



FOR ALBERTA EMPLOYERS

Become an inclusive employer in 5 steps

As told by **Marco Pasqua**, keynote speaker at the DEAM IDEA Conference 2026, hosted by the Alberta Employment First Network.

Marco Pasqua is an accessibility consultant, inspirational speaker, and author with cerebral palsy who has spent his career helping employers get this right. We were in the room when he spoke, and what he shared was practical enough to pass straight on. Here are his five steps.

One in four Canadians identifies as having a disability, he reminded the room, roughly eight million people. It is the one group, he said, that any of us can join at any time, through age or accident.

1 Write the posting for the work, not the person

Marco's first point was about the job posting. Most postings, he said, describe the last person who held the role rather than the work itself, and that screens good people out before anyone meets them. His fixes were specific:

- List only the skills genuinely essential to the job.
- Drop the reflexive "valid driver's license." Many people in the disability community do not have one, he noted. Ask instead for "the ability to travel between sites," and let people solve it their own way.
- Name a real person applicants can contact for help with the application itself, not just after they are hired.
- Offer the posting in accessible formats, and add alt text to images.

2 Interview for the role, and ask rather than assume

He shared his experience of his first job, at a computer store, where the manager quietly modified his tasks before he had even started, deciding on his behalf what he could and could not do, without asking. The lesson Marco drew from it was simple:

"All we just need you to do is ask us how. That's it. How? What kind of actions can we make to do this? And you truly can learn that nothing is out of reach."

MARCO PASQUA

Interview for the role the way you would interview anyone, he said. Once you determine that the person would be a good fit, ask what would help them do the job well. That question is welcome at that point, and it is the one that improves the hire.

3 Onboard like it is standard, because it should be

Marco mentioned that the best onboarding experience he had was actually the standard in that organization for everyone, regardless of whether they lived with a disability or not. An employer that asks every new employee what would help them work well takes the pressure off those who would rather not disclose.

So build that conversation into your onboarding process, and check in again after a while to make sure the needs are still the same.

4

Build for meaningful access, not just technical access

There is a difference, Marco said, between someone being able to get in the door and being able to take part the way everyone else does. He calls the first technical access and the second meaningful access. His practical list:

- Talk to the person, not their companion. Let people answer for themselves.
- Ask before you help, and before you touch a wheelchair or mobility device.
- Use plain, current language. An accessible washroom, not a handicapped one. A person uses a wheelchair; they are not "confined" to it.
- Turn on captions in meetings and enable transcription on video calls. It helps far more people than those who ask.
- Most fixes are small and cheap. He described a \$60 speaker that transformed a workday for someone with an auditory processing difference.

"Policies can get an employee in the door, but it is an employer's decision that impacts how that person is welcomed into the room."

MARCO PASQUA

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Retain by staying in the conversation

Retention, he said, is not a policy. It is a habit of asking. The employers who keep people are the ones who keep talking to them.

- Start from day one. Ask what someone needs rather than waiting for a problem.
- Revisit it. What worked at the start may not be what works a year in.
- Recognise good work out loud, the same as you would for anyone.
- Do not leave it to a committee or a policy. It is everyone's job, and mostly the manager's.

"Disability doesn't necessarily mean disadvantage. It just means doing things differently."

MARCO PASQUA

Some employers worry about making mistakes. What if we get it wrong? It is an honest worry, but there is plenty of support available to guide you through the whole process.

You do not have to do this alone

Gateway Association helps Alberta employers put these steps into practice, and stays supported long after the first day, at no cost to your business. Start with a conversation about the role.

EMAIL

info@gatewayassociation.ca

gatewayassociation.ca/employer-support

Reported from Marco Pasqua's keynote at the DEAM IDEA Conference 2026, hosted by the Alberta Employment First Network. Marco Pasqua is the founder of [Meaningful Access Consulting](#). Disability statistics: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

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