today given kind of the situations that we're finding ourselves in. I think about my son, who's a junior in high school, and just the lockdowns that he's had to experience and being in school. We never had lockdowns when I was in school. So there's a level of anxiety that is prevalent in our society today that it wasn't there 20 years ago. And so being mindful of that, I think is really driving employers to truly engage in this work at a different level than we have in the past. And so ensuring that they've got the resources, and connecting them with community partners is an important one as well because I don't have all the answers, but we can help to connect them with partners and more importantly to especially the beauty of the Business Leadership Network is connecting with other employers so that you're not alone in this journey of disability inclusion, right. There's other employers that have been where you are, that are willing to kind of share best practices. And boy, that's one of the things that is huge for our organization, like the EYs and others that have demonstrated successes in hiring or in some areas of disability inclusion and are willing to share their journey with others is a big asset for our organization.

Joan: David, Can we open, can we unmute people now so if they have questions they can just speak them? In the meantime, people can type their questions into the chat box. And I assume there is a place where people can find if there's a U.S. Business Leadership Network chapter in their state.

Beth: Yes, there are several affiliates across the state, and depending on what state you're in, you may have three different ones. I know Florida has two or three different affiliates located in south Florida, north Florida and so forth. So yes, if you go to the U.S. Business Leadership Network website or www.usbln.org and click on, I believe About Us and maybe Affiliates. There should be information there in terms of the location of a Business Leadership Network near you. Okay. And if you'd like to contact me directly, my email is exec@ncbln.org and I'd be happy to help you in any way.

Joan: Okay. We have a couple of people typing in your questions. We'll get to them in a second. While we're waiting. I'll just add that our center did, took 20 years of research on accommodations for people with mental health conditions, and then they summarize all those results on a website that we have. And one of the most important accommodations had to do with what they call relationship accommodation, meaning particularly the kind of supervision that people get, the kind and the amount of supervision that people get a seemed to be the most important thing. And then the flexibility that you mentioned, Beth, was I think the second most important thing.

Joan: Okay. I'm gonna try to, well, it's a long question. First level career conversation clients meet informally with representatives from in demand industry to learn about job types, skills, career paths, etc. This takes place at either (bunch of initials) BCRHHR, a company site, estimated time, one to two hours. The second level career exploration program. I'm having trouble reading this because the print is so small, um, second level training, three to four hours. And then there's this third level of job shadowing. This would take place at the company site. Estimated time at the company site would be one to four weeks. So I guess she's teaching us about what, this is Linda Zimmerman, what are the agency that she is talking about does in terms of working with a company. Maybe you could send me a website or something. Linda, the knowledge included in the email for people.

Joan: Stacey has to leave.

Beth: I was just gonna say, job shadowing is certainly, depending on the business and the type of work that they do, job shadowing it sometimes in the option, training programs, other internship programs, are often available, as well. So yeah, there are different types of opportunities I think to for people if they transitioned to work.

Joan: This is a question, I don't know if it can be summarized because there's quite a range from company to company, but the question is what kind of training do employers get, if anything, to increase their awareness of mental health issues among current or potential employees?

Beth: That's a great question. And I will say, I think as of 2017, I think they're getting a whole lot more as part of their diversity training. Many employers, and I know our organization partners very closely with our vocational rehabilitation agencies here in the area and, also NAMI and the mental health organization across our state. So I think you can see some of the members of our organization as well, Partners Health and in some other organizations that help and support this space. So we always reach out and partner with folks recognizing that we don't have all the answers, and I think this is a tremendous opportunity for employers and in the business leadership networks to partner with members of the community that do have an expertise in the mental health space, to share and increase that education and awareness among employers because it's certainly getting a lot of attention, and we need to continue to foster that education and understanding and awareness.

Joan: I know that a lot of people who do job development and the player development in the disability world are the mental health world, are a part of that education of employers, and I don't think what they need has anything to do with the various kinds of diagnoses or anything like that. It's just more how to deal with people's functional issues. That's really what the accommodation letter is about. What are people functional needs? And if we can think in terms of what people can do well and what they need help with, those are the kinds of questions employers care about. They don't really care what the diagnosis is, they don't really care about people's hospitalizations, or any of that. They want information that relates to what the person can do on the job. And I'm glad you mentioned NAMI. I see that Kathleen Considine, from Massachusetts, is in this, in the people attending today, and I know that NAMI Massachusetts has a wonderful program going with corporations to enlist their support of the mental health of their employees and so forth. And I can't remember the number of, it's called CEOs for Mental Health, or something like that, where the CEO signed on board to follow certain principles, and I can't remember the exact number, but it's in excess of 100. Kathleen, if you know that number, type it into the chat box, and we'll be able to see it.

Beth: Yes, that's fantastic. And I will say kudos to that because I know that when we talk about the area of just overall disability and self-identification; and again, I'm not suggesting that those that are part of the CEO round table that you're talking about are disclosing a mental health issue. But my point is that when you engage at that level of an organization where an individual, you know, were folks say, "Look, I'm in and this is a priority" that begins to really resonate and transform the conversation. So, that's wonderful. And what I hope to see really as we move forward. Um, and when we talk about Section 503, which is the of the Rehab Act, which was, you know, really kind of the critical piece of legislation or regulations that came out in 2014, that really charges this idea of self-identification. And, for years we've talked about how not, you know, "don't ask, don't tell" kind of an approach under the ADA, you know, if they need an accommodation, they'll raise their hand. It's up to them to ask. And we've kind of turned that on its head with section 503. And instead said, well, no, we're gonna actually, it's a voluntary self-disclosure process, but we're going to invite folks to disclose both pre offer and post offer. So, when that happens though, I really do think that it creates opportunity senior and executive level managers who are willing to raise their hand maybe for the first time and disclose that they have a disability. And again, as we talked about statistically, one in five individuals are living with mental illness. So there's got to be individuals out there that are very successful, that are managing their mental health issues and would be willing to raise their hand and say, "Look, you know what? Here's my story, and I have found a way to manage and be successful." And when we opened the door, and we start to truly have folks engage at that level, we're going to transform this conversation around mental health, around physical disabilities, and all of it. Because, at the end of the day, we are all individuals that are really just trying to find our place and be successful and contribute in today's workforce. And so, I'm encouraged by that. I really am and believe that is really going to transform the conversation going forward.

Joan: Well, I for someone to thank Kathleen for her answer, which was over 250 CEOs Against Stigma, and there's a beautiful book, a nicely printed book that contains that whole story about

the CEOs against stigma. And I want to thank Beth for your presentation today, and I encourage everyone to find out more about the United States Business Leadership Network, and encourage employers to join; it's a wonderful organization. And I thank everyone for attending and for your good questions. And I guess it is the end of this webinar, but we have two more to go. One which we'll be focusing on the role of families in employment, and the last one will be on the establishment of employer and provider collaboratives. So I look forward to your joining us for those two. And thank you very much, Beth.

Beth: Thank you, Joan. I appreciate it. Thank you for your time and thank you for your work.

Joan: Alrighty, you too. Bye. Bye.