



# Speaking of Inclusion...

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“Blindspot.” “Falling on deaf ears.”

“Handicapped parking.”

“This is insane.” These might seem like common phrases, but

they are, in fact, some of the most common

examples of ableist language. Ableist

language is any language that

is offensive to people with a disability.

While something like “blind spot” may seem innocuous, it can have a disproportionate impact on a blind person. The phrase itself implies that you are lacking or missing something. It is these common phrases in our lexicon that we need to reexamine and replace.

Further, as we discuss inclusion, many of us are well-versed on the appropriate standards and language, but dead angles, i.e., blind spots, can hinder us as we use phrases that are all too common, yet incredibly disrespectful.

## Language Matters

At its core, language both describes and tells a story. We choose words based on our experience. As such, there was a time when something like “wheelchair-bound” was an acceptable term. There is no nuance to this description. While it might be accurate, it is also reductive and



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possibly hurtful. Imagine living your whole life with a disability and to only be described by that disability.

We need to become more sensitive, and our language is where we can start. It is common for words to come and go from our vocabulary but changing ableist words will not happen without a conscious effort. That effort begins with all of us, one word and one phrase at a time.

## Inclusion Means Everyone

When we use the ableist language, the implication is that we care about inclusion for some, but not for all. These outdated and derogatory terms have been widely used and in existence for many years, and while our own privilege may lead us to be desensitized to these hurtful words, we all have an obligation to get it right when it comes to using the right language. Pure inclusion means that everyone not only has a seat at the table but is invited to engage in the conversation. This must include people with physical or mental disability as well as traditionally disenfranchised and under-represented groups.

Being mindful of language sends the message that you value those you work with, interact with and our part of your community. As champions of inclusion, it is our responsibility to learn the appropriate language to refer to others in the community. Doing so is not only the right thing to do but serves as a clear signal that we are indeed talking about everyone when we speak about inclusivity.

## If You Don't Know ... Ask

As we shift our thinking and lexicon, we will make mistakes. But it is learning from that mistake that will push us forward. If you don't know, ask. And when you hear the answer, make that part of your new language. Your thoughtful inquiry is not hurtful, but your continued use of outdated language will be.

I challenge all of us to think harder about language and the words we use. To be honest, I never thought of 'blind spot' as provocative, but now that I understand ableist language, I get it. These small changes can bring us closer and increase diversity, inclusion, and equity for all. There is a seat for everyone at our table and a true desire to hear all of voices.



## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR LEGAL INCLUSIVENESS

Center for Legal Inclusiveness (CLI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (Tax-Id 26-1264252) based in Denver, CO. Our mission is to advance diversity in the legal profession by actively educating and supporting private and public sector legal organizations in their own individual campaigns to create cultures of inclusion.

## CONTACT US

Center for Legal Inclusiveness  
1290 N Broadway, Suite 1700  
Denver, CO 80203

(303) 313-6860  
[info@legalinclusiveness.org](mailto:info@legalinclusiveness.org)

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