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Selma Blair:
A Beacon of Bravery

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From the Editor

Selma Blair – “It’s not easy choosing to be brave…”

Especially when you feel scared or alone, or like the whole world is against you, facing your fears head on can be paralyzing. And while it’s tough enough to deal with such emotions in private, imagine having to do so amid the scrutiny of the public eye.

Like actress Selma Blair.

For Blair, our inspiring cover story, being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis wasn’t an end, but the beginning of a journey she openly — and very publicly — embraced. As she shared with us, “I’ve learned there is an intrinsic value in opening up some of your experiences to people, because the conditions we deal with are often very isolating and there might be someone out there who could really shed a light on it.”

From using her cane as a fashion statement on the red carpet to her Instagram page motto, “This is my journey….and all are welcome here,” Blair is single-handedly changing how the public views people with disabilities. She is an inspiration and a fearless advocate for the MS community, but as Blair says, “I’m not a hero. I make no bones about that in my life. But I am very honored if my experience, my mess ups and my triumphs help other people.” Read more about Blair’s extraordinary journey on page 76.

Speaking of journeys, the American Disabilities Act is celebrating it’s 30th anniversary (page 14), and the focus remains on increasing access and opportunity for people with disabilities in the workplace during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (page 30). And whether you are looking for work-from-home opportunities (page 34), wanting to start your own business (page 54) or ways to adjust to learning online (page 70), this issue is chock full of tips to put you on the path to success.

Everyone has their own fears and challenges but remember, you are not alone. Being brave enough to share your own experience might not only help you but others who need it too.

Kat Castagnoli
Kat Castagnoli
Editor, DIVERSEability Magazine

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Kate Brouse is a disability advocate for national non-profit NTI@Home, the leader in helping Americans with disabilities train for and find work-at-home jobs. From coast-to-coast, Kate has appeared on talk shows and podcasts discussing remote work, accessibility, diversity, and disability. Her outreach efforts have led to more than 500 radio stations across the United States sharing information about NTI@Home through nationally recognized acts that care about disability rights. Kate earned her bachelor’s degree in English from Brigham Young University. When not working, she can be found around sunny southwest Florida, either bicycling or reading a book in the hammock under her oak tree.

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KAREN PUTZ
Karen Putz is a transformational speaker who is known as The Passion Mentor. She grew up hard of hearing and became deaf from a fall while barefoot water skiing. At the age of 44, she rediscovered her passion for walking on water and returned to the sport. Putz has been featured in MORE, espnW, Headline News, and CNN. She is the author of several books, including her latest, “Unwrapping Your Passion: Creating the Life You Truly Want.”
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This vision of strength in diversity has been an essential element of CSX's rise as an industry leader in safety, service and efficiency, and it has earned the company increasing recognition as an example of corporate diversity and inclusion of differently abled individuals.

For two consecutive years, CSX has been recognized as a “Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion” by Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), for its efforts in the areas of culture, leadership, enterprise-wide access, employment practices and community engagement.

CSX offers closed captioning on multimedia assets; self- and instructor-led diversity and inclusion training; and disability accommodations, such as automated doors, restroom access, modifications to breakrooms and dedicated parking. The company also proudly welcomes service animals into its facilities.

CSX's efforts are advanced through a partnership of the company's Human Resources Diversity and Inclusion team and the employee-led ABLE Disability Inclusion Group, which organizes informational sessions, volunteer events and awareness campaigns. Recent initiatives have ranged from a Count Me In! Campaign to measure and support diversity, to a celebration of the 30-year anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

CSX is a company that values ability in all its forms.
CSX believes that to be the best-run railroad in America, it must employ the best railroaders — a diverse workforce of people contributing their fullest through a unique combination of abilities, perspectives and experiences.

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CSX is a company that values ability in all its forms.
The 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act
Increasing Access and Opportunity

This year marks 30 years since a major milestone in our nation’s history—the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Since its passage in 1990, this landmark legislation has helped increase access and opportunity for people with disabilities in our nation’s workplaces and communities.

Signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush, the ADA is a landmark piece of civil rights legislation that works to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life, including employment.

“The Americans with Disabilities Act broke down barriers to opportunity for millions of American workers,” U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia said. “On this anniversary, we recognize and celebrate the access to opportunity created by the ADA. Together with our strong economy, the Act has led to historically low unemployment for American workers with disabilities.”

Many of the events and activities focused on the ADA’s impact on employment are being led by the U.S. Department of Labor’s (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy, including the 75th annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) observance in October.

How You Can Celebrate

Individuals and organizations, including employers and employment service providers, are highly encouraged to participate in the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) 30th anniversary celebration, as well as the 75th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

Below are a few ideas your organization can implement to celebrate.

- Issue a press release expressing your organization’s commitment to the ADA and actions you’ve taken to create a disability-inclusive organization.
- Feature the anniversary in internal and ex-
“The ADA ushered in a new era of opportunity for Americans with disabilities. Instead of being excluded from opportunities to contribute their skills and talents, Americans with disabilities gained access to places and public services, such as employment and training programs, that were not possible before the ADA.”

—Office of Disability Employment Policy Deputy Assistant Secretary Jennifer Sheehy.
We are pleased to announce DIVERSEability Magazine’s 2020 Top Disability-Friendly Companies, as determined by the Disability Equality Index® (DEI) for Disability Inclusion, annual reports, and our own survey and research.

DIVERSEability Magazine polled hundreds of Fortune 1000 companies for its 2020 Best of the Best evaluations. The DEI® offers businesses an opportunity to receive a score from zero to 100 on their disability inclusion policies and practices.

The survey is a joint initiative of the American Association of People with Disabilities and the Disability:IN that gives companies the opportunity to re-evaluate policies and practices and determine where they stand among other organizations for disability inclusion practices. Two hundred and forty-seven Fortune 1000 corporations completed the DEI in 2020, with the number of top-scoring companies more than quadrupling to 205 in 2020 as compared to 43 in 2015. The companies on the Top Disability-Friendly Companies list demonstrate exemplary hiring and employment practices for people with disabilities. This public, annual recognition is designed to applaud those organizations that are leading the way in disability hiring and to encourage additional companies to tap into the many benefits of hiring talent with disabilities, including strong consumer preference for companies that employ individuals with disabilities and greater employee engagement across the workforce.

“The companies on this list represent the very best in diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities,” said Mona Lisa Faris, president and publisher of DIVERSEability Magazine. “We hope that by highlighting the successes of these cutting-edge organizations, we will encourage other companies to follow suit and drive forward the inclusiveness of corporate America.”

The 2020 Best of the Best winners are companies that need no convincing that people with disabilities make outstanding contributions to the workplace. They have seen the untapped potential of this particular talent pool and they are welcoming individuals with disabilities into their ranks.

“The organizations being recognized this year understand that people with disabilities have tremendous talents to offer, and people with disabilities make outstanding contributions to the workplace,” said Faris.

The hope is that the companies highlighted on this list will show other organizations that people with disabilities are as easy to hire and retain as any other employees. And that is what President George H.W. Bush wanted employers to know when he signed the American Disabilities Act (ADA) into law in 1990: that employers hold the key to unlocking the great potential of the ADA.

More than 1,800 companies participated in the 2020 survey. There is no fee to participate, and every company receives a free report card assessing its performance against all competitors. The survey, now in its 5th year, leads to a detailed, empirically driven ranking. The free report card assesses performance based on four areas of diversity management:

- Talent pipeline: workforce breakdown, recruitment, diameter of existing talent, structures
- Equitable talent development: employee resource groups, mentoring, philanthropy, movement, fairness
- CEO/leadership commitment: accountability for results, personal communications, visibility
- Supplier diversity: spend with companies owned by people from underrepresented groups, accountability, support

For people with disabilities, work flexibility can be as much a top priority as for other job seekers looking for the best flexible work options. Companies that met the initial threshold for inclusion on the Best of the Best list were also evaluated using additional factors, including:

- How inviting a company’s website was to customers, job applicants, and others with disabilities
- Whether a company’s recruiting process was inclusive of job seekers with disabilities
- How and whether a company keeps track of employees with disabilities, including new hires
- Availability of flexible benefits like working from home and alternative career options

The disability community, from grassroots advocates to powerful cross-disability organizations, devotes a lot of time and energy to proving the value of hiring disabled workers. Providing equal opportunity is providing equal rights, because it’s moral and ethical.

The companies on this list are leading the way in promoting an inclusive workplace, part of a community of businesses that are proud of the advancements they have made in hiring workers with disabilities.

“We are honored to celebrate the forward-thinking companies on this year’s list,” continues Faris, “and to shine a light on the companies that are leading the way in including people with disabilities.”

“...
Top Disability-Friendly Companies

3M
Accenture
Adobe
Advance Auto Parts
Aetna
Allstate
Amazon
AMC Entertainment, Inc.
Ameren Corporation
American Airlines
American Electric Power
American Water
Anthem, Inc.
Aramark
AT&T Inc.
AXA
BAE Systems, Inc.
Bank of America
Bayer
BD
Best Buy Co., Inc.
Biogen
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Inc.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island
Blue Shield of California
BMO Harris Bank
BNY Mellon
Boehringer Ingelheim
Booz Allen Hamilton
Boston Scientific
Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
Brown-Forman Corporation
Capco
Capital One Financial Corporation
Cargill
Caterpillar
Centene Corporation
CenturyLink
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Choice Hotels
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Comcast NBCUniversal
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CUNA Mutual Group
CVS Health
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Dominion Energy
Dow Inc.
DTE Energy
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Merck
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Northwestern Mutual
Oak Ridge Associated Universities
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OppenheimerFunds, Inc.
Oracle
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Travelers
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Uber Technologies Inc.
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Unilever
United Airlines
United Health Group
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Can You Hire a Deaf Employee When the Job Requires Phone Work?

By Karen Putz

Imagine this: You are hiring for a job that requires phone work...but the person sitting in front of you is deaf/hard of hearing.

You may be wondering, can a person who is deaf/hard of hearing use the phone successfully?

The answer is yes.

And consider this: companies and corporations are actively seeking out people with differences. Diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords, they’re real-life practices that today’s companies are required to implement. Diverse teams and inclusive environments produce an organizational culture that is beneficial to the bottom line.

Yet, at first glance, managers and human resources personnel may be reluctant to consider a deaf/hard of hearing person for a job because of presumed limitations.

They may be wondering:
- If a person can’t hear in the normal range, how can they manage parts of the job that require audio communication?
- If a person can’t hear in the normal range, how will they communicate?
- If a person can’t hear in the normal range, can they really do the job?

The reluctance from employers to consider deaf/hard of hearing for jobs that involve phone work often comes from fear of the unknown. If you’ve never met a deaf/hard of hearing person doing the work that you’re hiring for, you might hesitate or even refuse to consider hiring that person.

Technological advances have leveled the playing field in many professions. In many cases, deaf and hard of hearing people bring a perspective to a job that a person with hearing in the normal range may not have.


Even at call centers—which require being on the phone all hours of the job! Dale McCord works as a Purchase Card Specialist and his job requires frequent phone contact with vendors. “In the past, I occasionally came across managers who were reluctant to hire me for jobs because of perceived ‘limitations,’” Dale explained.

“I’m a loyal and hard-working person and today’s technology allows me to do my job very well.”

Dale also has some advice for those who hire:
- “When you hire a person with a disability, don’t doubt their ability to do the job—because they will often do the job twice as well.”

Today’s technology has made telephone communication accessible in a variety of ways, including captioned phones and videophones. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use American Sign Language can make and receive calls via Video Relay Service (VRS) such as ZVRS and Purple Communications. By utilizing a videophone, a deaf/hard of hearing person is capable of working via phone. The person on the other end of the line does not necessarily know the conversation is woven with two languages, facilitated by a qualified, highly skilled interpreter.

Here are some frequently asked questions about using Video Relay Services:

**How does a deaf/hard of hearing person use a phone with a Video Relay System?**

Both ZVRS and Purple Communications provide equipment and software that routes a phone call through a video relay system. The deaf/hard of hearing individual accesses a phone conversation by watching a sign language interpreter on a video screen. The

The employment gap between deaf and hearing people in the United States is a significant area of concern. In 2017, only 53.3% of deaf people were employed, compared to 75.8% of hearing people. This is an employment gap of 22.5%.

— National Deaf Center
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Can a deaf/hard of hearing person answer an inbound call?  
Yes, calls can be routed through a phone number assigned to a videophone. A visual alert system will notify the deaf/hard of hearing person that a call is coming through. With the press of a button, the call can be answered.

Our network is extremely secure—will a videophone work with our network?  
ZVRS and Purple have developed a wide range of video phone solutions that include the use of physical phone devices developed by Cisco, and softphone client software that works on Windows, Mac, iPhone/iPad and Android devices. They support many large and small corporate customers, including Federal Government agencies, and work within their very demanding security requirements. The costs of providing VRS on a call are supported by shared funding mechanisms which are governed by Federal Communications Commission.

Where can I find more information about phone solutions for potential deaf/hard of hearing employees?  
Helping Employers “Bring Their A Game” to Workplace Mental Health

By the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

The challenges brought to daily life in 2020, coupled with an increased understanding about the prevalence of mental health conditions, is spurring employers to consider strategies they can use to support employees’ mental health.

To help employers learn how to cultivate a welcoming and supportive work environment for employees with mental health conditions, the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) created a Mental Health Toolkit centered around four pillars referred to as the “4 A’s of a Mental Health-Friendly Workplace.” The toolkit also provides summaries of research and examples of mental health initiatives implemented by employers of varying sizes and industries.

The first “A” of the four pillars, awareness, involves strategies for educating employers and workers about mental health issues and taking action to foster a supportive workplace culture. One example of an organization’s efforts in this area is professional services firm EY’s “We Care” campaign. This internal campaign uses personal stories, including those shared by company leadership, to educate employees about mental health conditions, reduce stigma, and encourage them to support one another.

The second “A” in the “4 A’s” is accommodations, meaning providing employees with mental health conditions the supports they need to perform their job. Common examples include flexible work arrangements and/or schedules, which may be considered reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other disability nondiscrimination laws and regulations.

An example of accommodations for someone with a mental health condition are those provided by defense contractor Northrop Grumman for an employee who is a veteran with service-connected disabilities, including post-traumatic stress disorder. The employee uses several workplace accommodations to ensure his workplace success, including noise-cancelling headphones and bringing his service dog to work with him.

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The third “A,” assistance, refers to assisting employees who have, or may develop, a mental health condition. Many employers do this through formal employee assistance programs (EAPs). An example of this in action is chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturer DuPont, which has a long history with EAPs. In fact, DuPont is regarded as having one of the first.

Today, DuPont has a number of internal initiatives focused on mental health and employee wellbeing, with strong support from top leadership. As an example, DuPont’s global EAP team created and implemented an internal anti-stigma campaign called “ICU” (“I See You”), the centerpiece of which is an animated video about how to recognize signs of emotional distress in colleagues and encourage them to seek help. Based on its success, DuPont decided to make the program available to all employers, free of charge, through a partnership with the Center for Workplace Mental Health.

EAPs are associated with larger businesses, but it is important to note that there are strategies small businesses can use to offer EAP services, for example, by banding together to negotiate for better rates. Business membership groups such as chambers of commerce or trade associations may be of assistance in this regard. In fact, providing employee assistance in the small business environment can be especially important, given that decreased productivity or the absence of even one employee can have a significant impact on a small organization.

The final “A,” access, encourages employers to assess company healthcare plans to ensure or increase coverage for behavioral/mental health treatment, something shown to benefit not only individuals, but also companies by way of the bottom line. According to the American Psychiatric Association, more than 80 percent of employees treated for mental health conditions report improved levels of efficiency and satisfaction at work.

An example of a company with a strong focus on providing access to mental health services for its employees is global pharmaceutical company Lundbeck, which engages in the research, development, and sale of drugs for psychiatric and neurological disorders. According to company representatives, educating about and decreasing stigma associated with mental health is one of Lundbeck’s core corporate beliefs—and this applies not only externally, but also internally for its employees. Reflecting this, prescription medications for mental health conditions are available to employees or their dependents at no cost when prescribed by a physician. Further, all benefits information sent to employees leading up to the company’s healthcare plan open enrollment period prominently feature mental health messaging.

For companies that are federal contractors, taking steps to foster a mental health-friendly workplace can have additional benefits by helping demonstrate an overall commitment to disability inclusion. As a result, employees with mental health conditions may feel more comfortable self-identifying as having a disability, which helps employers measure their progress toward goals under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. Federal contractors, and all businesses, can use EARN’s Mental Health Toolkit to learn how to “bring their A game” when it comes to workplace mental health.

Access EARN’s Mental Health Toolkit at AskEARN.org/mental-health.
7 Steps to Make Your Virtual Presentations Accessible

By Devin Boyle

With the rapid rise of telework, the PEAT team recognizes it’s more important than ever to make sure virtual presentations are accessible. These efforts allow all participants, particularly people with disabilities, to effectively engage with presented content. Below, you’ll find seven essential steps and related resources to help you create accessible presentations.

Before and During Your Presentation

Step 1: Research

Before hosting a virtual presentation, identify all accessibility features of the online platform you intend to use. The following websites discuss accessibility features for several commonly used platforms for webinars, virtual conferences, and other collaborative activities:

● Adobe Connect Google G Suite
● Microsoft Teams
● Slack (keyboard accessibility, screen reader accessibility)
● Workplace by Facebook
● Zoom

Step 2: Need Sensing

When sending invitations to join your virtual presentation, encourage participants to share their requirements and accommodation needs to engage effectively in your event. For example, you could craft a request like this:

“We strive to host an inclusive and accessible presentation. Accessible materials will be distributed to participants in advance, and live captioning will be provided during the event. If you have questions about the accessibility of our presentation, or want to request accommodations, please reach out to [add name] at [add email].”

Step 3: Put Systems in Place

Before your live event starts, check off these critical to-do items first:

● Adjust your platform settings to record your presentation. Though this may not be specifically requested, it’s helpful for everyone to access content after the live event concludes.
● Arrange captioning for your presentation in advance (such as through the Federal Relay Service for government employees or another service provider).
● Secure sign language interpreters—if requested.

Step 4: Create Accessible Materials

In advance of your presentation, create and share accessible slide decks and other presentation materials with the audience. Sending your materials ahead of time ensures participants have access to electronic versions in case they encounter accessibility issues during the live event. Consider these resources for creating accessible presentations and documents in Word (or another software application for word processing):

● How to Make Presentations Accessible to All
● PowerPoint Accessibility
● Best Practices for Making Word Documents Accessible

Step 5: Prepare Speaker(s)

For a presentation to be fully accessible, speakers must understand how to use key features of the online platform and convey content in a manner that promotes accessibility. Participants with certain disabilities can absorb information better and more effectively engage in presentations when the speaker(s) follows recommendations for accessible communication. We also suggest conducting a preparatory or dry-run session with the presenters in advance to verify their familiarity and comfort with the run of show and platform controls (e.g., screen sharing, muting/unmuting audio, etc.).

After Your Presentation

Step 6: Share Materials

After your presentation concludes, disseminate a recording of your presentation and the transcript to participants. This best practice enhances the accessibility of the information you shared and affords people with and without disabilities more opportunities to review and better understand the content you presented.

Step 7: Ask for Feedback

When sharing materials from your presentation, ask participants for feedback on the content of the presentation, its utility, and their experiences with the accessibility of your virtual event.

Additional Resources

● Learn more about how to foster accessibility for all your digital materials (e.g., emails, PDFs, social media posts, etc.) by reviewing PEAT’s digital accessibility basics
● Watch a recording and access PowerPoint slides from this recent presentation: “Creating and Hosting an Accessible Online Presentation”
● Utilize additional tips for virtual meetings and presentations: “Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience”
● Use PEAT’s Buy IT tool when evaluating a meeting platform for purchase

Devon Boyle is a consultant for PEAT supporting efforts to ensure new technologies, such as autonomous vehicles and X-Reality, are born accessible. She has more than 10 years of experience in policy analysis and development, stakeholder engagement, strategic communication, advocacy and partnership building.

Source: Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT)
Rehiring the Smart Way: Mainstreaming Disability in Recruiting Strategies

By Tamala Scott

As we envision a return to normal following the pandemic, many businesses find themselves in a position of having to rehire staff to ramp back up to pre-COVID productivity and revenue. While traditional sourcing strategies—such as online job boards, newspaper ads, staffing agencies—may secure employees in the short-term, your recruiting strategy may be missing the mark in reaching a valuable yet untapped resource—job seekers with disabilities. This article will shed light on the multiple advantages that businesses gain from hiring people with disabilities, beginning by dispelling three of the most common myths that deter businesses from actively recruiting jobseekers with disabilities. We also offer a few key strategies on how to get started on your inclusion journey.

Cost.

The first and perhaps most insidious myth is that hiring people with disabilities is a costly practice. The Job Accommodation Network has surveyed nearly 3,000 employers since 2004 to ask them about their accommodation practices and costs. Nearly 60 percent of all of those surveyed have reported reasonable accommodation costs of $0 for their employees with disabilities, while the remaining respondents report an average cost per individual of $500 or less. The same study also lists numerous cost-saving benefits for providing a streamlined and comprehensive reasonable accommodation strategy, including employee retention, increased employee productivity and improved workplace safety.

Productivity.

Another misconception is that employees with disabilities are less productive than their peers. One of the country’s leading disability-inclusive employers, Walgreens, conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of its disability hiring strategy within its distribution centers. Among the three areas the study examined was the productivity, safety and turnover among its staff with and without disabilities. The study concluded that Walgreens' employees with disabilities typically outperform or perform at the same level as their colleagues without disabilities, while also experiencing less safety-related incidents and remaining in their positions for longer.

On a macro-level, disability-inclusive companies are also proven to perform better than
their industry counterparts. A landmark study conducted by Accenture in 2018 shows that businesses that prioritize diversity and inclusion within their workforce outperform their industry peers and are better able to respond to business challenges.

**Difficulty finding talent.**

The labor force with disabilities has historically been—and remains—underemployed relative to the overall national labor force. The unemployment rate among jobseekers with disabilities is 1.5 times that of jobseekers without disabilities. Despite recent data showing a narrowing employment gap between graduates with and without disabilities, graduates with disabilities report that they are more likely to get part-time or temporary positions and earn on average less than their peers without disabilities. Qualified talent is out there, but due to the barriers to employment, many of these jobseekers with disabilities remain invisible to employers that could benefit immensely from their skill.

For the first time in history, business leaders are realizing that hiring jobseekers with disabilities is not simply the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do for their business. Despite that, many businesses get stuck trying to figure out where to start in their disability inclusion efforts. Here are some achievable steps to getting YOUR business started on a path to a stronger and more inclusive diversity strategy:

**Create a group of champions.**

As a first step, establish a core group of passionate individuals within your business that are willing to dedicate time and resources toward advancing your initiative. This group should include people from a variety of different departments and leadership levels within the company so that there are as many diverse perspectives and skillsets represented as possible.

**Cultivate buy-in.**

Creating a disability-inclusive workplace requires that changes be made to an organization’s culture, operations, recruiting and hiring practices, and many other facets. Now that the business case has been made, your champions need to create an airtight pitch and messaging campaign to inform staff and leadership at multiple levels of the “how” and the “why” to have a disability-inclusive workplace.

**Develop partnerships with local and national disability organizations.**

Once your internal support is secured, the next step is to seek out the expertise from local and national disability agencies to familiarize yourselves with the local disability community and find that aforementioned talent. Establishing your business as a disability-inclusive employer to the surrounding disability community is an important step toward getting individuals with disabilities to join your team.

**Start small.**

It is important to keep an eye on the big picture and how to fold disability inclusion into multiple facets of your organization, but it is even more important to start small to develop a sound strategy that can be scaled in the future. Start small and aim for small wins before scaling.

Thinking about starting a disability hiring initiative? Contact The Arc@Work.

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www.diverseabilitymagazine.com | DIVERSEability Magazine | 27
Creating an Accessible “Work from Home” Experience

From the Salesforce Office of Accessibility and Abilityforce

With more people working remotely than ever before, we’re all learning new ways of working and what it takes to be productive and successful from our own homes. As we think about how we virtually interact with our colleagues, it’s important to keep in mind accessibility for people with disabilities. Salesforce’s Office of Accessibility talked to some of our employees with disabilities about how to create meetings and virtual experiences that employees of all abilities can participate in and, most importantly, feel empowered to bring their full, authentic selves to work.

Set your team up for a productive work from home experience.

A “home office” looks different for everyone. Empower your employees to make accommodations to fit their working needs with things like virtual ergonomic assessments, remote captioning and interpreting programs, etc.

Focus on inclusion in your meetings.

Remote work relies heavily on video meetings, and engagement can be challenging. Choose a platform that is compatible with captions, and make sure to activate for
Be mindful of those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or blind.
Keep people with visual or hearing impairments in mind when you send materials. Do you have NAD Captioning Videos & Images? With videos, there are a number of captioning services that provide both paid caption services, and free self-edit captioning. Remember, when sharing these assets on calls, presentations, virtual team meetings and more, it’s important to Perkins How-to Write Alt Text & Image Descriptions.

Make sure you are including everyone in your pulse checks.
Many of us have found surveys to be a good way to understand team sentiment among remote workers, but it’s important to make sure the survey works for everyone with accessible question types. For example, sliders, ranking, and image uploads are often not accessible question types. Surveys should allow users to turn off auto-advance, should that function be used.

Understand that we all work and learn differently.
Rapid moves to remote work are easier for some than others. Encourage teams to share best working hours and to block out times throughout the day for both breaks and uninterrupted work. Remember that showing flexibility and compassion will help us all navigate this new world together. Source: disabilityin.org

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Celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month

“Increasing Access and Opportunity” is the 2020 theme for October’s annual observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

This year is the nation’s 75th observance of NDEAM, which is administered by the Department’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The observance culminates the Department’s commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

“Ensuring that America’s workplaces continue to include and accommodate people with disabilities will be an important part of our economic rebound,” said U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia. “Looking ahead, the Department will remain focused on the policies that led to a strong economy and record-low unemployment rates for persons with disabilities prior to the pandemic. A vigorous economic rebound and job growth will, alongside the Americans with Disabilities Act, increase access and opportunity for Americans with disabilities.”

“People with disabilities are experienced problem-solvers with a proven ability to adapt,” said Office of Disability Employment Policy Deputy Assistant Secretary Jennifer Sheehy. “Now more than ever, flexibility is important for both workers and employers. National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebrates the ingenuity people with disabilities bring to America’s workplaces.”

Each October, NDEAM celebrates America’s workers with disabilities and reminds
Nearly 50 million Americans have disabilities.

Capitalize on their talents with employment practices that benefit everyone.

Learn how your organization can help advance the employment of people with disabilities and access resources to assist in recruiting, retaining and promoting skilled, qualified employees.

What can YOU do?
The Campaign for Disability Employment
www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org

The Campaign for Disability Employment is funded under contract #DOLJ079426341 from the Office of Disability Employment Policy/U.S. Department of Labor.
employers of the importance of inclusive hiring practices. In 1945, Congress declared the first week of October “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was dropped to include individuals with all types of disabilities. Congress expanded the week to a month in 1988 and changed the commemoration to National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

With its 2001 establishment, ODEP assumed responsibility for NDEAM. The agency’s efforts include selection of NDEAM’s annual theme, announced earlier in the year to enable organizations nationwide to plan their own observances. Employers of any size, in any industry – as well as community organizations, advocacy groups and schools – are encouraged to participate.

For more information about NDEAM, including ideas for how your organization can participate, visit www.dol.gov/ndeam. The website also features the 2020 NDEAM poster, highlighting ADA’s 30th anniversary.

The mission of the Department of Labor is to foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights.

Source: dol.gov

Did You Know?

In 1945, Congress declared the first week of October “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was dropped to include individuals with all types of disabilities. Congress expanded the week to a month in 1988 and changed the commemoration to National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

What Does the Future Hold for People with Disabilities?

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NTI@Home Aids in Finding Work-at-Home Opportunities

By Kate Brouse, Business Development Lead at NTI

For many Americans with disabilities—even prior to these unusual times—finding and keeping a job comes with unique challenges: commuting to a workplace, job flexibility to allow for doctor’s visits and treatments, and needed accommodations to complete a job. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended traditional businesses nationwide, resulting in many companies sending employees home while at the same time, seeing a huge increase in the demand for customer support. Call and contact centers in particular have become the frontline for branding and customer experience. Companies are increasingly seeing an urgent need to create and staff virtual call centers to meet the increasing demand. This shift in the typical office dynamic has increased the availability of flexible, work-at-home jobs with competitive pay, and has opened doors for new job opportunities for the disability community.

Before mid-March, only 1.3 percent of job postings on ZipRecruiter explicitly offered the opportunity to work from home. Now, 11.3 percent of jobs on the site offer at-home flexibility. As unfortunate as the pandemic is, one silver lining is that it has forced companies to allow people to work at home—an accommodation those within the disability community have been requesting for years that has suddenly become the norm due to COVID-19. A person with a disability who may be at a disadvantage in the workplace may now find it easier to secure an at-home job for which accommodations are not even required; their homes are already set up for their needs.

National nonprofit NTI@Home has been providing work-at-home opportunities for people with disabilities and their caretakers for over 25 years. NTI@Home provides free training and job placement services to disabled Americans and veterans, providing many with the first step on the path to a new career—all from the comfort and safety of their own homes. Over 4,300 Americans have found roles in government organizations, Fortune 500 companies, and other national organizations after completing NTI@Home’s free training program.

Andrea Thomas founded NTI@Home after a debilitating illness kept her out of the workforce for more than six years. Following a two-decade career and early, unplanned retirement, Thomas always had a desire to go back to work. After working with NTI and completing a self-paced training program, Thomas found a role at Celgene, a global pharmaceutical company that develops cancer and inflammatory disease therapies. As a customer survey agent, she works with patients to log prescription information, medical history, and more.

“My job has given me the opportunity to be a part of the workforce again and I love it,” said Thomas, a California resident. “This is a great opportunity for people to work from home.”
LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES

How Adam Croneis Played to His Strengths and Found Success at Michelin North America, Inc.

Adam Croneis, Zone Retail Specialist for Michelin North America, Inc., was diagnosed with a learning disability in reading and writing expression at a young age. Early in his career, Adam was reluctant to share that he had a disability because of the stigma he feared people would associate with it.

Since joining Michelin 15 years ago, Adam has excelled in his career, working his way up from an Area Sales Manager to a Key Account Manager to a Regional Sales Manager, and now serves as a Zone Retail Specialist responsible for managing Michelin’s field operations with Costco.

“Michelin is a company that exemplifies its value of respect for people,” said Adam. “Throughout my career, I have been afforded opportunities to create a career path that plays to my strengths.”

As with many people with differing abilities, Adam learned to lean on his strengths to be successful. He is quick to identify sales patterns, uses his interpersonal skills to build strong relationships and solves complex problems by identifying solutions not often seen by others.

“The way I go about solving complex problems isn’t always linear,” said Adam. “I process information differently than my peers that often leads to solutions that may be unorthodox.”

These traits separate Adam from his peers and have earned him awards and recognition from both Michelin and his customers.

As a manager, Adam uses his experience to help others. “I find that my life experiences help me improve inclusiveness in the workplace. I try my best to ensure everyone feels welcomed, their contributions valued and their opinions respected. Michelin creates a work environment that allows this approach to flourish,” said Adam.

Adam serves on the leadership team of capABLE, one of Michelin’s business resource groups that promotes an environment of inclusion and support for Michelin employees and their families with differing abilities and special needs.

Michelin North America, Inc. is honored to be selected by Forbes magazine as one of its Top 10 “America’s Best Employers” for 2019 and “America’s Best Employers for Diversity” in 2020 and chosen by FORTUNE magazine as one of the “World’s Most Admired Companies” in the Motor Vehicle Parts category for 2020.
People within the disability community find an alternate path to employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated their ability to help Americans with disabilities find remote work with competitive pay. The nonprofit recently expanded their mission to serve not only people receiving disability benefits from the Social Security Administration, but also any American with a documented disability, including those with invisible disabilities and chronic health conditions like asthma, COPD, PTSD, and cancer, to name just a few.

“In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act empowered more workers with disabilities to work from home,” said Alan Hubbard, COO of NTI. “But now the economic situation created by the COVID-19 crisis has opened the doors for thousands of disabled Americans to enter the workforce.”

After making the adjustment to working as a remote customer service agent following an injury, Adrian Galaviz, 38, of Corpus Christi, Texas, is a strong advocate for working-from-home. Galaviz had worked in the call center industry on site before a car accident in 2016 caused him to seek a telework opportunity.

“You have to treat it like you would any other job,” said Galaviz. “You have to be ready mentally, with no TV or radio in the area. I also don’t have any Internet browsers open. It took a bit of time to get used to working at home. It was different than going to a brick-and-mortar store, as there were so many distractions.”

For the one in four Americans who live with a disability, the opportunity to work from home after completing NTI@Home’s free training allows many benefits: a flexible schedule, a paying job in a reputable company, and an active role in the workforce. NTI@Home is committed to helping and inspiring Americans with disabilities by sharing stories of individuals like Andrea Thomas and Adrian Galaviz, who now have successful careers working at home.

Source: Kate Brouse, https://twitter.com/NTIatHome
We aggressively seek individuals with a variety of differences that support an all-inclusive work environment.

For more information on ORAU and its employment opportunities, visit [www.orau.org](http://www.orau.org).

ORAU provides innovative scientific and technical solutions for the Department of Energy and other federal and commercial organizations to advance national priorities in science, education and health. We do this by integrating unique laboratory capabilities, specialized teams of experts and a consortium of more than 120 universities.
Digital Accessibility: Why It’s More Vital Than Ever

By Elizabeth Stephen, VP of Customer Engagement at Striata, The Americas

In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 achieved what years of lobbying and education has not—convincing organizations of the importance of making sure digital assets, like websites, emails and mobile apps, are easy to use and simple to navigate. With the sudden upswing in digital demand and the almost overnight disappearance of physical interactions, it’s become clear how someone who cannot leave their home is forced to rely on digital channels, and how frustrating it is for them if those digital channels are not optimized for accessibility. This is a regular experience for people living with disabilities and COVID-19 has forced people to have empathy for those with the need for digital access.

Making online content more accessible means ensuring that all people can read and understand it—taking into account any disabilities they may have or assistive devices they could be using to access it. This includes those with disabilities such as impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments or learning disabilities, deafness or impaired hearing. In fact, stats from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 61 million (or 1 in 4) adults in the US have some form of disability.

The pandemic has accelerated the rate of digital transformation and with it, the need for digital accessibility. People with disabilities, who previously may have relied on physical interactions (when shopping, banking etc.), are now also being forced to interact via digital channels instead. It is therefore imperative that organizations consider this segment. They can start by assessing the accessibility level of all their digital content and changing the copy as well as layout where necessary. Taking these steps will not only ensure that digital content can be consumed and understood by all, but that it also complies with accessibility laws.

Some common accessibility standards include ensuring websites and emails are easily navigable on a mobile device or via keyboard only and creating PDF documents that can be read by screen readers by avoiding text with a poor color contrast.

Before the pandemic hit, while physical interactions were still acceptable and in-store visits more common, email was already a popular communication channel for many consumers and businesses alike. Now, with the recent, sudden, and unprecedented restrictions of movement imposed by governments across the globe, companies have been forced to adjust their communication or risk losing touch with customers.

It is not surprising that a large number of companies turned to email as the channel of choice to reach out to customers with information about their business continuity plans.

The result was a deluge of emails from brands wanting to make contact with customers and reassure them that new, digital ways of applying, buying and transacting would return things to business as usual. But if customers aren’t able to access those emails in spite of their disabilities, there can be no “business as usual.” Fortunately, a report from Level Access shows that 67 percent of U.S.-based businesses felt compelled to implement inclusion to be truly inclusive of persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, some 45 percent implemented a standard, organizational-wide approach to accessibility. They could do far worse than to start with email.

The pandemic has emphasized the undeniable value of these communications, and as the value of email is a channel for everyone, it makes sense for organizations to put energy into making email accessibility a key focus in their digital accessibility strategy.

“The pandemic has accelerated the rate of digital transformation and with it, the need for digital accessibility.”

Elizabeth Stephen is the VP of Customer Engagement for the Americas, overseeing all commercial business and channel management in North and South America. For the past decade, Stephen has managed teams of sales groups both nationally and internationally. She has a true passion for helping customers identify their needs and consulting with them to help fill those needs. Since joining Striata, Stephen has taken a keen interest in Customer Communications Management (CCM) and helping clients utilize digital communications to meet their CX goals.
CBRE values the unique contributions diverse professionals bring to our organization. We are at our best when people with different backgrounds and abilities come together to produce great results for our clients, our communities, and each other.

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10 Steps to Help Adults with Autism Find the Right Job

In celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Autism Speaks shares 10 steps to help young adults and adults with autism find employment:

1. Register on TheSpectrumCareers.com, a free website designed by and for job seekers with autism to connect with businesses looking to hire individuals on the spectrum. Only answer a few questions about yourself, and you can begin searching for jobs right away!

2. Write a list describing what you see yourself doing in the future. List your dream job, but also write down other jobs you would be willing to do and ones you may be interested in trying. Then create a list of your strengths. Which ones match up?

3. Write down the names of businesses accessible to you via public transportation, walking distance, etc.

4. Speak with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor about the support you can get, including help with writing a resume, job development and job coaching.

5. Make a list of all your contacts who could help you get a job. Your personal “network” is an important place to start—family, friends, neighbors and others who know you well.

6. Consider joining social networking and job search websites to help you expand your contact list. Check out LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and CareerBuilder.

7. Create/update your resume. Include your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address. Then list your education, training...

CREATING A WORKPLACE WHERE EVERYONE THRIVES SUPPORTS OUR MISSION TO SERVE PATIENTS

For most of her life, Karen McConnell, executive specialty sales rep for Amgen, has masked her personal challenges, using skills of observation and mirroring to become a leader in her field. She's smart, professional, articulate and practiced at being an empathetic listener. Her brain is wired for keen process thinking and problem solving that benefits her clients. But underneath her “good with people” exterior she's easily overwhelmed by noisy environments and struggles with not melting down. “Getting diagnosed on the autism spectrum was a relief. It explained so much about the struggle I had my whole life to try and be ‘normal.’ I didn’t realize other people weren’t working that hard to fit in,” recalls Karen, who was diagnosed later in life. “Recognizing this is how I am wired has allowed me to be a friend to myself and be kind.”

Although Karen hid her struggles when she first came to Amgen, she discovered a culture within her sales team that was authentic and supported the unique contributions of each team member. “They help each person understand where they are strong and where they can develop,” explains Karen. “My manager helped me understand where I could be softer and show a range of emotions. When you mask, it’s easy to become rigid.” When Karen did share her diagnosis with her leadership and sales team, the culture of inclusion was already in place. “The process was amazingly liberating. I didn’t feel judged, only safe and supported. I bring gifts no one else does, and others bring things I can’t.”

Karen believes a value for diversity and inclusion can help everyone, including the business thrive. “Amgen’s commitment to inclusion and belonging incorporates all kinds of diversity and brings us together,” says Karen. “They recognize this is where innovation comes from, that being a place where everyone thrives helps us deliver on our mission to serve patients.”

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For opportunities to join our team visit careers.amgen.com
experiences, work history and experience. Include any non-paid work experiences too, such as internships and volunteer activities. Tools on TheSpectrumCareers.com help you create a resume if you do not have one.

8 Write a cover letter. Identify who you are and why you are applying for the job. You also should invite the employer to contact you for an interview. Include a copy of your resume with your cover letter.

9 Fill out several job applications! You can do this easily on TheSpectrumCareers.com. Or you can go to the actual job site to ask for an application—if so, wear clothes that are clean and ironed. Be polite and bring a pen and a copy of your resume.

10 Practice your interviewing skills. Have a friend or support person ask you practice questions and simulate introducing yourself, shaking hands, making appropriate eye contact, and sitting down across a desk from each other. Arrive at the interview location 15 minutes before the appointment. Focus on your abilities, not your disabilities, and emphasize your strengths, not your weaknesses!

Source: autismspeaks.org
How to Handle Video Interviews When You Have a Disability

By Jennifer Parris

By their very nature, video interviews are tough. You might not know where to look (do you glance at your camera, the computer screen, or both?), what to say, how long (or short) your answers should be, and so on. But for people with disabilities, video interviews can be even more challenging. Dr. Kathryn Bingham, CEO of LEADistics, a leadership development and executive coaching company, offers her expert advice on how to handle video interviews when you have a disability—and win over a potential employer!

Present yourself in the best possible light

Before your video interview, it’s important to see how the device you’ll be using (such as a computer, tablet, or smartphone) will make you appear to others. “Candidates often seek to be evaluated on the knowledge, skills, and potential contributions they bring to the table without introducing bias or faulty assumptions,” says Dr. Bingham. “One way to assure this is to manage the technical element of video display as part of the interview preparation.” You can opt for Skyping or FaceTiming with a friend or family member to get a glimpse of how you look, and see where you might need to make some corrections, if any. And while you might not necessarily be hiding your wheelchair, cane, or service dog, for example, you might not want to present that first and foremost, either.

Know your rights

It’s illegal for an employer to ask you about your disability. If your disability is visible, though, an employer can ask if you might require certain accommodations, such as a standing desk or special equipment to allow you to work successfully. It’s up to you to then to determine if you want to address your disability with your interviewer or not. The good news: some employers might actually want to know about your disability, since they know the positive impact hiring you for the job would make not only in your life, but to their company as well. Plus, they might be eligible to earn certain tax credits, like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which offers a monetary incentive for employers to hire individuals with disabilities, ranging from $1,200–$9,600.

Practice your answers

It’s easy to get flustered during your job interview, but when you’re trying to hide a disability, it can make it even harder to focus. That’s why you should conduct mock interviews prior to the big day. You can rehearse why you’re a qualified candidate, and explain exactly what it is that makes you want to work for the company.

If you’re interviewing for a remote job, you should also mention the soft skills you’ve mastered that can make working remotely a cinch.

Focus on the positive

Obviously, the fact that you were called for a job interview shows that an employer believes you have the skills, education, experience, and qualifications necessary in order to do the job. So, highlight those strengths during the job interview instead. After all, if you don’t make your disability the focus of the interview, neither will your interviewer.

Offer solutions

Sure, it could be easy for a prospective employer to be distracted by your disability—but only if you allow it to happen. That’s why you need to take the spotlight off of what your perceived limitations might be and show what you can do instead. Explain that you might use certain equipment (like an enlarger to read text on a computer screen) to help you work, and cite examples in the past of how you’ve successfully worked with your disability.

That way, the focus will be on what you can offer the company, not your disability.

Source: flexjobs.com
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www.txdot.gov/careers
Meet Ellie Goldstein, Gucci’s Newest 18-Year-Old Model

Beauty and fashion brands, Gucci and Vogue, represent the highest standards of their respective industries worldwide. However, the two companies’ latest collaborative campaign for their newest product, Mascara L’Obscur, shows that the definition for beauty goes beyond the classic stereotype.

The product was designed for, as Gucci creator Alessandro Michele described, “an authentic person who uses makeup to tell their story of freedom, in their way.” Along those lines, campaign photographer David PD Hyde decided to feature models who did not fit the societal norms of beauty.

Starring in this new campaign is 18-year-old Ellie Goldstein, a British model with Down Syndrome and the holder of the most-liked photo on Gucci Beauty’s Instagram page, with over 850,000 likes to-date.

Goldstein began modeling professionally at just fifteen when she signed with Zebedee Management, a talent agency that focuses on clients with disabilities and physical differences. Always having a love for being in the spotlight and in front of the camera, Goldstein saw modeling as an opportunity to pursue what she loves.

“I always feel beautiful but especially when I’m in the media, offered modelling work and wearing lovely makeup,” Goldstein told Vogue, “I love to be in front of the camera and show how professional I am.”

But Goldstein’s ambitions to model go beyond fame as she has also expressed her desire to serve as a media representative for the disability community. “It’s important to let the world see that anyone can model and act with a disability.”

Since the campaign’s photos were released on social media, Goldstein has received a tremendous amount of praise. Her appearance with the Gucci and Vogue campaign has made her a source of inspiration to others with disabilities who share the same desires.

“When I look at the images, I feel happy with myself, and all the likes and comments on social media across the world have been overwhelming,” Goldstein told Vogue, “I enjoy being a role model. It shows that if you follow your hopes and dreams, you can achieve anything.”

Though having tremendous success with Gucci and Vogue, this is only the starting point for Goldstein. She plans to continue pursuing modeling, acting, and dancing, with her biggest aspirations to work for large brand names, be on the cover of Vogue, and inspire others to follow their dreams, no matter what their circumstance.

Source: insider.com
Collette Divitto proves you can do anything, one cookie at a time

After applying for numerous jobs and receiving countless rejections, Collette Divitto did what not too many young ladies her age might do after college – she decided to start her own business. Born with Down Syndrome, Divitto has now made it her personal mission to beat all odds and help others with disabilities.

The Ridgefield, Connecticut, native and disability activist graduated from Clemson University’s three-year LIFE program in just two years. Shortly after that, she moved to Boston in search of employment. “I went on about nine interviews and would have a cup of coffee with the CEO and talked about their company, but days later I would always get an email saying it was great to meet you in person, but that I was not a good fit,” she told us in a Zoom interview.

No stranger to facing rejection over the years, the headstrong Divitto knew she would...
WE GET DIVERSITY.

Nine years ago, Kristin Malek gave birth to a daughter with Down syndrome. Her daughter, Katelynn, changed her life, her passion and strengthened her resolve to assist marginalized groups. When she joined CDW 18 months ago, her professional and personal roads merged, creating the passion with which Malek approaches CDW’s Supplier Diversity Program every day.

CDW is committed to embracing differences and offering everyone an equal share of voice, power and status. Join us in our mission to promote equality and create change.

CDW.com/diversity

“IT’S more than a passion. It’s a must. There’s a lot on the line.”

~ Kristin Malek
have to reinvent herself. With her mother (and biggest cheerleader), Rosemary, by her side, they developed a marketing plan to do what Collette has always loved doing – baking cookies.

“Collette had a teacher back in high school, who said that she could make baking a profession because she is the best student in the class and helps everyone else in the class,” Rosemary said. “I would always tell Collette I would help her as best as I could to have the life she wanted, but it was Collette who has to do all of the work. She had a mantra that she used to say to herself all the time growing up – ‘I deserve the best for me’ – and that has helped build her confidence, be clear about what she wants, and set herself up to work hard to achieve it.”

After learning the basics of baking in high school, Collette began creating new recipes to have her family taste test. The standout was one filled with chocolate chips, rolled in cinnamon sugar and baked to a golden perfection. Originally dubbed “The Amazing Cookie,” it’s now one of her best sellers.

Today, she has a thriving online cookie business known as Collettey’s Cookies (www.colletteys.com) that serves up everything from her personal favorite (and the now famous) crunchy-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside, chocolate chip cinnamon cookies to the popular chewy peanut butter cookies.

With 13 employees and three interns in her Boston kitchen, the Collettey’s team bakes twice a week and ships to customers four to five days a week. “In four hours, they make and bake between 2,000 to 3,000 cookies,” Collette said. “Some of these cookies have to go right into storage containers to avoid getting too hard too fast if not stored immediately, so there are extra precautions they have to take with each cookie along with all of the sanitization requirements.”

At the beginning of the pandemic, Collette decided to create a specialty gift package for essential workers and first responders. The response she received was so overwhelming that she wanted to give back as well. She decided that for all cookies ordered, she would personally match the number of cookies in each order. Right now, she is wrapping up filming for a TV show that will feature select entrepreneurs like Collette, who have faced major challenges in life but were successful in overcoming them.

Collette, who loves chocolate, is in the process of perfecting yet another cookie – this one made with espresso and dark chocolate. She first tested the recipe with milk chocolate and cocoa powder, but determined “it wasn’t rich enough.”

Today, this big-hearted young lady is setting out to prove to the world (one cookie at a time) that with a positive attitude and determination, you can do anything. “I would say to people with disabilities do not focus on your disabilities,” she said. “You need to focus on your abilities. Do not give up on your dreams. Do not let people bring you down, and my favorite saying is, ‘No matter who you are, you can make a difference in this world.’”

Luckily for Collette, she has already done just that.
JPMorgan Chase values the unique insights that people of all abilities bring to our workforce, our supply chain and our diverse communities. Together we are making inclusion and accessibility cornerstones of how we do business around the globe.

For more information please visit jpmorganchase.com/supplierdiversity
Meet George Nyfeler, a Businessman who Keeps Giving Back

Nyfeler Associates is a diverse, Virginia-based professional land-surveying company specializing in robotics.

George Nyfeler, LS, LEED AP, started Nyfeler Associates, a small, yet diverse professional land surveying company specializing in robotics, in 2010. During his first year, he used a 7(a) SBA loan to finance working capital and has since grown the company to ten employees and $1,083,520 in sales as of 2019.

Last year, the firm went to Antarctica for a project for the National Science Foundation. Other notable survey projects include the U.S. Capitol Dome Restoration, National Gallery of Art stone repairs, Reagan National Airport, NASA Wallops Flight Facility, Fort Bragg, Quantico National Cemetery, a crane-rail alignment survey at a Boeing facility, and extensive work at the State Department’s Foreign Affairs Security Training Center.

Nyfeler focuses on cultivating happy and empowered employees and giving back to his community. Having attended West Point as a cadet and serving the 2nd Battalion, 157th Field Artillery of the Colorado Army National Guard, he has been, since becoming president of the Society of American Military Engineers Central Virginia Post, heavily involved with the Families of the Wounded Fund, Inc. and the West Point Society of Richmond’s Wounded Warrior Mentor Program.

Nyfeler donates resources toward educational programs, including the Society of American Military Engineers, which aids school robotics program.

DIVERSEability Magazine (DM) spoke with Nyfeler about his company and success.

DM: What advice can you give to other people with who strive become business owners?

Nyfeler: I would give the same advice as to people who are not disabled – and would suggest not thinking of yourself as disabled. I used to think that people were either ‘normal’ or not normal – the same for families. I have concluded that most people and families are ‘messed up’ to some degree. If we’re all mostly not what I imagined as ‘normal,’ then I would suggest that these collections of differences actually describe the true definition of normal. So, congratulations – if you thought you weren’t normal, well you are normal by my definition.

My advice:
1. Carefully plan for sufficient cash flow. Be ready and able to borrow a lot. I heard a mentor with SBA put it well years ago, “start-ups eat cash like an alligator!” From the day we opened, we managed to post more than 26 consecutive profitable months – under accrual accounting. We billed clients for more than our expenses each month. We opened during the great recession and I had two significant clients take 24 months to pay $50,000 invoices. With a small firm, that presented a huge challenge. As years rolled past, profits slowly but surely backfilled that gap, and we have been financially very stable for about four years now.
2. Plan to prioritize your employees over yourself and over your clients. As the age-old Southwest Airlines motto went, “The customer is not always right.” You may have to fire some customers to keep employees happy. Happy employees will keep your best customers coming back to you forever. When a priority client needs something requiring weekend work or overtime and your employees have family plans instead, be prepared to either do the work yourself and give employees the time off, or at least offer to be there with them. My priority order: 1. Employees, 2. Clients, 3. Owner (me). If you take care of your employees, the payoff in success can be great. It’s also the right way to treat people and have the office be a nice place for them and for you to work. And they will do right by you even when you are not around.

DM: Why is business certification important and how has it helped you?

Nyfeler: Special status registrations, such as 8a, SDB, WOSB, VOSB, SDVOSB and HUBZone (we have the last two statuses), are often only enough to help break an otherwise tie with other firms with the same experience and quality. In today’s competitive business world, even a grain of sand extra to break a tie can mean the difference between a firm’s success or failure. Our statuses tipped the scale toward us for a $275,000 survey fee federal project before our one-year anniversary.
Together, Making a World of Difference

Welcoming Minority-Owned Businesses to the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies where:

Our legacy and commitment to our diverse suppliers aligns with our Credo responsibility to the communities in which we live and work. We believe in the power of inclusion to deliver innovative products and services, that support our mission of caring for the world, one person at a time.
DM: How has your business survived COVID-19?

Nyfeler: We wear masks on congested work sites and limit two people to a survey truck – and same seats throughout the day. If we send three people, we add a truck, even though they all have seat-belts for at least five.

Fortunately for us, our industry has not been completely decimated by COVID-19. Our workload is, however, down. We benefited from a PPP loan and have not laid off employees, nor reduced hours, even though our monthly billing is down from last year. A strong financial performance last year, coupled with the PPP loan, has positioned us to a somewhat safe position now and through the foreseeable future.

We have been invited to join many large-firm teams for federal contract pursuits, some of which should result in profitable new work in mid to late 2021. The big federal contracts take a year or two (or three) from solicitation to task order awards. I am confident that we can hold on until then.

At work, it’s what people CAN do that matters.

This year marks 30 years since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—landmark legislation that helps increase access and opportunity for people with disabilities in our nation’s workplaces and communities.

We hope you will join us in marking this important anniversary by spreading the message that at work, it’s what people CAN do that matters.

Learn more at WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org
Opportunities in Energy at the NY Power Authority

For Professionals

Margaret Lubeck is a compliance clerk at the New York Power Authority (NYPA), the largest state electric utility in the nation. She performs administrative duties, including maintaining compliance documentation for several departments and is based at the Frederick R. Clark Energy Center in Marcy, NY.

Lubeck, who is hard of hearing, began her career at NYPA in 2007, where she has also been an assistant scheduler’s clerk and a scheduler clerk. She has a bachelor of fine arts degree in graphic design and a master of science degree in print media, both from the Rochester Institute of Technology.

“My favorite and personal motto is that ‘deaf people can do anything…except hear.’ I thank NYPA for welcoming me to the utility industry and giving me a chance to prove to people that I can do the job,” Lubeck said. “I have reasonable accommodations in the workplace such as being able to request emails instead of phone calls, and obtaining interpreters for meetings and events, which gives me access to all the information that my colleagues receive. NYPA also provided me with a videophone for videoconferencing.”

NYPA was named one of America’s Best Midsize Employers by Forbes in 2018.

To learn about openings—nypa.gov/careers

For Businesses

NYPA’s Supplier Diversity Program has a long history of promoting economic development in New York State, which has allowed us to surpass the $1 billion mark in business with Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises alone. In addition, our efforts to continue to offer purchasing opportunities to Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses and Small Business Enterprises can lead to significant growth for these companies.

To learn more—nypa.gov/procurement/supplier-diversity

nypa.gov
How to Start A Business If You Have A Disability

By Ron Flavin

Often, people with disabilities feel as though employers don’t take full advantage of their skill sets, and they become frustrated because they know they could be much more valuable to their workplace. When you take the plunge into business ownership, you can make money for yourself without being held back by anyone. There are several choices for business ownership and several tools and funding options to get you there, so make this the year that you become your own boss. Now, let’s learn more about how to start a business if you have a disability.

1 START A HOME-BASED BUSINESS

For those new to business ownership, a home-based business is an ideal option. Not only do you save on overhead costs, but you also get to work in a location that is accessible and accommodates your needs. To start a home-based business, consider your hobbies, talents, and skills. If you love to bake, start a home bakery. If cooking is more your thing, start a catering business using your home kitchen. Similarly, artistic people make a living selling their creations online via Etsy, Amazon, or their own business websites.

On the other hand, if you want to become an entrepreneur and you have a degree, then you could put your degree to work for your home-based business. People with teaching degrees offer tutoring out of their homes, tutor students online, or teach English as a second language to international students. If you have an accounting degree, you can work as a CPA out of your home.

You also could become a freelance accountant and offer your services to companies as an independent contractor. Similarly, people with communications, journalism, and English degrees become freelance writers.

Many aspiring entrepreneurs have also found success these days by starting an ecommerce business that utilizes the drop shipping model. Of course, it takes more than simply signing for a drop shipping service and waiting for the money to roll in to succeed. In addition to a desirable in-demand product, you’ll also need a great website that’s consumer-friendly and easy for people to use on smartphones and tablets. Oberlo.com has a great guide with tips to help you get started.

2 CONSIDER ALL FUNDING OPTIONS

If you want to start a more traditional business, you likely will need a loan or grant to get started. Fortunately, people with disabilities often qualify for loans and grants designed especially for business owners with disabilities. A good place to start looking into your funding options is the Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA partners with lenders to provide loans to small businesses following specific guidelines. They often offer competitive terms in addition to counseling, education, and unique benefits.

A resource partner of the SBA, SCORE and its volunteer expert business members can help disabled entrepreneurs via mentoring, workshops, and educational resources. Consider contacting SCORE for assistance in writing your business plan, finding funding options, and making sure you register your new business correctly.

These mentors also will help you understand how to market your new business. You should consider using social media such as Facebook and Instagram to find new customers and create a user-friendly website to tell customers more about your business and yourself.

3 RELY ON A SERVICE DOG

If you don’t already have one, you should consider getting a service dog as you begin your journey to business ownership. Not only do these dogs provide companionship, but they offer physical and emotional assistance. Your service dog can help you turn on and off lights, reach objects that fall on the floor, retrieve the mail, and more. Overall, your service dog will serve as a willing assistant in your new business venture.

Starting a new business is stressful, and your service dog will give you the mental health support you need in addition to physical assistance. Studies show that dogs give people a mental boost; in fact, simply petting a dog reduces your stress level and blood pressure. Dog owners also have a lower risk of having depression. It’s a good idea to have a service dog around when you feel the pressures of business ownership and become a little overwhelmed at first.

People with disabilities are among some of the most successful business owners today. If you are ready to take the plunge, consider starting a home-based business. You also should take advantage of special funding options and get a service dog to make business ownership a little easier. Interested in learning more about how to start a business if you have a disability? Check out ableusa.info and learn more!

Source: https://rflavin.com
Helping people on their path to better health

Coming together with Aetna, we’re leading the change to create a new health care model that is easier to use, more affordable, and puts consumers at the center of their care.

And that leads to a healthier you.

Learn more at cvshealth.com/aetna
Entrepreneurial Resources for People with Disabilities

Entrepreneurship resources that help and support people with disabilities:

- **Entrepreneur Resources for People with Disabilities**

- **Important Considerations for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities**

- **Small Business and Self-Employment Service**
  (https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/SelfEmploymentEntrepreneurship.htm) Provides access to information such as the pros and cons of starting a business as a disabled person, counseling, and referrals regarding self-employment and small business ownership opportunities.

- **Work Support**
  (http://www.worksupport.com) Contains self-employment information and resources.

- **Ticket to Work Program**
  (https://www.ssa.gov/work/) Connects Social Security Disability Insurance and supplemental security income beneficiaries with employment networks for training and other support services needed to achieve your employment goals, including self-employment.

- **MA Home-Based and Self-Employment Guide**

- **Accessible IRS Tax Products**
  (https://www.irs.gov/uac/accessibe-irs-tax-products) Provides popular tax forms from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and publications in accessible formats, including Braille and talking formats.

- **Facts About Disability-Related Tax Provisions**
  (https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-disab.html) Contains facts on the IRS’ disability-related provisions that are of particular interest to businesses as well as people with disabilities.

- **Tax Incentives Packet on the Americans with Disabilities Act**
  (https://www.ada.gov/archive/taxpack.htm) Explains how to take advantage of the tax credit and deduction available for complying with the ADA.

- **Business Leadership Network**
  (http://www.usbln.org) Details the only national disability organization led by business for business, and how it promotes best practices in hiring, retaining and marketing to people with disabilities.

- **Chamber of Commerce for Individuals with Disabilities**
  (http://disabilitychamber.org) Provides information about the national consumer volunteer organization that uses business principles to improve the economic status of individuals with disabilities.

- **Disabled Businesspersons Association**
  (http://disabledbusiness.org) Explores the association that assists enterprising individuals with disabilities to succeed in the business world.

- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**
  (http://askjan.org/entre/index.htm) Provides access to technical assistance, consulting and mentoring services for disabled entrepreneurs.

- **Disability Entrepreneurs: What Can You Do Campaign**

- **SBA Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet**
  (https://www.sba.gov/content/sba-video-phone-service-rollout-deaf-and-hard-hearingentrepreneurs)

- **SBA American Sign Language (ASL) Services**
  (https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/what-we-do/american-sign-language-asl-services) The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has launched the American Sign Language (ASL) Video Customer Support Line, which allows deaf and hard of hearing customers to communicate directly with the SBA over videophone. Now deaf and hard of hearing customers have a better option to communicate with the SBA to get service or support for their businesses.

- **SBA - People with Disabilities**
  (https://www.sba.gov/starting-business/how-start-business/business-types/people-disabilities) This page offers resources to help disabled people start, grow and manage a small business.

- **CAPTEC - Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program**
  (http://www.cap.mil/Customer/Services/CAPTEC.aspx) CAP’s Technology & Evaluation Center (CAPTEC) is a demonstration and assessment facility located in the Pentagon. People seeking solutions to accessibility challenges can visit CAPTEC to see assistive technology (AT) and compare different solutions.

Source: SBA.gov
Supplying strength. That’s Defining Possible.

Across thousands of communities around the world, our suppliers help us define what is possible. Bringing people together from different backgrounds and perspectives is a point of pride and inspiration for us as we work to make the world a safer place.
SBA: Helping Everyone Achieve the American Dream

Created in 1953, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) continues to help small business owners and entrepreneurs pursue the American dream. The SBA is the only cabinet-level federal agency fully dedicated to small business and provides counseling, capital, and contracting expertise as the nation’s only go-to resource and voice for small businesses.

Below are just a few SBA success stories:

Innovative Prosthetics & Orthotics – Omaha, Nebraska

Rakesh Srivastava, President and Founder
https://www.innovativeprosthetics.net/

Rakesh Srivastava became familiar with prosthetics as a young child in India. When he was 10 years old, his left leg was amputated due to an unfortunate accident. This experience led to a life-long passion for the fields of orthotics and prosthetics. After completing his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from University of Nebraska Kearney and residency, he was certified by the American Board of Certified Prosthetics and Orthotists.

In 2006, he started Innovative Prosthetics & Orthotics. Srivastava opened a 600 square-foot clinic with two employees. Since then, the Hastings clinic has grown to 3,000 square feet and in 2009 and 2011, he opened two additional full-time locations in Omaha and Grand Island, Nebraska.

Srivastava received assistance on several occasions from SBA resource partner, the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) in Grand Island, Nebraska. NBDC’s Procurement Technical Assistance Center staff first met with him in 2013 to help him pursue government contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2015, NBDC’s Technology Commercialization Team helped Srivastava to obtain a prototype grant. Most recently, NBDC consultant, Sara Bennett, started working with Srivastava in 2018 to help him expand his current operations to include 3D print manufacturing of prosthetic devices. The result led to CRA, tax increment and bank financing to begin 3D printing operations.

Srivastava is very invested in his community both in Hastings and in his native India, including helping four companies in India set up prosthetic and orthotic clinics.

Elevated Technologies Inc. (ETI) – Grand Rapids, Michigan

Nathan D. McFadden, President & Owner
https://www.elevatedinc.com/

U.S. Marine Corps veteran Nathan McFadden purchased Elevator Service Inc. in 2017, with help from an SBA-guaranteed loan through Huntington Bank.

Working with an SBA-funded Veterans Business Outreach Center and a Procurement Technical Assistance Center, McFadden laid the foundation for ETI’s growth through contracting and certifying as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business.

A 32-year-old company, ETI now provides maintenance, installation, and modernization for elevator systems in 25 states to clients that include the U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Treasury, and auto manufacturers including Tesla and Ford.

From 2017 to 2018, ETI’s revenue grew by 52 percent, and the number of employees increased from 13 to 47. McFadden attributes much of this expansion to technology investments, process advancements, and continually improving their marketing strategies.

One-third of ETI’s employees are veterans. McFadden is particularly proud of making improvements to elevators at more than 20 Veterans Administration hospitals that were in a significant state of disrepair.

Appddiction Studio, LLC – San Antonio, Texas

Timothy Porter, Owner
https://appddictionstudio.com/#/home

In 2009, Timothy Porter, an Army veteran with a passion for Information Technology, taught himself to develop mobile applications and in 2011, Appddiction Studio, LLC was formed. Porter received his initial start-up assistance and guidance from the local Procurement Technical Assistance Center and continues to receive support and assistance from the University of Texas at San Antonio Small Business Development Center.

The San Antonio based company is part of the SBA’s 8(a) Business Development Program and a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business with a national presence. They provide premier and innovative IT transformations by successfully implementing state of the art agile framework and methodologies delivering value. In 2016, the company received an SBA loan that was repaid in full within two years. From 2017 to 2018, the company experienced a 254 percent increase in revenue due to the successful procurement of contracts through the DoD for software development and project management.

Appddiction Studio has since established itself as the go-to small business for DoD to support new or existing enterprise transformations for DoD clients and was highlighted on the USA Network television channel as one of their USA Character Unite Award winners for developing an award-winning anti-bully mobile application for use in K-12 schools.

Source: SBA.gov
TELEMEDICINE - WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

WHAT IS TELEMEDICINE?
Telemedicine is the use of electronic information and telecommunication technology to get the health care you need while practicing social distancing. All you need is a phone or device with the internet to continue your medical care while protecting yourself and your healthcare provider from COVID-19. Speak with your doctor to determine whether telemedicine is appropriate for your health needs.

WHY TELEMEDICINE NOW?
To decrease your contact with healthcare facilities, other patients, and healthcare staff in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and keep you and your family healthy.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TELEMEDICINE?
- Allows you to talk to your doctor live over the phone or video chat
- Allows you to send and receive messages from your doctor using chat messaging or email
- Allows for remote monitoring of patients
- Save on travel time/transportation costs
- Reduced wait time for services
- Reduced number of visits to clinic

WHEN CAN YOU USE TELEMEDICINE?
To contact your healthcare provider about the management of your health generally or about management of an existing health condition during the COVID-19 outbreak.

What types of care can you get using telemedicine?
- Screening for COVID-19, testing recommendations, and guidance on isolation or quarantine
- General health care (i.e. wellness visits, blood pressure control, advice about certain non-emergency illnesses, like common rashes)
- Prescriptions for medication
- Nutrition counseling
- Mental health counseling

HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER TO SCHEDULE A TELEMEDICINE VISIT?
Call your healthcare provider to check if they are offering telemedicine visits and what technology you need to have a telemedicine visit.

cdc.gov/coronavirus

Jeanine Cook is the 2020 Winner of the Richard A. Tapia Achievement Award

By Jerri Barrett, Marketing Consultant

Jeanine Cook, a Principal Member of Technical Staff at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico in the Scalable Architectures department at the Computer Science Research Institute, has received the 2020 Richard A. Tapia Achievement Award for Scientific Scholarship, Civic Science and Diversifying Computing. The award was presented for her many achievements in computer science research in the areas of High-Performance Computing, performance characterization and modeling, large-scale system monitoring and data analytics, her work in diversifying computer science for the disabled and her teaching and mentorship of students while an Associate Professor at New Mexico State University. The award was presented by Richard Tapia at the 2020 ACM Richard Tapia Celebration of Diversity in Computing Conference.

Cook was raised by her parents in Colorado. Her father, a Physics PhD, inspired his daughters in their love of computers from an early age. Her mother was a home maker whose own mother came from New Mexico while it was still part of Mexico. Cook chose to pursue a BS in Electrical Engineering at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. It was in her second year at college that her life changed. Driving home one night she fell asleep at the wheel and drove off an embankment. She broke her back and severely damaged her spinal cord, resulting in T12 paraplegia. She soon realized that she had decisions to make on how to live her life. Cook made a critical decision to choose...
life, joy and positivity. She was lucky to have an extremely supportive family and many friends who came to see her in the hospital and rehab facility to not only support her but to learn how to enable her to continue on her chosen path. Friends learned how to assist with her self-care, assemble and disassemble her wheelchairs so they could be transported and encouraged her constantly. The incredible outpouring of support and her very close family enabled her to continue her education.

“My friends and family changed my life. They stood by me and supported me when they really didn’t have to. Because they loved me and encouraged me, I was able to be happy and positive about my future,” said Cook.

Cook received her BS and continued with her master’s degree at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She decided to pursue a PhD program. While many of the east coast universities had very attractive programs she realized that many of their campuses were not wheelchair accessible. She attended New Mexico State University and received her PhD in Electrical and Computer Engineering. She then joined the university as an Assistant Professor. During her eleven-year tenure Cook graduated eight PhD students and twelve masters theses students. She was extremely successful in securing research funding and in 2009 received the Presidential Career Award for Scientists and Engineers from President George Bush and the Frank Bromilow Excellence In Research Award from the College of Engineering, New Mexico State University.

While teaching Cook also became involved in a wide array of diversity and inclusion programs focused on people with disabilities. One of her early lessons came from attending a diversity workshop in a hotel in Florida. The hotel itself was not accessible which she discovered her first morning there. She ended up falling and had to be moved to a hotel down the road. This renewed her resolve to become even more involved to make sure that accessibility was part of diversity and inclusion in computing. Cook participated in the Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) as an external subcommittee member and was active in the Development of the CISE Strategic Plan for Broadening Participation. She was a leader in BPC programs focused on getting people with disabilities introduced to computer science at an early age. She developed and delivered workshops all over Pennsylvania and Texas, anywhere there were populations of disabled people. These workshops taught participants the basics of programming and also provided information on how to fund college, navigate campuses and pursue their academic careers. Cook has also been involved in capacity building work with AccessComputing and delivered talks at CAHSI (Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions). She is a member of the Center for Minorities and People with Disabilities in Informational Technology (CMD-IT) board.

Cook reached a turning point after teaching for 11 years. She was feeling burnt out from the load of both teaching, raising money for projects and the research. A colleague from Sandia National Laboratory called to ask her to take on an additional project. Cook simply proposed “Why don’t you just hire me?” Joining Sandia National Laboratory was a better solution for her physically and allowed her to enjoy her passion for horses and riding.

“My accident gave me a greater appreciation for life at an early age. I learned a lot about myself and other people. Life is a daily struggle and nothing is easy except rolling down hill. The people in my life that embraced me, stood by and encouraged me when they didn’t have to gave me the ability to make the decision to not let the accident ruin my life and stop me from enjoying life. I am especially grateful to my husband, Jonathan Cook, who has shared my life and made it such a joy,” said Cook.
COMMUNITY

How Kindness Changed the Life of this Child with Cerebral Palsy

By Paige Long

“Now more than ever, during these uncertain times, we need to be more kind,” said Caroline Naif.

The Michigan mother of a determined 6-year-old living with cerebral palsy (CP) wants you to understand how kindness has made a difference in her daughter’s life.

“We are all facing challenges daily and life looks a little different for each of us, but we can and we will get through this if we work together, be patient and respect one another,” she said. Caroline’s daughter, Briella, was diagnosed with CP at 21 months old. This is the most common motor disability in children, caused by abnormal development or damage to the parts of the brain that control movement, balance and posture. CP looks different in each individual, and in Briella’s case, her speech and leg mobility are affected.

“Briella was born six weeks early, weighing only 3 pounds and 11 ounces, and spent the first 24 days of her life in the NICU. By her first birthday, Briella wasn’t hitting all of her mobility milestones, and right away, we admitted her into physical and occupational therapies. Later, an MRI scan revealed Briella had Spastic Diplegia Cerebral Palsy, caused by a lack of oxygen, either shortly before or after her birth,” said Naif.

Doctors told her that her daughter may never walk or talk on her own.

At three-and-a-half, Briella had Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy, a life-changing lower spinal surgery to get rid of the spasticity and tightness in her legs to strengthen her mobility. This procedure also allows a more independent lifestyle. Briella took her first steps four months after her surgery.

“When you receive a diagnosis, you never know what to expect or how life will look down the road. Our family has gotten to where we are today by lots of research, faith, patience, inspiration and the friendships of other amazing warrior families through social media.”

Briella continues to become stronger and more independent with the physical and emotional support of Variety the Children’s Charity of Detroit – one of the international children’s charity’s 45 “tents.” Briella, who has been a “Variety Kid” since age 2, received an adaptive bike, which she can pedal and steer by herself, rode Max the horse in the nonprofit’s equestrian riding program, and even modeled in the annual Variety SHINE Fashion show. Through Variety’s mission to simply serve Detroit-area kids—no matter the need—Briella’s never-give-up attitude has blossomed, and she took her first 100 independent steps without her walker earlier this year.

“Briella is a shining example of why Variety is committed to serving kids through programs that enable and empower mobility, confidence and independence. The support and services that Variety provides are simply life-changing, and we are proud to be a small step on Briella’s journey to walk,” said David King, president of Variety the Children’s Charity of Detroit. Briella’s story and involvement in Variety programs were recently featured in a national webcast by the clothing brand Justice.

Over the last 12 months, Briella also started talking in full sentences and began to read. Naif is encouraged to see Briella’s communication and physical strength grow. “We are finally starting to hear her sweet voice, and its priceless. She works so hard at school, in therapy and at home. My husband and I have seen the growth, and Briella is more centered and aware of her body, giving her less fear to tackle different movement and mobility challenges in physical therapy and daily living.”

Despite meeting challenges many kids her age will never have to consider, she continues on with determination and greets each obstacle with a smile. Briella loves to play, swim, ride her bike, go horseback riding, read books, work with arts and crafts, and attend school and physical therapy. Briella loves to play veterinarian with her stuffed animals and talks about someday being a teacher or working with animals.

“Briella has many goals to keep working towards as she grows from child to teen to adult,” said Naif. “Ultimately, it’s getting her comfortable with daily living skills and having her involved in the process as much as possible, whether that’s helping brushing her own teeth, getting dressed or assisting with meals. We want Briella to be as comfortable and independent as possible, but at the same time, want her to be able to express her feelings and ask for help when needed.”

“Our world is starting to become more adaptive and inclusive for kids like Briella, but unfortunately, we still have a long way to go by making buildings, stores, schools, playgrounds- you name it- more adaptable and accessible for kids and adults who have mobility issues.”

Briella is a shining example of someone who has, and will continue to surpass expectations with unmatched determination.

You can follow Briella and Naif’s journey on Facebook and Instagram at Briella + Me.
Because my boss encourages me...

What can YOU do?
The Campaign for Disability Employment
WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org

I am a valuable employee.
How Building the Titanic Built Confidence

Up until Brynjar Karl Birgisson, an autistic teenager from Iceland, was only fourteen years old, he was almost completely incapable of communicating with others. Now, only three years later, Birgisson spends much of his time giving interviews, speeches and even TED talks. Birgisson’s success didn’t come overnight, but during the eleven-month period it took for him to build his most ambitious project yet—a twenty-foot lifelike Lego replica of the Titanic. After research and counsel from his engineer grandfather, Birgisson spent over seven hundred hours and 54,000 Legos to build the ship, ultimately facing challenges in frustration, patience, and failure along the way. “This whole journey has helped me out of my autistic fog,” Birgisson said, “It has given me confidence.” Since completing the project, Birgisson has become an inspiration to many other autistic children, has co-authored a book, and was featured in his own documentary.

Source: brynjarkarl.com
“Love on the Spectrum”

In July of 2020, Netflix released its newest docu-series, “Love on the Spectrum,” that follows two autistic couples and seven individuals as they face the world of dating and relationships for the first time. As the dating world often requires many forms of social interaction, the process has proven to be more difficult for many individuals who are on the autism spectrum and struggle with social cues and interactions. The show not only strives to highlight how various individuals and couples have grown in the dating world, but also provides practical advice from experts on how to overcome social interaction barriers.

Source: disabilityscoop.com

Meet AJ Gadgets: The First Autistic Superhero

This Summer, PBS KIDS released their latest cartoon, “Hero Elementary,” a cartoon about four superhero children learning to navigate their powers through real-life science. Though this show is already breaking boundaries by encouraging children to overcome their fears, embrace their individualities, and focus on diversity, the show has also included AJ Gadgets, a child superhero with autism. Creator Christine Ferraro said of the character, “We feel like there is so much strength in the idea of portraying a kid on the spectrum as just one of the kids and not making a huge deal about his autism.”

Source: disabilityscoop.com
LEGO Foundation Sends Braille Bricks to Schools Across U.S.

The LEGO Foundation is sending sets of braille bricks, free of charge, to school districts across the United States, according to a press release from American Printing House, a non-profit that promotes independent living for people who are blind and visually impaired. The Foundation aims to send sets of the bricks to school districts that are closed due to COVID where blind or visually impaired students are registered, in the hopes that teachers or administrators will send them to students’ homes. The braille bricks are the latest in a series of new offerings from LEGO. In July, the company announced that it was launching a classic Nintendo Entertainment System made of Legos. The company also debuted a new line of “Lego Art” featuring Marilyn Monroe, The Beatles, Star Wars and Iron Man.

Source: ktla.com

‘Sesame Street’ Changing Attitudes About Autism

Five years after “Sesame Street” added the character of Julia and focused on autism, new studies are showing how the material is changing the attitudes of parents of kids both with and without the developmental disorder. Looking at the “Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children” website made a difference for parents, whether or not they were personally affected by the developmental disability, according to findings published in August in the journal Autism.

Source: Disability Scoop
The online shoe shop, Zappos, has begun selling single shoes and varying sizes of shoes for people for physical differences as part of its Zappos Adaptive line with the launching of “The Single and Different Size Shoes Test Program.” Customers will be able to obtain popular brands such as Converse and Nike in both kids and adults’ sizes and will also have access to an instructional online video on how to measure a prosthetic foot for the correct size.

Source: zappos.com
Higher Education’s Next Great Challenge: Ensuring Inclusion

Twenty-six percent of people in the U.S. reported having a disability in 2019, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). National data also shows that people with disabilities are less likely to complete high school, achieve a college degree or higher, or find a job, leading to higher rates of poverty. Inclusive education is key to sustained financial independence. While most institutions of higher education have incorporated basic elements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in their policies and practices, higher education has failed to achieve full inclusion of students with disabilities.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has published “Higher Education’s Next Great Challenge: Ensuring Full Inclusion for Students with Disabilities,” which outlines the actions needed on campus to achieve full inclusion and support all students with disabilities.

“Inclusive education means the entire campus is thinking about and engaging students and faculty with disabilities. This requires leadership from the top levels—deans, provosts, department chairs, and Boards of Trustees,” notes Dahlia Shaewitz, IEL Vice President for Transition, Disability, and Employment.

The guide includes strategies for recruiting students with disabilities, providing accommodations as a student retention and inclusion approach, strengthening access and accessibility with technology, and going beyond compliance to promote disability-diversity and equity for all students.

A more diverse student and alumni population benefits the entire learning establishment while preparing all students for a future workforce that is fully inclusive. This new guide offers higher education leaders and their staff the information and strategies they need to improve successful participation of students with disabilities in higher education.

Learn more about the guide at iel.org/higher-education-inclusion-guide

Source: ahead.org
Tips for Teaching Students Remotely

By Lorre Wolf, Boston University

What follows are some tips and guidelines for faculty who will be teaching remotely during the pandemic to help students with different disabilities.

Some Blackboard Basics:
- Blackboard is fundamentally accessible to Assistive Technology (AT) BUT students vary in their skill level with AT. Please check in with your students who may be struggling.
- Students are very concerned about how they will receive their extra exam time accommodations. If you chose to administer exams in Blackboard, you will need to know how to extend the timing options. You may also choose different methods of assessment which are not exam based.
- Many of you will be scanning materials (textbook pages, articles, PDF, etc.) for students who do not have their books, notebooks and belongings during this period. Please be aware that students with (and without) disabilities may use screen reading software to access digital text. In order to maximize the effectiveness of these programs when you are scanning material, please use clear copies and scan in a straight vertical orientation.

Communication Access for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing:
1. Remote CART (Live Captioning Transcription) and/or remote American Sign Language (ASL) can be provided through Zoom and Blackboard platforms to cover synchronous and asynchronous courses where communication access is required.
2. Due to the unexpected current burden on vendors and educational technology services, we neither expect nor encourage you to use remote CART for your classes at this time unless you have a consumer who requires communication access.

Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired:
1. Please read aloud all text and provide a description of any images used in a live synchronous or recorded asynchronous presentation or lecture (e.g. PowerPoint, videos, webcasts, images, tables, graphs, etc.).
2. Chats and discussion boards are accessible to screen readers. Some students will be using phones and apps which have different access features. Please check in with your students to be sure they are able to use these features and if not, consider modifying the mechanism of group communication.
3. Scanned text (articles, textbook pages, etc.) should be clear copies scanned in a straight vertical orientation.
4. As a courtesy, all participants in synchronous classes should identify themselves by name prior to speaking.

Student Emotional Needs:
Many students using accommodations have hidden conditions, often emotional in nature. Many more students with mental health challenges have never requested or used accommodations. Finally, the current uncertainty and change may even precipitate new mental health challenges in your students. We encourage you to be aware of the following:
1. Remote classrooms under the best of circumstances can be disorienting and lonely for students who are used to face-to-face interactions. This can amplify pre-existing mental health challenges.
2. Be mindful of social isolation and ask students how they are managing and what you can do to help.
3. Anxiety can impact all aspects of attention. Consider building time and redundancy into your remote curriculum, assessments and messaging to students.
In a matter of months, the pandemic has rearranged the lives of children and families around the world. Schools have closed in 188 countries, disrupting the educations of more than 1.5 billion children and youth, according to unicefusa.org. In the U.S. alone, at least 54.8 million students have been affected by school closures.

Many school districts are shifting to online instruction and, as more and more children are adapting to learning from home, it’s important to establish healthy routines for success. Below are some tips to help students get organized and manage this new, and sometimes uncomfortable, learning environment.

- Help students order their courses in order of difficulty level or concern, and break down tasks into clear, manageable steps. That makes the pie a little easier to attack, one bite at a time. They can start a list of upcoming tasks for each course and put it all in one place, like a journal or planner or just a piece of paper. As they get information by email or from the LMS, they can add the to-do items to their central list to stay in control.

- Communication is going to be lacking from some instructors who aren’t used to teaching online or who are just bad at communicating already! Let students know that this will happen and to anticipate it. In email correspondence, they can phrase questions to require only a brief response. Faculty members may be more likely to respond if they know they can answer quickly, plus this will...
keep down the back-and-forth emails with professors. Students should create email folders for each course and dump any communication into that folder, to manage the huge influx of digital information.

- It can be isolating to go from an active student on a busy campus to sitting at home with no one to interact with but email and the LMS. Help your student anticipate this so they make it a priority to stay engaged with family and friends through this stressful experience. They’re least at risk outside, so get outside for exercise and fresh air, if possible. This will be critical for those students who aren’t able to leave the campus due to international status or finances.

- Remind students to engage in their courses EVERY day. Because the content may be delivered awkwardly, erratically, or not in the method they’re used to, they will likely need to spend more time on learning the content than they usually require. More review of notes, more reading, and employing more active study methods to stay engaged while learning alone are important strategies.

- Some students may be unfamiliar with taking tests online, elevating a stressful situation to a whole new level. Immediate communication is critical if they’re having trouble with an online test. Contact the instructor, of course, and use IT support as well, since that department is providing a lot of support to faculty. Students must take an active role. It might take more than one email to the instructor to figure out how to solve a problem. Keep communicating!

- Utilize academic support, even remotely. Academic coaches, tutors, learning specialists or accommodations coordinators will likely be available to talk on the phone, Skype, Zoom, etc., to help minimize overwhelm for students.

Source: ahead.org

Searching for a rewarding career? Find your ideal job in higher ed.

At www.hercjobs.org, you can:

- Search 40,000+ faculty, staff, and executive positions, including IT, engineering, logistics, mechanical, administrative, and health care jobs

- Set up custom job alerts

- Access free career advancement resources and job seeker guides
Every year, Disability:IN puts together a conference to educate businesses on accessibility and how they can be more accommodating to employees and customers with various disabilities. Since the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled the original plan for an in-person conference, Disability:IN decided to hold their conference on a virtual platform for the first time in its history, making the conference more widely available to a broader audience.

Throughout the weekend, the conference held an array of educational and resourceful panels on disability inclusion given by experts across the field, but this year, Disability:IN decided to take their dedication for inclusion a step further by creating their newest campaign, “Are you IN?” created in honor of the American with Disabilities Act’s (ADA) 30th anniversary.

**Are You IN? Campaign**

“Are You IN?” is a space where business owners can show their dedication to inclusivity, gain interactive access to Disability:IN resources, and to exchange stories and tips with other business owners on how to be a more inclusive company. Businesses who participated in the new campaign included Best Buy, Microsoft, Walmart, CVS Health, Accenture, Bristol Myers Squibb, and several others.

Many of the organizations that decided to join the campaign also happen to be included in the 2020 Disability Equality Index, a list of the top inclusive businesses for people with disabilities. Each year, Disability:IN sets a list of standards on how to be the most accommodating to various people and their disabilities. The companies who receive 100 percent are recognized on the equality index as the best places to work. This year, 205 companies scored 100 percent on the index including the previously mentioned Accenture and Microsoft, along with Chevron, Merck, UPS, Northrop Grumman and others.

**Inclusivity with Holly & RJ**

Providing accessibility, accommodation, and equal job opportunity for those with disabilities in the workplace has always proven to be necessary, not only for those receiving employment but also for the companies providing it. In the opening plenary, actor and singer Holly Robinson Peete and her son, RJ, who has autism, spoke on how important inclusivity is in the business world.

In the workplace, it can be easy for companies to fall into the stereotypes of what people with disabilities can or cannot do. RJ, for example, was told by various people growing up that he wouldn’t be able...
to perform certain activities because of his autism. However, when RJ joined the workforce, he not only began to grow as an individual, but proved to be a model employee.

For RJ, working has become a source of independence and confidence. This has proved especially true in his most recent job with the Los Angeles Dodgers as a clubhouse attendant. Through this position, RJ is responsible for tending to the players’ needs, preparing for games, and making sure they have the ideal environment to perform their best work.

“Being a clubhouse attendant for the Los Angeles Dodgers gives me confidence and purpose and a paycheck,” RJ said of his job, “I really love that.”

The confidence and independence that RJ has experienced in the workforce is far from uncommon. For many employees with autism, as discussed in this panel, joining the workforce allows them to build the confidence and social skills that were more difficult to gain in other areas of their lives. In return for this gratitude of sorts, employees with autism have proven to take their jobs seriously and become some of the best employees in the workplace.

Though he stays humble about it, Holly Peete mentioned how appreciated RJ is in his line of work, being called one of the Dodgers’ best employees, “I always shower them with gratitude for how well they treat my son,” Holly told the panel, “and they’re like, ‘Holly, what you don’t realize is how much RJ means to us in that clubhouse. He makes our days better every time.”

Holly also hopes that the workforce’s autism training will be able to revive itself in a new way.

“We are going to have to pivot and figure out how to do this in a socially distanced, safe way,” Holly said of opening the workforce again, “But we don’t want to forget the fact that we still need to get our kids hired and they can be the best employees you ever had. Just ask the Dodgers.”

**Highest Disability:IN Attendance**

This year, the conference had its highest attendee rate yet, totaling over 3,000 people from twenty different countries, 900 of them attending the corporate Inclusion Works Meeting. With 175 speakers, over 600 NextGen leaders connecting with big name businesses, 250 DOBE- interested conversations, and 68 expo exhibitors striving to better the world of inclusion, it just goes to show how important the topic of disability and inclusion is—particularly with the current political and social climate and the 30th anniversary of the ADA.

Disability:IN’s dedication to education, information, accessibility, and proper inclusion changes the business world for the better with each passing year. Whether it be on a digital or physical platform, Disability:IN, along with its accompanying supporters and sponsors, have proven to be as effective and informative in promoting a more inclusive workplace for all.

All plenaries and breakout sessions are still available online for conference attendees. If you missed this year’s event, Disability:IN has already announced its 2021 conference, set to take place from July 12-15 at the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, Nevada.
We all have a role to play in building an inclusive global economy.

Learn More and Join IN at INforInclusion.org
Empowering Fortune 1000 and Am Law 200 firms with an objective score and roadmap towards workplace disability inclusion policies and practices.

The Disability Equality Index (DEI) was launched in 2014 by Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). According to recent research from Accenture, “Companies that have improved their inclusion of persons with disabilities over time were four times more likely than others to have total shareholder returns that outperformed those of their peer group.”

The DEI guides both those just starting the inclusion journey as well leaders wanting to do more. Over time, the benchmark gradually evolves with innovative and incremental changes to help companies consider additional policies and practices.

Top-scoring companies (earning 80-100) are recognized as “Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion.”

According to a recent Accenture study, companies that offered the most inclusive working environment for employees with disabilities achieved an average of:

- 28% higher revenue
- 30% greater economic profit margins
- 2x net income of their industry peers

Register and learn more at DisabilityEqualityIndex.org
Selma Blair

A Beacon of Bravery

By Jaeson “Doc” Parsons & Samar Khoury

It began in 2011. Selma Blair didn’t know where it all came from—the overwhelming fatigue, anxiety, depression, neck pain, and severe vertigo. She didn’t understand why that after she’d drop her son, Arthur, off at school, she was so exhausted that she had to get back into bed. She was puzzled by the sudden loss of feeling in her leg.

Selma would go to doctors seeking answers, but they dismissed her symptoms, believing her exhaustion and fatigue were the result of her becoming a new mother. As the constant pain continued, Selma began to self-medicate to dull the pain.

“When I first suspected that something wasn’t right with my health, with my brain, was when I was pregnant with Arthur,” Selma shared with DIVERSEability Magazine. “I really knew something was wrong when I ran into a UPS truck…literally. I mean, I just skinned it, but I realized my perception was really off. That’s when I went to the eye doctor thinking it was just my eyes, but it was a perception coordination thing. I’d felt exhausted for years, but it really reached a point that I couldn’t deny it when I was first pregnant with Arthur, and certainly right after his birth.”

It wasn’t until 2018, when she was filming the movie After, that Selma finally got answers.

“When I was in Atlanta the first time shooting the beginning of the film, I had extreme vertigo on steps; I was walking with Josephine Langford down some steps, and I was like, ‘whoa, something’s really happening.’ I couldn’t feel my left leg or my right side and was having difficulty writing and texting, so I sent my manager a video telling him that something very strange is going on.”
“There’s no tragedy for me. I’m happy, and if I can help anyone be more comfortable in their skin, it’s more than I’ve ever done before.”
Selma heeded the advice from a new doctor who urged her to get an MRI, during which she was in tears, frightened of what was happening to her body.

The results were undeniable: 20 lesions on her brain—it was multiple sclerosis.

“I cried. I had tears. They weren’t tears of panic—they were tears of knowing I now had to give in to a body that had loss of control,” she said in an interview with Good Morning America’s Robin Roberts. “There was some relief in that, ’cause ever since my son was born, I was in an M.S. flare-up and didn’t know. I was giving it everything to seem normal.”

The Journey with M.S.

Multiple sclerosis, or M.S., is a potentially disabling disease. It impacts the brain and central nervous system. It gradually affects the entire body. It causes the immune system to eat away at the protective covering of the nerves.

Having M.S. is an emotional, painful, and unpredictable ride, sometimes leaving people who suffer from the disease wanting to give up.

But, for Selma, that is not the case. “There’s no tragedy for me,” she told Vanity Fair. “I’m happy, and if I can help anyone be more comfortable in their skin, it’s more than I’ve ever done before.”

The 48-year-old actress is resilient, using M.S. as a way to fight, giving hope to others suffering from the disease, and being an advocate for people with disabilities.

Through her journey with M.S., Selma decided that she would open about her disease and not hold anything back from the press or social media. “This is my journey…and all are welcome here,” she writes on her Instagram page.

“It just made sense to be candid. At the time, I was in a long flare and was very symptomatic. It was all new to me, and I just didn’t want to bother playing any type of game of peekaboo,” she said.

This candidness is evidenced through her interviews, such as her appearance on Good Morning America, in which she appeared with a cane and her statement of wanting to make canes chic, which touched many viewers who witnessed the interview, many of whom have their own canes.
Blair and her son, Arthur Saint Bleick.
Selma rocks her cane, viewing it as a great fashion accessory. When she first stepped out with a cane at the 2019 Vanity Fair Oscar Party in Beverly Hills, Selma turned heads, and prompted others to show the same courage. Twitter feeds were filled with praise for the star:

“The real winner of Oscar night is Selma Blair.”

“#SelmaBlair in tears as she attends the @VanityFair #Oscars party made me cry. I’ve often been walking on aid and exhaustion can just hit and you think, how am I going to do this? But you keep going. She is amazing.”

Selma was—and is—an icon.

Advocating and Raising Awareness

Selma aims to bear all and to help raise awareness for those suffering from this little understood disease and those who, like Selma years ago, have no idea they have M.S.

Selma shared her insights into the struggles that impact her not just as a woman but also as a single mother.

“One of the bigger things is honestly the fatigue. As a mom or anyone trying to do something primarily by themselves with a little tiny person witnessing everything you’re doing, it can feel unsustainable. Figuring out intricacies of neurological disorders is a constant reckoning of how to do better, when to sleep, what you can do, what is very emotionally triggering, you know. There are many layers of it that I now see, people with the disabilities are so busy in our minds.”

Through the sharing of her journey, Selma makes it her mission to help those struggling with M.S. and other disabilities. She credits others who have taken this path of openness and advocacy, such as Michael J. Fox, with inspiring her to do the same.

“I remember when I was younger and Michael J. Fox came out. I was such a humongous fan of his, and seeing him be so candid about something that seemed so far away from me at the time. I’ve kind of held his example, and I’ve learned that there is an intrinsic value in opening up some of your experiences to people, because the conditions we deal with are often very isolating and when there’s someone that’s out there that could possibly really shed a light on it and bring more attention.”
Her grace and humility as well as her willingness to be a light shining into the unknown darkness for people with disabilities is heroic, though she shrugs off such a label.

“I’m not a hero. I make no bones about that in my life. But I am very honored if my experience, my mess ups and my triumphs help other people,” she said.

For those who are struggling with the disease or for those who have recently been diagnosed, Selma offers some insight and advice:

“Some people said you’ll be better right away. Some said no, healing is not linear. It can take two years. I kind of have fallen in between all that, and I think I would tell someone, ‘Your whole mind can change. Try not to be afraid. I’ve learned so many things, and I pray that you continue to search for what can make you happy and calm. But it takes time. I’m just starting to feel like I’m learning now.’”

“Mommy’s Brave”

To 9-year-old Arthur, his mom is a hero, and he does not view her experiences negatively. “He says, ‘Mommy’s not sick. Mommy’s brave,’” Selma shared with People.

Selma’s commitment to Arthur has remained steadfast and honest. He has seen her face these challenges but remains extremely proud of his resilient mother.

She stated, “He said, ‘I love when you come to school because you make the kids laugh and you answer all their questions.’” She remains completely open about her struggles, even with Arthur’s classmates, explaining to them why she may walk differently.

“I explain what’s happening and that my voice doesn’t hurt, and we have really decent exchanges. I had no idea Arthur was proud of that. I thought ‘I’m probably an embarrassment,’ but to know I’m not was one of my proudest moments.”

Always Resilient

Selma’s resilience started at a young age. She was born outside of Detroit, Michigan, in the suburb of Southfield. Her interest in acting took hold at an early age, and she credits a high school English teacher, Mr. Toner, with pushing her forward, telling her never to give up, which would serve her well in years to come.

Moving to New York, she was torn between acting and photography.

“When I went to New York, the purpose was a toss-up,” Selma stated. “I didn’t know if I could be a photographer or an actress, but with acting, you can at least go to a class and...
do workshops, but it was hard to just be an assistant for someone without a lot of experience as a photographer and break-in, so they were both passions.”

Over the years, Selma has played many roles with more than four dozen short and feature films. Her most favorite role was her first major picture, the 1999 film *Cruel Intentions* with Selma starring opposite actors Ryan Phillippe, Sarah Michelle Gellar, and Reese Witherspoon.

“It was kind of the dream come true first job. After studying in New York, I went to LA, and my first major part was in a real studio film. And while I had done a few small roles before that, that was really my first substantial role with stars that I had loved and they were basically my contemporaries, but, of course, they are already established actors. I laughed and laughed and laughed, and that’s when I kind of realized I really loved what comedy could be and how it could feel.”

**Shining Light, Bringing Hope**

Selma’s journey is one of inclusion, a journey that many have been on and, sadly, many more are just beginning. Through her candidness, she is willing to share her triumphs and defeats with the world to help others learn, to be a pathfinder for those suffering from the debilitating symptoms of multiple sclerosis. She is a hero of advocacy.

And through it all—her slurred speech, aches and pains, exhaustion, and much more—Selma handles it all with a smile, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. “…Take this opportunity to be the best you can be, to help your days along,” she said.

For Selma, there is no tragedy—only positivity. “I don’t know if I believed in myself or had the ambition before my diagnosis,” she said to *Vanity Fair*. “And oddly now I do, and I don’t know if it’s too late.”

This is her journey and all are welcome.
Autistic NASCAR Driver Armani Williams is Living his Dream

Armani Williams is a 20-year-old, Detroit-based professional NASCAR driver who is using his racing career as a platform to draw awareness to Autism, promote research-based solutions, and create better life outcomes for families impacted by the disorder. Williams has competed coast to coast in the United States and throughout Canada.

Williams is a two-time NASCAR Drive for Diversity Combine Participant. He currently races in the NASCAR ARCA Menards Series. He has raced as a professional in the ARCA Truck Pro Series, the former NASCAR Canadian Tire Series—now branded as the NASCAR Pinty’s Series, and the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East and West. The sky is the limit as Williams climbs the ladder to the biggest races in ARCA, the NASCAR Gander Mountain Truck Series, Xfinity and Monster Energy Cup Series.

Williams was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at the age of two, and he was considered nonverbal. He is the first openly diagnosed autistic NASCAR driver. Autism is a disorder that is characteristically marked by difficulty focusing on and processing different stimuli and tasks simultaneously, in addition to complications with communication. These are two key skills for any race car driver. Initially, it seemed that Williams’s dream of becoming a professional NASCAR driver was impossible.

However, Williams didn’t accept impossible. When he was eight-years-old, Williams began competing in go-kart racing, then bandolero styles vehicles, and quickly progressed to professional series. He raced in the ARCA Truck Pro Series in 2016, signing with SPEAR MotorSports. He broke records by becoming the highest finishing African American in a series race and the highest finishing African American in the series championship.

That same year, Williams was invited to compete in the NASCAR Drive for Diversity Combine and returned to the competition for a second year in a row. In 2017, Williams moved up to a higher level of competition to hone his skills as a race car driver and gain confidence in the former NASCAR Canadian Tires Series—now known as the NASCAR Pinty’s Series of Canada. He was coached by team general manager and driver Joey McColm, along with NASCAR Monster Energy Cup driver D.J. Kennington. To date, Williams has 18 wins and two championships.

In 2018, Williams made his United States debut at the NASCAR K&N Pro Series in Memphis, Tennessee. On September 22nd of that year, Williams earned his first top 10 finish in his 8th start in a NASCAR Sanctioned race event, finishing 9th at New Hampshire Motor Speedway for Simone Autosport.

His future plans are to compete in the Menards ARCA Series, NASCAR Gander Outdoor Truck Series, making his way to the highest level of the sport.

Williams’s future is both remarkable and bright. His personal diagnosis with autism and success on the track inspires his philanthropy off the track. In 2015, Williams and his family established the Armani Williams Race 4 Autism Foundation to raise awareness and promote research. He continues to speak to audiences and make appearances to local communities during race week to drive action and hope.

“Tell me I can’t so I can show you that I can.”

— Armani Williams’ mantra
Williams believes that people on the autism spectrum can do anything, and he is proof of that. Team Williams Racing strives to inspire people living with autism to achieve their goals, and to empower friends and family to support best life outcomes.

The Armani Williams Race 4 Autism Foundation drives autism awareness, promotes research, and strives to provide life enrichment opportunities to people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

Armani Williams is rising in the NASCAR ranks and looking for sponsors and business partners that are passionate about Autism, and/or Diversity. If interested, please reach out to Team Armani Racing on LinkedIn-Armani Williams or at del@teamarmaniracing.com.

Source: teamarmaniracing.com
Seven Steps to Building a Disability-Inclusive Workplace

By the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

October marks the 75th observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). While the past 75 years have seen groundbreaking developments, including the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, when it comes to disability inclusion in the workplace, there’s still work to be done. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) reports that, in June 2020, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 16.5 percent, compared to 11 percent for people without disabilities. Many employers want to establish diverse workforces that include people with disabilities but don’t know how to do so. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) can help. EARN is a free resource funded by ODEP that provides information and tools to help employers recruit, hire, advance, and retain people with disabilities. EARN’s Inclusion@Work Framework, which was developed in collaboration with employers with exemplary practices in disability employment, outlines core components of a disability-inclusive workplace, along with a menu of strategies for achieving them. From disability-inclusive recruitment practices to effective communication, here are seven ways companies can foster disability inclusion at work:

1 **Lead the Way**
   The foundation for a disability-inclusive work environment is an inclusive business culture. This begins by gaining buy-in from executive leadership. Examples of best practices for fostering an inclusive culture include:
   - Making equal employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities an integral part of the company’s strategic mission.
   - Establishing a team that includes executives with disabilities to support the recruiting, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.
   - Conducting employee engagement surveys to gather input on whether the workplace environment is accessible and inclusive.

2 **Build the Pipeline**
   Proactive outreach and recruitment of people with disabilities is the foundation of a successful workplace disability inclusion program. To build a pipeline of applicants, employers should work to develop relationships with a variety of recruitment sources. Best practices for disability-inclusive outreach and recruitment practices include partnering with local and state service providers (such as vocational rehabilitation agencies), participating in employer networking groups, attending career fairs for people with disabilities, and providing inclusive mentoring and internship opportunities.

3 **Hire (& Keep) the Best**
   Building a disability-inclusive organization means not only attracting and recruiting qualified individuals with disabilities but also ensuring policies and processes across the employment lifecycle support the hiring, retention, and advancement of employees with disabilities. Companies should have effective policies and processes in place for job announcements, qualification standards,
hiring, workplace accommodations, career development and advancement, and retention and promotion.

4 Ensure Productivity
All employees need the right tools and work environment to effectively perform their jobs. Employees with disabilities may need workplace adjustments—or accommodations—to maximize their productivity. Examples of workplace accommodations include automatic doors, sign language interpreters, and flexible work schedules or telework. According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), more than half of all workplace accommodations cost nothing to provide. Furthermore, JAN research has found that most employers report financial benefits from providing accommodations, including reduced insurance and training costs, and increased productivity.

5 Communicate
Attracting qualified individuals with disabilities requires clear communication, both externally and internally, about your company’s commitment to disability inclusion. This can include internal campaigns, disability-inclusive marketing, and participation in disability-related job fairs and awareness events. Best practices for communication of company policies and procedures can include:
- Incorporating disability imagery into advertising and marketing materials.
- Informing local disability organizations about company sponsored career days.
- Distributing information about relevant disability policies and priorities to subcontractors, vendors, and suppliers.

6 Be Tech Savvy
As technology continues to shift, so does the concept of accessibility. Being able to get through the physical door is no longer enough to ensure people with disabilities can apply and interview for jobs; a company’s “virtual doors” must be open as well. Furthermore, once on the job, employees with disabilities—like all employees—must be able to access the information and communication technology (ICT) they need to maximize their productivity. Examples of best practices for ensuring accessible ICT include using accessible online recruiting platforms, adopting a formal ICT policy, appointing a chief accessibility officer, and establishing clear procurement policies related to accessibility.

7 Measure Success
While policies and procedures are necessary to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, the ultimate objective should be to ensure effective implementation. Companies can take steps to ensure disability becomes part of their overall diversity goals and can encourage self-identification of disability by their employees to benchmark the impact of disability inclusion efforts. Examples of best practices for accountability and self-identification include providing training on disability-related issues, establishing accountability measures and processes for self-identification, and incorporating disability inclusion goals in appropriate personnel’s performance plans.

Visit AskEARN.org to learn more about creating a disability-inclusive workplace.
TangibleCircuits

A research project that aims to help people that are blind or that have other visual impairments learn computer circuit design was recognized recently by a global conference on human-computer interaction.

The Dartmouth study, “TangibleCircuits: An Interactive 3D Printed Circuit Education Tool for People with Visual Impairments,” allows users to interact with models of circuit boards that provide audio feedback in response to being touched.

“This is a powerful tool that can help people with visual impairments learn electronics,” said Xing-Dong Yang, an assistant professor of computer science and the senior researcher on the paper. “Through innovations like this, we hope that visually-impaired people will no longer miss out on education opportunities and high-tech careers.”

According to the research team, web-based tutorials that teach novices how to make circuits are not accessible to everybody. As an example, many existing tools rely heavily on visual information for instruction, making them difficult to use for those who are blind or otherwise visually impaired.

While many accessibility tools already exist, most do not enable users that are blind or visually impaired to create their own accessibility tools.

The Dartmouth research uses an inexpensive practice circuit board that can be accessed by computer hobbyists and students. The design is intended to broaden the inclusivity and accessibility of maker spaces and engineering classrooms by allowing instructors to create cheap, portable, and easy-to-use tutorials.

A narrative-based smartphone application that promotes physical activity by visualizing and tying together the progress of the user with that of the app’s main character was awarded a best paper award by the conference.

Dot

Dot is a wearable that is also the world’s first Braille smartwatch. Dot is a practical solution that is more affordable than regular e-Braille devices, which may cost thousands, yet still works well for the blind. Dot helps the blind access messages, tweets, even books, anywhere and at any time. Technically, this tool functions with six dots on four cells found on the surface of the smartwatch. These dots will raise or lower to form 4 letters in Braille at any time. It can connect via Bluetooth to any smartphone, then retrieve and translate the text (from an email or messaging app) into Braille for its owner.
**AXS Map**

This map is a user-generated database of accessible locations in all major cities. Powered by GoogleMaps API, AXS Map functions by providing users with a database of locations that they can edit with ratings and reviews of accessibility metrics for disabled individuals.

AXS Map is a crowdsourced map that carries information about wheelchair-accessible ramps and restrooms in public places such as restaurants, hotels, shopping malls, and more.

The map also carries information about how well-designed these facilities are with the help of star ratings.

This allows other users to see these reviews, screen which locations they choose to travel to, and add their own reviews of the places they enter to expand the database. Rather than leaving accessibility reviews to specialists, AXS Map allows any member of the public to use the tool to report their experience. As well as offering accessibility ratings for the mobility impaired, AXS Map also reviews accessibility for the visually and hearing impaired.

**Ava**

Ava has reinvented AI-based speech recognition technology. Ava is a mobile app that everyone (coworkers, family members, friends) downloads on their smartphone. By connecting each smartphone’s microphone via the app, Ava captures what the group says on the deaf/hard-of-hearing person’s phone. They can then answer by either talking, or if they have a “Deaf” voice, typing. Instant captions for any situation make any online and in-person conversation accessible to Deaf & hard-of-hearing people. The app captures the conversations for you when lip-reading is too hard for you to follow. Ava helps 100,000 deaf & hard-of-hearing people in captioning their everyday life and be part of a fully inclusive society.

**Be My Eyes**

Be My Eyes is an app made up of a global community that connects people who are blind or have low vision with sighted volunteers and company representatives. On the app, volunteers assist blind and low-vision users through a live video connection and work together to tackle challenges and handle a wide range of tasks. With the Specialized Help feature, blind and low-vision users can connect with company representatives for accessible customer support. The app harnesses the power of generosity, technology, and human connection to help blind and low-vision people lead more independent lives. Be My Eyes is accessible in more than 150 countries worldwide and in over 180 languages. The app is free and available for both iOS and Android.
LUCI Reimagines Modern Mobility through Wheelchair Smart Technology

LUCI, a company that is reimagining modern mobility, today announced the release of its premier product also named LUCI. It’s a first-of-its-kind hardware and software platform that uses sensor-fusion technologies to allow a power wheelchair to “see” its environment, giving riders unprecedented stability, security and cloud connectivity.

LUCI mounts onto a power wheelchair between the power base and the seat, to help users avoid collisions and dangerous drop-offs while maintaining personalized driving control. Through cloud-based capabilities, LUCI can also monitor and alert users and caregivers of low battery, possible tipping scenarios, and other important updates regarding the chair and the user.

Tipping over in a wheelchair is a common, treacherous reality, which often leads to trips to the hospital and expensive healthcare bills. In fact, 87 percent of wheelchair users reported at least one tip or fall in the past three years. Wheelchair accidents were the cause of more than 175,000 ER visits in 2010 -- the last year the data was tracked -- and 30,000 of those were significant enough for admission into the hospital.

“What started as a labor of love among family members has ultimately created a safer, more stable way for people with disabilities to navigate their world and stay connected to loved ones.”

— Barry Dean, CEO and founder of LUCI.

“Wheelchair users were left behind when it comes to most innovative technology,” said Barry Dean, CEO and founder of LUCI, a Grammy-nominated songwriter, whose daughter Katherine, 19, has cerebral palsy and has used a wheelchair her whole life.

“We realized no one else was working on this problem in a meaningful way so my brother Jered (Dean, CTO of LUCI) and I set out to create a solution for Katherine. What started as a labor of love among family members has ultimately created a safer, more stable way for people with disabilities to navigate their world and stay connected to loved ones. Today, we’re excited to launch LUCI and continue collaborating with researchers, universities and other companies using our open platform to move the industry forward together.”

The LUCI team spent the past two and half years collaborating with clinical professionals and logging over 25,000 hours of user testing to develop an invention to help people with physical disabilities drive safely, precisely and independently. LUCI’s R&D efforts have already resulted in a total of 16 patents (eight pending).

“When we started tinkering with my niece Katherine’s chair, we had no idea where this journey would lead,” said Jered Dean, CTO, who has spent two decades in design and systems engineering, most recently serving as director of the Colorado School of Mines’s Capstone Design@Mines program. “From
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developing advancements in millimeter-wave radar technology to collaborating with engineering leaders from Intel® RealSense™ Technology group to maximize the application of some of the world’s smartest cameras, I’m incredibly proud of the unprecedented work our team has accomplished to solve the challenges our customers face."

LUCI’s technology combines stereovision, infrared, ultrasonic and radar sensors to offer users these critical features:

- **Collision avoidance:** LUCI is designed to prevent wheelchair users from running into objects (walls, people, pets, furniture, etc.) as they navigate their daily lives. It does this by smoothly helping to navigate the chair in coordination with user steering inputs based on obstacle detection in the driver’s surroundings.

- **Drop-off protection:** It doesn’t take a large drop-off to tip a wheelchair (less than three inches in some cases). LUCI helps users avoid tipping by recognizing steps or drop-offs and smoothly helping the chair continue on a safer path.

- **Anti-tipping alert system:** LUCI monitors the steepness of a ramp or the ground users are driving on and provides an audible alert if it becomes a tipping danger. In the event that a chair tips over, LUCI sounds an alarm and can be configured to quickly alert other individuals, such as a caregiver or loved one, of the exact location of the rider and the tipped chair.

- **Cloud-based communications and alerts:** The MyLUCI portal allows users to view their data and share it with loved ones or clinicians. LUCI can be set up to alert others of specific events, such as the user’s location if their battery gets dangerously low. LUCI also now works with Hey Google and Amazon Alexa so users can interact with MyLUCI using their voice. MyLUCI portal is available as mobile apps for both iOS and Android™ phones, as well as for desktop with the Web Portal.

- **Secure health monitoring:** LUCI users can choose to share their heart rate data with their team using either Google Fit® or Apple HealthKit from day one.

Based in Nashville, with R&D headquarters in Denver, Colo., LUCI was founded by Barry and Jered Dean—two brothers who were driven to innovate from personal experience and committed to create change for people living with disabilities. For more info, visit luci.com.
From Curb to Gate: Improving Air Travel for People with Disabilities

By GeMar Neloms, Senior Technical Assistance Consultant, American Institutes for Research

When we travel by air, most of us don’t instinctively think about the process and the number of industries and services involved in our experiences at the airport and on our flights. We, instead, focus on how to get from curb to gate as quickly as we can and, preferably, with as little drama as possible. The “curb-to-gate” experience is also a focal point for airports as they seek to provide positive customer experiences for all travelers, including those with disabilities.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) recently worked with Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) and the Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority to address common obstacles faced by passengers with disabilities and identify opportunities for improving disability awareness and access among airport personnel and vendors. This included interactive, online training, developed with and through the experiences of travelers with disabilities.

For the 26 million adults with disabilities who travel annually (Open Doors, 2015), this promotes respectful customer service interactions and recognizing travelers with disabilities as the expert on their own needs. For airport personnel, it increases their skill sets and knowledge about a segment of their customer base and promotes high standards of customer service. It also helps businesses identify ways to go beyond the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) to create a culture that reflects all passengers when reviewing and implementing changes to impact traveler experiences.

This is just an example of the type of work that AIR does to contribute to a more equitable world through research; translate evidence into user-friendly products; and provide technical assistance customized for specific audiences.

Recruitment, development and retention of employees is another ongoing focus across industries. But how can business and employee be supported when circumstances impact an individual’s ability to work due to an injury or illness? The Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration Project combines capacity building coaching and resources, research and evaluation to help states, employers and employees address that question through strategies that help the injured or ill employee return to work or stay at work (RTW/SAW) as soon as possible. Led by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labor, and in partnership with the Education Training Administration and the Social Security Administration, RETAIN states work in multi-sector teams that include healthcare, workforce and disability services to determine what RTW/SAW model works best with the potential to replicate evidence-based and promising practices across their states.

Through our diverse portfolio of work on disability issues and our role as a knowledge broker and translator of research, improving outcomes for people with disabilities is part of our mission-aligned work to create a better, more equitable world. Conducting and leveraging research for business, industry, government and organizations presents the opportunity for all involved to achieve this goal.

For more information about AIR and our work, please visit air.org.
Eight years ago, Travis Mills’ life was forever changed when he became one of only five servicemen from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ever to survive his injuries as a quadruple amputee. Retired United States Army Staff Sergeant Travis Mills of the 82nd Airborne was critically wounded in action on April 10, 2012 by an IED on his third deployment in Afghanistan. But with a positive attitude, he refuses to let his injuries define him.

“In the beginning it was a little difficult not being able to look in the mirror for six months,” he told us. “There were times when you wonder why this happened and how can you go back in time. After a while, you just realize that it’s never going to change so you might as well make the best of it.”

Mills said he had wonderful doctors, nurses, and medical staff as well as therapists (occupational, physical, driving rehab) that would get him back on his feet. His wife and his daughter were right there with him, literally every step of the way.

“I learned to walk with my daughter as she was learning how to walk,” he said. “Once you peel back the layers and realize this is the rest of your life, stop dwelling on it, get moving and reminisce about what you had, life gets a lot easier.”

Mills said the mental part was the toughest, and that he struggled with the “why?”

“Am I a bad person? Why didn’t I just die? Things like that go through your head,” he said. “I realized for the first five weeks of my injuries that I had to have someone feed me, have someone help me change my clothes, help me use the restroom, things that you wouldn’t think of. It’s like being an adult baby that can’t do anything for themselves. It has taught me patience.”
Today, the motivational speaker, actor, author and advocate for veterans and amputees, whose motto “never give up; never quit” continues to inspire everyone he meets, lives “a pretty normal, hectic, crazy all-American dream life” with his wife, Kelsey, and two children.

Mills and his wife founded the Travis Mills Foundation to assist post 9/11 veterans who have been injured in active duty or as a result of their service to our nation. Through the foundation, they have created a Veterans Retreat where veterans and their families receive an all-inclusive, all-expenses paid vacation to Maine to participate in adaptive activities.

“The original vision in creating the foundation was just care packages overseas, because I would see a lot of guys who wouldn’t get care packages,” he said. “I thought, ‘let’s just send them peanut butter M&Ms, beef jerky that’s peppered, of course, because that’s the delicious one, and a few other items.’ So, we started with that idea.”

Then Mills, who could still go kayaking, canoeing, horseback riding and snowboarding, would take these trips with his wife and enjoyed them so much, it sparked his next idea. “I thought how great it would be to bring people out and show them they can do things adaptively with their family?” he said. “It just kind of progressed to a small camp in the woods with little cabins to this huge facility. We don’t even say ‘camp’ anymore because it’s more of a retreat at a huge estate (the former Elizabeth Arden Estate). We have been able to expand greatly.”

Mills’ advice for veterans who may be struggling with injuries suffered during combat? “I just tell people never be too strong to reach out for help, and understand there are ways to get over post-traumatic stress. And if they are physically injured, every day is a step in the right direction,” he said. “I am always so grateful and thankful when I think about what could have happened. I lost some really, really close friends of mine, and their families would give anything to have them back—their children, parents, spouses, their siblings and friends would give anything. So, when I think about it in that aspect, I know I was given a chance to live, move forward and make the most of every day.”
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Seven years ago, Coast Guard veteran and PVA member Kaleb Wilson took a $100 bet that changed his life.

Some friends dared him to jump off a pier. He was 22 years old, and he figured he’d do it—it’s $100, right? So, he dove in head-first and hit the bottom, shattering several vertebrae. Instead of celebrating his win with friends, he found himself in a New Orleans Trauma Center, paralyzed.

One Goal

With his sweetheart Brittany by his side, he fought tooth and nail with one goal in mind: He wanted to walk down the aisle on their wedding day. She had been there for him during his recovery and rehab, and now he made it his mission to be there for her, standing across from her at the altar, and dancing at their wedding. With a lot of love, support, and hard work, he made it happen.

Wilson had been interested in joining the military ever since he was a little boy. He was a swimmer in high school, and started looking into programs with the Navy and the Air Force. But it was the Coast Guard that caught his attention. He was drawn to rescue swimming. “I knew it was where I needed to be,” he says.

He was a part of the Coast Guard for three years. After he graduated from boot camp, he was assigned to a station in New Orleans, where he worked doing search and rescue missions, intercepting drug shipments, escorting vessels into the Gulf, and patrolling rivers and lakes. He loved his job, and he enjoyed the culture in New Orleans. He was a young man enjoying his career, living in a lively city, in love with a beautiful girl. Wilson was on the list to go to “A” school in November of 2012 when he took that fateful dare that landed him in a wheelchair.

A New Normal

Becoming paralyzed presents a whole host of challenges, of course, not just for the
injured, but for those closest to them. Wilson and Brittany had to work together with trust and focus in order to adjust to their new normal. They relied on each other, and became stronger together. He proposed in 2013; they married in 2014, both of them standing for the ceremony.

They also relied on Paralyzed Veterans of America. During rehab and recovery, PVA helped Wilson with benefits information, and later on, with vocational rehab benefits, which allowed him to return to school to pursue a chemical engineering degree. A couple of years ago, Wilson competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in swimming, and was inspired to join the Mountain State chapter of PVA, serving on the Board and as Treasurer.

He has attended two Games so far, most recently in Louisville, where he brought home seven medals in swimming, rugby, and field events. “It’s nice to be around people who are in a similar situation as I am, who understand what you are going through,” he says. “Brittany loves it, too, because she gets to socialize with other wives who know what we’re dealing with, and we get to come together with friends who live around the country.”

### Giving Back

He and Brittany are in the process of moving to Illinois, where he will transfer his membership to the Vaughn chapter of PVA and do some volunteering for fellow veteran Noah Currier with his Oscar Mike Foundation.

“It’s not just money that keeps these programs running, it’s volunteers, too. I don’t want to be somebody who just takes, takes, takes. I want to give back.”

Today, Wilson is a loving and happy husband, and delighted father of two little girls, with a third child on the way. He is also a proud veteran of the United States Coast Guard.

“Seven years ago, I sustained my injury that ended my time actively serving in the Coast Guard, but that did not take away the fact that I still am a Coastie. I still feel at home around my fellow Coasties; I still feel connected in the way I always have. I may not serve beside them anymore, but I will always be a part of them!”

Source: https://blog.pva.org & craighospital.org/blog/wilsonwedding

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**MARKETING YOUR BUSINESS**

**Thursday, December 10, 2020**

1:00 pm–3:00 pm

The FDIC’s Office of Minority and Women Inclusion in collaboration with Acquisition Service Branch is seeking Minority and/or Women-Owned Businesses to attend our **free virtual Technical Assistance event, Getting to Success: Marketing Your Business.**

This event will be interactive with dialogue about traditional and digital marketing.

For more event information, please visit https://cvent.me/3E3eBD.
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Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit diverseabilitymagazine.com. Send your conference announcements to partnerships@diversitycomm.net.
FEBRUARY
City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
See Calendar
citycareerfair.com

From Day One
TBD
Dallas, TX
Fromdayone.com

Black College Expo
Virtual Multiple Events
See Calendar
Thecollegeexpo.org

BEYA Stem
February 11-13
Washington, DC
Intouch.ccmag.com

Value of a Veteran
February 23-25
Walton Beach, FL
https://veteranrecruitingconference.com/

Abilities Expo
February 26-28
Los Angeles, CA
Abilities.com

MARCH
City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
See Calendar
citycareerfair.com

CSUN
Virtual Event
March 8-12
Csun.edu

NSBE
March 10-14
Orlando, FL
Nsbe.org

From Day One
March 18
Chicago, IL
Fromdayone.co

WiCyS
March 25-27
Denver, CO
Wicys.org

AEC Next Technology Expo
March 30-April 1
Denver, CO
www.aecnexnext.com

APRIL
City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
See Calendar
citycareerfair.com

From Day One
April 6
Boston, MA
Fromdayone.co

HACU Capital Forum
April 13-14
Washington, DC
Hacu.net

NFBPA
April 21-25
Phoenix, AZ
Nfbpa.org

ASHHRA
April 24-27
Denver, CO
Ashhra.org

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