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Advancing Accessibility

It’s often been said that with every dark cloud, there’s a silver lining. There may not be many upsides to the pandemic, but here’s one that we hope is here to stay – unprecedented accessibility. When the world went into lockdown, virtually anything you could need or want became accessible online – from company meetings and college classes to doctor’s appointments and job interviews. This not only gave people with disabilities access in a way they never had before – it also shed new light on the importance of fostering an inclusive and accessible workplace – and life – for everyone.

But accessibility is more than just about providing wheelchair ramps, braille signage or assistive technology. There’s an attitudinal component; a genuine willingness to be open both literally and figuratively to ALL qualified individuals. On the other side, we urge those with disabilities to speak up and go after what you want – and never be afraid to seize your opportunity, as our latest cover, actor and CP advocate RJ Mitte, can attest.

He jumped at the chance to play the role of Junior, the sweet, sarcastic son of chemistry-teacher-turned-drug-lord Walter White in the hit TV series, “Breaking Bad.” While Mitte himself has had his share of medical and social challenges along the way, it’s his belief that, “if you have a disability, you have an asset. You’re coming from a different human condition. And whether you’re 19 or 45, you can still set out and do what you wanted to do.” Turn to more on Mitte and his plan for a “Bad” sequel on page 76.

Employers who make the work “work” on both sides are the ones that thrive! Learn how to best to retain employees with disabilities on page 12. And why is making your company’s website accessible so important? Find out on page 50. If you’re a job seeker, learn which states have the most competitive jobs right now (page 32) and how to make your cover letter stand out (page 36). Maybe you’ve discovered you love working from home – see how to best negotiate doing so permanently on page 40.

It’s a fallacy that only people with disabilities benefit from accessible workplaces – we all do. Inclusion inspires innovation and increases value. By drawing on a wider pool of talent, you will not only advance your company’s goals and expand your customer base – but your bottom line as well.

Kat Castagnoli
Managing Editor, DIVERSEability Magazine
We are strengthened by our differences and together we can change the world.

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At Leidos, we believe that a focus on appreciating the unique backgrounds of our employees improves team performance, influences innovative business strategies and drives positive results. We strive to continually improve the experience from applicant to employee and apply relevant accessibility standards. As part of this commitment, we work to design inclusive systems and processes that allow all users to fully participate and feel their needs are met.

LEIDOS IS SEEKING POWERHOUSE TALENT FOR POSITIONS IN THE AREAS OF IT, ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE.
Contributing Writers

CJ Lange, President and CEO of Industries, Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. (IBVI)

CJ Lange is the president and CEO of Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. (IBVI) and the architect of a highly successful career in which he has innovated around technology, consistently implemented and executed strategies successfully and unified the organization to create business opportunities for the blind and visually impaired.

Mark Baird, founder of Patriotic Hearts

Mark Baird is the founder of Patriotic Hearts, a 501c3 for U.S. veterans and HirePatriots.com, one of the most popular web destinations for job seeking, active and former U.S. military personnel. He is the author of, An American Crisis: Veterans Unemployment and The Patriotic Business Plan: Strategies for Sensational Success, both available in book stores and on Amazon.com.

Michele Mehl, founder and CEO, Excy

Michele Mehl is the founder and CEO of Excy, an innovative exercise device to meet the fitness needs of those looking to stay healthy while battling injury, disease, or disability. Michele’s passion for innovation and disruptive technology started over twenty years ago with a fast-paced startup-focused PR firm in San Francisco. She holds a B.A. from the University of the Pacific, where she was a two-sport Division I scholarship athlete. In her free time, she enjoys the outdoors with her son and husband and tries to mountain bike as frequently as possible.

Sheri Byrne-Haber, accessibility architect, VMware

Sheri Byrne-Haber is a prominent global subject matter expert in the field of disability and accessibility best known for launching digital accessibility programs at multiple Fortune 200 companies, including McDonald’s, Albertsons, and VMware, as well as consulting on government accessibility. Her award-winning Medium blog summarizes legal cases and issues facing people implementing accessibility programs, with over 250,000 readers since its launch.

Tonia Nifong, communications manager, The Arc Pikes Peak Region

Tonia Nifong is a Colorado native who is very inspired by beauty, especially when it is captured in writing, dance, nature, or relationships. After studying communications and Spanish at Colorado State University, she moved to Colorado Springs with her husband, Daniel; they have one little boy – Logan. Tonia enjoys using creative, strategic thought to enhance The Arc Pikes Peak Region’s communications and day-to-day operations, benefiting those with I/DD and their families.

Jeff Vistica, wealth advisor, Valiant Partners

Jeff Vistica, CFP™ (Certified Financial Planner), ChSNC® (Chartered Special Needs Consultant), AIF® (Accredited Investment Fiduciary) is the co-founding partner of Valiant Partners, a registered investment advisory firm located in Carlsbad, Calif. Valiant Partners devotes its practice exclusively to serving the needs of parents with special needs children. Visit valiantfutures.com for more information.
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Opportunities for Improvements on Retaining People with Disabilities

Recognizing that people with disabilities have difficulty finding jobs and are in less stable jobs once they become employed, they are similarly committed to their jobs as employees without disabilities, and this commitment is high. Four out of five employees with disabilities are very satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, two-thirds of employees with disabilities say that, if they had to do it all over again, they would take the same job without hesitation. Almost two-thirds say they would strongly recommend their job to a good friend who was interested in a job like theirs. Additionally, they are similarly likely as employees without disabilities to want to remain with their employers.

On the other hand, among those employees who do not plan to quit or retire soon, we find that 40 percent of employees with disabilities report that it is very likely or somewhat likely that in the next couple of years they will lose their present job and will have to look for a job with another employer. By comparison, 25 percent of employees without disabilities feel this way. Thus, our first recommendation for improvement is that employers focus not only on hiring employees with disabilities but also on retaining them.

Second, most employees with disabilities feel very supported by their supervisors and co-workers, except in a few important ways. They are less likely than employees without disabilities to trust what higher management says (59 percent vs. 75 percent). In addition, they are less likely than employees without disabilities to say they really feel a part of the group in which they work (78 percent vs. 87 percent). These findings point to no cost opportunities for improvement, such as increasing...
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transparency and respect in the workplace to help all employees — those with and without disabilities — feel a sense of belonging. By doing so, employers can, at the same time, make the workplace more conducive for employees with disabilities to safely self-identify so they can receive the accommodations they may need to be more successful at work.

Third, although many employees with disabilities need some accommodations in the workplace, what they want most does not differ from what all employees need and want: a supportive supervisor and a flexible schedule, followed by co-worker support. Assistance to pay for health insurance is also a benefit all employees would welcome. These needs offer a strong blueprint for improvements.

Specifically, employees with disabilities want more schedule flexibility. This finding is not surprising given that employees with disabilities are more likely to be in less stable jobs and to have caregiving responsibilities than employees without disabilities. For example, for nonstandard shift workers, having more predictability in their schedules, such as knowing their shift schedule in advance, would go a long way toward helping employees with disabilities — in fact, all employees — succeed at work.

Employers that make work “work” in ways that benefit both the employer and the employee alike are the employers who thrive!

Source: The National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD) is a collaborative of disability, workforce, and economic empowerment organizations led by the National Disability Institute.
WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATION TOOLKIT

AskJAN.org/toolkit

Building Your Inclusive Workplace
A free, comprehensive resource for employers seeking to move beyond basic compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in order to create more disability-inclusive workplaces.

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- Supervisors and Managers
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- Employees with Disabilities and Allies

JAN provides free, confidential technical assistance about job accommodations and the ADA.

Ask JAN! We can help.
Workplace Accessibility: Striving For Equity

By CJ Lange, President & CEO, Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired (IBVI)

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990, its intent was to help make buildings, products and services more accessible to people with disabilities. But accessibility means a lot more than just ramps and properly coded websites — it means going beyond equality (treating people the same) to reach equity (giving people the same opportunity to thrive).

Conversely, the word disability is defined only by how you look at it, because behind it are thousands of capable people who are ready and willing to work. That’s why, at Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IBVI), our mission is to create meaningful employment for those with visual impairments. And that starts with accessibility.

Did you know more than 70 percent of people who are blind and visually impaired are unemployed? To further expand career offerings and opportunities — and help lower this percentage — IBVI provides employees who are blind or visually impaired with technology and tools to do their jobs well.

To accomplish this, we’ve equipped our three facilities throughout Wisconsin with the latest accessibility technology and software — including an investment in Oracle Cloud that we are customizing to be 100 percent accessible for our blind and visually impaired staff. Some employees use screen readers or image magnification while others take advantage of more subtle ADA measures like windows on doors and different textures on the floor that help them navigate our buildings.

These aids give our employees the tools (and access) they need to have fulfilling experiences and independent jobs. And because of these tools and advancements in accessibility technology, currently more than half of our staff is people who are blind and visually impaired.

Other initiatives to enhance accessibility are driven by our Education and Development Policy, which includes Individual Development Plans (IDP), tuition reimbursement and an on-site educational center for blind and visually impaired employees requesting additional assisted technology training.

We are vocal about our employees and their stories because they make us who we are. Celebrating our employees brings a sense of awareness that helps break down barriers for both the sighted and the blind and visually impaired in our local communities. But it also does something else — it inspires.

When you meet our employees, you’ll not only be amazed by the extraordinary things they’re capable of, you’ll be captivated by their remarkable stories of triumph, perseverance and courage. Machine operator Emily Merced survived hurricane Maria and started over more than 2,000 miles away with new-found independence. Tool kitter Easton Kons has achieved the career he’s always wanted and welcomes the challenges to come.

Blind employment doesn’t just give people jobs — it empowers them to be more financially independent and makes them feel like they’re a part of a team. I will say it time and time again: our employees inspire us and make us who we are — with their stories, commitment to excellence and drive to achieve remarkable things. By implementing changes at your company to make it more accessible, you’ll open your doors to extraordinary individuals.

To learn more about IBVI and our employees, please visit ibvi.org.

CJ Lange is the president and CEO of Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. (IBVI) and the architect of a highly successful career in which he has innovated around technology, consistently implemented and executed strategies successfully and unified the organization to create business opportunities for the blind and visually impaired.
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3 Onboarding Techniques of A Confident Employer

By: Tova Sherman

Onboarding persons with disabilities may be different, but it’s certainly not difficult. What’s more, exactly how different the process is depends more on your issues than the potential employees.’ Inclusive onboarding is founded upon on the hiring and management teams disability confidence.

It’s crucial to ask yourself: As leaders, managers and hirers, are we disability confident enough to ensure bias is not playing a part in our hiring process — which, in turn, dramatically affects our onboarding capacity? We all want the right person for the right job, but a diverse workplace without an inclusive culture is like a house without a foundation.

As a diversity educator, I often receive queries about onboarding. First, I’d like to reframe the initial question from “how to onboard…?” to “are we ready to onboard fairly and without bias?” As an organization, do we have the disability confidence to ensure that the talent pool we draw from includes as many fits for the position as possible?

If you can answer these questions with a resounding yes, you are ready to onboard all new employees into a welcoming, disability confident workplace.

Not so sure? You are certainly not alone. In fact, most business leaders want to be inclusive but do not know where to begin. Here are three “inclusion-isms” focused on onboarding employees with disabilities.

Win, Win, Win

Onboarding is about ensuring the new hire is provided all the tools to be successful. At the same time, the workplace benefits from their presence. I call this win, win, win. When we onboard with disability confidence, the employee, the team and the business will be successful in our everchanging workplace. The first rule of onboarding is to focus on the win, win, win.

People Don’t Come with Instructions

Let’s say you’re bringing on a new team member who is on the ADHD spectrum. No matter what you know about ADHD, you don’t necessarily know this new hire. You’re not sure how the ADHD Spectrum Disorder affects them. Therefore, you must start the accommodation process with an open mind and ready to learn. Unlike IKEA furniture, people simply do not come with instructions.

Revise, Revisit, Reassess

Whether or not your employee identifies as living with disability, onboarding means creating the most productive environment for the new member of the team. That means finding out how they work best.

At reachAbility, we recently onboarded a new employee who self-identified with some accommodation requirements. She was quite sheepish to discuss her needs, despite her extensive knowledge about our company. During our onboarding process, we revised her workspace to reflect those needs. Any company can revise the workplace in small ways that ultimately benefit everyone. This employee asked about glare resistant glasses, and soon the entire team requested to use them. This is a low-cost accommodation that benefits all. By checking back with her on the initial accommodations and allowing her to share the advantages of the glare-reducing glasses, we all benefited from a Revisit. Finally, there is never a good time to stop checking in. Reassessing the accommodation is another way to ensure your new team member is truly the best they can be. Now, that is a true win, win, win.

Tova Sherman is an award-winning inclusion leader and CEO of The NGO, reachAbility. Her trail-blazing approach to equalizing the playing field around disability at work has led her to be a highly sought-out presenter and consultant to P3 clients across Canada and the U.S.. Her recently released title, “Win, Win, Win: The 18 Inclusion-isms You Need to Become a Disability Confident Employer,” is only the latest accomplishment from this passionate innovator.
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Lack of eye contact is a sign of autism. Learn the others at autismspeaks.org/signs.
Effective recruitment and outreach are necessary to improve an organization’s pipeline of qualified applicants with disabilities. EARN’s evaluation of the research literature uncovered important implications in a number of areas, including: online messaging, outreach, and recruitment, application processes and accessibility and establishing partnerships to broaden talent pools. The following is a summary of research-based practices and elements of online outreach that increase the likelihood of attracting individuals with disabilities during the job application process.

**Online Messaging**

Website features and approaches to online recruitment play an important role in influencing job seekers. Often, a company’s website may be the first step in forming perceptions of person-organization fit. Website messaging can affect how job candidates perceive and respond to online application/selection tools such as personality tests, work samples and situational judgment tests. The perception of bias can even dissuade applicants with disabilities from applying to positions. Early-stage reactions to a company’s disability messaging can also influence employee decisions to disclose their disability to the employer. Their comfort-level in doing so can serve as an informal indicator of an employer’s success in achieving a supportive and inclusive workplace culture. Applicant reactions can include perceptions of fairness and justice, feelings of anxiety, levels of motivation and a range of other experiences. Increasingly, researchers have been applying a justice lens to applicant reactions, looking at how interaction with online application/selection processes influence factors like employer attractiveness, applicant intention to accept the position and whether an applicant would recommend the employer to others. There is growing evidence of additional relationships between applicant reactions and hiring outcomes, including acceptance of job offers, performance on selection tests and possibly even job performance.

A content analysis of 34 corporate social responsibility reports from organizations nationally recognized for their disability inclusion efforts found that four practices were commonly used to promote disability inclusion efforts:

- Diversity and inclusion statements
- Employee resource groups
- Supplier diversity initiatives
- Targeted hiring and recruitment plans

Corporate social responsibility plans, in themselves, often highlight publicly desirable organizational practices and are used frequently for the purpose of marketing and recruiting talent.

A study that analyzed the web content of 30 randomly selected Fortune 500 and Fortune 100 companies — rating them for perceived openness to employing people with disabilities — reported that several companies exhibited:

- Message inconsistency
- A lack of disability awareness
- Weakly navigable, inaccessible websites
- Difficult to locate accommodations information and diversity statements
- Web-based recruiting constraints that exclude or alienate potential applicants with disabilities

**Outreach & Recruitment**

Disability-focused recruitment plans play an important role in advancing workplace inclusion and overcoming discrimination or bias in the job application process. Recommendations from the literature focused on developing more sophisticated career websites that highlight the organization’s hiring goals, including employee testimonials give potential recruits deeper insight into the company’s values and policies. Researchers suggest personalizing recruitment processes by allowing candidates to build personal accounts on the website that go beyond an application form or procedure, and engaging in applicant tracking that involves recruiters and other collaborators, rather than relying solely on algorithmic filters. Recruitment practices, corporate advertising and firm reputation all have direct effects on applicant pool quantity and quality. Organizations with comparatively high existing levels of advertising and reputation, such as more detailed recruitment ads and employee testimonials, are more impactful at broadening applicant talent pools. Technological practices, such as social media recruiting, can also limit talent pools by filtering out qualified candidates with disabilities.

In one study of job seekers with disabilities, 50 percent of respondents reported using social media as part of their job search process, but of those, 40 percent experienced accessibility or usability issues, such as features they could not access at all or that were not user-friendly. Research also shows that organizations benefit from frequently auditing their hiring practices for continuous improvement and inclusivity, but this practice does not often occur.
Application Processes & Accessibility

One assessment of job seekers with disabilities’ experiences using eRecruiting tools found that 46 percent of respondents rated their last experience applying for a job online as “difficult to impossible.” Common challenges included complex navigation features, timeout restrictions, confusing or inconsistent instructions and a wide range of general accessibility issues. Here are some of the things that made eRecruiting tools difficult to use:

- Reliance on text embedded within graphics to convey directions or important information
- Lack of alt text
- Applications requiring mouse input
- Lack of closed captioning
- Inaccessible CAPTCHA
- Inaccessible upload features
- Lack of information on how to request an accommodation

Experts recommended that employers approach accessibility from both a usability and a compliance standpoint. They also acknowledged barriers in the areas of technology, logistics, cost and complexity or unwillingness to approach accessibility challenges beyond the job application form itself. Ideally, accessibility improvements should include processes related to job sourcing, pre-employment testing, digital interviews and the need to improve or modify the accessibility features of off-the-shelf technology platforms. EARN’s Disability Outreach and Inclusion Messaging: Assessment Checklist for Career Pages is a useful tool to assess your organization’s career page(s) to ensure they appeal to candidates with disabilities and highlight disability inclusion.

Establishing Partnerships to Broaden Talent Pools

A survey of 6,530 supervisors at private, nonprofit and governmental organizations across U.S. industries identified several employer practices that supervisors perceive to be highly effective for recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. The study indicated that establishing partnerships with disability organizations is a highly effective means of identifying qualified candidates, yet only 28.5 percent of organizations had implemented this practice as a means of recruiting employees with disabilities. Despite the few organizations utilizing this strategy, 75 percent of supervisors reported that this practice would be feasible to implement.

Because HR professionals often play an important role in developing the recruitment pipeline and online recruitment strategies, they should be aware of community agencies that can provide qualified candidates. By collaborating with vocational rehabilitation service providers and local job placement specialists, employers can tailor placement efforts, develop conduits for new talent and enhance organizational education and knowledge on disability hiring practices.

This can take the form of more formal linkage agreements and long-term partnerships, or simply posting on online recruitment boards or resources aimed specifically at job candidates with disabilities. For more information, visit AskEARN.org.

Source: EARN (Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability)

People With Disabilities Shouldn’t Have to Wait a Decade or More for Critical Support Services.

Thirty six states still prioritize costly and outdated institutions that segregate people with intellectual and developmental disabilities from friends, families, and community life—and increase their risk of contracting COVID-19.

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WE CAN DO BETTER.

Learn more and help The Arc fight for the right to community inclusion at thearc.org/homeliving
Celebrating

**SKILL and TALENT:**

The Campaign for Disability Employment

What can YOU do to help change attitudes and improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities? Quite a bit, say the organizers of the Campaign for Disability Employment (CDE).

Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP)—which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year—the CDE promotes positive messages to employers and others about the skills and talents that people with disabilities bring to America’s workplaces and economy. In fact, it is the force behind four powerful public service announcements (PSAs) that have aired more than 400,000 times on television stations nationwide.

If you watch TV, there is a good chance that you’ve spotted one of the CDE PSAs. Its flagship production, “I Can,” features seven people with disabilities stating what they can do at work when given the opportunity. “Because” targets those who influence the career aspirations of youth with disabilities, demonstrating that all of us have a crucial role to play in helping young people set goals and dream big. And “Who I Am” showcases nine people who are not defined by their disabilities.

The CDE’s most recent PSA, “Working Works,” explores the many reasons people work. Its four primary cast members include Major League Baseball great Cal Ripken, Jr. and three other individuals who worked with their employers and healthcare professionals to make a plan to stay at or return to work following illness or injury.

While TV has been the primary distribution channel for the CDE’s PSAs, a radio version of “Who I Am”—which really strikes at the heart of disability pride and identity—was distributed to stations nationwide last year in honor of ADA’s 30th anniversary. In addition, billboards honoring the important milestone appeared on highways in several states.

Of course, there’s much more to the CDE than its PSAs. Its website, WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org, features a range of tools and ideas for supporting the campaign’s goals, such as CDE support badges, posters, and ready-to-publish news briefs and ads. The CDE also engages its followers through regular Twitter chats and a robust social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

While ODEP leads the CDE, the campaign is a highly collaborative effort among leading business and disability organizations. Members include the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), Disability:IN, the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the National Business and Disability Council (NBDC), the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NLGCC), the National Organization on Disability (NOD), the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Special Olympics (SO). These groups meet regularly to share innovative disability employment policies and practices that will serve as the basis for the CDE’s next media products.

So stay tuned. In the meantime, what can YOU do to advance the CDE’s mission? Leverage its products, join the conversation and spread the vital message that at work, it’s what people CAN do that matters—this year, and every year.
Join the Movement

Interested in joining the CDE movement? Here’s what you can do.

• **Get Social.**
  Follow the CDE on social media platforms.

• **Subscribe to CDE e-alerts.**
  Just visit WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org and click SUBSCRIBE.

• **Play and Distribute Its PSAs.**
  Embed the CDE’s flagship media products on your website, share them, and use the sample letter on the website to request the PSAs air in your hometown.

• **Download and Use CDE Resources.**
  Check out the free posters, web banners, print ads, ready-to-publish articles and discussion guides.

• **Engage in CDE Dialogues.**
  From Twitter chats to photo-sharing campaigns, the CDE engages in a number of interactive conversation-starters. Join in!

• **Become a CDE Supporter.**
  Take steps to adopt the CAN-do spirit and proactively engage in CDE outreach.

• **Foster Disability Inclusion.**
  Support the hiring, retention and promotion of employees with disabilities. Visit the CDE website for valuable tools and resources.

Learn more at WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org
10 Tips for Navigating Business Growth

By Joel Patterson of The Vested Group

When running a business, you are constantly striving to promote growth. Once things start to take off, there’s often a whole new set of challenges that must be addressed. Here are a few tips I’ve found useful when navigating a period of business growth and expansion:

1. Don’t Lose Sight of Your “Why.”
Seeing your business grow and thrive is exciting, but it’s important to stay focused on your mission. A rapidly growing business can sometimes take off in a direction that doesn’t align with your core mission. Periods of growth are an opportune time to reflect and realign with your “why.”

2. Learn to Delegate.
As an entrepreneur, you often begin by handling almost every aspect of your business. As your business expands, you must delegate to manage your workload. If you’ve been feeling overwhelmed by your organization’s growth recently, look over your responsibilities. Are there aspects of your workload that could be handled efficiently by someone else?

3. Hire with Culture in Mind.
Retention of quality talent is essential to the long-term success of a business. When searching for new hires, consider how candidates will do in your company’s unique culture. Of course, credentials are important, but the candidate that looks the best on paper is not always the best fit.

4. Listen to Your Customers.
Your customers are the life force of your company. Never lose touch with what your customers want out of your brand. Especially in periods of rapid growth, be sure to focus on customer experience. You can show customers you care through meaningful communications and requests for feedback.
5 Encourage Employee Feedback.
Speaking of feedback, it’s vital to listen to your employees as well. During periods of growth, lots of things shift and employees are invaluable sources of information. Their insight into what needs revision or improvement can help your business grow with grace and agility.

6 Analyze Your Inefficiencies.
In addition to listening to employee feedback regarding ways to improve your business, seek out inefficiencies in the processes you currently have in place. Is there a manual task that could be automated? Are employees spending too much time on tasks that don’t benefit overall productivity?

7 Reduce Regulation Risk.
A growing business has to be on the lookout for new government and industry regulations! Growth can take many different forms — expanding your markets, utilizing new sales channels, teaming up with a distributor, rolling out new products, etc. Big changes like these might mean dealing with new or different regulations. Be sure to do your homework to ensure that you’re in compliance.

8 Integrate Your Processes.
When a business is just starting out, the decision is often made to go with the most economical software solutions. This can mean patching many different systems together, which can be especially problematic during high-growth periods. Disparate systems will struggle to keep up with the demand, causing internal issues as well as a diminished customer experience. Switching to a comprehensive business management system allows all departments to communicate effectively and efficiently.

9 Make Scalability a Priority.
When thinking about how to navigate growth in your business, always consider the scalability of your decisions. Demand fluctuates over time, and (if things keep going this way) you will need to account for more growth in the future. Make sure the solutions you implement now can support growth in the future as well.

10 Bring in an Expert.
All of this may sound daunting to tackle on your own, but the good news is you don’t have to! Partner with someone that can help grow your business and find software solutions that make business processes more fluent and efficient.

Source: The Vested Group
Disability:IN and AAPD Urge Nasdaq to Include People with Disabilities in Board Proposal

Disability:IN, the leading global nonprofit organization for advancing business disability inclusion and equality, and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), a national cross-disability rights organization, have jointly submitted comment letters to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Nasdaq (Nasdaq: NADQ) requesting that Nasdaq include people with disabilities in its proposed board diversity rules.

The letters were sent to SEC Acting Chair Allison Lee and Nasdaq President and CEO Adena T. Friedman, who are considering requiring the more than 3,000 companies listed on Nasdaq’s U.S. exchange to provide diversity statistics on its boards of directors. Companies are also expected to include one or more
diverse directors on their board within specific timeframes or explain why they did not meet their objectives — or risk being delisted from the exchange.

Nasdaq defines a diverse director as one who self-identifies as female, an underrepresented minority or LGBTQ+. People with disabilities are not included in the definition.

“Including disability diversity in the corporate boardroom would mark a major turning point for disability rights and have the single largest impact on the economic independence and quality of life for millions of people with disabilities,” said Ted Kennedy, Jr., chairman of the AAPD. “If this omission persists, then Nasdaq and the SEC will miss an enormous opportunity to ensure that corporate leadership reflects the diversity of the U.S. and the world.”

“Nearly half of the world’s one hundred largest economies are actually public companies, giving Nasdaq and the SEC a unique role in creating a more just and equitable society,” said Jill Houghton, president and CEO of Disability:IN. “Decisions are made in corporate boardrooms, and people with disabilities deserve to be represented alongside other diverse groups. We are simply asking that Nasdaq include people with disabilities in the proposed rule’s definition of diverse.”

Institutional investors are also advocating for disability inclusion as part of their environmental, social and governance (ESG) activities. Thomas DiNapoli, trustee of the New York State Common Retirement Fund, the country’s third-largest pension fund, asked the SEC for a broader definition of diversity that includes disability. The New York fund and its $76 billion Massachusetts counterpart, Mass PRIM, have also taken the further step of adding disability inclusion measures as a new component of their proxy voting guidelines, with other investors expected to follow.

Houghton says companies can register to take the Disability Equality Index, a confidential benchmarking program from Disability:IN and AAPD that tracks progress toward inclusive workplaces for individuals with disabilities. Now in its seventh year, more than 250 Fortune 500 companies participate in the DEI.

About Disability:IN
Disability:IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. Partnering with more than 235 corporations, Disability:IN expands opportunities for people with disabilities across enterprises. The organization and 26 affiliates raise a collective voice of positive change for people with disabilities in business. Join us at disabilityin.org/AreYouIN.

About The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)
The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is a convener, connector and catalyst for change, increasing the political and economic power of people with disabilities. As a national cross-disability rights organization, AAPD advocates for full civil rights for the over 56 million Americans with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living and political participation. To learn more, visit the AAPD Web site: aapd.com.

Source: Archie Group for Disability:IN
A More Perfect Union: Celebrating Inclusivity at Inauguration

By Natalie Rodgers

The 2021 year’s presidential inauguration was different than any other inauguration in the past. Not only did the United States swear in its first woman Vice President and introduce the world to the youngest inaugural poet, this year’s ceremony could arguably be one of the most inclusive to date for people with disabilities. While this may not come as a shock, given President Joe Biden’s early promises of disability inclusion throughout his campaign, the ceremony not only attempted to cater to the specific needs of varying disabilities, but also showed the country how we should be considering this kind of inclusion in our day-to-day lives.

Before the ceremony had even begun, the inaugural committee made several livestreams available with different types of translations and accessibilities. This was to ensure that everyone could watch the inauguration live without feeling excluded from any part of it. The committee displayed these livestreams on the “Accessible Inauguration” webpage, which offered live coverage accompanied by closed captions, audio descriptions, ASL translations and even Cued Speech transliteration. These kinds of resources were also made available for the children’s inauguration event that was hosted by Keke Palmer.

Unfortunately, the website did experience many technical difficulties that rendered some of the day’s events inaccessible, such as incorrect captions and cut away shots to show the audience rather than ASL interpretations of the Pledge of Allegiance that was done by Fire Captain Andrea Hall.

But despite those cuts, Hall’s leadership through the Pledge of Allegiance proved to be just as integral to including disability in the narrative. In a conscious effort of inclusion, Hall led the Pledge verbally and through American Sign Language——, a rarity for the Inauguration.

“I really just wanted to pay homage to the deaf and hard of hearing community,” CBS reported Hall saying, “The words of the pledge are significant not just for us, but for them as well.”

Hall’s signing of the Pledge of Allegiance was also a homage to her late father, who was deaf and ensured that the Pledge was one of the first pieces she learned in ASL.

Other forms of representation throughout the ceremony were present, but more subtle. As Reverend Father Leo O’Donovan prepared to lead the invocation, Missouri Senator Roy Blunt asked the crowd, “Stand if you are able.” Advocates for disability inclusion have been trying to encourage the normalization of such a sentence for years to include those in wheelchairs.
or with conditions in which standing was not an option. Though a short moment in the scheme of the event, many took to Twitter to show their appreciation of the phrase’s inclusion, crediting it as one of the most appreciated and notable moments for them.

Other forms of inclusion could be seen in the performances of the inauguration. After capturing the attention and appreciation of the world through her poem, “The Hill We Climb,” Inaugural poet Amanda Gorman revealed that she has dealt with an auditory processing disorder and a speech impediment for most of her life. Up until a few years ago, Gorman heavily struggled pronouncing words with the “r” or “sh” sounds and used poetry as a way to practice her speaking skills while expressing her thoughts.

“The voice I’m hearing aloud can’t pronounce Rs, can’t pronounce sh.” It kind of sounds a bit garbled,” Gorman told TODAY. “But I hear this strong, self-assured voice when I am reading this simple text, and what that told me is the power of your inner voice over that which people might hear with their ears.” While many credit her poetry as a device to help her impediment, Gorman says she still struggles at times and her condition better frames her identity as a storyteller.

Her inclusion in the inauguration is also reflective on President Biden, who has spoken openly of his own stutter. The President still advocates for the normalization of speech impediments, has inspired others with similar conditions around the world.

Since the beginning of his campaign, President Biden has promised further inclusion and accessibility. Though his inauguration was not the perfect model for what these changes would look like, it does show the kind of attention inclusion needs to continue to better unite the nation.

Sources: TODAY, CBS News, The Verge, CNN

PHOTO BY ERIN SCHAFF/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Captain Andrea Hall of the South Fulton, Ga. Fire Department delivers the pledge of allegiance verbally and through sign language during the 59th presidential inauguration on January 20, 2021, at the US Capitol in Washington, DC.
Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman speaks during the inauguration on January 20, 2021 in Washington, DC.

Father Leo J. O’Donovan speaks at the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol.

In this screengrab, Lady Gaga performs as an ASL translator interprets in honor of the 59th presidential inauguration on January 20, 2021.
The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across many facets of life, not the least of which is the economy.

By the end of 2020, nearly 11 million Americans were unemployed. It’s still unknown how long it will be before the economy makes a full recovery, but as the vaccine rolls out and businesses begin to hire again, it’s likely the job market in many industries will be saturated with qualified job-seekers.

Even in a normal economic situation, setting yourself apart from the crowd is challenging. Particularly in fields or individual jobs with many applicants, getting noticed can mean the difference between landing the job of your dreams and not receiving a second look.

Take resumes for example. According to studies, the average time spent looking at an applicant’s resume before making a decision about interviewing them is just six seconds. And that’s if you can get past the bots: almost every Fortune 500 company uses applicant tracking systems (ATS), and smaller companies are expanding their use of this technology as well.

The need to use your resume as one way of setting yourself apart is stronger in some fields than others, and we wanted to understand which industries and occupations are the most competitive across the U.S. and in each state. To do this, we analyzed data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics covering employment in thousands of occupations, as well as what’s expected over the next several years.

Read on for our full analysis, and take a look at some key findings below:

- Office and administrative support jobs account for about 14 percent of all jobs in the U.S., making it the most competitive of all job types.
- Retail salesperson, food prep and serving worker, cashier, office clerk and registered nurse are the most common jobs in the U.S.
- Retail salesperson is among the three most common jobs in 48 states, followed by cashier (26 percent) and food prep and service worker (16 percent).
- Solar installers (45 percent) and wind turbine technicians (39 percent) are expected to have the highest rate of job growth through 2028.

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Most Competitive Industries & Jobs in the U.S.

Excluding the food service industry, which is perhaps in the greatest state of flux because of the pandemic, the most competitive types of occupations in the U.S. are sales and office and administrative support.

In fact, about one in four jobs are in these, meaning these types of occupations will draw the most attention — and the highest number of applicants. Office and administrative sup-
My career at State Street has been all about opportunity.

John Zarkauskas joined State Street in 2009 as a fresh college graduate. He spent a number of years working in a group focused on Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) servicing and eventually took an opportunity to join State Street’s Leadership Development Program. This allowed him to rotate for two years across different areas of the company: Corporate Audit, Data Governance, and Software Solutions in Frankfurt, Germany. Following his final rotation, he took a full-time role within SPDR Exchange Traded Funds within State Street Global Advisors, the asset management arm of State Street. He is also an inclusion and diversity advocate and is the Co-chair of the Disability Awareness Alliance, one of many employee networks thriving at State Street.

**How does Disability Awareness Alliance impact life at State Street?**

State Street’s Disability Awareness Alliance was originally structured as an employee network focused on employees serving as caregivers for persons with disabilities. Throughout the years, the employee network has grown and evolved into a global reaching network involving employees with disabilities, employees serving as caregivers for persons with disabilities, and ultimately anyone that has an interest in being a part of our community. The network focuses on ways that employees, especially those connected to the disability community, can make an impact, ranging from volunteering with our many community partners, to creating an environment where employees feel confident in self-identification, to exploring new ways of recruiting talent with varying skillsets. We are involved in a little bit of everything. We work to support employees and to advance State Street as an employer of choice by promoting awareness and understanding of disabilities.

**What is your advice for anyone considering a career at State Street?**

My career at State Street has been all about opportunity. State Street offered me my first job opportunity at a point where I wasn’t sure if my skillset would be a fit. It then allowed me to build upon that skillset within varying roles across the company and globe. For those considering a job change or more specifically considering applying to State Street, I would point to the fact that there is an incredible amount of opportunity here and that it goes beyond the job. No matter where you are considering applying, be confident in your particular abilities and embrace that you can always continue to learn and develop.

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**John Zarkauskas**  
Vice President, Head of Americas  
ETF Management & Operations  
Global SPDR Business  
Co-chair of Disability Awareness Alliance

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Are you ready to make your mark? Get tailored job recommendations in finance and technology based on your interests at statestreet.com/careers

**STATE STREET**
Which Jobs Are Most Competitive in Your State?

In every state, the most competitive occupational groups are either sales, food prep and service or building/grounds cleaning and maintenance. The only area in which the top job group isn’t one of those three is the District of Columbia, where legal jobs account for about three times more than any other occupational group.

Similarly, to overall U.S. statistics, the slate of most competitive jobs by state is dominated by a few roles — retail sales, food prep, cashiers, office clerks and registered nurses are all in the top 10 for almost every state.

In fact, in only three states, Indiana, D.C. and Kentucky, retail sales workers are not among the top three most competitive jobs. The next most competitive job, based on how frequently it appears near the top of employment rates, is cashier, followed by food prep and service worker.

While these lists have many familiar entries, in a handful of states, there are some unique entries. For example, in Hawaii, two jobs are listed that don’t appear on any other states’ lists, while none of the most competitive jobs for the District of Columbia appear anywhere else.

What’s Next?

Looking far past the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which types of jobs are likely to become more competitive over the next several years? While the biggest jobs will largely remain in place, there are several that are expected to surge in demand.

The two occupations expected to see the most rapid growth rate are both related to the expansion of renewable energy; solar installers and wind turbine technicians should see employment grow by upwards of 35 percent. Another climate change-related occupation, forest fire inspector and prevention specialist, will enjoy 13 percent growth.

Sixteen of the 25 jobs with the fastest growth rates are in medicine, physical therapy, and psychology, while a few other STEM-related roles also should become considerably more competitive over the next several years.

5 Tips for Job Seekers During COVID-19 to Stand Out

While unemployment rates remain high as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s perhaps never been more important for job seekers to ensure they stand out from other applicants in a job search that’s likely to be entirely or mostly online. Here are a few tips that should help ensure you remain top of mind for hiring managers and recruiters:

1. Consider Your Presentation

   This is especially important for interviews conducted over video conferencing platforms. While your family and friends might not care too much that they can see the dirty laundry in the background of the shot or that the lighting you’re using makes you look a bit scary, hiring managers definitely will. Think of it this way: A few years ago, if you were planning to go on job interviews, you’d probably get a new interview outfit or at least make sure your grooming and wardrobe were the best they could be; that same energy should go into make sure the spot you’re interviewing from presents you in the best light.

2. Rethink Your Resume

   We know that most major companies use ATS platforms to filter resumes, and companies of all stripes are increasing use of these tools because of the pandemic. Consider customizing your resume for the job opening by ensuring that the text of your resume mirrors specific words and phrases that appear in the job posting. Resume writing services can help you take an objective look at how you present yourself, your goals and your experience.

3. Focus on Flexibility

   The economy as a whole is in a state of upheaval, but some industries have been harder hit than others. It’s reasonable to think that the specialized skills you gained in one particular field can only be used for jobs in that area, but that’s usually not the case. A good example would be someone with years of experience in the restaurant industry, as food service is among the hardest-hit sectors thanks to lockdowns. It might not be realistic to think you’ll be able to get a comparable restaurant job, but think about the skills you gained there that can apply in virtually any industry — soft skills like time management and communication but also hard skills like quickly learning new point-of-sale systems or menu items.
4. Cast a Narrow Net
The quickest way to become overwhelmed in any job search is by applying to any role that seems remotely in your wheelhouse. But this can be counterproductive, and doing some research into which jobs and companies are the best fit for your skills can be the difference between a demoralizing slog and an energizing job search.

5. Don’t Forget the Old Ways
Just because the hiring process is likely to look different than it might have a few years ago doesn’t mean that the advice of yesteryear is outdated. Networking has always been important, and it remains so, perhaps even more now that hiring managers are often unable to get the sense of someone in person. Also, the often-artificial nature of virtual communication methods like video chat makes it even more important to make an emotional connection with an interviewer through simple techniques, like sending a thank you email after a chat.

Conclusion
In any field, setting yourself apart from the masses is crucial. But as we’ve seen, not all types of jobs are equal when it comes to just how many applications any one opening is likely to draw. Whether your skills are one of your state’s high-competition fields or a role that’s expected to draw more and more applications in the future, it’s important to do everything you can to ensure your resume stands out.

About This Report
As mentioned, we used employment data reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a branch of the U.S. Department of Labor. Employment figures reported by the BLS and projected growth rates reported by the labor department were compared to population data and projections reported by the U.S. Census Bureau and federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to create the analysis.

Source: CareerCloud

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How to Make Your Cover Letter Stand Out

Let’s be honest — if you’re applying for a job, you’re probably not the only person qualified for the position. How can you stand out among the competition before an employer even gets to meet you? One technique you can use to your advantage is to write an attention-grabbing cover letter. Here’s some advice and a few tips to get you started.

What is a cover letter?
A cover letter is a one-page document that introduces you to a potential employer. Your resume describes the facts of your work experience (either paid or volunteer work), while your cover letter gives the hiring manager some insight into your personality. While your resume tells what you did, the cover letter gives you the opportunity to describe how you did it.

**Tip:** For example, rather than stating that you have strong communication skills, provide the details of a particular problem you were key in solving and how you used your communication skills to solve it.

Do I need to send a cover letter?
Yes, you should include a cover letter with your job application whether the company requires it or not. It can help you catch the hiring manager’s attention!

**Tip:** For example, rather than stating that you have strong communication skills, provide the details of a particular problem you were key in solving and how you used your communication skills to solve it.

What should be in my cover letter?
There are 3 basic elements you need to be sure to include: 1) how your experience meets the job requirements; 2) how your skills match the job requirements; and 3) why you want to work for this specific employer.

**Tip:** Every cover letter needs to be unique to the particular job. There are templates online that can guide you, but there is no one size fits all. You have to do the work to research the company and understand the
job requirements. Remember, your cover letter should be customized for each job application. Be sure to adapt it for each particular company and include keywords from each job description.

**Should I disclose my disability in a cover letter?**

Disclosing your disability in a cover letter is up to you. If you decide to do so, employers may ask you to fill out a job application that includes a formal opportunity to discuss your disability and accommodations you may need on the job. Whether or not you disclose your disability, focus your cover letter on the skills you have that make you a great fit for the job.

**How do I organize my cover letter?**

Below is a simple structure you can follow:

- **Heading** — includes your full name, phone number, email and the date
  
  **Tip:** Add your social media profile (e.g., LinkedIn) if relevant to the job.

- **Addressee** — the name of the hiring manager, company and business address
  
  **Tip:** Researching online (e.g., Google, LinkedIn, company website) to find the name of the hiring manager shows you’ve done your homework.

- **Greeting** — specific to the person you determined was the hiring manager

- **Opening paragraph** — briefly talk about 2 or 3 of your accomplishments that are specifically relevant to the job. Tell your story.
  
  **Tip:** If you have results that can be quantified, e.g., I increased production by 10 percent, this is the place for those.

- **Second paragraph** — identify the key elements of the job requirements and explain why you’re the best person for the job. Where do your skills and the job requirements overlap?

- **Third paragraph** — explain why you want to work for this particular company. What is it about this one company that you admire? Their product? Their inclusive culture? Be specific about why this is meaningful to you.

- **Conclusion** — thank them for reading your letter and put the ball in their court. For example, you could end by saying you’d love to discuss your experience with them.

- **Closing** — use a formal sign off such as Best Regards, Kind Regards, Sincerely or Thank you.

**Now what?**

You’re almost done! Just a few final tips:

- Edit your letter to be sure that it is only one page.

- Proofread your letter. Make sure there are no typos or errors in spelling or grammar. Better yet, ask someone else to read it over for you.

- If you’re sending your resume and cover letter by email, consider including the cover letter in the body of the email message itself. That way, you save the reader an extra step and your letter is more likely to be read.

Source: Choosework.ssa.gov
**Reimagining Apprenticeship to be More Inclusive**

National Apprenticeship Week, Nov 8-14, is an annual celebration of a proven training model that benefits employers and workers alike.

Despite being one of the oldest forms of job training available, apprenticeship is remarkably flexible. It enables workers to earn a steady paycheck while receiving valuable on-the-job training in a wide range of industries while helping employers develop a highly-skilled pipeline of talent.

The power of apprenticeship is amplified when they include all workers, including those with disabilities. That’s why the Labor Department’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) supports disability-inclusive apprenticeships through a range of programs and initiatives.

**Inclusive Apprenticeships**

The ODEP-funded Apprenticeship Inclusion Models (AIM) initiative seeks to research, develop, test and evaluate apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs in high-demand, high-wage industries that provide skills training to people with disabilities. The goal is to connect working-age youth and adults with disabilities with quality career opportunities in information technology, healthcare and advanced manufacturing.

**Universal Design for Learning**

Of course, expanding apprenticeship opportunities involves reimagining ways to make them accessible to all Americans. That’s where Universal Design for Learning principles come in. These principles provide a framework for individualized learning in standards-based environments — such as apprenticeships — through flexible training, instruction and tools. Instructors incorporate flexibility into instructional methods and materials to accommodate every student. The AIM webinar, “Incorporating Universal Design and Accessibility into Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship,” offers more information on this important topic.

**Accommodations**

Workplace accommodations are adjustments or modifications that enable people with disabilities to perform the essential functions of a job, including apprenticeships. ODEP’s free resources and technical assistance centers can help employers provide such accommodations.

The Job Accommodation Network is the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. And the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology helps employers implement inclusive workplace technologies that optimize the skills of employees with disabilities through its digital accessibility toolkits and other resources. These resources can help employers ensure equal access to their programs and empower more apprentices with disabilities to excel.

Efforts like these can connect more Americans with disabilities to quality apprenticeship programs that lay the foundation for rewarding, sustainable careers. To learn more about our efforts to expand inclusive apprenticeship opportunities and apprenticeships in general, visit ODEP’s apprenticeship webpage or Apprenticeship.gov.

Source: blog.dol.gov
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How to Negotiate a Permanent Work-From-Home Arrangement

By Jillian Kramer

The pandemic changed a lot for workers, including where they work. A study conducted early in the outbreak showed nearly one-third of U.S. workers were working from their homes — and presumably some of those workers won’t want to return to the office when their employers call them back. “Working from home can provide employees many benefits,” says Ray Luther, executive director of the Partnership for Coaching Excellence and Personal Leadership at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business, “including a much shorter commute time, fewer distractions and a sense of freedom that might not come from reporting to an office every day.”

But negotiating a permanent work-from-home arrangement may not be a slam-dunk. Employers have “traditionally worried about employee productivity when working from home,” Luther says, adding some managers may feel they’ll lose control of employees they can’t see in person.

It’s not impossible, though. “Employees who want to make working from home permanent would be wise to put themselves in their employer’s shoes,” Luther says. “What would my employer be concerned about, and how can I show them that those concerns are minimal risks? For most employees, if you can demonstrate high-productivity, accessibility and still build productive relationships on your work teams, you will have addressed most managers’ significant concerns.” Here’s exactly how you can negotiate a permanent work-from-home arrangement.

Demonstrate your productivity.

To be allowed to continue to work from home, employers will want proof you’re as productive at home as you are in an office. “Quantify and qualify the work you’ve accomplished on a work-from-home trial or mandate would be wise to put themselves in their employers’ shoes,” Luther says. “What would my employer be concerned about, and how can I show them that those concerns are minimal risks? For most employees, if you can demonstrate high-productivity, accessibility and still build productive relationships on your work teams, you will have addressed most managers’ significant concerns.” Here’s exactly how you can negotiate a permanent work-from-home arrangement.

Demonstrate your productivity.

To be allowed to continue to work from home, employers will want proof you’re as productive at home as you are in an office. “Quantify and qualify the work you’ve accomplished on a work-from-home trial or mandate,” says Luther. “How productive have you been on your own? How have you worked with co-workers to learn through the new office sys-

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tems? Where have you helped develop solutions to the challenges that work from home has potentially caused?” You’ll need concrete answers to those questions to convince your manager you can be trusted at home.

Come prepared with proof of your productivity — and kick off your negotiation with hard facts.

**Prepare an action plan.**

While you’ve already been working from home, you and your manager may not have collected hard evidence of your ability to do so successfully. If that’s the case, Maureen Farmer, founder and CEO of Westgate Executive Branding & Career Consulting, suggests you develop an action plan that will help your manager assess your ability to work from home over a trial period. Talk to your manager about what milestones he or she would like you to reach during the trial — for example, 90 days — and agree to check-ins during that time to see if you’re on track. “The offer of work-from-home must demonstrate value and benefit to the employer foremost,” Farmer says.

**Build trust.**

“When you’ve demonstrated you can be productive, show that your employer can trust you,” says Luther, who adds that most managers’ concerns about employees working from home are rooted in a lack of trust. “How does the employer know they can trust you, and what have you done to demonstrate that trust? Are you accessible when they need you?” Luther asks. “Be prepared to make the case for why they can trust you to deliver even if they can’t see you in the office.”

One way you might demonstrate your trustworthiness is by proposing a communication plan in your negotiation, says Farmer. Such a plan would “lay out the periodic and regular touchpoints with each of [your] colleagues to ensure projects remain on task,” she says. “The communication plan will offer a guarantee that [you] will be available on-demand throughout the day by phone, email, text or message service. The employee must reassure the manager of their availability.”

**Show you’re flexible.**

It’s important during the negotiation to “listen to your employer’s concerns about working from home and seek to understand any objections,” says Luther. “While these concerns might not be as important to you, they provide clues where you could show flexibility so it doesn’t turn into an all or nothing situation.” For example, perhaps your manager would be more comfortable if you came into the office one day a week or for critical team meetings. “Working from home can provide many benefits for employees, even if it’s only four out of five days per week,” he says.

Source: Glassdoor
Washington State Appoints its First Black, Lesbian Judge with a Disability

Gov. Jay Inslee recently announced the appointment of Judge Grace Helen Whitener to the Washington State Supreme Court. She replaces Justice Charles Wiggins, who retired from the bench in March.

While a public swearing-in ceremony will have to be delayed because of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, Whitener will be informally sworn in as soon as possible so that she can begin her work on the court.

Whitener has been a judicial officer since 2013. From 2013 to 2015, she served as a judge on the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals. Inslee then appointed her to the Pierce County Superior Court in 2015, where she has worked as a judge for over five years, retaining her seat in a 2015 election and winning re-election to a full term in 2016. Before becoming a judge, Whitener litigated criminal cases for 14 years as both a prosecutor and defense attorney.

Judge Whitener is the first immigrant-born judge of her court, the second black woman to serve on her bench and she is also the first openly black LGBT judge in the State of Washington.

She speaks often on human rights, access to justice, and the responsibility of the judiciary in ensuring the rights of all that appear before them to basic dignity and respect in judicial proceedings.

“Judge Whitener inspires lawyers and non-lawyers alike with her relentless work to raise awareness for matters of race, justice and equity,” Inslee said. “She is tireless in her commitment to building a justice system that works for all, and as a Supreme Court justice, she will have an even greater platform to promote justice for everyone in Washington State.

“I am very pleased to appoint her to this bench and I look forward to her many contributions to our state for years to come,” he concluded.

Born and raised in the beautiful Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, Judge Whitener arrived in the United States at the age of 16 to attend college, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and International Marketing from Baruch College, City University of New York, in 1988. Judge Whitener entered law school in 1995 at Seattle University School of Law, where she obtained her J.D. degree in 1998.

Judge Whitener is co-chair of the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission. She was appointed by the Washington State Supreme Court to the Office of Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee and is a former Chair of the Washington State Superior Court Judges’ Association Equity and Fairness Committee. She is on the Board of Directors for the International Association of LGBT Judges and is a member of the International Association of Women Judges, the National Association of Women Judges, the American Judges Association and a member of the Advisory Council for the QLaw Association of Washington. She also teaches STREET LAW at Lincoln High School and belongs to other civic minded organizations.

“Judge Whitener is an outstanding choice for our highest court,” said John Allison, Spokane attorney, and president of the Washington State Association for Justice. “In a field of outstanding candidates, she stood out as a dynamic and exciting jurist who would add to the talent and perspectives of our Supreme Court.

“Lawyers and citizens who have tried cases in her court uniformly rave about her work ethic, insights, and her ability to help advance the concept of justice for all. During a very challenging time, this is a real bright and shining moment for justice in our state,” Allison concluded.

Source: Slate.com
“Judge Whitener inspires lawyers and non-lawyers alike with her relentless work to raise awareness for matters of race, justice and equity. She is tireless in her commitment to building a justice system that works for all, and as a Supreme Court justice, she will have an even greater platform to promote justice for everyone in Washington State.”

— Gov. Jay Inslee
Meet John Cronin: The Founder

PHOTO: JOHN'S CRAZY SOCKS
Founder of John’s Crazy Socks

By Natalie Rodgers
During Fall 2016, John Cronin began his senior year of high school and like most high school seniors, John began looking at his options for the career world. He was currently studying retail and customer service, but he also wanted to work in an atmosphere that was creative and enjoyable. Not liking any of the options that were currently available to him, John decided that the best way to find his ideal workplace was to create it himself.

That’s when John decided to team up with his father, Mark Cronin, who created small businesses online. After bouncing around creative business ideas that they could start, John decided that he wanted to start a sock company that specifically sold “crazy” socks.

“I wore crazy socks my entire life,” John said of his choice in business. “They are fun, colorful and creative. They let me be me.”

And thus, John’s Crazy Socks was born—an online sock company specializing in the exact brand of sock that John has come to love himself. The two got right to work in setting up their e-commerce platform, finding sock suppliers to support John’s dream and even shooting some commercials they posted to Facebook.

Despite technical difficulties on their first day, John’s business took off. Orders began piling in from local members of his community who were made aware of the new business from the company’s Facebook videos. With such a positive response, John decided to step up his customer service game and make the first batch of deliveries extra special. He packaged each sock order in a red box accompanied with candy and a handwritten thank you note, and made many of the first deliveries personally. As he arrived on the doorsteps of his customers with their orders, his customers began to post their purchases on social media, creating exposure and eventually attracting a larger demographic. In the first month of business, John’s Crazy Socks had shipped over 450 orders and earned more than $13,000 in revenue.

But even with the excitement and success that came, the two business owners decided they wanted to do more than just sell socks, they wanted to help the organizations that were closest to them. So, from the beginning to now, 5 percent of all sales are donated to the Special Olympics, one of John’s favorite organizations. From there, the duo decided they wanted to expand their advocacy and create “awareness” themed socks. 10 percent of profits from these specially-themed socks support awareness efforts for Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, Alzheimer’s, breast cancer and more.

“Everything we do is designed to spread happiness,” their mission statement reads. “The more we can do for others, the more we can make people happy, the better off we are.”

Entering their fifth year of business, John’s Crazy Socks is thriving now more than ever. Their inventory has expanded to include home apparel, mugs, greeting cards, accessories, masks and customizable socks. Customers can even sign up for a sock subscription club that delivers a new pair of crazy socks to your doorstep every month.

Additionally, the business strives to follow its four business pillars: Inspiration and Hope, Giving Back, Socks You Can Love and Making it Personal. Through these four pillars, John and Mark have additionally began to take part in speaking engagements, facility tours and social events where the two men advocate for people with differing abilities, especially in the workforce.

“We learned three things,” Mark said of his business venture with his son. “People want to buy socks; people want to buy socks from John, and this young man and this old man can sell socks.”

To order your own pair of crazy socks and to learn more about the business, visit johnscrazysocks.com.
Freddie Mac Makes Work Possible with Commitment to Accessibility & Inclusivity

When Gregory Koch graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in actuarial science in May 2014, his impressive resume earned him several job interviews. One company even flew him to Kentucky for a face-to-face meeting. However, none of the opportunities panned out after the interviews. And while Gregory is not one for conjecture, he thinks his different style of interacting due to being on the autism spectrum was a factor in the hiring decisions.

“Gregory’s story is typical when it comes to people with autism seeking employment and getting sourced as a talent potential before being given a chance,” said Sarah Crump, Inclusion and Diversity program manager at Freddie Mac. “Experiences like his are at the crux of why Freddie Mac founded its autism internship program and continues with our Neurodiversity at Work approach to hiring those on the autism spectrum today,” said Crump.

Back in 2012, a former Freddie Mac chief diversity officer was reading a magazine article about a mother whose college-educated son with autism was getting job interviews, but not any offers, due to what was then defined as a “lack of social skills” during the interview process. This article was brought to the attention of Freddie Mac leaders felt it was important to investigate the possibility of evolving their program from an internship into a more robust training, education and, ultimately, hiring process. Freddie Mac paused the internship program in 2017 to build the foundation for a program aimed at full-time hires. During this time, Crump attended the Autism@Work Employer Roundtable with other companies to learn more and consult with experts. Freddie Mac hiring managers attended education and learning sessions in order to better understand those with neurodiversity and how best to work together. In April 2020, Freddie Mac officially kicked off the Neurodiversity at Work initiative.

“Even though we launched during the pandemic, we have already made five offers and have hired four people. The numbers are there. The science is there. We’ve gotten better at understanding what it means to be on the spectrum and how to develop an inclusive culture for neurodiversity,” explained Crump. “We also have leaders who understand the need and embrace the goal, such as our chief information officer who requested having all his hiring managers in IT go through Autism 101 training.”

This commitment is recognized both within the organization and by external organizations. For the sixth year in a row, Freddie Mac has received the top score of 100 percent on the Disability Equality Index and was recognized as one of the “Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion.”

“We value the insights and different perspectives that result when employees are encouraged to bring their authentic and best selves to the workplace,” said Crump. “We are always working toward ‘making work possible’ for our employees, suppliers and community members with disabilities.”

In addition to developing the Neurodiversity at Work initiative, Freddie Mac’s commitment to disability inclusion is also shown by its streamlined job accommodation process for current and prospective employees. All Freddie Mac employees can request job accommodations, such as sit-to-stand desks, closed captioning and a change in working hours even in its current remote environment.

“We believe that the best workplace is a diverse workplace — one that is inclusive and supportive of all people, and we are deeply committed to supporting these individuals through a variety of programs. Through our Business Resource Groups (BRGs) we can learn how to make meaningful work possible for so many people,” said Crump.

The ABILITIES BRG is an excellent example of the company’s commitment to learning about the best ways to encourage and employ those with disabilities — and to support their families and friends. ABILITIES is comprised of employees dedicated to sharing disability and elder care resources with fellow Freddie Mac staff. This group also works to create awareness and opportunities to expand the company’s workforce by valuing and upskilling people of all abilities.

In addition to providing programs for employees with disabilities, Freddie Mac is also committed to the business community at large and has a robust supplier diversity program that supports contracting opportunities for certified disabled-owned businesses.

“We are always seeking ways to broaden our reach and to make working at Freddie Mac a real possibility for anyone with the desire to deliver on our mission to make home possible,” said Crump.
Target, Eli Lilly and Company, Cargill Join the CEO Campaign

By Jill Houghton, President & CEO, Disability:IN

When we first created the CEO Letter on Disability Inclusion one year ago, we knew we wanted it to be a leadership driven campaign where CEOs could call on their peers to commit to disability inclusion across their enterprise. The nation’s top executives would agree to carry out tangible actions to further equality and inclusion in business, from hiring inclusively, contracting with disability-owned business enterprises and creating accessible tools and technology for all within their companies.

Specifically, the leaders would also call on their peer CEOs to leverage the Disability Equality Index (DEI), a benchmarking tool created by Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities. The DEI helps companies develop a baseline for their inclusion efforts to date, benchmark against industry competitors and build a roadmap to achieve disability inclusion in business.

The initial signatories of the 2020 letter — marking the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act — were the CEOs of Accenture, CVS Health, Intel, Microsoft, Voya Financial and Walmart. Rod Martin, Voya Financial (100 on the 2020 DEI) chairman and CEO, said it best: “With our signature, we ask every CEO for their much-needed help in advancing disability equality and inclusion at a time when the need to make sure that no one is marginalized has never been more important.”

Over the last year, we’ve had so many corporate leaders join our cause across financial, technology and healthcare sectors, bringing the total number of CEOs to over 50! From T-Mobile (100 on the 2020 DEI), whose president and CEO Mike Sievert signed in July, and said in a recent blog post that people with disabilities “navigate a world that isn’t necessarily built for them, [making] them natural, intuitive innovators” for companies that attract them through dedicated hiring initiatives.

Or Marc Benioff, chairman and CEO of Salesforce (100 on the 2020 DEI), who signed in October. Last year, Salesforce created the Office of Accessibility, led by a Chief Accessibility Officer, to increase the accountability and transparency of its products, customer events and workplaces across the company.

Or Gianrico Farrugia, M.D., president & CEO of Mayo Clinic (100 on the 2020 DEI), where its employee resource group for people with disabilities hired a full-time disability recruiter and also launched the Self-Identify Campaign, an invitation to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability.

To today, where we are thrilled to have commitments from the CEOs of Eli Lilly and Company, Target and Cargill, with more names on the way. In signing the letter, Lilly (100 on the 2020 DEI) chairman and CEO Dave Ricks says, “Lilly needs top people with critical skills, expertise and talents. Some of them have disabilities now — or will in the future. We’re working to remove barriers to ensure that everyone can contribute fully, because we can’t afford to miss out on anyone’s contributions.”

Every CEO who has signed the letter has seen its company take the DEI or sign up to take the assessment this year. Nearly one-third (28 percent) of Fortune 500 companies and more than half (59 percent) of Fortune 100 companies currently use the DEI, with those earning a score of 80 and above recognized as a “Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion.”

And there’s a good business reason, too. Accenture research shows that companies that qualify as DEI “champions” — meaning they are committed to strengthening the bridge between businesses and the disability community — achieved on average 28 percent higher revenue over a four-year period, double the net income and 30 percent higher economic profit margins.

We’re so proud of the more than 50 CEOs who recognize that disability inclusion is critical for building sustainable futures. These corporate leaders are prioritizing cultural diversity, innovation and employment opportunities for people with disabilities to deliver positive impact and outcomes for their company, employees and stakeholders.
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Why is Making My Website Accessible Important?

By David Gevorkian

The internet was built on the idea of establishing equal opportunities for everyone, including persons with disabilities (PWDs). However, there are still accessibility barriers that make it harder for millions of PWDs worldwide to use and access websites independently.

Learn about web accessibility and what you can do to help avoid negative public perception, discrimination and even costly litigation for your small business.

What is Web Accessibility?

Web accessibility refers to the configuration of online products, facilities and services to make them usable and navigable for everyone, including those with hearing, vision, motor and cognitive conditions.

The web should be inclusive — it should be accessible to those who have permanent or temporary disabilities or situational disabilities.

People who are visually impaired should be able to read through screen readers, the deaf can stay up-to-date with current events through indexed transcripts, and the mute can join online discussions through blogs and comments.

What is ADA compliance?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), instituted in 1990, aims to end discrimination based on differing abilities. It requires establishments — government institutions, non-profit organizations, commercial organizations — to give equal-access accommodations.

The ADA Standards for Accessible Design, published in September 2010, covers all electronic and information technology, including computer hardware, software and documentation. Accordingly, the ADA Standards apply to all commercial and public entities that have places intended for public accommodation.

What does ADA say about websites?

The web is considered a public accommodation and thus obliged to comply with the ADA standards. Even though there are no pertinent regulations covering ADA web accessibility, federal courts ruled that website accessibility falls within the spirit of ADA by lessening commerce and business barriers for individuals with disabilities. In several cases, the courts have ruled that websites fall under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act and are thereby interpreted as a place of public accommodation.

So, any forms of ineffective website design and development that are not accessible can be considered discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Benefits of Web Accessibility

There are numerous practical benefits to making your website accessible, aside from avoiding possible legal issues. Making your website accessible gives a better user experience not just for the disabled, but for everyone. It also helps you rank better on search engines, improve conversion rates, optimize your site’s overall performance and create more loyal and satisfied users.

At Novartis, we harness the innovation power of science to address some of society’s most challenging healthcare issues. Our researchers work to push the boundaries of science, broaden our understanding of diseases and develop novel products in areas of great unmet medical need. We are passionate about discovering new ways to improve and extend people’s lives.

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For more information about our supplier diversity efforts, visit: [www.supplierdiversity.novartis.com](http://www.supplierdiversity.novartis.com)
overall performance and create more loyal and satisfied users.

**How to Make Your Website Accessible**

Making the web accessible is dependent on several key components working together. These components are web browsers, web technologies, authoring tools and other “user agents.” Follow international standards for web accessibility, like WCAG 2.1, which were developed to provide technical specifications, techniques, guidelines and resources for accessibility solutions.

**Create an Accessibility Guide and Statement**

One way to express support for accessibility and avoid legal consequences for non-compliance is to publish a web accessibility statement on your company website. The statement should affirm your organization’s commitment and intent to making your website accessible for everyone.

Before you start redesigning or developing your site, or publishing a statement, it’s a good idea to evaluate your accessibility. This is to address problems or to mention in your statement that you are “in the process of...” This way, you can communicate to disabled visitors your intent and commitment to web accessibility.

Other best practices you should consider when curating your Web Accessibility Statement are:
- Write a simple, easy-to-read, clear statement about your intent and commitment to following WCAG 2.1, ADA Standards, and other accessibility guidelines to make your site more accessible.
- Make your statement highly visible and

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The Office of Minority and Women Inclusion supports the Minority and Women Outreach Program which includes Minority and/or Women- Owned Businesses, Minority and/or Women- Owned Investors, and Minority- and/or Women- Owned Law Firms.

For information on each program, please visit [www.fdic.gov/mwop](http://www.fdic.gov/mwop).
EMPOWERING EQUITABLE FUTURES WITH DISABILITY-OWNED BUSINESSES

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It’s why we believe in empowering disabled business owners and entrepreneurs with tools and resources to succeed – both through our leadership in Disability:IN Wisconsin and within American Family’s very own Supplier Diversity Program.

From our supplier workshops and scholarships, to business development opportunities and our Executive Mentorship Program, American Family is proud to actively build innovative collaborations with disability-owned businesses like yours.

American Family’s new Supplier Diversity Program is growing quickly. We’d love to learn more about your story and business. Find out more at: amfam.com/supplierdiversity
How are emerging technology trends in the workplace impacting people with disabilities?

How can we ensure technologies like virtual reality and artificial intelligence are accessible and inclusive?

Find answers to these questions on the Future of Work Podcast, powered by the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT) and Workology.com.

Listen to PEAT’s Future of Work Podcast and read transcripts from each episode. Visit PEATworks.org/podcast.

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**Business**

2 BUSINESS

linked it in the footer of all your pages.

- Provide a clear path for communication so people can reach you easily (i.e., a toll-free number, chat support, contact form, email, etc.)

**Keyboard Input**

Many individuals with disabilities depend heavily on adaptive keyboards and other assistive technology when navigating the web. So, consider adopting a keyboard-friendly layout and navigation.

**Alternative Text for Images**

Alternative text for images (alt-text) is a simple yet effective way to make your site more accessible. Screen readers read the alt-text aloud so the visually impaired know what images are on your site. It also helps search engines to properly index your image content.

**Transcripts for Audio**

Transcripts for audio or video are beneficial for people with disabilities, particularly deaf and blind users. They use Braille or other assistive devices to access the content.

**Design Your Forms for Accessibility**

Make your forms simple and easy-to-read to benefit everyone, with larger font and clean design.

**Use Headers to Structure Your Content Correctly**

Use headers (i.e., H1, H2) to correctly structure your content to make it organized and more readable; this is beneficial for those who use a screen reader.

**Avoid Automatic Media and Navigation**

Automatic media and navigation can be frustrating to many users, especially those who use a screen reader as it also interrupts the audio. Not everyone reads at the same speed, so the automatic navigation prevents them from fully absorbing the information on the current page.

Consider adding a “skipping navigation links” to conveniently redirect the user to important anchor links.

**Follow ARIA Good Practices**

The Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) provides guidelines on how to make your site accessible for those who use assistive technologies.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the importance of web accessibility is a moral and ethical obligation. Making the web more accessible brings a positive impact and eliminates discrimination against those with disabilities. Optimizing your site to be fully accessible helps avoid costly litigations, as well as provides practical benefits such as better search engine ranking, better conversion rate, repeat visitors and more loyal users.

Source: Score.org
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Everything You Need to Know to Become SDVOSB Certified

The Department of Defense (DoD) has undertaken an outreach effort to identify small businesses owned and controlled by veterans and service-disabled veterans. The DoD outreach effort aims to improve prime and subcontracting opportunities for veteran and service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses. The DoD believes that the sacrifices made by veterans in the service of our country needs to be recognized at all levels of government. The Defense Department is committed to make the maximum practicable prime and subcontracting opportunities available to such firms.

What does Veteran and Service-Connected Disability mean?
A: The terms veteran and service-disabled veteran are defined in 38 U.S.C. 101(2) and (16) respectively, the Department of Veterans Affairs, United States Code. The term “veteran” means a person who served in the active military, naval or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. The term “service-connected” means, with respect to disability or death, that such disability was incurred or aggravated, or that the death resulted from a disability incurred or aggravated, in line of duty in the active military, naval or air service. An injury or disease incurred during military service will be deemed to have been incurred in the line of duty unless the disability was caused by the veteran’s own misconduct or abuse of alcohol or drugs or was incurred while absent without permission or while confined by military or civilian authorities for serious crimes.

Who is a Service-Disabled Veteran?
A: A service-disabled veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable, and whose disability was incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service.

How does a Veteran verify their status as a Service-Disabled Veteran?
A: To be considered a service-disabled veteran, the veteran must have an adjudication letter from the Veterans Administration (VA), a Department of Defense Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, or a Statement of Service from the National Archives and Records Administration, stating that the veteran has a service-connected disability. Copies of most military personnel and medical records are on file at the National Personnel Records Center in St Louis, Mo.; however, some military personnel records are maintained by the Military Services depending on when the veteran was discharged. Veterans who filed or are filing a medical claim should contact the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office in their state in order to determine if their medical record and claim for service-connected disability is already on file. Generally, there is no charge for military personnel and health record information provided to veterans.

What is a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Concern?
A: A small business concern owned and controlled by a service-disabled veteran or service-disabled veterans, as defined in section 3(q) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632(q)) and SBA’s implementing SDVO SBC Program Regulations (13 C.F.R. 125)

Are sole source or set-aside contracts allowed under the SDVOSB program?
A: Yes. In accordance with 13 C.F.R. 125.19 and 125.20, contracting officers may award a sole source or set-aside contract to SDVOSBCs, if certain conditions are met.

Is there a formal certification process required from the SBA to participate?
A: No. The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 that established restricted contracting in Federal procurement for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Concerns (SDVO SBC) did not require a formal process to certify concerns as SDVO SBC. A SDVO SBC self-represents its status for all Federal contracts. In order to place an offer on a federal contract, the SBC must be registered in the Government’s Central Contractor Registration (CCR). Once the SBC is registered in CCR,
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Commitment to Access and Inclusion

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and an offer is submitted on a Federal Contract, the SDVO SBC will need to fill out an “On-Line Representations and Certifications Application.” To get more information about those data bases and to register on-line, go to the Government’s Business Partner Network (BPN) at bpn.gov.

Can the status of a SDVO SBC be challenged?
A: Yes. The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 provides that the Small Business Administration may verify the eligibility of any SDVO SBC under the following: For sole source procurements, the SBA or the Contracting Officer may protest the apparent successful offeror’s SDVO SBC status. For competitive set-asides, any interested party may protest the apparent successful offeror’s SDVO SBC status. In the case of a protest, SDVO SBCs must be prepared to provide the SBA with proof of status as a service-disabled veteran.

What eligibility requirements must a small business concern meet to participate?
A: The concern must be a small business pursuant to the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) code assigned by the Contracting Officer to the procurement. The concern must be 51 percent unconditionally and directly owned by one or more service-disabled veterans or in the case of any publicly owned business, not less than 51 percent of the stock of the company is owned by one or more service-disabled veterans, and the management and daily business operations of the SDVO SBC must be controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans (or in the case of a veteran with permanent and severe disability, the spouse or permanent caregiver of such veteran).

Can awards be made to SDVO SBCs below the simplified acquisition thresholds?
A: Yes. Although not mandatory, contracting officers may set aside requirements at or below the simplified acquisition thresholds for consideration among SDVO SBCs, using simplified acquisition procedures.

Are joint ventures allowed under the SDVO SBC program?
A: Yes. In accordance with 13 C.F.R. 125.15(b), SDVO SBCs may enter into a joint venture agreement with one or more other SBCs for the purpose of performing an SDVO contract. A joint venture of at least one SDVO SBC and one or more other business concerns may submit an offer as a small business for a competitive SDVO SBC procurement so long as each concern is small under the size standard corresponding to the NAICS code assigned to the contract.

May nonmanufacturers submit an offer under the SDVO SBC procurement program?
A: Yes, in accordance with 13 C.F.R. 125.15(c), a SDVO SBC that is a nonmanufacturer may submit an offer on a sole source or set-aside service-disabled veteran-owned contract if it meets the requirements of the non-manufacturer rule set forth in SBA’s regulation 13 C.F.R. 121.406(b)(1).

Is the SDVO SBC procurement program limited to certain NAICS codes?
A: No. The Contracting Officer shall assign the NAICS in accordance with the Agency’s requirement and the SDVO SBC must meet the respective small business size standard assigned to that NAICS Code.

Is there an order of precedence for the SDVOSB program?
A: No, however, the Contracting Officer should consider the 8(a), HUBZone and SDVO Program before considering set-aside the requirement for Small Business Concerns. If the Contracting Officer decides to set-aside the requirement for competition restricted to SDVO SBCs, the Contracting Officer must have a reasonable expectation that at least two responsible SDVO SBCs will submit offers and determine that award can be made at fair market price.

Why isn’t there a procurement program for other categories of Veterans?
A: For a veteran who suffers service-connected disability, our government provides a range of benefits. These benefits include government assistance for entering the federal procurement marketplace. To achieve that objective, agencies shall more effectively implement section 15(g) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 644(g)), which provides that the President must establish a goal of not less than 3 percent for participation by service-disabled veteran businesses in federal contracting and section 36 of that Act (15 U.S.C. 657f), which gives agency contracting officers the authority to reserve certain procurements for service-disabled veteran businesses.

What steps have been taken to encourage Federal agencies’ use of SDVOSB?
A: President Bush issued Executive Order 13360 on October 20, 2004. The Executive Order was issued to strengthen opportunities in Federal contracting for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Concerns. The Department of Defense has issued a five-year strategic plan to implement Executive Order 13360.

Source: business.defense.gov
It’s more than a passion. It’s a must. There’s a lot on the line.”

~ Kristin Malek

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
Easterseals Receives $162 Million - Largest Donation in 100 Year History

Author and philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, former wife of Amazon mogul Jeff Bezos, has pledged gifts to 22 Easterseals Affiliates nationwide and its National Office to support life-changing services for the one in four Americans currently living with a disability.

In naming the 384 organizations to benefit from her philanthropy, Scott says that she’d asked a team of advisors to accelerate her 2020 giving to immediately support people suffering the economic effects of the pandemic.

“We do our research and deeper diligence not only to identify organizations with high potential for impact, but also to pave the way for unsolicited and unexpected gifts given with full trust and no strings attached,” said Scott. “Because our research is data-driven and rigorous, our giving process can be human and soft. Not only are non-profits chronically underfunded, they are also chronically diverted from their work by fundraising, and by burdensome reporting requirements that donors often place on them.”

Scott says these 384 carefully selected organizations have dedicated their lives to helping others, working and volunteering and serving real people face-to-face at bedsides and tables, in prisons and courtrooms and classrooms, on streets and hospital wards, and hotlines and frontlines of all types and sizes, day after day after day.

She continues, “The response from these organizations in talking with us often included personal stories and tears, which invariably made me and my teammates cry. This kind of chain reaction was captured perfectly by a longtime advocate for people with disabilities: ‘Feeling valued is an amazing sensation. I see the eyes of our clients light up when their efforts are appreciated. Good begets good. I have always believed this, but I have been sorely tested over the past few years.’” Scott had this to add, “Me too.”

In addition to the gift provided to the Easterseals National office in Chicago, Scott selected the following Easterseals Affiliates to benefit from her philanthropy:

- Easterseals Central and Southeast OH
- Easterseals East GA
- Easterseals Greater Cincinnati Region
- Easterseals Greater Houston
- Easterseals IA
- Easterseals LA
- Easterseals MA
- Easterseals MI
- Easterseals Midwest (MO and KS)
- Easterseals North GA
- Easterseals Northeast Central FL
- Easterseals of Central IL
- Easterseals San Antonio
- Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford
- Easterseals South FL
- Easterseals Southeastern PA
- Easterseals Southwest FL
- Easterseals Southwest Human Development (Phoenix, AZ)
- Easterseals TN
- Easterseals WA
- Easterseals WV Rehabilitation Center
- Easterseals Goodwill Miami Valley (OH)

“This gift from Ms. Scott represents a transformational gift for Easterseals as we begin our second century of service to people with disabilities in America,” said Easterseals president and CEO Angela F. Williams. “These funds will allow us to grow our Network and expand our services to meet the increasing needs of children and adults with disabilities so they can fully participate in their communities and in society.”

In 2019, Scott — whose current net worth is $59.8 billion, making her the second wealthiest woman in the world — signed the Giving Pledge, a project that encourages billionaires to promise to give away at least half of their wealth throughout their lifetime. Wealthy individuals, including Warren Buffett, Bill and Melinda Gates as well as Reed Hastings and Patty Quillin, have also signed the Giving Pledge.

Driven by its purpose to change the way the world defines and views disability by making profound, positive differences in people’s lives every day, Easterseals has been an indispensable resource for individuals with disabilities, including veterans and seniors, as well as their families and communities for more than 100 years. Together, its national network of Affiliates serves 1.5 million people annually through high-quality services and powerful advocacy.

Join Easterseals in ensuring that everyone — regardless of age or ability — is 100 percent included and 100 percent empowered to fully participate in life. Learn more at easterseals.com.

Source: Easterseals
There’s a legacy waiting for you

How will you invent the future?

For more than a century, we’ve worked in service of humanity. As inventors. As leaders. As pioneers. At Merck, we work relentlessly to find solutions to many of the world’s most devastating diseases. To develop the medicines and vaccines that contribute to widespread medical advancement.

Every day we see driven people like you help to fuel leading-edge medical innovations that affect the world. Through a culture of applied inquiry and a drive to invent, we’re transforming lives in new and promising ways.

merck.com/supplierdiversity
Every day in the US, a conversation like the following occurs: Employee with disability: I can’t do X because of Y.

Some examples of this might include, “I can’t use this conference room because of the furniture configuration.” or “I can’t make coffee without asking for help because the supplies don’t have tactile labels.”

And the facilities manager replies, “The facility is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

The disconnect between what employees with disabilities need and the status reported by facilities’ teams results from the facilities’ personnel not understanding that there is way more to physical work campus accessibility than the sign off by the inspector before the building was occupied.

Most post-occupancy campus accessibility issues fall into these broad categories:

- Bathrooms
- Food
- Office Space / Conference rooms
- Events
- Digital

Bathrooms

**Problem:** There is a hashtag that sums it all up: Bathrooms are #NotACupboard. The bathroom may have been built to be ADA accessible, but once you start throwing stuff into it — I’ve seen packages of extra toilet paper, boxes of paper towels, a broken toilet from another stall and the ubiquitous mop and bucket — the clear space needed to turn a wheelchair becomes blocked and the stall is no longer accessible. Which is a really bad thing if only one accessible toilet is required.

**Solution:** Make sure the janitorial staff knows to put things where they belong and not in an accessible stall. Not your staff? You still might be held accountable since you contracted for the work, especially if there are complaints that go unaddressed. Put up signs that state clearly that people with disabilities have priority for using the accessible stalls. Have a number posted where people can call if there are issues.

Food

**Problem:** From buffet lines, garbage can and drink cooler door handles, to placement of coffee supplies, utensils and condiments, lack of food-related accessibility in an occupied workspace can be problematic for people with disabilities. Wayfinding for people who are blind is as much of a problem as placement height is for people with mobility issues or people who are short stature.

**Solution:** Make sure cafeteria staff have been trained on setting up buffet lines to ADA criteria for both spacing and height. Have a system for assisting people who are blind to easily find their way from point A to point B.
Office Space / Conference Rooms

Question: What do furniture, whiteboards on wheels and plants have in common?

Answer: They are all things that are typically not present when the inspector issues an occupancy certificate.

Problem: Once people start moving things around, anything that gets shoved into a clear path becomes an obstacle ranging from the difficult to the impassable for someone with a wheelchair to get around.

Solutions: Identify on the conference room booking platform which conference rooms are normally ADA compliant, and which ones aren’t. Ask people not to move furniture around in the non-compliant rooms, or put it back the way they found it when they are done. Don’t allow employees to clog up clear space areas with anything, not even short-term craft projects. Don’t forget you may need to keep some conference rooms animal-free for people with disabling allergic reactions, and you may be asked for a quiet room with acoustic dampening, soft lights and bean bags for people who are neurodiverse.

Temporary Signage

Problem: Most everyone is now obligated to put up signs about COVID and hand sanitizing stations. There may also be single flow arrows and signage about spacing in elevators. How does anyone know the signs are there if they can’t see?

Solutions: Figure out a way to get information from temporary signage to people with vision loss who need it. Tactile maps or accessible HTML pages/email are just two of many ways to accomplish this.

In-Person Events

Problem: You don’t have enough space for that event everyone wants to go to. Can you have it in the parking lot or on the grass?

Solution: Not without some really careful planning. Grass is not safe for people with mobility issues. Temporary flooring needs to be used to create an accessible path. Parking lots are dangerous unless there is lots of security directing cars away and nearby accessible parking is planned for.

Digital

Problem: Digital accessibility is just as important as physical accessibility for candidates, vendors and employees with disabilities

Solution: Make sure all online maps have text descriptions and that all websites comply with WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility criteria.

Key Takeaways:

- Post-occupancy activities can trigger many access issues for people with mobility issues, vision loss and other disabilities
- Keeping a building “ADA compliant” requires constant vigilance, not just a one-time inspection

Sheri Byrne-Haber has been working exclusively in the intersection of business, disability and technology for more than 15 years. She previously built a global accessibility team at McDonald’s and is currently doing the same for VMware. She has degrees in IT, law as well as business and is CPACC and ADA certified.
Focus on People First
A guide to interacting with people with disabilities

As a community, it’s important to be dedicated to empowering people with disabilities in becoming full participants in our society. We can all make this goal a reality by using language that reflects our respect for people with disabilities. While the language you use is important, it is equally important that you demonstrate your respect for people with disabilities through your behavior.

The most important thing to remember when you interact with people with disabilities is that they are people. Their disability is just one of the many characteristics they have. People with disabilities have the same needs we all do: first and foremost, among them is to be treated with dignity and respect.

When you interact with people with disabilities, focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. People with disabilities are unique individuals who have a wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, interests and experiences that add tremendous diversity, resourcefulness and creative energy to our society.

Remember, people with disabilities may do things in different ways than people without them however, they can achieve the same outcomes.

General Etiquette Tips
Practice the Golden Rule
Treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Think of the person first, not their disability. Don’t shy away from people with disabilities – relax and be yourself!

Always Ask Before Giving Assistance
Just because a person has a disability, they don’t necessarily need or want your assistance. Never help someone without first asking them.

One woman recalls: “When I walked on crutches, I was once knocked down by two little old ladies who were going to ‘help’ me walk on an icy sidewalk. Without asking, they came up, grabbed me, threw me off balance and down I went!”

People First Language
Always use positive, people first language that empowers rather than marginalizes people with disabilities. Here are some examples of offensive language and language that should be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offensive</th>
<th>Preferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>birth defect</td>
<td>Person who is disabled since birth, born with a congenital disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cerebral palsied</td>
<td>Person who has cerebral palsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cripple</td>
<td>Person who needs mobility assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deaf and dumb, deaf mute</td>
<td>Person who is deaf and does not speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deformed</td>
<td>Person who has a physical disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotionally disturbed</td>
<td>Person with an emotional disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handicapped</td>
<td>Person with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hunchbacked</td>
<td>Person with a spinal curvature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insane, deranged, deviant</td>
<td>Person with a mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midget, dwarf</td>
<td>Person who is small in stature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongoloid</td>
<td>Person who has Down Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Non-disabled, able-bodied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retarded</td>
<td>Person with a cognitive disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair</td>
<td>Person who uses a wheelchair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Illinois Department of Human Services
Think Before You Speak

Avoid using labels when you speak – they are offensive to everyone, including people with disabilities. Always use people’s first language when writing about or speaking to people with disabilities.

Avoid Showing Pity or Being Patronizing

People with disabilities aren’t victims. As a person in a wheelchair said, “I am not a wheelchair victim. Wheelchair victims are the people I run into with my footrest at the supermarket.”

When you talk to a person with a disability, don’t use pet names, such as “honey.” It is also very disrespectful to pat people with disabilities on the head or talk down to them as though they were children.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

When you interact with people with disabilities, talk directly to them, not to their companions, aides, or interpreters.

Here are some ways to interact with people with specific types of disabilities:

- When you interact with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, remember that some individuals may be able to hear, some may be able to lip read, while others prefer to use sign language or assistive technology. Ask them how they prefer to communicate.
- When you interact with someone who is blind or visually impaired, always introduce yourself and let them know when you are leaving. You may offer your arm or elbow as a guide if they request assistance but never push, pull or grab the individual. Don’t pet or distract a guide dog. The dog is responsible for its owner’s safety and is always working — it is not a pet!
- When you interact with someone who uses a wheelchair, do not push, lean on or hold the person’s wheelchair. Try to put yourself at eye level when talking with someone in a wheelchair.
- When you interact with someone with a cognitive disability, speak to the person in clear, simple sentences. Be patient with them and give them time to communicate with you.
- When you interact with someone with a speech impairment, allow them as much time as they need to communicate. Be respectful and avoid trying to finish their sentences.
Planning for a Lifetime: 5 Key Considerations (and Resources!) for Parents of Special Needs Children

By Jeff Vistica, CFP™, ChSNC®, AIF®

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), developmental disabilities affect approximately 17% of children aged 3 to 17 in the United States. As medical advances have continued, it’s become more likely that children with special needs may outlive their parents. According to the National Down Syndrome Society, the average life expectancy of a person with Down Syndrome is 60 today. In 1983, it was only 25.

JAMA Pediatrics suggests the lifetime costs for caring for a person with autism to be $2.4 million.

As parents and caregivers to children with special needs, we’re faced with challenges most can’t imagine. The University of Wisconsin did a study that demonstrated mothers of a child with autism had stress hormone levels similar to soldiers in combat!

This stress emanates from ongoing worry for the health and safety of your child, guilt that you did something wrong, feeling like you need to be an expert on your child’s physical or cognitive impairment, tirelessly advocating for medical treatments, school programs and accommodations — and paying for it all.

Here are five important considerations, along with resources, for parents of special needs children:

1. **Emotional Well-Being for the Entire Family**

   Parents of children with developmental disabilities have higher rates of physical and mental health issues than parents of children without these conditions.

   Are you taking time to look out for your emotional and physical well-being? Having a child with special needs places enormous stress on a marriage and other relationships. Too often, parents ignore their own mental health issues because they are understandably overwhelmed with caring for their child.

   You can find a helpful list of support groups for parents of children with special needs here.

2. **Financial Planning**

   Planning and getting started early is critical for parents of special needs children.

   Understand the ongoing estimated costs to help support your child. Set up a third-party special needs trust before your child turns 18. Inform and invite family members to participate in building financial security for your loved one. Anyone can contribute to the third-party trust and every little bit will help.

   If your child is receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), paying for food and shelter from a special needs trust will cause a reduction in SSI benefits. That may be a worthwhile tradeoff if it’s the only way to meet preferred housing needs. You can pay for things like personal care, vacations or therapies not covered by Medicaid using the trust.

3. **Estate Planning**

   When you set up your estate planning documents, take the time to understand how to choose a trustee and trust protectors. The job of the trustee is to act in the best interest of the beneficiaries of the trust by safeguarding the assets of the trust and ensuring those assets are used as required by the terms of the trust.

   A trust protector’s job is to supervise the trustee and protect the beneficiaries from any misconduct by the trustee. The trust protector can also perform other duties including replacing the trustee, assuming those powers are granted in the trust document.

   The appointment of a trustee and a trust protector are among the most important decisions you’ll make to start building a support system for your loved one. A skilled attorney and advisory team can help make this difficult process less overwhelming and will be indispensable to you and your family.

4. **Living Arrangements**

   As your child ages, don’t wait to start looking for housing arrangements. You’ll want your loved one to be comfortable with the new
living arrangements, and you’ll also want to help when you are able. It may be really difficult for your family, but imagine how much harder it would be to find housing when you’re gone.

5 Letter of Intent

How will your child be cared for if you were no longer alive or able to do so? One thing you can do is start writing down information about your child that would be helpful to a new caregiver. Doing so is known as writing a letter of intent, and it’s one of the most important documents you can prepare for your child with special needs.

The letter of intent should include an overview of your child, information about daily schedules, diet, medical care, education, benefits received, employment, social activities, religious activities, behavioral issues and even funeral arrangements.

Once you address these issues, you may find comfort in knowing you have taken the time and effort to do your best to plan for the transition your child with special needs may ultimately confront.

Jeff Vistica, CFP™ (Certified Financial Planner), ChSNC® (Chartered Special Needs Consultant), AIF® (Accredited Investment Fiduciary) is the co-founding partner of Valiant Partners, a registered investment advisory firm, located in Carlsbad, Calif. Valiant Partners devotes its practice exclusively to serving the needs of parents with special needs children. Visit valiantfutures.com.
Easterseals Introduces Sensory-Friendly Masks

Through a partnership with Rafi Nova, Easterseals has created a sensory friendly mask for children and adults with autism. Designed with safety, ease, security and attention to the senses, the masks are made of 100 percent mulberry silk lining, have minimal designs and seams, include an adjustable nose piece and a back clasp to easily secure the mask. These inclusions not only maintain the same safety standards as the original mask design, but are designed in a way that limits the unwanted stimuli and discomfort that is often found with them. The masks are on sale now and are available at Rafinova.com. To make sure a portion of sales support the Easterseals, use the code ESSC.

Source: Easterseals Southern California

Dungeons & Dragons Introduces a Wheelchair-Friendly Adventure

For the first time in the game’s history, the popular tabletop game, Dungeons & Dragons, introduced a wheelchair-friendly prompt into their newest book, Candlekeep Mysteries. One of the authors, Jennifer Kretchmer, a wheelchair user herself, wrote the one-shot adventure that would imagine wheelchair use into the fantasy prompt. Kretchmer noted that this inclusion was important to her game design so more participants could see themselves represented in gameplay. Kretchmer is also the founder of the Accessibility in Gaming Resource, which dives deeper into this topic.

Source: Polygon
Ady Barkan Named one of Time’s 100 Most Influential People

*Time Magazine* released its annual 100 Most Influential People and included on this list was activist and healthcare advocate, Ady Barkan. After being diagnosed with ALS in 2016, Barkan has spent much of his time advocating for better healthcare systems in the United States in support of easy accessibility to basic health care needs. Barkan has also been very vocal in his support of frontline workers and the working class during the COVID-19 pandemic. Barkan’s influential tribute was written by Senator Elizabeth Warren under the “Icons” section of the list.

Source: Time
A Super Bowl First

In what was arguably one of the most anticipated performances of the year, dancer Joshua Felder made history as the first person with a disability to perform in a Super Bowl halftime show. An accompanying backup dancer for The Weeknd, the self-taught dancer with autism gained popularity on TikTok, which landed him the audition for Super Bowl LV. “It was just amazing,” Felder told Bay News 9, “I never thought in a million years I’d be at the Super Bowl….and dance with The Weeknd.”

Source: Bay News 9
Nike Releases the GoFly Ease: The First Hands Free Shoe

Nike changed the game of accessibility in shoe wear with the release of their latest design, the GoFly Ease – the first shoe that can be put on without using your hands. Using smooth motion hinge technology, the GoFly Ease allows users to securely put on their shoes by simply stepping into them. The design not only makes it easy for athletes to quickly step into their sportswear, but has been a gamechanger for individuals with disabilities who have difficulties tying their shoes. GoFly Ease will be released to the public later this year and are currently available for Nike members.

Source: Nike News

Signia Releases the First Rechargeable Super Power Hearing Aid

Hearing aid innovation leader Signia has unveiled its newest lineup of Motion Charge&Go X hearing aids, which includes the breakthrough Motion Charge&Go SP X – the first-ever rechargeable super power hearing aid that delivers uncompromised hearing with up to 61 hours of run-time per charge. The all-new Motion Charge&Go SP X and its industry-leading rechargeability ensures that even individuals with severe to profound hearing loss can enhance their human performance through improved hearing in every situation.

Source: Signia
Self-Advocacy Paves Way for History-Making College Graduate with I/DD

By: Tonia Nifong, The Arc Pikes Peak Region

Thirteen years, a struggle with epilepsy and an asthma-related brain injury could not keep Ashley Mabry away from her dream of graduating from college and, in doing so, making history.

Ashley, a Colorado Springs, Colo. native who is passionate about self-advocacy, graduated in May 2020 with a Comprehensive Higher Education Certificate in Human Services and Self-Advocacy from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) Office of Inclusive Services (OIS) Program — making her one of the first three students in the program, and one of the first six students in the state of Colorado, to graduate with a higher education degree.

Making history was not an easy feat for Ashley, who encountered many challenges from an early age. “In elementary school, I was picked on a lot. Growing up, learning about my disability — one of them was epilepsy, and that was hard,” Ashley explained. “Some bright moments were the people who helped. The main person who stuck out was my elementary school principal. He had this phrase along the lines of, ‘Your parents expect the best of you; I do, too,’” she continued. “I was placed into a program called Talent Development. I really enjoyed the education, and my favorite class was geography. That program had 1:1 support, and it helped me to be the person I am today.”

A Foundation of Self Advocacy

Self-advocacy, defined as the ability to speak up in a positive way for oneself and one’s interests, is a common thread throughout Ashley’s life, becoming a passion that would eventually inform her later studies. In high school, Ashley began to find her voice as a self-advocate when she connected with The Arc Pikes Peak Region’s (a Colorado Springs nonprofit that promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities) Self-Advocates as Leaders (SAL) Program. “I fell in love with that group. I became the president of that group, and I taught them how to speak up for themselves,” Ashley emphasized. “We dug our heels into what we could get our hands on, and we planned events like large dances. We also had the opportunity to represent Colorado in Atlanta, Ga., to do a presentation on self-advocacy,” she continued. “The presentation reflected my process of learning that even though you have a disability, do not shy back from the fact that you can speak up for yourself. People can help you, even in your disabilities.”

After graduating high school, Ashley was devastated when she could not find a program to meet her needs while cultivating her growing passion for self-advocacy. “Ashley talked about attending college from the time she was a high school sophomore. It was painful for her when she couldn’t attend college immediately after high school,” Anne, Ashley’s mother, explained. “And she never gave up. For 13 years, she continued to speak to her dream while working part-time. She continued in a transition program until age 21.”

Making Dreams Reality

Ashley’s opportunity to make her dream a reality finally came in 2016, when a friend told her about UCCS’ OIS Program. Because Ashley shared her dream with so many people, the right people were in place to help. Ashley’s self-advocacy skills in-action aided her at just the right time. “We found out about the program just in time — with only two weeks left to apply and with only three spots available in the program,” Ashley said. “To think we nearly missed the chance! We were last in the application process because we found out so late.” During her interview for the program, Ashley was accepted on the spot, making history as one of the program’s first three students. “My
favorite college class was arts-based; I loved creating my own art. The professors were right-on.”

**Post-College Success**

Ashley’s foundation of self-advocacy continued to pay off post-college. After graduation, Ashley accepted a paid, year-long Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC) fellowship with the Green Mountain Self-Advocates. “I grew passionate about Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and decided to create a resource for young children about how they can be an active part of their IEP. During my fellowship, I created a YouTube account with videos full of tips for young children to learn how to be their own advocate,” Ashley said. “I love the opportunity to be a self-advocate and bring a smile to a child’s face.”

Ashley’s future goals include helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be socially aware of the community and to make friendships, while helping young students learn how to be self-advocates. “College helped me to gain self-confidence and self-trust that I am able to do these things. For thirteen years, I never gave up. I had several disabilities, but I overcame them. It’s possible for others to do the same.”

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Ashley Mabry with the UCCS sign
How to Choose the Right MBA Program for You

First established in 1908, the full-time MBA is still considered the flagship postgraduate degree program of business school education. But while its mission and values remain the same, the needs of working professionals around the world have shifted significantly. Cue, the rise of the online MBA, part-time MBA, blended MBA and the Executive MBA. We take a closer look at how the MBA has adapted and redesigned itself to stay relevant, keep up with market demands and reflect its global surroundings.

The Full-Time MBA

While the variety of MBAs and other postgraduate degree programs in business school have expanded, the MBA remains the most popular offering in graduate management education according to a 2019 survey by the General Management Admissions Council (GMAC).

The full-time MBA is an immersive experience offering a variety of experiential learning opportunities, such as consultancy projects, internships and international exchanges and study tours.

Ideal for...

Professionals who are ready to take their career to the next level, or want to switch career paths entirely, but have limited managerial experience. In the latest full-time MBA careers report at Alliance Manchester Business School, 26 percent of graduates did the ‘triple jump’ and changed their job function, sector and country.

Things to Consider

Most students who study a full-time MBA do so having put their careers on hold, so they can fully commit to studying. You will need to carefully consider your personal financial situation and whether you’re in a position that means you can cut back on a steady income for one-two years. Special funding — such as scholarships, bursaries and grants — are available. In some circumstances, it is possible to secure sponsorship/funding from your employer if you’re able to demonstrate how studying an MBA will also benefit the business. It’s also important to keep in mind that most full-time MBAs, such as the Manchester Full-time MBA Degree at Alliance Manchester Business School in the United Kingdom, will ask for at least three years’ worth of relevant work experience.

The Online MBA

Sometimes referred to as a distance learning MBA, demand for online MBAs is on the up. While you can still expect the same rigorous curriculum as an on-campus MBA program, the online MBA allows you to study at a time and place that fits in and around your personal and professional responsibilities and commitments. It also tends to be a more affordable option. Online MBAs in particular attract large international cohorts mainly because it allows you to study at an institution anywhere in the world.

Ideal for...

Individuals who want to enhance their career development opportunities while balancing their studies around their careers and family commitments.
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⭐ Post your resume/CV
⭐ Set up custom job alerts
⭐ Access free career resources, including ebooks

Things to consider
Online MBAs require self-discipline and self-motivation. In addition, the lack of face-to-face interaction may be challenging when it comes to online group projects and presentations as well as building your professional network.

The Blended MBA
Blended MBAs offer the opportunity to study the same core curriculum and receive the same MBA qualification. The only difference is you’ll study at a time and pace that’s convenient for you — much like an online MBA. The Manchester Global Part-time MBA Degree is a blended MBA, offering students the chance to study for an MBA qualification in 24 months while continuing to work full-time. The study format includes both online learning and face-to-face teaching.

With this particular MBA, students can undertake immersive learning at face-to-face workshop residences and during group business projects. This allows them to apply their learning to their jobs in real-time and make a real difference to their organization’s goals, strategies and practices. The Kelley-Manchester Global MBA is also a blended MBA program offered at Alliance Manchester Business School in partnership with the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. It offers a higher amount of online teaching compared to the Manchester Global Part-time MBA, plus an orientation week at the Kelley campus in Bloomington, Ind.

Studying the Kelley-Manchester Global MBA means you can experience both American and British MBA teaching, which will enhance your personal and professional development.

Ideal for...
Those who want to study at a time and pace that suits them, while boosting their career and/or salary prospects. It can also be the ideal opportunity for those who want to relocate, start their own business or change industries.

Things to Consider
Much like with an online MBA, you will need to be self-disciplined and self-motivated as you work alongside your studies. Also, many business schools including Alliance Manchester offer discounts to encourage early application.

The Executive MBA
Often misleading, the Executive MBA isn’t a superior form to the MBA. It’s important to note that some schools will use the term ‘executive’ to denote a part-time MBA, while at other schools it is a program aimed at a more senior cohort with a high level of managerial or entrepreneurial experience (at least five years). Executive MBAs tend to come with a higher price tag and are designed to allow you to continue working full-time while attending classes in residential blocks at weekends and/or in the evenings. The Global Accelerated MBA at Alliance Manchester is an 18-month version of its Global MBA. There is no difference in fees, but the cohort is handpicked from a large talent pool and have the unique opportunity to travel together to attend workshop residencies in Manchester, Dubai and Shanghai.

Ideal for...
Senior-level managers and entrepreneurs who want to go even further in their careers.

Things to Consider
Many executive MBA tuition fees are sponsored by employers while scholarships are also available.

Source: Topmba.com
RJ Mitte
Seizing Every Opportunity
By Brady Rhoades

You might do a double-take when actor RJ Mitte, most famous for his role in the acclaimed AMC drama, “Breaking Bad,” gives you his take on disabilities.

“The best thing about being human is that the ability to overcome is amazing,” said Mitte, 28, who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at age 3. “There’s no trick in life. Whether you’re 19 or 45, you can still set out and do what you wanted to do at 19.”

Second best thing?
“I believe if you have a disability, you have an asset. You’re coming from a different human condition.”

Mitte became a TV fixture with the debut of “Breaking Bad” in 2008 (the show ran for five seasons). “Bad” won 16 prime time Emmys and two Golden Globe Awards, among a slew of other accolades.

Bryan Cranston portrayed a middle-aged chemistry teacher — Walter White — diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Driven by financial concerns and a shortage of time, he started cooking the purest crystal methamphetamine in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and making top dollar on his way to running an empire.

Mitte played Junior, White’s sweet, sarcastic and, ultimately, conflicted son.

For the role, Mitte had to exaggerate his Cerebral Palsy symptoms; unlike Junior, Mitte doesn’t use crutches or speak with a pronounced slur. However, the 28-year-old actor has faced many of the same medical and social challenges as his character.

“People with CP overcome hurdles every day,” Mitte told Brain&Life Magazine. “One thing I’ve learned from my disability is that when there is an obstacle, you adapt and grow. You can’t let that obstacle break you down and discourage you.”

When asked how Hollywood is faring when it comes to placing actors, directors and producers with disabilities in places of power and esteem, Mitte says he sees more opportunities than ever.

“You can’t make a movie now without the diversity talk, “he said. “You’ve got to say: ‘We need diversity.’”
RJ Mitte hosts the Runway Of Dreams Foundation Fashion Revolution Event at Cipriani 42nd Street in New York City.

“Before “can’t” can even get out of the starting gate, just start doing the thing you want to do.”
And his view on what the industry’s doing as far as physical accommodations?

“Are the accommodations always there? No,” he said. “I try to make my own accommodations.”

But Mitte, who’s involved with SAG-AFTRA as a member of the union’s Performers With Disabilities Committee, says he’s seeing a change; a mutual effort.

“The key thing in everything is when both sides want it.”

Breaking into Stardom

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, Mitte was adopted shortly after by Ray Frank Mitte Jr and his wife, Dyna. He was a happy child who walked on his toes as a toddler — something doctors told his parents they would fix by the age of 4 if he didn’t walk properly by then.

A friend of Mitte’s grandmother recognized the signs of CP when he was 3 and urged the family to have him evaluated. After he was diagnosed, Mitte was then fitted with leg braces to straighten his limbs and used crutches throughout most of his childhood.

However, over time, his body became stronger through sports and exercise and he no longer needed any walking devices by his teenage years.

In 2006, Mitte moved with his family to Los Angeles, where his youngest sister, Lacianne Carriere, received an offer for a role in a film project. He became interested in film and took acting lessons, which then led to appearances on SHOWTIME’s “Weeds,”
Breaking Bad star RJ Mitte (L) is interviewed by Rachel McGrath, entertainment reporter at The Huffington Post, live at BUILD Series London in London, United Kingdom.

NBC’s “Vegas,” CW’s “Everybody Hates Chris” and a co-star role on ABC Family’s hit show, “Switched at Birth,” before being cast in his life-changing role on “Breaking Bad.”

Mitte then reemerged on the big screen in “Dixieland” — his first non-handicapped leading role. Following that, he starred opposite Wesley Snipes in “The Recall” and was also seen in “Tiempo Compartido” (an official 2018 selection in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival).


In 2020, he portrayed a disabled teen who seeks acceptance as a high school wrestler with Oscar winner Terrence Howard as his coach in “Triumph,” which was delayed because of the Coronavirus crisis. He also started shooting “Issaac,” a romantic thriller.

Most recently, Mitte turned to modeling as a celebrity face and model of GAP International’s “Lived in Spring” campaign, with his image appearing on mediums such as billboards, buses and life-sized posters in cities across the world from Tokyo to Dubai and across the U.S. He made his way to the catwalk, modeling in Men’s Fashion Week in Milan, Berlin and New York City for designers Vivienne Westwood, soPopular and Ovadia & Sons.
You might call it Heisenberg 2.0. Better, more enriching, maybe, more evil. The kind of follow-in-pops’-footsteps that you don’t want to encourage in real life, but you might want to watch on TV.

And in true Mitte form, he’s pitched it more than once.

There are, of course, doubts. Could people see Junior in such a dark role? How do we make that happen? How can we keep the plot seamless and still make you a villain? There are a million moving parts.

At this point, here’s one more thing you must know about Mitte.

He’s not big on the word “can’t.”

“I grew up with can’t not being a choice,” he said. “You can’t what? No, you’re going to go do this.”

It’s what he tells people with disabilities who ask him about obstacles. “Before “can’t” can even get out of the starting gate, just start doing the thing you want to do.”

If “can’t,” as Mitte said, is a decision, then

Cutting the Bullying

Aside from coping with his physical challenges, Mitte also faced his share of taunting and bullying as a child.

“I was verbally harassed, knocked down and even had my hand broken,” Mitte told Brain&Life. “Having CP made me a target for bullies, and I learned that kids with disabilities are twice as likely to be bullied as other kids.”

To bring awareness to bullying and prejudice, Mitte has engaged in public speaking and serves as the official ambassador for United Cerebral Palsy and Shriners Hospitals for Children and partners with Shriners to spearhead its #CTB campaign to advocate anti-bullying for children with disabilities.

Mitte has involved himself wholeheartedly in anti-bullying, through #cutthebull.

“Everyone bullies, not just kids,” he said. “I find with bullies that removing yourself from the situation is sometimes best... because a bully wants you to fight, they want an adversary.”

And if that doesn’t work?

“I always recommend to talk to your peers, talk to your allies.”

Mitte used every defense in his arsenal when he was bullied as a youth.

“Did it end the way I wanted it to end? Not always. I asked bullies straight out: ‘Why do you want to hurt me? Maybe you need help.’”

And Mitte stresses that, often, you can’t go it alone, and to prioritize your own health and safety.

A Dream Sequel

Mitte has projects in the works, but one project — a dream, really — is never far from his thoughts.

He’d like to see a sequel to “Breaking Bad” in which Junior follows in his dad’s footsteps.

his dream-role is just a greenlight away from becoming reality. He wants it. He’s envisioned it. He’s never stopped pitching.

Walter White Junior, sweet and devoted son, breakfast connoisseur, as the baddest of bad guys? Drug lord? Killer?

You might do a double-take.

Look again, and imagine not what is impossible, but what is possible.

Whatever you do, don’t count him out.
The first step in making fitness a habit is simply to start. But starting isn’t always easy for people with mobility challenges and disabilities. That’s why Excy is committed to always doing our best to provide quality exercise solutions. For us, that means matching the quality of big equipment in a small footprint but still meeting people where they are while also being able to take them where they want to go. Below is one of our most recent success stories about Hazel’s journey to exercise with cerebral palsy during and after the COVID-19 crisis. We customized a hand-cycling solution for her and will soon offer more solutions as part of our mission to eliminate the barriers to exercise for all.

**Knocking Down Barriers to Exercise for All**

At Excy, we believe everyone who wants access to physical fitness deserves quality access. This includes people with physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, stroke, spinal cord impairments and more. In fact, the Department of Human Health and Services suggests that those with disabilities and health conditions get the same level of exercise as able-bodied people. However, for many people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities, these recommendations may be quite difficult, if not impossible to achieve, depending on the severity of the disability.

Because of Hazel’s lack of reach, she couldn’t reach a pedal exerciser on the table with her hands. We have seen similar struggles with people who have had a stroke, or who have shoulder and spinal cord injuries, especially if wheelchair bound.

**COVID Life Creates New Challenges**

We met Hazel last summer several months into the COVID-19 pandemic. She was looking for a way to exercise with cerebral palsy at home while sheltering in place. Like so many, Hazel and Doug’s lives have been turned upside down with COVID. The things they enjoy doing — taking Bentley to dog agility and fly-ball competitions, walks to get fresh air, dining out, enjoying the cinema — have all been brought to an abrupt halt. In addition, to limit their exposure of getting COVID, the couple had to stop many home service providers who assist them in day-to-day life, with Doug having Addison’s disease and also being disabled.

**The Obstacles of Exercising at Home**

Being home so much and having less access to care providers, Hazel wanted to prioritize
home exercise. Not only for general health, mobility and independence, but also to help keep her immune system strong should she get COVID-19. However, it can be challenging to exercise at home. Hazel’s cerebral palsy causes her to have spastic movements. Her muscles are stiff and tight, which causes retraction of the muscles. Still, she finds that stretching and movement can help and assist with flexibility in her limbs. Hazel also has weakness in all her limbs, particularly the left side. She can grip with her left side, but it’s hard due to poor dexterity and weakness, so she feeds herself and does most things with her right hand. Hazel cannot walk or move her legs without help nor can she sit independently due to poor trunk control that requires lateral supports to help put her in a correct seating position. In short, access to exercise is difficult, but Hazel refused to give up and found us.

**Hazel is Making Huge Strides**

At first, she could only hand cycle for 5 minutes. Anyone who has ever hand cycled — able or disabled — knows that hand cycling is a challenging workout.

Hazel is now up to pedaling Excy 20 to 30 minutes per day and can feel her heart pumping. She does interval workouts where she pedals forward 20 revolutions, then rests then pedals in reverse for 20 revolutions. She then repeats the process. When she first started pedaling Excy, she could not talk and pedal at the same time, but now she can. When she needs more intensity as she gets stronger, she can simply turn up the resistance. You can see the progression of her range of motion and improvements in her reach and flexibility. She feels fitter.

**Hazel's Exercise Tips**

During this time of uncertainty due to COVID-19, and all the stressful situations it can bring to our lives, exercise can not only support your physical well-being but also your mental well-being too. Movement can help take away the worries of the day, if only for a few moments.

We asked Hazel to share her tips on what inspires her to exercise daily. Here’s what she had to say:

- Being able to set goals you want to achieve during a workout can be a fulfilling, positive experience, which can make you feel as good on the inside as looking good on the outside.
- Be kind to yourself, and don’t pressure yourself; your efforts will show improvements in the end. “Slow and steady wins the race.”
- As you exercise, remember to enjoy yourself; it’s as important as becoming fit.

We all have much to learn from Hazel’s commitment to her health and exercise. We will soon announce a new solution to help more people with limited mobility like Hazel have even more versatility to hand cycle independently. More details to come soon. Should you know someone who can benefit from the same customization that Hazel has, just reach out to us at excy.com.

Source: Excy.com
Feeling the Music and Fueling Inclusivity –  
A Moment with Mandy Harvey

If you watch Mandy Harvey perform, one of the first things you notice about the “America’s Got Talent” finalist is her amazing voice. What you might miss is that she’s not wearing any shoes.

“[It’s] so you can feel things better when you’re standing on the stage,” Harvey told NPR news. “You can feel the drums, and you can feel the bass. So, being able to feel the music through the floor, it makes me feel like I’m a part of the band and not just the only person in the room who doesn’t really understand what’s going on.”

This award-winning singer, songwriter and motivational speaker lost her residual hearing at the age of nineteen while a freshman vocal major at Colorado State University. She pursued multiple career options, but returned to music, her true passion. She quickly became an in-demand performer and has released four albums as well as a book about her incredible journey.

DiverseABILITY Magazine had the pleasure of speaking with Harvey about her personal journey, her songwriting career and the impact she’s had on disability inclusivity — both within and without the music industry.

DiverseABILITY: You partnered with Voya Financial and Disability:IN to create and headline a concert that featured multiple artists (musicians, and even a painter, with disabilities) in October 2020 for National Disability Employee Awareness Month, encouraging and highlighting the push to hire people with disabilities and special needs in order to create more inclusivity in the workplace. Why was this event so important to you and what were your considerations as you planned and orchestrated this event? Do you think it had the measurable impact you were hoping to achieve?

Harvey: First and foremost, I wanted to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is incredibly important because it is painfully obvious that a lot of businesses are not inclusive. They’re missing out on a lot of really talented and amazing workers who are a part of their company and team. And so, it was important to me to be able to encourage businesses to hire diversely.

There are a lot of businesses that are already striving, but [there were also] a lot of other businesses that made big commitments to hiring inclusively with the event. So that’s a measurable impact; even if that means one company hired one person — that’s a measurable impact in my life. We had a lot of CEOs make good commitments to change for inclusion, which is amazing.

The other part that was important to me is that I wanted to have a concert that was totally inclusive. With everything going virtual, there’s all these pop-up concerts but most of them are not inclusive or they’re featuring people who are not necessarily living inside of that community. And so, I wanted to allow different people to have the opportunity to showcase their art and to further the understanding that it doesn’t matter if you have an ability or disability, that you are an active contributor to the world, and you have the ability to make a difference.

DiverseABILITY: When you imagine inclusive spaces, especially in the music industry, what do they look and sound like? How are they different from what is most often seen and experienced by our society now?

Harvey: For the music industry, having an inclusive environment is so rare that it’s difficult to know what that would look like. I have personally been invited to several concerts where the building ended up providing an interpreter, but the interpreters didn’t have any access to the feed, so they couldn’t understand what the singer was singing. They were not given any materials, so they ended up just standing there and staring at me for the entire concert.

To be able to have different forms of communication throughout a concert, or in the music industry in general, is difficult because it’s one more thing for a company to have to think about — but at the same time, when you don’t think about it, you’re excluding a large pool of people who could be attending your shows and who want to.

Having lyrics available, having an interpreter who actually knows the songs ahead of time and is prepared to be there, even for big corporate events, having some type of audio description or captioning would [all] be amazing and beneficial. And not just for the people who are needing it — how many times has there been a concert or a corporate event where you didn’t understand what they were saying because too many people were talking at the same time? If you could actually see the captions in front of you, you would be more of a participant than you were before.

DiverseABILITY: The song that introduced and catapulted you into the spotlight was your self-written “Try.” It deals a lot with the issue of self-advocacy, which is the very difficult but necessary first step towards achieving anything in life. If you could expand on that song today and its message, now that you’ve traveled and spoken to so many fans who love it and have shared their stories with you, what would you add or change? What would you tell the young woman who wrote that song those years ago?

Harvey: I think that having that first step is so incredibly important, to be brave enough to even contemplate getting up off the floor. However, I’ve written other follow-up songs to “Try” that continue forward with the next stages of what I did — including the song “This Time.” The central idea of that is, “Yes, I’m trying. I keep failing, but I’m going to continue to try. However, because I’m not doing it alone, I know that I’ll be successful.” So, that song is a lot more about gathering a team around you of people who can encourage you when you fail or fall apart, and who can push you past your comfort zone to achieving something beyond maybe what you’re capable of even dreaming in that moment. I don’t think there was anything that I could have said to that young woman that would have really hit home at the time. I needed to live my experiences, and I would have ignored anything that you said in the midst of that pain anyway. I was told everything, but I needed to find my own path.
DiverseABILITY: There’s a great song by another beautiful artist called “I Was Here” that boldly declares, “When I leave this world, I’ll leave no regrets/ Leave something to remember, so they won’t forget.” What do you want your something to be? When it’s all said (or signed) and done, what does your legacy look like?

Harvey: If I could work towards anything, it would be to continuously be a gracious and compassionate person in everyday life. Yes, I would like to have a ripple effect for change, positivity and inclusion, and to be able to be there for people on a grand-scale, but just being a person who can sit next to somebody and not say a word while they cry has an impact that is a legacy in itself.

“Try” is about understanding that you’re broken and wanting to be different. My new single coming out in March, “Masterpiece,” is saying that I am embracing the parts of me that are broken, and realizing that they’ve made me who I am.

The point of “Masterpiece” is to say that even though you might not know where you’re going in that moment, when you shoot forward in time and you look back on it, you’ll realize how much you’ve learned and how much you’ve grown. And that’s a part of such a big story that I feel people should know about.

I don’t ever want to change that girl who wrote “Try,” and diminish the struggle that she went through because that has changed and impacted who I am and how compassionate I am towards others, so much so that I would never want to take back any part of my past journey. I hope that people can truly embrace their journeys however difficult they may be, and realize that it’s making you stronger.

Mandy Harvey continues to perform around the United States and has been featured on CNN, NBC Nightly News, Canada AM, The Steve Harvey Show and in the Los Angeles Times. In addition to performing and speaking, Mandy has become an ambassador for No Barriers USA with a mission to encourage, inspire and assist others to break through their personal barriers. She published her first book on her life story, Sensing the Rhythm: Finding My Voice in a World Without Sound, in 2017.

“No matter what my day looks like, or no matter what I’m doing, it’s all a part of my story, and I’m the only one who’s ever going to have a story exactly like this. That is worth celebrating.”
RoboKind Announces Robots4Autism: Tackling COVID-19 Virtual Learning Hardships

RoboKind, an education technology company that builds robotic technology and curriculum for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), announced the release of robots4autism: Avatar, a remote learning software built specifically to help educators support students during remote and blended learning. “Students with autism are one of the most at-risk student populations to be left behind during COVID-related virtual and blended learning,” said Richard Margolin, RoboKind’s Founder and CTO. “This new software provides the consistency these students need in order to progress toward their Individual Education Program (IEP) goals, regardless of the student’s location.”

Avatar is a version of RoboKind’s social-emotional learning program, robots4autism®, that was recently endorsed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE). Based on development theory and the principles of applied behavioral analysis (ABA), the program includes a modular, evidence-based curriculum, combining facially expressive avatar robots with social narratives, visual aids, video and natural modeling to help students learn and, eventually, master basic social-emotional skills.

Margolin added, “We as a team and company have invested heavily in bringing virtual, digital options to educators knowing that, now more than ever, schools and districts need the support and innovation companies like RoboKind can provide. For us, it’s about improving student outcomes and we have already begun seeing students across North America make tangible progress toward their IEP goals.”

The program was developed as part of an expanded platform the company says will allow for educators to help students, regardless of background or abilities, in a variety of implementations and learning models.

To learn more about remote social-emotional learning and educators FAQs, visit robokind.com/robots4autism-avatar.

About RoboKind
Founded in 2011 by Richard Margolin, RoboKind (robokind.com) is an education technology and robotics company based in Dallas, Tex. The company developed the world’s most Advanced Social Robots™ and an award-winning, evidence-based social-emotional instructional curriculum for students in grades K-12. Milo, one of RoboKind’s facially expressive robots, was named as Tech & Learning’s Most Inspiring Game Changer in 2019, the first non-human ever to win the award. Recently endorsed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), RoboKind is committed to working with PK-12 institutions in delivering and developing solutions that allow students to build the confidence and master the lifelong skills they need.

Source: RoboKind

“For us, it’s about improving student outcomes and we have already begun seeing students across North America make tangible progress toward their IEP goals.”

– Richard Margolin, RoboKind’s founder and CTO.
New Assistive Technology Restores Independence to Those With Neuromuscular Weakness

More than a million people in the U.S. rely on others to complete simple tasks such as brushing teeth, eating and opening doors, because of neuromuscular disorders caused by muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury and other conditions. Soon many of these people will be able to perform these everyday activities themselves with the use of a new assistive technology product, the Abilitech™ Assist, designed to help people live more independently.

“We’ve accumulated so many compelling stories that illustrate the patient’s need [for the Assist].”

– Angie Conley, founder of Abilitech Medical.

Medical device company Abilitech™ Medical is launching the Assist, which facilitates independent control of the arms by supporting and assisting both the shoulder and elbow for people with minimal strength. Software customizes the spring tension to lift objects such as a fork, phone or water bottle, supporting items that weigh up to 12 ounces. Those living with the limitations of upper-arm weakness, and their caregivers, can visit the Abilitech Medical website to schedule a confidential assessment to learn if the device can help them increase their independence and be referred to an Abilitech-trained clinic for a device fitting.

Abilitech assistive devices are designed to bring life-changing benefits to people with arm weakness:

- Physical independence — Increases independence by assisting with activities such as eating, drinking and using a computer.
- Social independence — Increases the ability to more fully engage with others and participate in social events.
- Economic benefits — May help decrease the reliance on caregivers and avoid or delay
the need for a skilled nursing home — both services can be extremely expensive and are challenged by shrinking employee pools. Personal care assistants cost an average of $28,000 per year and assisted living costs can be up to $250,000 per year. In some cases, people using the Assist may even be able to return to work or stay in the workforce longer.

The Assist is the first in Abilitech’s future suite of products, which includes a powered handgrip device and a fully robotic voice-controlled arm-hand combination assistive device. “We’ve worked with leading clinicians across the U.S.” said Angie Conley, who founded Abilitech Medical in 2016 after time at Medtronic. “Equally as important, every week we work with people, their clinicians and caregivers to get user feedback. This includes input from an engineer on our team who lives with a spinal cord injury.” Direct patient experience has led to optimal comfort, style and weight of the device.

Abilitech is conducting clinical trials for the Assist at the University of Minnesota and Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare. Other organizations partnering with Abilitech to bring the product to market include Houston Methodist, Texas Children’s Hospital, HealthPartners and Allina Health Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute. “We’ve accumulated so many compelling stories that illustrate the patient’s need,” said Conley, who cites Dr. Henry Samir, a cardiac anesthesiologist and critical care intensivist who lost his ability to work and perform simple functions after a stroke. Dr. Samir shared important feedback for the device.

“My dream is to be able to use my arm again, make things easier for my wife and go back to the profession I love and live for,” said Samir.

**About Abilitech Medical**

Abilitech Medical brings innovative solutions to market that allow people living with upper-limb neuromuscular conditions that prevent their arms to function independently. The company’s first product, the Abilitech™ Assist, is a one-of-a-kind powered orthotic device that provides functional assistance and support to both the elbow and the shoulder and will improve the lives of people in the U.S. affected by neuromuscular weakness.

Source: Abilitech Medical

America’s natural gas industry is growing fast. With new technologies and new products it’s leading the charge to a cleaner, greener future. We’re PGW – the country’s biggest municipal natural gas company – and we’re building a better energy economy for all.

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How Equine Therapy Helps Veterans & Others

By Mark Baird

The development of treatment for service-related health conditions such as PTSD, depression, and TBI has notably progressed. A study published in the Medical Research Review recently stated that, “The formidable challenges associated with US veteran polytraumatic injuries warrants the application of interventions, such as equine-assisted interventions.”

We know that using horses to help people recover from physical, mental, and emotional afflictions has been used for at least 2500 years. Hippocrates, the “Father of Modern Medicine,” wrote about using horses for people with such issues. (Today, “Hippo-Therapy” is one form of treatment used by equine therapists.)

The benefits of using horses is due to their particular nature and discernment abilities. Typically, horses are not judgmental, and are highly effective in detecting and mirroring human emotions and behavior. Since 1990, scientific research has shown that in the care and feeding of horses, gaining a horse’s trust, and developing a mutual emotional attachment, people who have suffered extreme trauma and injuries often regain and maintain greater physical fitness and enhanced mobility, including a positive state of mind that leads to happier, more productive, and fulfilling lives.

Equine therapy is being used today in a myriad of treatment programs, such as PTSD, abuse, dementia, addictions, behavioral and emotional issues, as well as learning and speech disorders. It is also effective for children with special needs, and in assisting people with neurological and movement disorders, such as people affected by paralysis, and cerebral palsy. The rhythmical gait of a horse creates a pelvic motion which simultaneously promotes strength, balance, coordination, flexibility, posture, and mobility. Equine therapists guide the rider’s posture and actions by controlling the horses’ speed, and direction. This decreases limitations and increases the mobility of those afflicted with movement disabilities.

Modern therapeutic riding started with Liz Hartel from Denmark. She was the Danish dressage champion in 1943 and 1944. Then, at
age 23, she contracted polio, which permanently paralyzed her below the knees, as well as affecting her arms and hands. Despite the insistence of doctors that she could never ride again, she was determined. Although needing assistance to get upon a horse and saddle, she relearned how to ride and to maintain her balance. Amazingly, Liz Hartel was able to win the Silver medal for dressage in the 1952 Olympic Games!

Equine assisted-therapy professionals work with veterans to create meaningful bonds between the themselves and their horses. This is accomplished by the caring, feeding, and grooming of horses. Therapeutic riding creates a natural sense of calm as riders feel the rocking motion of a horse. A bond between the rider and the horse quickly develops. This helps therapists to identify riders’ emotional and behavioral patterns. Horses are “mirrors” for human emotion; they act the way we act. By showing patients their own emotions reflected in horses, equine therapists can identify anger, depression, and other causes of psychosomatic stress that lead to destructive activity, such as drinking in excess or the misuse of drugs. By helping patients to identify how their own actions and emotions work, equine therapy programs give patients the tools to stay in long term recovery.

Volunteers are almost always welcome at equine therapy centers, and classes from schools and other groups too. But these visits usually need to be arranged in advance. These centers require hard work and long hours for all of their staff. They are always striving to accomplish miracles! Sometimes they must focus and cannot be disturbed.

If you want to become an equine therapist, there are a variety of modalities from which you can choose to become certified. Path International and Eagala are the premier organizations for training and certification in equine therapy.

More information can be found at pathintl.org or eagala.org.

Source: PatrioticHearts.org
When Pete Buttigieg was officially confirmed to President Joe Biden’s cabinet earlier this year, not only was this a huge step forward for the LGBTQ+ community, but for the world of disability as well. Buttigieg’s appointment as the new Secretary of the Treasury has made him one of the first members of the LGBTQ community to be confirmed to a presidential cabinet position and, much like his campaign plans, Buttigieg has the disability community in mind for the changes he wants to implement.

Much like President Biden, Secretary Buttigieg made a significant effort to include the disability community in his campaign. While still in the running for the democratic nomination, Buttigieg released a plan he entitled, “Dignity, Access and Belonging: A New Era of Inclusion for People with Disabilities,” which outlined the changes he wanted to bring, should he become President of the United States.

Among his plans was guaranteed inclusion for disability-owned businesses for federal grants, increased training and funds for special education teachers, inclusion friendly changes to social security administrations and full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Now as the Secretary of Transportation, Buttigieg will have the resources and authority to implement his newest plan: a complete update on all transit systems. Buttigieg announced that he will be investing $100 billion in updating transit systems over the next ten years, putting accessibility and ADA at great importance. This means that all forms of transportation in the country, from public transit to ride-share services, will be better equipped to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

“People with disabilities must learn to navigate a world that all too frequently wasn’t built with them in mind,” NBC reported Buttigieg saying, “And these hurdles are even higher for people with disabilities who belong to other marginalized groups. This reality must change.”

Buttigieg has shown a great deal of care in the fields of transportation and inclusion in the past, most notably while he was still serving as Mayor in South Bend, Ind. Under Buttigieg’s leadership, he established programs that would grant access to technological resources for all citizens, improve transportation benefits for commuting workers, welcome undocumented immigrants, support minority-owned small businesses and invest in the presence and business life of South Bend’s downtown area.

Secretary Buttigieg’s plans to improve transportation for all also coincide with President Biden’s desire to put inclusion and accessibility at the forefront for those with disabilities.

Source: Transportation.gov and NBC
Learn how you can get a COVID-19 vaccine.
cdc.gov/coronavirus/vaccines

Protect Against COVID-19.

A safe and effective vaccine to protect against COVID-19 is now available.
APRIL

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

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

The Arc Disability Conference
Virtual Event
April 19-21
Washington, DC
Thearc.org

X - Stem All Access
Virtual Event
April 20-23
usasciencefestival.org/x-stem-all-access

M - Enabling Summit
Virtual Leadership Series
April 21
m-enabling.com

ASHHRA Convention
Virtual Event
April 26-27
Ashhra.org

AAPD Leadership Awards Gala
Virtual Event
April 28
aapd.com

MAY

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

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

DIFEST Global
Virtual Event
May 5-7
Difest.co

The Conference Board
Leadership Development Conference
Virtual Event
May 18-19
conference-board.org/events/leadership-development

VA Healthcare Summit
Virtual Event
May 24-26
idga.org/events-veteransaffair-healthcare-spring

The Conference Board
The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Conference
Virtual Event
May 25-26
www.conference-board.org/events/diversity

NUDC Convention
Virtual Event
May 27
Nudc.com

JUNE

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

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

NAWBO Annual Advocacy Days
June 6-7
Washington, DC
Nawbo.org

PSW M SDC Procurement Conference & Diversity Awards Virtual Event
June 9 & 10
Pswmsdc.org

Celebrasian Procurement Conference - Part 1 Virtual Event
June 2nd Week- TBD
Uspacec.com

CCME Development Symposium
Virtual Event
June 14-17
Ccmeonline.org

AMAC Diversity Conference Virtual Event
June 14-17
Amac-org.com/annualconference

M Enabling Summit
Virtual Leadership Series
June 22
M-enabling.com

WITI
Virtual Event
June 22-24
Witi.com

NFBPA Convention
Virtual Event
June 22-25
Nfbpa.org

Chicago MSDC
TBD
June 23-24
Chicagomsdc.org

JULY

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

Venture Summit Virtual Connect Global Virtual Event
July 6-8
Youngstartup.com

NAACP National Convention
Virtual Event
July 10-14
Naacp.org

ARC NCE Summer Leadership Institute
July 12-14
Chicago, IL
Thearc.org

Disability:IN Conference
Virtual Event
July 12-15
Disabilityin.org

Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit diverseabilitymagazine.com. Send your conference announcements to partnerships@diversitycomm.net.
NCOA Annual Conference
July 20-23
San Antonio, TX
ncoausa.org

LULAC
July 21-25
Albuquerque, NM
Lulac.org

FEW National Training Program
July 26-30
Houston, TX
Few.org

BDPA National Conference
Virtual Event
August 12-14
Bdpa.org

Military MOJO Career Fair
September 10
Washington, DC
militarymojo.org

TheARC National Conference
September 27-29
New Orleans, LA
thearc.org

LULAC
July 21-25
Albuquerque, NM
Lulac.org

FEW National Training Program
July 26-30
Houston, TX
Few.org

BDPA National Conference
Virtual Event
August 12-14
Bdpa.org

Military MOJO Career Fair
September 10
Washington, DC
militarymojo.org

TheARC National Conference
September 27-29
New Orleans, LA
thearc.org

M-Enabling Summit
October 4-6
Washington, DC
m-enabling.com

WPO National Conference
October 4-6
Nashville, TN
womenpresidents.org

Women’s Veteran Alliance UnConference
October 8-10
Las Vegas, NV
womenveteransalliance.org

AAAED National Conference
Virtual Event
October 11-15
aaaed.org

HR360 Summit
Virtual Event
October 15-17
hr360usa.wbresearch.com

The ARC National Conference
September 27-29
New Orleans, LA
thearc.org

NGLCC International & Business Leadership Conference
August 9-13
Hollywood, FL
Nglec.org

Commercial UAV Expo
September 7-9
Las Vegas, NV
expouav.com

PSWMSDC Business Summit
Virtual Event
September 8
pswmsdc.org

USHCC National Conference
Virtual Event
September 26-28
ushcc.org

Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit diverseabilitymagazine.com.
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We’re making a difference for underutilized communities across the nation

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