

Promoting DEI in Job Descriptions

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Introduction

For potential future employees, the first look they have into your business is often through a job description, though many companies don't focus enough on ensuring their job descriptions emphasize their commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

Here's why this is so important: research has shown that diverse and inclusive teams tend to be more innovative, more productive, and more successful overall. By actively seeking out and welcoming candidates from underrepresented groups, organizations can tap into a wider range of experiences, perspectives, and skill sets and create a more dynamic and well-rounded workforce that is better equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing business environment, where employees feel included and supported.

DEI in job descriptions isn't a "nice-to-have"—it's a business imperative that can have a real and measurable impact on an organization's bottom line.

So, how do you ensure that your job descriptions are created with DEI in mind? We'll outline some actionable best practices for writing inclusive job descriptions, addressing topics such as gender, ageism, neurodiversity, company culture, and accommodations, that will empower you to reach a broader candidate pool.



More than **75%** of job applicants
say that a diverse workforce is
an important factor when
deciding where to work.
—Glassdoor

Job Description Best Practices

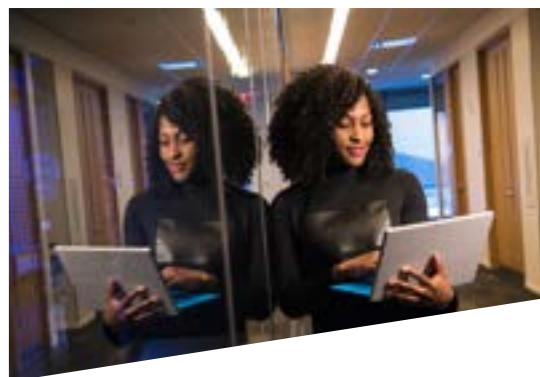
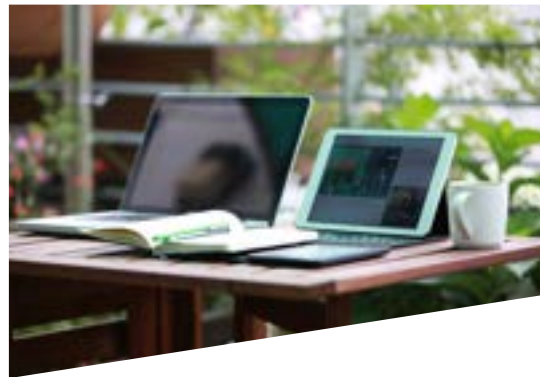
For some candidates, a job description that isn't DEI-friendly may result in them entirely overlooking an opportunity at your company for which they could be an ideal fit. Therefore, it's important to be diligent in how you create, review, and maintain the content of your job descriptions.

There are dozens of opportunities for a job seeker to become disengaged from a job description, whether it's the formatting, language and tone, or content. Some pitfalls are more nuanced than others, but there are a lot of tweaks to job descriptions that can be made to benefit all candidates regardless of age, gender, neurodiversity, race, religion, or ability.

We'll identify specific topics where biases tend to creep in, or which consistently pose roadblocks for certain groups of job seekers, by using these tags:



With that in mind, here are fourteen best practices for creating inclusive job descriptions.



1. Include a DEI Statement

Commitment to inclusivity is important to your company—after all, that’s why you’re reading this! Make sure potential employees know this too by putting your DEI statement front and center on your job descriptions.

Your DEI statement should encourage specific groups of job seekers to apply for the job, even if they don't feel qualified to do so. Don't be afraid to say directly that you're looking for diverse applicants; let them know you're looking for whatever it is that your company doesn't have. For example:

"At our company, we are committed to creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environment. We believe that diversity in all its forms, including but not limited to age, ability, gender, race, religion, and neurodiversity, is a strength and an essential part of our success. We are committed to equal employment opportunities for all qualified individuals, regardless of their background. We encourage people from underrepresented groups to apply for roles at our company and to bring their unique perspectives and experiences to our team. We strive to create a workplace where all employees feel valued, supported, and respected, and where everyone has the opportunity to grow and succeed."

Additionally, it can be helpful to include information about the company's specific diversity and inclusion initiatives and any support or resources that are available for diverse employees. If this information is included on your website, add a link to it in your job description.

NEURODIVERSITY

Clearly state that you welcome diverse candidates including applicants who are neurodiverse.

AGEISM

Consider a specific age-welcoming comment in the job description such as, “Applicants of all ages over minimum legal working age encouraged to apply.” Federal regulations permit employers to favor relatively older persons and to express that preference in job descriptions. If applicable state and local employment law permit, an employer might consider an even more direct appeal to older workers with a note such as “Retirees welcome to apply.”

2. Use a relevant and recognizable job title

Being mindful of the job titles used in job descriptions is important for several reasons:

- It helps to attract the right candidates to the role. Internal company titles may not be accessible to job seekers, who often search for positions using specific keywords or phrases—using the most commonly-recognized job title for the role will make it easier for them to find your job posting.
- It helps establish credibility and professionalism, as it demonstrates that your company has a clear understanding of the role and the industry in which you operate.
- It helps ensure the job posting is properly indexed and ranked by search engines, making it more visible to job seekers.

3. Follow good documentation practices

It's not just about looking pretty—job descriptions are used by a wide range of people with varying abilities, so the most effective and inclusive ones are those that are clear and easy to understand.

- Visual sections and headers help group related information together and make it easier to locate specific details.
- Bulleted lists help organize ideas and break up long blocks of text.
- Keeping sentences short and to the point helps with comprehension and retains interest.

Not only do these tactics keep job descriptions organized and efficient, but they also help establish credibility and professionalism—it demonstrates that your company has taken the time and effort to carefully consider and document the requirements and expectations of the role.

NEURODIVERSITY

Include a video, TTS (text-to-speech) support, graphics, or visual aids in conjunction with the written job description to show rather than tell. This is helpful for people who can't interpret written language well.

4. Be mindful of the language used throughout the job description

The goal is to ensure the job description is clear, skill-based, and omits jargon and flowery language. Use plain language and avoid terms or phrases that exclude applicants. Don't use assumptive language or assume everyone views things in the same way—words like “fast-paced” or “old-school” are dependent on perspective.

There are online tools that can help screen for racialized, gendered, ableist, and binary language, as well as overall readability. However, remember that tools are limited and not a replacement for human input and perspective.

NEURODIVERSITY

Many neurodivergent people may interpret all requirements literally, assume that they are not qualified, and not apply. Avoid superfluous terms like “superstar” or “jack of all trades.”

AGEISM

Scrutinize your job descriptions for words and phrases which may be interpreted as biased against older applicants. Common phrases, each of which have been noted in age-based lawsuits, are included below (these examples aren't unlawful, but they tend to give the idea that an employer is only interested in applicants below a certain age):

- “Recent college grads”
- “Fresh applicants”
- “Early career”
- “Energetic”
- “Digital natives”
- Describing the employer’s team as a “young team”
- Describing the employer’s work environment as for “fresh ideas only.”

4. Be mindful of the language used throughout the job description (cont.)

GENDER

There isn't an on/off switch for gender-coded language, as so much of the business world has been (or continues to be) male focused, but we should strive to keep our language as gender-neutral as possible. Avoid terms or titles that reference gender (e.g., councilman, chairman) and replace them with words that don't have a gender (e.g., council member).

Another way we inadvertently use gender-coded language is through the use of adjectives (e.g., active, adventurous, assertive, cheerful, committed, connected). Studies show that using certain adjectives significantly decreases the applicant pool by excluding certain genders. Rather than the adjective, focus on the desired result—how can you better describe expected behaviors?

RACE/ETHNICITY

Ensure your job description is free of racially biased phrases, such as:

- "Native English speaker"
- "Migrant"
- "Illegal Immigrant" or "Legal Citizens Only"

Also, be aware that not everyone appreciates the use of acronyms such as BIPOC, Latinx, etc., so be mindful when using these so-called inclusive labels—when in doubt, seek counsel from the groups you're trying to represent!



5. Focus on skills rather than years of experience or education

The “Qualifications” section of a job description can be alienating for many groups of applicants. Job seekers with non-traditional learning backgrounds or those with transferrable skills but no direct experience with the same job title are just two examples.

Skills are often more relevant indicators of an individual's ability to perform a job successfully than years of experience or education, as they demonstrate the specific capabilities and accomplishments that a person brings to the role. Focusing on the skills required to perform a role also significantly widens your pool of applicants.

- Don't require that experience is gained in a certain way—allow for equivalent experience outside the traditional paths.
 - For all required degrees, add “OR demonstrated experience in [whatever the skill areas are].”
 - Provide options for demonstrating experience (“These are all the ways you can demonstrate ability”)
- List the skill proficiency levels needed for the job.
- List behaviors to help people understand how it's desired they show up to work.
- Avoid long laundry lists—determine what skill sets are truly required to successfully do the job. If you choose to list other requirements, make sure they are noted as helpful but not required.



Clearly differentiate required from desired skills. Certain groups of applicants are more likely to not apply if they're not 100% sure they meet all the criteria. You can learn more about hiring neurodiverse individuals [here](#).



Specifying a certain age range or level of experience excludes qualified candidates who are over or under a certain age. For example, newer fields such as data analysis have just started producing graduates and skills—avoid asking for an unreasonable number of years of experience. Conversely, more seasoned professionals may see a years of experience requirement and assume that the position is entry-level or that they are overqualified.

6. Spend the time necessary to get the role description right

Too often we encounter mismatches between what the job description says and what the role actually entails or what the hiring manager is seeking, which eat up time and resources in the long run. A clear, accurate, up-to-date job description attracts the right candidates for the role, and:

- Describes the role from the employee's point of view.
- Avoids generic or clichéd requirements.
- Provides a detailed picture of the tasks the job entails.
- Ensures a clear understanding of responsibilities and goals.
 - All of these should help employees understand how their work fits into the overall mission and goals of the company.

Do not just post a job description used for internal benchmarking—create a job description that can accurately communicate the details of the role to external audiences.

NEURODIVERSITY

If a task isn't really required, don't include it! Job descriptions with unnecessary information can make some neurodiverse individuals, like those with dyslexia or autism, apprehensive about applying.

GENDER

Avoid specifying certain physical or personal characteristics that are perceived as gendered, such as height or weight requirements.

7. Document working norms so expectations are clear

This pairs with ensuring the required tasks are well-documented, as they are a crucial part of the employee experience. This can provide answers to questions such as:

- Would I be part of a team?
- Is remote work a possibility?
- How do people engage with each other?
- What tools would I use?

While it might be nerve-wracking to codify working norms, don't ride the fence—even if you might deter some people, demystifying working norms up front avoids confusion later and helps candidates determine if a working environment is a good fit for them.



8. Pay attention to how you talk about company "culture"

The language and messages that you use can have a significant impact on the way that potential candidates perceive the company and its values. Don't go out of your way to say, "Our culture is ____." Coded messaging can discourage talented people from applying because they're not sure they'll fit in.

Instead, try something different and share personal experiences. Grab a testimonial or quote from someone in the department regarding their favorite thing about the culture/environment. For example, "I love working at XYZ company for the people and the perks. They order in free lunches on Thursdays to encourage hybrid/remote workers to join and meet one another. That in-person energy can really spark new ideas, creative insights, and process improvements for us all!"

You could also include imagery, stories, and content that showcases the employees behind the scenes and provides a small snapshot of the culture and the team the individual will be joining.

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiverse individuals may be perceived as lacking social skills or not fitting in with traditional office culture, even if they have the necessary skills and qualifications for the job, due to biases and misunderstandings about their capabilities and needs.



9. Address the need for accommodations

The word “accommodations” can seem like a negative, and oftentimes applicants don’t feel comfortable asking for one even if they know they have the right to. Accommodations should feel transparent and be actually accommodating, not alienating. Use informal language and express openness to customize the application and interview process to meet a candidate's needs, such as:

- “If you aren’t certain what we’re looking for, please contact __ and we will gladly verbally share the job scope and requirements with you,” or
- “We are committed to developing an inclusive recruitment process and work environment. If you require an accommodation, please contact __, and we’ll work with you to meet your accessibility needs.”

Have a plan in place to provide accommodations when they are requested. Whether this is having applicants provide a PowerPoint or video rather than a Word document or filling out a form, or having a call to discuss the criteria and qualifications instead of the person completing the application by themselves, ensure your hiring team is prepared to assist.



10. List the salary range, and keep it narrow enough to be meaningful

Many applicants will skip right past a job description if there's no salary range listed. People don't have time to go through the rigamarole of an application and interview process without knowing if it's worth their while, especially if they're a casual job seeker.

Listing a salary range in a job description creates a more transparent and efficient hiring process for both the company and the candidate. For the company, it can help to:

- Attract more qualified candidates, as people are more likely to apply for a position if they know that the compensation is fair and competitive,
- Save time and resources in the long run, as it reduces the need for the company to negotiate salary with candidates who are not willing to accept the offered pay, and
- Reduce the potential for salary-based discrimination and ensure that all candidates are treated fairly and equitably.

For the candidate, knowing the salary range can help to:

- Determine whether the position is a good fit and aligns with their career goals and financial needs, and
- Prevent misunderstandings or disappointments during the hiring process, as the candidate has a clear understanding of what they can expect to be paid for the role.



11. Be transparent about benefits and "perks"

Candidates scrutinize job descriptions to get an idea of not just what their role will entail, but also what it's like to work for your company. What will their work environment look like? Who will they work with? What perks or benefits does your company provide beyond a paycheck?

Employees are people, and people work best when their needs are met. Whether it's a preference to not be seated at a desk all day, needing a quiet and private space to focus, or generous/flexible time off or scheduling to provide care for loved ones, there are things we do as employers to help our employees perform their best.

Being transparent about these benefits and perks in a job description might feel daunting, but you'll attract the right candidates for your company. List everything that sets your company apart from the rest!

For the sake of keeping job descriptions succinct, you might also outline all the perks and benefits identified below on a separate document(s) or webpage(s) that can then be linked to the job description.

- DEI initiatives within the organization.
- Time off policies.
- Training and professional development opportunities.
- Offer remote or hybrid schedules if the role permits.
- Healthcare coverage, especially if there are benefits beyond "traditional" healthcare coverage (mental health or holistic health options).
- Retirement plan options.
- Commitment to offering inclusive physical spaces beyond ADA compliance (gender neutral bathrooms, private/public workstations, variety of equipment like standing desks or wireless headsets, etc.).

12. Consider if automated personality tests or other AI tools are necessary

NEURODIVERSITY

Though not directly tied to the job description, tread lightly with automated personality tests or other AI testing tools, as many are created for the neurotypical mind and therefore may not give accurate results for the neurodivergent population. Myers-Briggs, for example, has been found to be extremely inaccurate in this regard. Even mentioning this type of computer assessment in a job description may prevent someone from applying.

These tests can also be a turnoff in general because some applicants feel like it's too much work up front. If you must include a test, make sure it's the right tool for the right job and will attract the right applicants.

13. Have a diverse group of reviewers

Don't just rely on a tool, try to guess, or make one person represent entire groups of people—it's important to have a diverse group of people review a job description.

This helps to ensure that the job description accurately reflects the needs and expectations of the role, as different individuals may have different perspectives on the skills and qualifications required for the job—you'll be able to capture a more comprehensive and nuanced view of the role.

More importantly, having a diverse group of reviewers helps to identify and address any potential biases or issues that may not be immediately apparent to a single individual. Seeking reviewers who come from the target populations you're recruiting from helps ensure you're speaking the right language.

NEURODIVERSITY

Particularly if you are in an industry where neurodiverse employees tend to thrive (software engineering & QA, data science, animal science, accounting & finance, creative work & content creation, engineering, etc.) consider hiring a neurodiverse recruitment specialist to help you with your process.

14. Formalize your job description review process

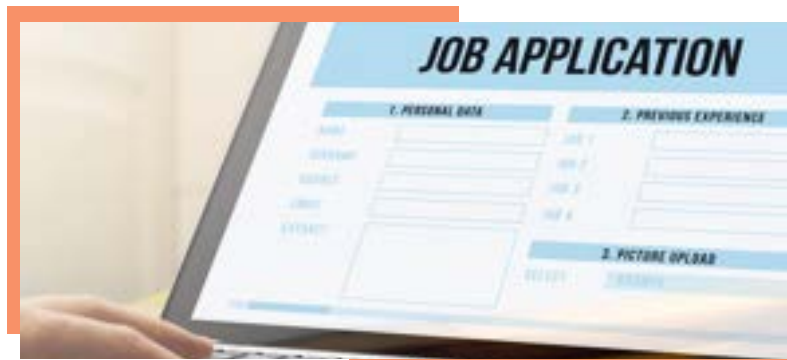
Creating an accurate and inclusive job description isn't easy—it takes time and work to get it right. Formalizing your job description review process ensures it doesn't slip through the cracks, and all your hard work won't go to waste.

At a general level, this means job description review happens on a regular basis and actually gets done. Once you have a team and process in place, it's not a huge commitment to uphold!

15. Make it easy to apply for the job

By this point, you've crafted a descriptive and inclusive, welcoming job description—now let's make sure people actually apply to the job!

- Simplify the application form. Reduce anything unnecessary to determine if further discussion is warranted.
- Offer applicants support if writing/typing isn't easy for them: "If you need any extra support to apply for this job, we offer <<assistive technology software>> to make your application process simpler."
- Provide clear instructions for the application process. Make it clear what materials are required for the application and how the candidate should submit them.
- Consider allowing someone to verbally apply for the job.
- Consider alternative application and evaluation methods: "Apply for this job in the way that best describes why you'd be a good fit" – allow for PPT instead of Word doc, video application, portfolio reviews or demonstration of skills, etc.



You Did It!

Creating inclusive and equitable job descriptions is an essential step in promoting DEI. By removing biased language, highlighting the value of diverse perspectives, and being transparent about the qualifications needed for a role, you can create job descriptions that attract a broader range of candidates and foster a more inclusive workplace.

Regular review and updates to job descriptions will help ensure that they continue to align with your organization's DEI goals, and having a diverse team who performs these reviews ensures a variety of perspectives are always represented.

By making these changes, your organization can take a significant step towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all employees.

For more information or to start a conversation about hiring practices, please visit carexconsulting.com.



About Our Panel



Andrea Cooper

Andrea is a human resources executive who has invested more than 20 years to the practice of improving employee experiences. She currently leads the People function for Talkspace. As a long time Walmart employee she developed a broad range of human resources skills, including global HR, learning and development, labor relations, diversity & inclusion, and strong business partnership. Andrea has further developed her strategic leadership and innovative HR skills through her roles at Amazon, CUNA Mutual, and while running her own consulting practice (Flourish). Andrea has a bachelor's degree in organizational management from John Brown University and a Senior Human Resources Management certification from HRCI. She teaches HR study sessions through the UW SBDC to support developing human resources professionals and is a member of the Wisconsin Innovation Awards board of directors. Outside of work, Andrea is busy spending time with her wife, three sons, two cats, and two dogs. She is a proud Girl Scout alumni and Gold Award recipient.



Mike Gotzler

Mike represents employers in all aspects of labor and employment matters, including labor management relations, and assists the employer community in understanding and impacting Wisconsin legislation before it becomes law. He has partnered with and provided legal counsel to employers of all sizes and industries throughout the U.S., from multinational Fortune 50 companies to startup companies looking to hire their first employee. He has presented at national conferences, represented businesses at White House briefings, participated on expert panels, and has been regularly interviewed and quoted as a result. To help his clients minimize claims, Mike has designed and delivered a wide range of preventive HR training courses, including anti-harassment courses designed with EEOC involvement and approval. Mike also serves as the Wisconsin coordinator and liaison for Littler's Workplace Policy Institute (WPI).



Barbara Hewitt

Barbara joined Career Services at the University of Pennsylvania in 1998 and currently serves as the Executive Director, where she leads a team of 30 people. Prior to becoming Executive Director, Barbara provided career advising to students in the College of Arts and Sciences and in Wharton. Barbara holds a Bachelor of Arts from Dickinson College with majors in Psychology and Spanish, a masters in Counseling from Shippensburg University, and an EdD in Higher Education Administration from Penn. Barbara believes strongly in the power of education to change lives and indeed the world, and has enjoyed focusing her career on helping students and alumni to take what they have learned while in school to contribute to society in their own unique ways.

About Our Panel



Christine Kemnitz

Christine has spent her career building highly effective teams across various industries, as part of start-ups, privately held, venture capital backed and public companies. From leadership development to hiring & organizational design to process development/continuous improvement and change management, she has supported teams large and small through business transformations of all types. She believes that successful teams are diverse, inclusive and operate with their culture at the center.

Christine is able to motivate people towards common goals and objectives by utilizing techniques tailored to each individual situation. She is also passionate about neurodiversity and giving opportunity to all people to shine in their professional field of choice. She is a great cook, people usually eat what she bakes and she loves animals and travel when her busy schedule allows.



Casey Liakos

Casey has spent nearly 20 years both helping healthcare organizations improve their technology and operations and connecting client partners to top talent in their fields. Formerly a Managing Director of a leading global Management Consulting firm, Casey brings a deep level of healthcare knowledge, talent acquisition experience, and business acumen to his current role at Carex Consulting Group, where he's served as President for over 5 years. Casey was named Madison, WI's 2020 Small

Business Executive of the Year and is passionate about and involved with numerous community organizations, including a board seat with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dane County.



Andree Mendoza

Andree is a tenacious first-generation college graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Business. Born in Peru and raised in Madison, Andree has cultivated a rich cultural background and an unwavering drive to succeed. Andree is an IT recruiter at Carex and is passionate about equal-opportunity employment. Andree is dedicated to fostering diverse and inclusive work environments that allow individuals to thrive, regardless of their background. Their experience working with the

Madison school district during college made him sure that he wanted to focus on breaking barriers, empowering others, and helping everyone reach their full potential. A firm believer in the power of community engagement, Andree is an avid soccer player and loves being part of a community with a shared love for the sport that has fostered a strong sense of camaraderie, celebrating diversity and unity in their local community.

About Our Panel



Erin Mowbray

Erin graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in Professional Writing: Digital and Technical Writing and a minor in Sustainability Studies. While at MSU, she participated in various honor societies, the Women in Entrepreneurship club, and Exceptions Journal, an editorial by and for people with visual disabilities. She is passionate about helping others tell their stories and has worked with all manner of organizations, from a STEM education research group to payroll company to medical device manufacturer. She currently works for Carex Consulting Group as their Marketing Specialist. Erin loves reading, video games, and hiking with her husband and golden retriever.



Rachel Neill

Rachel is a serial entrepreneur (Carex Consulting Group, Figgy, and Talent Bandit) passionate about the startup space, scaling companies, raising capital, and women in tech. Rachel's background includes extensive experience in and national recognition for building exceptional teams, facilitating fundraising, and scaling companies. In 2017, determined to reinvent the staffing process and create better alignment between top-tier companies and best-in-class talent, Rachel left her comfortable gig and a regular paycheck to launch Carex Consulting Group, a career matchmaking firm. Prior to founding Carex, she worked as an executive at Nordic Consulting and helped to build it into one of the largest nationwide Epic consulting firms. In 2021 Rachel co-founded Figgy Play and launched her first eCommerce business. Talent acquisition and company culture is Rachel's jam, and she's proud to be an entrepreneur, a connector, a working mom of six, and a dog lover. She's also never met a Peloton run she didn't like.



Christina Outlay

Christina is the Executive Director of Maydm. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and M.S. in Information Systems from DePaul University and a Ph.D. in Management Information Systems from the University of Illinois at Chicago, along with 12 years of IT corporate experience and 13 years of academic teaching and research experience. Christina was an Associate Professor of Information Technology at UW-Whitewater and nonprofit director prior to joining Maydm. Outside of work, Christina is a married mom of four and a chronic overachiever who is constantly juggling multiple priorities. She is the President of the Sun Prairie Police Commission, board member for Ghana Code Club, past board member for Collaboration for Good, 2019 Madison Magnet Impact Award finalist, 2018 UW-Whitewater College of Business and Economic Service Award recipient, 2017 Brava Woman to Watch and 2013 UW System Outstanding Woman of Color in Education. She has been quoted in The Capital Times, Madison 365, and Wisconsin State Journal.

About Our Panel



Chantel Soumis

Chantel has established a following of over 90,000 on LinkedIn as a marketing thought leader and a voice for disability accessibility and inclusion. Chantel has worked in collaboration with LinkedIn and Facebook as well as many Fortune 500 clients and has received international honors such as The Universal Women's Network Woman of Inspiration for Diversity & Inclusion and Brava Magazine's Woman to Watch. Through unwavering optimism, Chantel shares the importance of bringing awareness to invisible disabilities and the magic behind neurodiversity.



Paulina Walicka

Paulina graduated from Babson College this past spring with a concentration in finance and business analytics. While at Babson, she was involved in the Student Government Association, the Sigma Kappa sorority, and the Babson Finance Association. Currently, she works for Dell Technologies on a specialty storage team where she looks at different KPIs to generate quarterly goals. In her free time she enjoys travelling, cooking, and exercising.

