



Eric L. Pines

Dec 13 · 12 min read · [Listen](#)



Disability Inclusion In The Workplace: Ajay Kaul Of AgreeYa Solutions On How Businesses Make Accommodations For Customers and Employees Who Have a Disability

An Interview With Eric Pines



Keep time for unwinding and continuous learning: Save yourself from total burnout. Keep time for hobbies or anything that helps you unwind. Look for opportunities to learn new things to keep yourself refreshed and energized.

...

As we all know, over the past several years there has been a great deal of discussion about inclusion and diversity in the Workplace. One aspect of inclusion that is not discussed enough, is how businesses can be inclusive of people with disabilities. We know that the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) requires businesses to make reasonable accommodations for people with

disabilities. What exactly does this look like in practice? What exactly are reasonable accommodations? Aside from what is legally required, what are some best practices that can make a business place feel more welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities? To address these questions, we are talking to successful business leaders who can share stories and insights from their experience about the “How Businesses Make Accommodations For Customers and Employees Who Are Disabled “.

As a part of this series, we had the pleasure of interviewing Ajay Kaul, managing partner, AgreeYa Solutions.

Ajay Kaul is a visionary leader and trendsetter. As managing partner of AgreeYa Solutions, he has been instrumental in leading the company through solid growth and international expansion for the past 20 years. Kaul has three decades of experience building powerful and innovative solutions for businesses across various industries and verticals. His expertise and knowledge span across enterprise sales management, marketing and strategy, global delivery and mergers and acquisitions.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you ended up where you are?

I have always been very fascinated with technology and the way it impacts lives. After completing my formal education, I worked with leading technology companies like Deloitte Consulting, iGate (Mastech) and Tata Infotech (TUL). During that time, my passion for technology continued to grow.

In 1999, I decided to start my entrepreneurial journey with the objective of helping not only enterprises but the communities around them. The whole idea of ‘Customer First’ was, and continues to be, the prime fabric of [AgreeYa Solutions](#)’ DNA. I was passionate about creating an organization where the customer was at the center of everything. Our motto as an organization, “Building *our* future on *your* success,” also stems from this very idea.

Over the last 23 years, AgreeYa has helped many small and Fortune 100 organizations meet their business goals and implement their technology roadmap. For the public sector, we have helped cities and counties better engage with their citizens, optimize their operations and modernize their technology ecosystem through smart, innovative solutions. After three decades, I still feel the same excitement when we build a powerful solution or help a customer solve a complex business problem.

You are a successful leader. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

As an organization, we strongly believe in creating a positive impact through technology in organizations and the community at large.

We take immense pride in our value system, which is built on the pillars of **Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect** and **Excellence** (“I-CARE”). It is because of our value system that we continue to deliver on our promises to our customers, employees and partners.

Both individually and as an organization, we strongly believe in diversity, the inclusion of all people and accepting different perspectives. We continuously strive to bring together creative and talented people to promote innovation and demonstrate growth to our customers. Our commitment and efforts in the direction of diversity and inclusion have helped us deliver quality and value to our customers while providing employment opportunities to underrepresented groups.

“AgreeYans,” as we endearingly refer to ourselves, possess the shared philosophy of giving back to society. We are all committed to making our communities better than we found them. We support many social causes and love devoting our time and resources to those collectively as a team.

Can you share a story about one of your greatest work related struggles? Can you share what you did to overcome it?

COVID -19 took the world and businesses by surprise. No one anticipated a situation like this, and hence many of us ended up being under-prepared and without a plan.

At AgreeYa, the initial wave did bring some anxious moments, but as an IT organization, we were able to react quickly with our knowledge and technological know-how. We shifted our mindset from seeing the pandemic as a problem to seeing it as an opportunity and ensured that our customers could continue business operations with minimal disruption. Our teams prioritized communication and collaboration to support the internal business and customers. By focusing on the opportunity in front of us, the pandemic allowed us to show the world the power of technology and how it can truly transform the way we operate.

To support businesses, we built solutions to enable collaboration and an AI-powered Chatbot to improve adoption of new technologies/solutions, establish governance, drive automation and also reduce operation costs while improving service levels of the IT Helpdesk. In addition, we created business process automation and “Return to Workplace” solutions that helped companies be more productive and see a strong ROI.

It gives me immense joy and pride that AgreeYa solutions were utilized by so many organizations during COVID and that we had more revenue in 2020 than the year before.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now?

A recent project that was extremely rewarding was for the largest Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in Southern California. AgreeYa's Teams implementation and governance solutions enabled the MPO to ensure a smooth transition to Microsoft Teams, while keeping the data and conversations secure and compliant. It equipped the organization to manage user resistance better and drive adoption.

An additional project for the same customer was for their Active Transportation Program (ATP) initiative. We developed an app to increase the number of trips accomplished by biking and walking, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance public health and make the region more enjoyable to live in.

Another project we are very proud of is an app we created for our customer based out of Detroit, Michigan. They provide full support and services to individuals with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbances, people with autism, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those with substance use disorders.

Though not very recent, another favorite project was for a leading air pollution agency regulating emissions from stationary and mobile sources of air pollution across four primary counties in the U.S. It services 17 million residents across 10,000 square miles. Its goal is to empower citizens with real-time and forecasted air quality data, helping them avoid health hazards caused by poor air quality.

Fantastic. Let's now shift to our discussion about inclusion. Can you tell our readers a bit about your experience working with initiatives to promote Diversity and Inclusion? Can you share a story with us?

In our experience, commitment to diversity and inclusion means that as an organization you accept and believe that everyone is different, and that we respect and embrace those differences. We feel it is very important to send a clear message to your workforce that as an organization you are open to learning different points of view. At AgreeYa, we encouraged leveraging these ideas to learn from each other. We can very proudly say that everyone at AgreeYa played an important role in building an inclusive work environment. Having said that, we also believe it is leadership's responsibility to set the tone and lead by example for the rest of the workforce to follow — to lead with specific actions that demonstrate our organization's commitment to DEI.

At AgreeYa, with help from everyone, top to bottom, we created an environment that promotes inclusion, sense of belonging, equality and equal opportunities.

This may be obvious to you, but it will be helpful to spell this out. Can you articulate to our readers a few reasons why it is so important for a business or organization to have an inclusive work culture?

In the current business culture it is particularly important to understand that employees are expecting their organizations to understand and care about their unique needs for inclusion, and they want to see real commitments to addressing them.

As an organization, we strongly believe that the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) of all people is imperative, not only in a professional environment but in a personal one as well. DEI should be the foundation for any organization. Various studies have proved that building diverse and inclusive teams not only augments performance, but it also pays off in recruitment, retention and better teamwork bonding. In addition, inclusive organizations find it easier to attract talent across demographics.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) requires businesses to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. For the benefit of our readers, can you help explain what this looks like in practice? What exactly are reasonable accommodations? Can you please share a few examples?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires reasonable accommodations (sometimes referred to as “productivity enhancers” but not “special privileges”) on the part of employers as they relate to three important aspects of employment. First is ensuring equal opportunity in the application process. At AgreeYa, we follow a recruiting process that helps attract and select top candidates with fair hiring practices that are legal and consistent with labor laws.

Apart from this, in accordance with the ADA, we ensure that a qualified individual with a disability is able to perform the essential functions of a job. In addition, it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure an employee with a disability enjoys equal benefits and privileges during employment. To support this, we evaluate our existing practices. We understand that, at times, it may require us to restructure jobs, create part-time opportunities or modify work schedules, revise tests and training materials, or provide qualified readers or interpreters if needed.

Lastly, we are committed to maintaining a facility and equipment that are compliant with ADA requirements. In fact, we believe that workplace facility enhancements such as ramps, accessible restrooms and ergonomic workstations benefit all our employees, not just employees with disabilities.

Aside from what is legally required, what are some best practices that can make a business place feel more welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities? If you can, please share a few examples.

At AgreeYa, we feel that businesses should not only have a legal but ethical obligation to hire people with disabilities. Employing people with disabilities can help bring new ideas and fresh perspectives, increase productivity and boost higher-quality service. Furthermore, businesses should start to create or improve accessibility and offer a more welcoming environment for disabled customers.

Enforcement of the ADA doesn't have to be a big issue — however, businesses need to take a positive interest and sense of responsibility in it.

Can you share a few examples of ideas that were implemented at your Workplace to help promote disability inclusion? Can you share with us how the work culture was impacted as a result?

As an organization, we are very conscious about the difference we can make by promoting disability inclusion. We have clear communication to the entire organization from senior management that all people, including people with disabilities, are to be respected and openly welcomed and evaluated for their work.

We ensure that we identify and eliminate processes that support unconscious bias. Further, we put in efforts to help all employees understand the challenges that persons with disabilities face and contribute to solutions to make their experience comfortable.

We made small changes to our standard training programs, which now have capacity to support any necessary accommodations. We also engage with groups supporting people with disabilities to help us better understand their challenges and offer the right working environment for them.

This is our signature question that we ask in many of our interviews. What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me When I First Started My Career”?

1. Surround yourself with smart people and delegate with intention: Hire the best people and encourage them to take the lead instead of you driving them to do things you want. Leverage your teams' strengths and delegate the work accordingly. This will not only allow employees to grow but will save you valuable time so you can focus on other important things.
2. Make customer challenges your own: Going the extra mile to realize your customer's vision or goals can help you better serve them. Success for us lies in seeing our customers achieve their goals. Always put the customer's needs first, and everything will fall in place.
3. Always give constructive feedback: Create a culture of providing constructive feedback. A culture of actionable feedback eliminates the fear of giving criticism, and the team understands that feedback isn't a personal attack on them.
4. Celebrate your wins and learn from your mistakes: To keep your motivation level and spirits high, always celebrate your smallest wins. However, do not shy away from learning from your failures. It is good to make mistakes, but do not repeat the same mistakes again.

5. Keep time for unwinding and continuous learning: Save yourself from total burnout. Keep time for hobbies or anything that helps you unwind. Look for opportunities to learn new things to keep yourself refreshed and energized.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share a story about how that was relevant in your own life?

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, I have started to believe more in this approach: “Instead of worrying about what you cannot control, shift your energy to what you can create.” I apply this philosophy both in my personal and professional life. No one had anticipated a situation like we experienced with COVID and hence many of us ended up being under-prepared or overwhelmed.

When COVID struck, the whole world had to learn how to operate in a completely new way. People across the globe were struggling in both personal and professional capacities. No one had expected a situation like this and therefore no one had a playbook for how to best deal with it.

During that time, we focused on engaging with our customers. We ensured that our customers continued with business as usual with minimal disruption. Our teams communicated and collaborated more than usual to immediately address any concerns and establish stability. This was another way that showed the world the power of technology and how it can truly transform the way we operate. I would say that we shifted our energies toward creating something that could help the world manage and survive the pandemic and we succeeded quite well.

You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

AgreeYa is philanthropic at heart. We believe in giving back to society and leaving the world a better place than we found it. I personally want to see the world disease-free and hunger-free. In line with this, personally and at the organizational level, we support organizations dedicated to finding cures and solutions to help the world become disease-free, especially cancer. Our employees also actively participate in supporting social causes, such as CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for children in foster care), Children’s Charities of Sacramento, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, American Cancer Society UCP of Sacramento and Northern California, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Sacramento’s “Build for Unity” Program and many others. We also organize food distribution camps for needy families. I strongly believe that all humans across the globe should contribute to mankind and work toward the well-being of everyone.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

You will find me most active on [LinkedIn](#).

You may also follow AgreeYa's social media handles on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

I also regularly share my thoughts and ideas on many reputable platforms and publications, including *Staffing Hub*, where I expressed my views on **“The Importance and Benefits of Bringing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives Into Your Workplace.”**

My article was also featured on *Channel Futures* for my thoughts on **“How Remote Working Promotes Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace.”**

AgreeYa was named in the diversitybusiness.com 10th annual listing of the **“Top 500 Diversity-Owned Businesses in the United States”** Div500.

This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for the time you spent with this. We wish you continued success and good health!

About the Interviewer: Eric L. Pines is a nationally recognized federal employment lawyer, mediator, and attorney business coach. He represents federal employees and acts as in-house counsel for over fifty thousand federal employees through his work as a federal employee labor union representative. A formal federal employee himself, Mr. Pines began his federal employment law career as in-house counsel for AFGE Local 1923 which is in Social Security Administration's headquarters and is the largest federal union local in the world. He presently serves as AFGE 1923's Chief Counsel as well as in-house counsel for all FEMA bargaining unit employees and numerous Department of Defense and Veteran Affairs unions.

While he and his firm specialize in representing federal employees from all federal agencies and in reference to virtually all federal employee matters, his firm has placed special attention on representing Veteran Affairs doctors and nurses hired under the authority of Title. He and his firm have a particular passion in representing disabled federal employees with their requests for medical and religious reasonable accommodations when those accommodations are warranted under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (ADA). He also represents them with their requests for Federal Employee Disability Retirement (OPM) when an accommodation would not be possible.