



Inclusive employment in practice

A practical employment guide
for visually impaired inclusion.



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Foreword

I've run marathons on Antarctic ice, completed the Absa Cape Epic on a tandem mountain bike, finished an Ironman, sailed the Cape to Rio Yacht Race, and on two occasions broke the World Blind Land Speed Record driving a car at 322.5 km/h.

My single biggest personal achievement? Unconditionally accepting my blindness. As I often say, "It's better to be blind and have vision, than to be able to see and have none." I started my career as a switchboard operator and soon realised that technology is the key to unlock my corporate potential. For the next 20 years I worked for multinationals in the information technology sector, including as brand ambassador for the German-based technology giant, SAP.

In 2019, I founded the Hein Wagner Academy in Worcester, South Africa. The academy provides national and international accredited programmes to post grade 12 students in fields like cybersecurity, management and administration. More importantly, the Hein Wagner Academy equips visually impaired graduates with technical mastery, confidence and independence to thrive in any workplace.

When organisations such as Absa and Primedia partner with the Hein Wagner Academy to employ our graduates, it marks a powerful shift:

from sponsorship and goodwill to meaningful, full-time careers built on talent, not charity.

What makes this guide so valuable is its practicality. Grounded in real-world experience rather than theory, it offers employers and employees clear steps and checklists. And it reframes inclusive employment as smart business. The stories from Absa, Primedia and our Hein Wagner Academy graduates beautifully illustrate what happens when organisations do this well: teams grow in empathy and insight, individuals gain dignity and independence, and companies become stronger, more innovative and prouder of their culture.

My hope is that this handbook becomes a catalyst. Let it inspire you to look beyond perception to potential. Let it guide you to build workplaces where visual impairment is simply one characteristic and not a barrier to contribution.

Vision is not about what we see. It's about what we dare to achieve together!

I invite you to turn the page and take the next step.

Hein Wagner
Founder and Chairman
The Hein Wagner Academy NPC

Why this handbook exists

This handbook exists to move inclusive employment from intention to meaningful action.

It's grounded in real-world experience, drawn from two leading corporates that have successfully employed visually impaired graduates. The handbook offers a clear, practical and empowering guide for any organisation to implement inclusive hiring practices with confidence. By providing step-by-step guidance for both employers and employees, it aims to remove fear and misconceptions from the employment process.

Employers will find the handbook useful to inform thoughtful and sustainable decisions while avoiding common challenges. Equally, it serves as a resource for visually impaired graduates and professionals and equips them with insights to navigate new work environments, integrate effectively and contribute with confidence.

At its core, this handbook champions dignity, productivity and shared accountability. It reframes inclusivity not as a compliance exercise or moral obligation, but as a powerful competitive advantage and driver of innovation.

What this handbook is not

This handbook is not intended as legal advice, a rigid one-size-fits-all solution or an academic textbook. Nor is it rooted in charity-based thinking or positioned as a corporate social investment (CSI) initiative.

Instead, it's an experience-led guide designed to help organisations practically prepare their workplaces, leadership and teams to successfully welcome, integrate and support visually impaired employees.

This handbook draws on the first-hand experiences of visually impaired graduates, their direct line managers and the broader organisation. It shares honest insights into how inclusive employment has enhanced organisational thinking and competitiveness, and demonstrates the tangible value of diverse perspectives in real business environments.

"Inclusive employment means creating a workplace where every individual, regardless of background, ability, or identity, has the opportunity to contribute and thrive. At Primedia, we believe that diversity sparks innovation, and inclusion ensures that every talent is recognised and valued."

Tsholofelo Maimane

Chief Talent Officer, Primedia Group

Guide for employers

1. The business case for inclusion

In countries like South Africa, diversity and inclusion should not be aspirational ideals – they should be core business values. Ideally, these terms will one day be redundant, because inclusive practice will simply be how we work.

The decision to employ visually impaired graduates was informed by a stark reality: approximately 97% of visually impaired individuals in South Africa are unemployed, despite many graduating from colleges and universities with strong qualifications and professional skills. The talent exists. The opportunity doesn't.

To begin addressing this imbalance, Absa and Primedia partnered with the Hein Wagner Academy for the Visually Impaired. What started as sponsorships, donations and media exposure soon evolved into meaningful, full-time employment opportunities for Academy graduates.

Both organisations moved beyond intention and into action. By employing graduates simultaneously, they were able to learn in real time, sharing both practical insights and human experiences. This handbook is shaped by that journey.

Interestingly, a series of common themes soon emerged:

- Graduates integrated more quickly than anticipated.
- They demonstrated advanced problem-solving abilities within their roles.
- Technological advancements made required workplace adjustments simple, cost-effective and accessible.
- Teams developed deeper respect, insight and appreciation for their colleagues.
- Overall company morale improved.

"If it's the right candidate for the job in terms of skills, experience and so on, hire them. While there may be small allowances required like a larger screen, their output is the same as a sighted employee."

Leigh Woods

Head: Platforms and Engineering, Absa

2. Getting ready as an employer

Although visually impaired professionals are sometimes employed as receptionists and call centre operators, the scope of their skills often extend far beyond these roles. In the case of the two corporates in question, the graduates were employed in specialist IT positions in the cybersecurity and user support teams.

Regardless of their role in your organisation, the first step is to create an environment where integration, performance and success can flourish. This is only possible with leadership buy-in from executive level to direct line managers.

When leadership visibly supports inclusive employment, it sets the tone for the entire organisation. It signals that inclusion is not a side project or a compliance exercise, but a strategic and human priority. From there, small but meaningful shifts begin to take place in daily operations and company culture.

Leadership commitment also shapes practical decisions – from budgeting and procurement to accessibility standards and long-term sustainability goals.



Accessibility is key

"For those without disabilities, employment is about personal preference like remote or hybrid work. But for our visually impaired colleagues, it's not about preference, but accessibility. If the opportunity is not accessible, it's not enabling or inclusive."

Cosley Sathekge

Manager: Cyber Academies, Absa

A visually impaired professional's experience depends on accessibility. When access is built in, performance follows. When it's not, barriers – not ability – define outcomes.

Accessibility can be considered across three areas:

- Physical: layout, navigation and signage.
- Digital: systems, documents and communication tools.
- Behavioural: attitudes, communication habits and team culture.

Well-designed accessibility benefits everyone, not just the visually impaired professional. Clearer systems, better communication and thoughtful environments strengthen the organisation as a whole.

Accessibility must also be embedded in procurement processes, technology lifecycle planning and vendor management. It's not a once-off adjustment, but an ongoing commitment to ensure that talented professionals aren't excluded by design.



The visually impaired graduates and their teams identified a couple of myths and fears, and realised a couple of (sometimes hard) truths as well:

Myths and fears	The facts
It's too expensive	The basic equipment required is a screen reader, which typically costs between R15 000 and R30 000, depending on the employee's needs. Free screen reader options are also available. Some annual licence fees could apply.
We're not equipped	Preparing a company – large or small – is not difficult. It requires openness, a few practical adjustments and a willingness to learn. No organisation is perfectly equipped at the outset. Solutions evolve naturally as teams learn from one another.
It will slow the team down	When a visually impaired employee joins, the team pauses and integrates them as they would any new colleague. The difference is that, for many, it may be their first time working with someone who is visually impaired. The pace may initially feel slower as everyone adapts and upskills. Both Absa and Primedia found that visually impaired employees quickly gained momentum. They brought strong analytical and problem-solving skills, contributing to more innovative thinking in their digital environments.
We won't know how to manage them	Performance management and daily operational oversight is no different to that of sighted employees. Anything unfamiliar can feel uncomfortable at first. The challenge to management is to grow alongside the new recruit and build a shared understanding.

Myths and fears	The facts
They'll need someone to guide them throughout the office all the time	At both organisations, visually impaired employees were navigating the office environment independently after only a few guided tours. Visually impaired employees generally adapt easily, especially if they've experienced living with sight.
Not all software applications are accessible	This is true, and it's a daily frustration for many visually impaired professionals. However, the impossible becomes possible when you engage with application owners. The result was more accessible applications that enabled the employees to perform at the highest level. Assigning a clear owner of accessibility within the organisation helps drive progress across operations.
We don't know how to treat them	The truth is all people are different, and everyone, whether sighted or not, deserves the same respect and courtesy. A few simple practices will aid practical integration: • Never make assumptions. Ask the employee what they need. • Do not shy away from phrases such as "as you can see" or "have a look". Interact with the employee in the same way as everyone else. • Importantly: Don't overreact to perceived mistakes. In our experience, visually impaired colleagues navigate awkward moments with grace and humour.

"This experience has strengthened our team's understanding that inclusion is not accommodation. It's empowerment. By setting clear expectations and providing the right tools, we've seen capability and independence flourish naturally. It proves that when barriers are removed and standards remain consistent, performance and professionalism are the results."

Yazeed Emeran
IT Manager, Primedia Broadcasting

3. Budgeting for reasonable accommodation

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. What's considered "reasonable" will differ between individuals and organisations, which is why ongoing, open conversation between the employee and Human Resources is essential.

The information below is drawn from the lived experience of Primedia and Absa. Your company might have different requirements, but the requirements below will serve as a useful guideline.

3.1 Equipment requirements

- **Screen readers:** A screen reader is software that enables people who are visually impaired to use computers and mobile devices by converting on-screen text, images and interface elements into synthetic speech or Braille output. It acts as an interface between the operating system, the applications and the user who interacts with keyboard commands or touch gestures.
- **Headphones:** Quality headphones allow the employee to access screen reader audio clearly, particularly in open-plan environments.
- **Elevators:** Tactile indicators or braille on elevator control panels could be useful.
- **Kitchen equipment:** Appliances such as microwaves and ovens may require tactile markings or Braille indicators to ensure safe and independent use.

3.2 General requirements

- **A mobility instructor:** A mobility instructor can be helpful, especially if the employee has relocated. Absa, for example, partnered with the South African Guide-Dogs Association to assist graduates in acclimatising to both their new work and home environments. The South African Mobility for the Blind Trust is also a valuable resource.
- **Socialisation sessions or sensitivity training:** These sessions help teams understand how to engage respectfully and confidently with a visually impaired colleague.

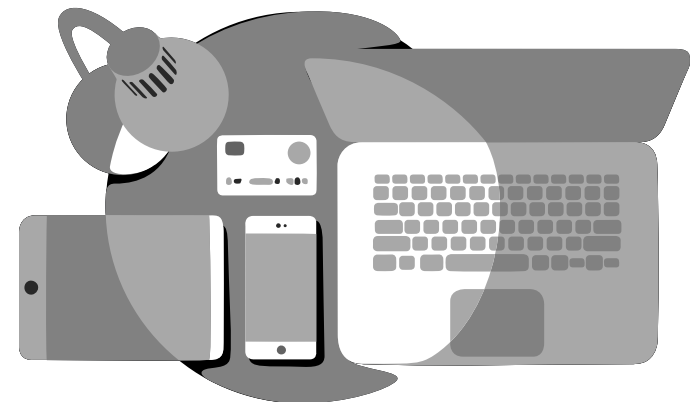
They create space for questions, remove anxiety and establish mutual understanding. Organisations such as the South African Guide-Dogs Association or the Hein Wagner Academy can facilitate these conversations.

- **Transport:** Transport to and from work may require consideration, particularly if public transport is used. Reasonable accommodation could include a monthly e-hailing stipend. In Absa's experience, structured route training with a mobility instructor was sufficient to enable independent travel.
- **Employee wellness:** Additional emotional support might be required as some visually impaired professionals could suffer from sensory overload. Both Absa and Primedia provided additional support through their employee wellness programmes, giving access to professional mental, financial and legal assistance where needed.
- **A guide dog-friendly workplace:** Some visually impaired persons use long canes, while others are assisted by guide dogs. Where a guide dog is involved, employers can seek guidance from the South African Guide-Dogs Association to ensure that the workplace is appropriately prepared.

"Something to be mindful of is not waiting to be ready. The process doesn't have to be perfect. The 'good enough' principle can be employed while the team finds its natural rhythm. Also, ask the employee what they need. A lesson for us at Absa was not to make assumptions."

Nicole Cader

Head: Cyber Academies, Absa



4. Recruitment and hiring

Many visually impaired professionals graduate from tertiary institutions each year. A list of relevant institutions and resources is provided at the end of this handbook.

Recruiting a visually impaired professional follows the same principles as recruiting any other candidate. The focus remains on skills, experience and organisational fit. However, the following practical considerations may be helpful:

Inclusive job descriptions 	• Ensure that the job description clearly outlines responsibilities, expectations and measurable outcomes. • Use straightforward, plain language. • Don't list a valid driving licence as a requirement. • Provide all documents in accessible electronic formats. • Remove unnecessary visual requirements. • Clearly state location, remote or hybrid policies, and travel expectations up front.
The interview process 	• Because the candidate relies primarily on audio, ensure that the interview environment is quiet and free from unnecessary background noise. Clear communication is essential. • Only one person should speak at a time. Overlapping voices can make it difficult to follow the conversation. • In panel interviews, each interviewer should identify themselves before speaking. For example: "It's John again. Could you tell us about your experience with XYZ?" While this may feel repetitive, it provides orientation and clarity. Alternatively, ask the candidate what works best for them. • Allow time for the candidate to explain any workplace adjustments they may require. If not addressed, ask whether they use a cane or a guide dog, and whether any specific arrangements would support them. • For online interviews, avoid comments in the chat function. Screen readers read these aloud, which can be distracting.
Selection and offer stage 	• If the position is offered, transparency from both the employer and candidate is essential to determine what support may be required. • Discuss reasonable accommodations early in the offer stage, so that expectations are clear and preparations can begin before the start date. • Be mindful that some individuals with disabilities may receive SASSA (South African Social Security Agency) grants. Once employed above a certain income threshold, they may no longer qualify.

5. Onboarding a visually impaired employee

Successful onboarding begins well before the employee's first day – ideally a month in advance.

Absa and Primedia found that partnerships with organisations such as the Hein Wagner Academy and the South African Guide-Dogs Association were instrumental in preparing both the environment and the team.

In larger organisations, where procurement processes can be complex, it's advisable to initiate the purchase of screen readers, headphones and any other required assistive technology at least a month before the start date.

5.1 Sensitivity training

A critical element of onboarding a visually impaired employee is creating psychological safety for both the new recruit and the existing team. This begins with education. Depending on the size of the organisation, training may involve the full company or the immediate department.

Sensitivity training equips managers and colleagues with practical insights into how to create an environment where the employee can perform and belong.

Typically, training covers:

- Understanding the lived reality of a visually impaired professional.
- Physical guidance and touch: what's appropriate and what's not.
- How the employee works, including the assistive tools they use.
- How they'll navigate the office environment.
- When to offer assistance and when to allow independence.
- Creating space for honest, even awkward, questions.

When colleagues are encouraged to ask, learn and adapt without fear of judgement, inclusion becomes natural rather than forced. This foundation enables both performance and genuine belonging.

Several reputable organisations offer focused two to three hour workshops. Their contact details are listed in the resources list at the end of the handbook.

- South African National Council for the Blind
- Hein Wagner Academy
- Blind SA
- South African Guide-Dogs Association
- South African Mobility for the Blind Trust

"I've spent my life on radio, which is basically theatre of the mind. Jos lives that every day. He has taught me and everyone around him that vision has nothing to do with eyesight and everything to do with mindset. He brings clarity, courage and an absurdly sharp sense of humour into every room he enters. He has exposed how limited our own vision can be as leaders and colleagues. Inclusion is not charity. It's common sense. Talent doesn't need sight to shine. It simply needs opportunity."

Darren Simpson

Host: Kfm Mornings with Darren, Sherlin & Sibis



5.2 The first day and week

The first few days should focus primarily on physical orientation and building confidence within the workspace.

The physical environment

Visually impaired employees use consistent reference points to orient themselves, so stability in the physical environment matters.

If your organisation uses hot desks or flexible seating, it's recommended to assign a dedicated desk.

It's equally important to communicate any changes to the workspace, particularly obstacles, moved furniture or temporary hazards, along established routes.

Internal support

A new recruit should never feel alone in the transition. Clear support structures make a world of difference. Internal support could include:

- **The line manager:** The line manager plays a central role in the onboarding and integration of the new employee. Their involvement sets the tone for the rest of the department to support the new staff member(s).
- **A departmental support person:** Nominating one person in the department as the primary support contact is of immense value for any day-to-day queries.

- **Secondary staff support:** A second contact outside the department can broaden the support network and provide perspective while new relationships are forming.
- **Departmental disability awareness training:** Targeted training for the immediate team builds both practical understanding and emotional confidence. It equips colleagues to engage naturally and constructively.
- **Occupational health and safety (OHS):** OHS representatives must be aware of the employee's workstation and layout. In emergency situations, preparedness ensures safety and dignity.
- **Internal management sponsor:** A senior sponsor (other than the line manager) can serve as mentor, advocate and strategic enabler.
- **The broader visually impaired community:** A company's diversity team can also connect the employee with other visually impaired people in the business. Likewise, individuals in companies such as Primedia and Absa can offer valuable first-hand accounts.



5.3 Technology and tools

Accessibility technology continues to evolve. Below is a broad overview of the current tools that are commonly used by visually impaired professionals to navigate digital environments.

Screen reader software: Screen reader software is supported and configured as required to enable effective access to systems and applications. Examples include:

Windows-based

- JAWS (licensed, often used in secure environments).
- NVDA (free and highly rated).
- Narrator (built into Windows).

Linux-based

- Orca (commonly pre-installed on GNOME-based distributions such as Ubuntu, Fedora and Mint). It requires the GNOME desktop environment, Speech Dispatcher for audio, and an assistive technology service provider interface (AT-SPI) to interact with applications.

Chrome OS

- ChromeVox (pre-installed on ChromeOS devices) enables visually impaired users to navigate the system with keyboard shortcuts or voice feedback.

macOS

- VoiceOver (a built-in accessibility feature on Apple devices) allows visually impaired users to navigate the computer using a keyboard, trackpad gestures or a braille display.

Magnification software: Partially sighted employees may use magnification tools or display adjustments such as ZoomText to enhance productivity.

Accessible documents and software applications

Not all systems or documents are automatically accessible. Accessibility often depends on structure and formatting (for example, clear headings, readable fonts and compatibility with assistive technology). Where barriers exist, employers can engage application owners or vendors to improve accessibility. These improvements frequently benefit a wider user base.

Assistive devices: Assistive devices may include larger desktop screens and external keyboards, or higher specification laptops. These are additional and will depend on specific requirements.

5.4 Workplace adjustments

- **Desk layout:** The workstation should remain consistent and uncluttered, with clear access pathways. Frequently used equipment should stay in fixed positions to support familiarity and efficiency.
- **Lighting considerations:** For partially sighted employees, lighting may need adjustment to reduce glare or harsh reflections. Task lighting and screen brightness can be tailored to individual needs.
- **Navigation and safety:** Clear, unobstructed routes should be maintained throughout the workplace. Furniture placement should remain consistent where possible, and any changes must be communicated promptly.

6. Managing performance and productivity

Setting clear key performance indicators (KPIs)

As with any employee, KPIs for a visually impaired professional should be clearly defined, documented and aligned to role requirements.

Accessibility directly affects performance. If critical systems or applications are not accessible, productivity will be compromised, not because of capability but because of barriers.

Fair performance measurement

Performance should be measured consistently against agreed KPIs and outcomes. The same standards apply to the visually impaired professional as to the rest of the team, while taking reasonable workplace adjustments into account.

Managing without overprotection

Visual impairment doesn't define a person's capability. It simply means they may work differently. Leaders should focus on strengths, not limitations. With the right support – particularly during the early stages – the employee will assume responsibility and work independently without unnecessary interventions or lowered expectations.

Addressing underperformance appropriately

If underperformance arises, it should be addressed as it would with any employee: constructively, through open dialogue and with clear improvement plans. The focus must remain on outcomes and capability, not on disability.

"Focus on potential, not perception. With the right mindset, tools and support, visually impaired colleagues thrive like any other high-performing professionals."

Laura Kass

Application Security Lead, Absa

7. In closing

Ask, don't assume

A key lesson learnt by both the teams and visually impaired graduates during onboarding was the value of ongoing learning through open and honest conversations. But the single most valuable principle was simple: avoid assumptions. Ask instead.

Where applications were not immediately accessible, solutions were found. Situations where well-meaning team members offered unrequested physical assistance were gently corrected.

Unexpected outcomes

Across both organisations, teams were pleasantly surprised by how independently and effectively the visually impaired employees worked and how their performance exceeded expectations.

Equally impactful was their ease within the team: engaging fully, participating in activities and often using humour (including about their own disability) to build connection.

The prevailing sentiment was clear: visually impaired professionals are not less capable. They simply work differently. With the right opportunities and support, they contribute exceptional value.



Being part of an organisation that's willing to adapt and learn proved powerful. Employees reported a renewed sense of pride in their company, not because of charity, but because of shared humanity and innovation.

"This has been an extraordinary journey of growth. It expanded our skills in ways we never anticipated and profoundly shaped our people and leadership as they develop a deeper understanding, respect and appreciation for colleagues who are visually impaired."

Trish Taylor

Head: Primedia Cares

Guide for visually impaired professionals

Leaving one's comfort zone to join a new organisation is stressful – even daunting – for any professional. The guidance below is intended to support you through that transition, by offering practical insights and reassurance as you step into a new environment.



1. Preparing for employment

- **Self-awareness of strengths and limitations:** Understanding your own needs – particularly as they relate to your visual impairment – is essential. If you don't articulate them, others may make incorrect assumptions about what support you require. Technical skills may secure the job, but soft skills keep you employed. Prioritise clear communication, email etiquette, active listening and punctuality.
- **Tech readiness is non-negotiable:** Don't wait to receive an offer before you master your tools. You should be a super user of your tech (such as JAWS, NVDA and ZoomText) and have strong typing skills before your first day.
- **Confidence without overcompensation:** Avoid the trap of trying to be "superhuman". Focus on being a reliable, competent professional rather than trying to prove you have no limitations. Reliability speaks louder than overexertion.
- **A positive attitude:** A positive, solutions-focused attitude shapes how others experience you and how you experience the world. The Hein Wagner Academy often reminds students not to rely on the "blind card", as this can unintentionally foster learned helplessness.

2. Disclosure: When and how

- **Timing (application versus interview versus offer):** Disclosure is a personal decision. Sharing at the application stage offers transparency but may carry risk of bias. Disclosing at the interview invitation stage is often a practical middle ground, to allow time for arranging accessibility – while keeping the focus on your qualifications.
- **Constructive framing:** Don't position your blindness as a problem to be solved. Present it as a characteristic that simply requires specific tools. For example: "I use screen-reading software to access my computer, which enables me to work at the same pace as my colleagues."
- **Interview responses:** Showcase what you've achieved. Answer questions to illustrate outcomes, independence and competence. This is true for all candidates, but critical if you have an impairment. Demonstrate clearly that your disability doesn't prevent you from delivering results.



3. Starting a new job

3.1 Advocating for yourself

- **Asking for accommodations:** You're the expert on your own accessibility. Clearly and respectfully explain your tools, workflows and requirements to IT and management. Don't wait for them to figure it out. Learn the company's platforms quickly and communicate any accessibility barriers early.
- **Setting boundaries:** Establish early on that you don't need "parenting". If someone grabs your arm without asking, correct them calmly by saying, for example: "I prefer to take your elbow." Boundaries build respect.
- **Integrate, don't settle:** Don't accept reduced expectations. At the same time, demonstrate willingness to collaborate and integrate fully into the team. Inclusion works best in a partnership.

"The support I received gave me confidence and restored my dignity. I'm able to independently do my work, navigate the floors and use the lift. If I get stuck at any point, I know there's someone to assist me. These are the small things that made all the difference to me."

Ncebakazi Tyalisi
Junior Cybersecurity Analyst, Absa

3.2 Navigating the workplace

- **Orientation strategies:** Request a formal orientation and mobility (O&M) session before your start date. Learn the routes to the bathroom, emergency exits and coffee station immediately. Independence in movement signals competence. Be patient with yourself and take your time – nobody learns at the same pace.
- **Managing fatigue:** Listening all day can be mentally exhausting. Respect the energy cost. Short, intentional breaks – even five minutes of silence – can help you reset and sustain performance.
- **Diversity and inclusion support:** Ask HR or your manager to connect you with the diversity and inclusion team. Where possible, connect with other visually impaired colleagues. Shared experience shortens the learning curve.

4. Performance, growth and accountability

- **Owning your role:** Inclusion doesn't remove responsibility. If you miss a deadline, take ownership. Raise accessibility barriers early, not only once delivery is compromised. Proactive communication protects your credibility.
- **Asking for feedback:** Some managers may hesitate to give critical feedback, so invite it. For example: "Am I being measured against the same KPIs as the rest of the team? I value honest feedback so that I can grow."
- **Have proactive discussions:** Share your strengths with your team. Identify where your competencies add the most value. When colleagues understand your capabilities, collaboration improves.
- **Career growth:** Don't become stuck in your current role. Map your career intentionally. Keep learning daily, so that you're prepared for the next opportunity when it arises.
- **Focus on what you can control:** There will be tasks you cannot complete in conventional ways. Concentrate on your strengths and on delivering excellence where you can.

"Life doesn't end with becoming disabled, but it does become much more challenging. Equal opportunity isn't a privilege – it's a lifeline."

For years, every door I knocked on was met with a quiet 'sorry, we can't help you'. Each rejection pushed me deeper into a place where hope felt out of reach. But just one opportunity changed everything.

Through the Hein Wagner Academy and Absa, I was given a chance to study, to grow and to believe again. And when Primedia Broadcasting opened their doors to me, they didn't just offer employment, they restored purpose, dignity and belonging.

My journey proves that ability isn't defined by sight, but by being seen. By being given an opportunity, I was able to change my life, feel valued and make contributions."

Josua Rex
IT Support Engineer, Primedia Broadcasting

5. Relationships at work

- **Managing curiosity:** Colleagues may ask awkward questions. Decide your tolerance level early. It's OK to use humour, but it's also OK to set professional boundaries. Mistakes will happen, so respond with maturity. The more open and curious both parties are, the easier it is to build relationships based on respect and honesty.
- **Feeling included:** Guide colleagues on how to include you. People can't adjust if they don't understand your needs. Clear communication makes participation easier for everyone.
- **Addressing discomfort respectfully:** If colleagues over-help or avoid you, address it kindly but directly. For example: "I appreciate the offer, but I have a system for this. I'll let you know if I need assistance." If your perspective is overlooked, raise it constructively and be solution-focused.

"Hiring is always a challenging task because you don't only hire based on the skillset, you also consider team compatibility. Working with Iain re-engineered how we view both concepts. It's been a journey I wouldn't trade for anything."

Thoko Mathenjwa
Senior Security Architect, Absa

6. Challenges and resilience

- **Emotional labour and burnout:** Recognise the "disability tax": some tasks may require more energy. Counter this by being fiercely organised. Don't burn out trying to prove you are superhuman.
- **When things go wrong:** Tech updates will sometimes disrupt accessibility. Always have a backup plan. For example, join a meeting via your phone instead. When tools fail, demonstrate that you're a problem-solver.

Employer Readiness Checklist

Leadership and commitment

- ☐ Executive support confirmed.
- ☐ Budget approved for reasonable accommodation.
- ☐ Dedicated internal coordinator identified.

Mindset and culture

- ☐ Hiring based on skills and outcomes (not CSI or charity).
- ☐ Leaders aligned on inclusive employment principles.
- ☐ Commitment to ask, not assume.

Human Resources, Recruitment and Policy

- ☐ Job descriptions reviewed for inclusivity.
- ☐ Outcomes-focused role expectations defined.
- ☐ Interview process planned with accessibility in mind.
- ☐ Recruitment partners briefed on inclusive hiring.

Technology and accessibility

- ☐ Screen reader identified.
- ☐ Assistive technology identified (if necessary).
- ☐ Procurement process initiated early.
- ☐ Accessible document standards enabled.
- ☐ Accessibility included in technology procurement criteria (if applicable).

Physical environment and safety

- ☐ Office layout reviewed for safe navigation.
- ☐ Dedicated desk identified.
- ☐ Lifts and shared facilities assessed for accessibility.
- ☐ Guide dog friendly considerations reviewed.
- ☐ OHS representatives briefed.

Support and wellbeing

- ☐ Mobility/Orientation support identified.
- ☐ Sensitivity training scheduled.
- ☐ Wellness and mental health support communicated.
- ☐ Transport considerations reviewed.
- ☐ Internal communication plan prepared.

Employee Onboarding Checklist

Before day one

- ☐ Employee consulted on specific individual needs.
- ☐ Assistive technology requirements confirmed.
- ☐ Screen reader and audio equipment installed and tested.
- ☐ IT access granted before start date.
- ☐ Contracts and policies provided in accessible formats.
- ☐ Desk allocated and reserved.

Orientation and mobility (O&M)

- ☐ Physical workspace orientation planned.
- ☐ O&M session scheduled.
- ☐ Key routes learnt.
- ☐ Process agreed for communicating environmental changes.

People and support structure

- ☐ Line manager briefed and prepared.
- ☐ Primary departmental support person assigned.
- ☐ Secondary support person identified (if applicable).
- ☐ Management sponsor identified (if applicable).
- ☐ Disability network introduction arranged.

Team integration

- ☐ Disability awareness session completed.
- ☐ Inclusive communication norms agreed.
- ☐ Team briefed on do's and don'ts.

Technology and tools

- ☐ Assistive technology configured and supported.
- ☐ Accessible workflows agreed.
- ☐ Application accessibility gaps identified and escalated.

Performance and ongoing support

- ☐ KPIs clarified and documented.
- ☐ Feedback and check-ins scheduled.
- ☐ Ongoing accessibility review agreed.

Resource list

Published research on visual impairment, inclusion and citizenship in South Africa:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11012159/>

Basic Conditions of Employment Act:

https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a75-97.pdf

Recruitment agency specialising in disability inclusive hiring:

Step Ahead Staffing - <https://stepaheadstaffing.africa/>

Tertiary Institutions:

- Hein Wagner Academy - <https://heinwagneracademy.org/>
- Africane Training Academy - <https://africane.org.za/>
- Optima College – SANCB - <https://sancb.org.za/optima/>
- UNISA - <https://www.unisa.ac.za/>

Sensitivity training workshops:

- South African National Council for the Blind - <http://www.sancb.org.za/>
- Hein Wagner Academy - <http://www.heinwagneracademy.org/>
- Blind SA - <https://www.blindsa.org.za/>
- South African Guide-Dogs Association - <https://guidedog.org.za/>
- South African Mobility for the Blind Trust - <https://sambt.org.za/>

“When we replace fear with open dialogue and provide the necessary reasonable accommodations and guidance, we create a workplace where everyone - regardless of their visual status - can contribute with confidence and excellence. This handbook is an essential tool in that mission.”

Jace Nair

CEO, Blind SA



“We are grateful to the Hein Wagner Academy, Primedia and Absa for putting their experience into a guide that opens employment to more blind and partially sighted South Africans.”

Parishna Ramluckan

Managing Trustee, SA Mobility for the Blind Trust



“True inclusion doesn’t mean lowering the bar; it means providing the right tools to clear it. In developing accessible cybersecurity curricula and training the next generation of IT professionals, I see every day that technology is the ultimate equaliser. This handbook perfectly captures the reality we experience at the Academy: when organisations focus on accessibility over assumptions, they don’t just accommodate a disability - they unlock world-class, analytical talent.”

Len Viljoen

Head of Department: Cyber Security Training, Hein Wagner Academy

