2021 Best Of The Best

Equality vs. Equitability

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Amy Purdy: Living Beyond Limits

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When you’ve spent the last 10 years and approximately 10,000 hours practicing something, you should naturally excel at it, right? But for Paralympic athletes, it’s not just about the hours — or years — of training. In addition to the immense talent, laser focus and unwavering determination required to even be considered for the Paralympic team, there’s a mental toughness these athletes possess that pushes them well beyond what we could ever conceive a human body can do. For them, “impossible” isn’t a word in their vocabulary.

Paralympic snowboarding champion and this month’s cover of *DIVERSEability Magazine*, Amy Purdy, is a shining example. Purdy was just 19 years old when she contracted bacterial meningitis and lost both of her legs below the knees, both her kidneys and her spleen. However, none of this deterred Purdy — who never lost sight of getting back on her snowboard again. “There’s always going to be something preventing you from your goal, whether it’s a loss of legs or anything else,” she said, “but you’ll never be happy if you surrender to circumstances.” Check out more of her inspiring story on page 86.

In honor of the 31st anniversary of the ADA (page 16) and National Disability Employment Awareness Month, our focus is on helping employers learn how to best interview applicants with disabilities (page 22), as well as how to foster more inclusive workplaces through employee resource groups (page 26). If you’re looking for a job, I’m sure you’ve thought about whether to disclose your disability or not (page 36) and also what happens when you’ve requested accommodation but are denied (page 40). Both of these articles offer the guidance you need to successfully navigate these situations.

Finally, take a deeper dive into this year’s Paralympics (page 28) and celebrate all that these tremendous athletes have accomplished. We hope they inspire you to keep working to achieve the impossible in your life.

*Kat Castagnoli*  
Kat Castagnoli  
Managing Editor, *DIVERSEability Magazine*
Leidos is continuously building on the steps that led to substantial growth in 2021. Along with two acquisitions and a climb to No. 248 in the Fortune 500 rankings, Leidos is also proudly positioned as one of America’s most ethical and admired companies, and best employers for diversity and Veterans. We are creating more opportunities for our employees and those who join us, enabling us all to grow together.

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

Sheri Byrne-Haber
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. Sheri is a frequent panelist and speaker at accessibility related conferences and an active member of several accessibility committees and non-profits, helping drive and communicate the evolution of accessibility standards.

Natalie Rodgers
Natalie Rodgers is the submissions editor and a writer at DiversityComm, Inc., the publisher of six diversity-focused professional magazines. With a passion for inclusion and popular culture, Natalie earned her B.A. in American Studies from California State University of Fullerton, where she wrote on an array of topics that combined the two subjects. When she isn’t writing, Natalie enjoys reading graphic novels, watching movies and finding new adventures with her friends.

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Brooke Mickler
Brooke Mickler is currently a senior at Taylor University. Her hobbies are binge-watching movies and TV and creating stories of her own.
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+ 12-week practicum experience(s)
+ Renewable up to four years

These equal opportunity programs are open to all qualified persons without regard to race, gender, religion, age, physical disability or national origin.
Few corporate awards are as highly sought-after or revered as a “Best of the Best” title. A company achieving recognition in this area values inclusion and has one hand on the heartbeat of diversity at all times.

The Process
Each year, DiversityComm, Inc. (DCI) and its six magazines selectively evaluate the nation’s Employers, Supplier Diversity Programs, Industry Leaders, Law Enforcement & Government Agencies and Schools. The evaluations integrate findings by each magazine independently to identify the “Best of the Best,” companies at the top in their industry (i.e. Top Veteran-Friendly Companies, Top STEAM-friendly Companies) for inclusion of people with disabilities as well as the minority, veteran, female and LGBTQ+ populations. These non-biased studies are a valuable resource for each publication’s readers, jobseekers, business annual evaluations — not only to bring the latest information to our readers but to also encourage active diversity policies among corporations and government agencies. The studies are also designed to assist corporate and government leaders in evaluating the success achieved within their industries and their measurement in diversity when compared to their peers.

Completion of our annual survey is recommended as part of the evaluation process. It is important to state our surveys are not pay to play. Strategic review is conducted in the decision-making process.

In addition to the surveys, our researchers analyze surveys and compile their own independent data, which includes public records, such as 10-K annual reports, reader responses, market research, interviews, community and conference participation.

The analysis scores policies that support equal access, advancement and inclusion of all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation. Creating or joining a non-profit diversity group is one method of actively seeking diverse candidates that is also taken into account. Sponsorships and/or participation at non-profit diversity conferences also demonstrate commitment to diversity and EEO.

To Participate
To participate in our annual review, simply visit us online at blackcoejournal.com, hmamagazine.com, professionalwomannmag.com, usvetprograms.com, diversityinteam.com, and diverseabilitymagazine.com. Surveys are also sent out annually via email directly to Chief Diversity Officers, Human Resource Directors, Talent & Acquisition Managers, Supplier Diversity Directors, Deputy Councel, PR/Advertising Agencies, and Corporate Affairs Personnel within or on behalf of each organization. Individuals/organizations who have previously participated will automatically receive the survey. Being awarded gives you the opportunity to market your achievement and recognition in a national press release, logo on your website or branding within your national marketing materials and advertising.

Each company is given approximately three months to complete each 15- to 30-question survey (depending on the category). Questions are specific for each category: Employer, Supplier Programs, Corporation by Industry, etc. Surveys will also include a release authorization to publish selected responses. By sharing these unique responses, we encourage other companies to follow the lead and ultimately create a more diverse workforce.

Why Take Our Survey?
Demonstrate You’re Doing Something Right! Business awards are important badges of honor to companies. The Best of the Best list is an opportunity to demonstrate to clients, employees, investors, customers and the general public you’re doing something right, according to a third party and an objective panel of judges.

Diversity Matters. A company that makes it on a Best of the Best list believes in diversity and understands the importance of salaries, benefits, leadership, personal growth and wellbeing, ultimately revealing what employees really care about in the workplace.

Employee Retention. Recognizing a job well done affects employee retention. When employee morale receives a boost, employee retention is increased. When a company is rewarded, it is encouraged to strive to stay on the Best of the Best list and do even better.

Attract Great Talent. Award-winning status can help you compete for great talent. Customers, prospective employees, and the community hold top workplaces in high regard. If you’re recognized as a Top Veteran-Friendly Company, for example, it encourages veterans to apply with less hesitation knowing you’re diverse and inclusive to the veteran community.

Media Exposure. Recognition as a Best of the Best company will keep your diversity message and branding alive all year long. Companies on the Best of the Best list performed two to three times better than their counterparts. Being awarded is a great opportunity to brag and put out public notices of achievement, such as a press release. It’s a great recognition to put on their website or use the Best of the Best logo to brand and market across the nation.

Compete by Advantage. With better performance comes stronger revenue. When you’re on that list, this means you’re diverse, which means you’re getting diverse perspectives, ultimately putting out...
the best product and service because of the different views you have within your company. With a recognition, you also have a wider consumer base, which gives you an advantage over non-diverse competitors.

**Increase Innovation.** Diversity drives innovation. It is helpful for managers to establish a culture in which all employees feel free to contribute ideas, implement feedback, and give credit where credit is due. Employees who are given an environment to speak freely, no matter what the feedback is, are more likely to contribute their culture, ethnicity, gender, and work experience to drive innovation.

**Increase Profits and Revenue.** Recognition keeps employees satisfied, ultimately increasing revenue and profits. The bottom line is that we want our employees to be satisfied at work, because that is what influences company performance. Thus, diversity and inclusion are the keys for a company’s bottom line.

The much-anticipated lists are available in the spring and fall issues. At the conclusion of these evaluations, the “Best of the Best” results are announced and published through the print magazines, digital editions, bi-weekly eNewsletters and press releases. Honorees are listed in alphabetical order and not ranked by number. Those selected have the advantage of using our Best of the Best logo on their marketing material.

As the magazine of choice for conference exposure and community outreach, we are in a unique position to evaluate those who regularly participate and support diversity as a whole.

If you would like your company or agency to receive a survey invitation via email for the next evaluation, please send your request to surveys@diversitycomm.net.
Top Disability-Friendly Companies 2021

3M
AbbVie
Accenture
Adobe
Advance Auto Parts
Aetna
Airbnb
Allstate
Ally Financial
Amazon
AMC Entertainment, Inc.
Ameren Corporation
American Airlines
American Electric Power
American Water
Anthem, Inc.
Aramark
Astellas Pharma US, Inc.
AT&T Inc.
AXA
BAE Systems, Inc.
Bank of America
Barclays
Baylor Scott & White Health
BD
Best Buy Co., Inc.
Biogen
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Inc.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island
Blue Shield of California
BMO Harris Bank
BNY Mellon
Boehringer Ingelheim
Booz Allen Hamilton
Boston Scientific
Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
Brown-Forman Corporation
CAI
Capco
Capital One Financial Corporation
Cargill
Caterpillar Inc
CBRE
CDW
Centene Corporation
Century Link
Charles Schwab
Chevron
Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
Choice Hotels
Cigna
Cisco
Citrix
Colgate-Palmolive
Comcast NBCUniversal
Compass Group
Corning
Cox Communications
CSX Transportation, Inc.
Cubic Corporation
Cummins Inc.
CUNA Mutual Group
CVS Health
DCX Technology
Dell Technologies
Deloitte
Delta Air Lines, Inc.
Deluxe
Discover Financial Services
Dominion Energy
Dow Inc.
DTE Energy
Duke Energy Corporation
Dun & Bradstreet
DuPont
DXC Technology
Edison
Entropy Corporation
Equitable
Excelus BlueCross BlueShield
Express Scripts
EY
Facebook
Fannie Mae
Fidelity Investments
Fifth Third Bank
First Data
Florida Blue Cross Blue Shield
Ford Motor Company
Franklin Templeton
Freddie Mac
Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin
Gartner, Inc.
General Dynamics
General Motors Company
GlaxoSmithKline plc
Goldman Sachs & Co.
Google LLC
Grant Thornton LLP
Health Care Service Corporation
Hewlett Packard Enterprise
Highmark Health
HP Inc.
Humana
Huntington Bank
IBM
IFF Inc.
Indeed
Intel Corporation
International Flavors & Fragrances Inc
Jabil
Jacobs
JLL
Johnson & Johnson
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
Kaiser Permanente
KPMG
L’Oreal USA
Land O’Lakes, Inc.
Leidos
Lenovo
Lilly
Lincoln Financial Group
LinkedIn
Lockheed Martin
Lowe’s Companies, Inc.
Lumen
M&T Bank
Macmillan Learning
ManpowerGroup
Marriott
MassMutual
Mastercard Worldwide
Mathematica
Mayo Clinic
McKesson Corporation
Medtronic
Meijer
Merck
MetLife, Inc.
Microsoft
MITRE
Motorola Solutions
Nestlé Health Science
Nestlé USA
NetApp
Nielsen
Norfolk Southern Corporation
Northern Trust Corporation
Northrop Grumman
Northwestern Mutual
Novant Health
Numotion
NVIDIA
Oak Ridge Associated Universities
Old National Bank
OppenheimerFunds, Inc.
Oracle
Pacific Gas and Electric
Pearson
Pfizer
PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.
PPL Corporation
PRIDE Industries
Principal
Procter & Gamble
Prudential Financial
PWc
Qualcomm
Quest Diagnostics
Randstad
Raytheon Company
Reed Smith
Regions Bank
Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.
Rush University Medical Center
S&P Global
Salesforce
Sanofi
SAP America, Inc.
Siemens
Sodexo, USA
Sony
Southern California Edison
Southern Company
Southwest Airlines
Spaulding Rehabilitation Network
Sprint Corporation
Starbucks Coffee Company
State Street Corporation
Stephane & Johnson LLP
Synchrony
Target
TD Bank
TEKsystems
The Boeing Company
The Coca-Cola Company
The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.
The Kroger Company
The Travelers Companies, Inc.
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
The Walt Disney Company
Thermo Fisher Scientific
Thomson Reuters
T-Mobile
Tracfone
Traders
Tufts Health Plan
Twitter
U.S. Bank
U.S. Cellular
Uber Technologies Inc.
UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group)
Ultimate Software
Unilever
Unisys
United Airlines
United Health Group
United Technologies Corporation
Unum Group
UPS
USAA
UCellular
UT Southwestern Medical Center
Verizon
Viasat
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W.W. Grainger, Inc.
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“
For years I struggled and was told I wasn’t smart enough and that I would never succeed. Through the attention and kindness of one person, I received a formal diagnosis of ADHD, Dyslexia, and Dysgraphia. These diagnoses do not define me. My personal mantra is simple, ‘just because I am different, doesn’t mean I am broken.’”

Rachel E. Carter
Lead Technical Project Manager - Federal
Member of Friends Respecting Inspiring Everyone Needing Disability Support (FRIENDS) and Women Empowered (WE)

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We are committed to providing equal employment opportunities to all persons regardless of race, color, ancestry, citizenship, national origin, religion, creed, veteran status, disability, medical condition, genetic characteristic or information, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, pregnancy, or other legally protected status (collectively, “protected statuses”). We do not tolerate unlawful discrimination in any employment decisions, including recruiting, hiring, compensation, promotion, benefits, discipline, termination, job assignments or training.
The Anniversary of the ADA: How it Supports Equity & Independence for People with Disabilities

By Linda Masandrea and Reyma McCoy McDeid

This year we celebrated the 31st anniversary of the landmark signing of The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA provided a strong foundation for FEMA and our partners to work together to serve disaster survivors with disabilities and ensure equitable access to services and programs, while preserving and promoting the independence of people with disabilities.

Although much progress has been made, there is more we can do to live up to the law’s promise of equal opportunities for all people. We’re committed to integrating the needs of people with disabilities into emergency preparedness, response and recovery programs around the nation, and we value the collaboration with disability stakeholders at the state, local, tribal and territorial levels that make it possible.

One of the themes for this year’s ADA celebration is independent living for people with disabilities. FEMA and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) are focused on helping people with disabilities affected by disasters to return to communities that are accessible, where the supports and services they need are readily available and where they can live independently alongside family and friends. NCIL and FEMA’s Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) work together to create a path to independence for people with disabilities impacted by disasters.

Here are three ways the ADA lays the foundation for that path:

1. The ADA expands the civil rights requirements contained in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities by federal agencies and federally funded programs. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 built on that foundation, making sure that the protections afforded at the federal level were extended to the programs and services of state and local governments and other public entities. Title II of the ADA, among other things, ensures that people with disabilities impacted by disasters will have access to the same programs and services as others in their community as they prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

That’s one of the reasons why partnership between ODIC and disability-led organizations like NCIL is important. Because disaster response happens at the community level, and centers for independent living are community level organizations that have a deep understanding of local demographics, issues facing people with disabilities, and creative solutions for many of those issues.

All year long, FEMA’s Regional Disability Integration Specialists are available to work with the centers for independent living in their region on education and outreach to improve the ability of people with disabilities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. And during active disasters, our Disability Integration Advisors work with NCIL and other disability-led organizations to make sure the needs of people with disabilities impacted by that disaster are being met.

2. The ADA requires accessible transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to state and local government programs and services.

When a disaster happens, many systems are impacted. Housing. Transportation. Public Accommodations. Communications. Health Care. Access to vital government programs and services may be limited. Disability-led organizations like NCIL play a vital role in
that planning, making sure that the programs, services and systems designed integrate the perspectives and lived experience of people with disabilities, resulting in better outcomes when disasters happen.

The ADA addresses the need to include access and accommodations in all aspects of emergency preparedness, response and recovery for people with disabilities.

For example:

- Accessible transportation to support evacuation of people with disabilities in emergency operations plans.
- Modifying policies, practices and procedures and providing accommodations to enable people with disabilities to stay with their families or support networks in integrated shelters.
- People who use personal assistance services may need guidance coordinating or receiving those services to be able to use local shelters.
- People who are blind or have low vision can access emergency management and disaster related communications and materials in alternative formats, i.e., Braille, large print and audio.

The ADA requires state and local governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations to ensure that communication with people with disabilities is accessible and provides the same information that people without disabilities receive.

People cannot plan for or ensure their safety if they do not have the ability to receive real-time information about situations and options. Working with state, local, tribal and territorial governments to integrate the needs of people with disabilities into emergency management planning is important; through these efforts, we can understand how best to address everyone’s needs in a disaster, including people with disabilities.

The ADA requires state and local governments and private agencies provide auxiliary aides and services for people with disabilities, like qualified readers, large print, Braille and audio versions of print documents; qualified sign language interpreters, certified deaf interpreters, real-time captioning and video relay.

Local partners may need to be educated on the availability of technologies that provide people who are Deaf or hard of hearing access to vitally important emergency and disaster related information. Broadcast networks may need to be reminded of the need to keep interpreters in the video feed and use other captioning services, particularly when they are reporting emergency, disaster and public health messaging.

These are just some examples of how the ADA includes emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts. And, with open dialogue between federal agencies and disability-led organizations, we can better work together to develop comprehensive accessible and inclusive disaster preparedness, response and recovery programs in our communities across the nation.

Source: FEMA.gov
Equality in the workplace is all the buzz in the HR world. If you’re a business owner, finding ways to expand your workforce and diversify your client base will prove to be beneficial for your company culture and for your brand’s revenue-generating potential. As a whole, businesses have made concerted efforts towards achieving diversity, but while some of these efforts are commendable, others are clearly tokenistic in an attempt to look good on paper. We’re not seeing notable transformation in our societies or upliftment in disadvantaged communities. Which begs the question: What isn’t working?

Is equality realistic at this point?
Possibly a controversial question that begs asking: Is equality realistic? We want a business industry that is high-functioning, diverse, collaborative and that ultimately boosts the entire country’s economic net-worth. We want to encourage disadvantaged members of the population to gain meaningful employment and transform the roles they play as part of our society. With businesses wanting to fulfill these needs, why are they still largely unmet? Should we examine equitability first? Let’s start by defining it.

Equity is the missing piece of the puzzle
Picture yourself attending a show. Everyone who attends the show gets the same welcome package: Binoculars, popcorn and booklet. It doesn’t matter what kind of vehicle you arrived in, whether you’re male or female or if you’re disabled or use some sort of mobility aid, everyone gets the same welcome box.

This is an example of equality. It means regardless of who you are, you can expect the same treatment as every other attendee.

Equitability means that not everyone is able to attend. There are potential guests that may enjoy the show. They’re welcome to arrive. However, the show doesn’t offer wheelchair access. The show is too far away from the outlying areas where poorer people live. The show runs through the same time as most parenting duties. People with disabilities, people from low-income areas and parents, while welcome, will not be able to attend.

Regardless of the hosts’ statements regarding equality, if it’s not equitable (meaning accessible), equality still only applies to a select number of people who are in the position of privilege to be able to attend. Now, think of it as a workplace and not as a show.

How equity makes equality attainable
Equity in the workplace is slightly different from the above analogy, but that scene demonstrates the problem. We can create the most encouraging and positive work environments for a diverse range of people. However, until full-time employment is accessible and practical for disadvantaged individuals, equality remains theoretical. Examples of equality that needs equitability in order to make it work, include:

- For women: Equitability means offering both men and women maternity leave. The fact that only women get...
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maternity leaves suggests that it is solely the woman’s job to raise a family, thus setting aside her career aspirations. This assumption also means that women of childbearing age come with added risks, expenses and stress, so employers would rather hire a man. For women, equitability also means having flexible work options.

- **For workers with disabilities:** Professionals with disabilities are often asked for their thoughts on equality. Many of them feel that until workplaces have wheelchair access, provide protocols that enable time off to see specialists and remain flexible enough to allow workers to achieve their KPIs in a less rigid 9-5 schedule, working is also inequitable and largely inaccessible to them. Note: “Wheelchair access” isn’t just about access by those using a wheelchair. It can also mean people using other mobility aids or those who can walk but may have difficulty with long distances or stairs. In these instances, individuals may prefer to use access points for those of us in wheelchairs.

- **Skilled workers from disadvantaged communities:** For many skilled and qualified individuals that have proven they have the tenacity to make it through university, working at high-performing firms is still not an option, regardless of how the company might embrace “workers from all walks of life.” Traveling from outlying areas makes the daily commute completely impossible while moving closer is also impractical due to financial and resource restraints. Unless companies offer remote working options, once again, equality remains theoretical simply because the opportunity for employment is not attainable to someone who isn’t already in a position of privilege.

As a whole, businesses have made concerted efforts towards achieving diversity, but while some of these efforts are commendable, others are clearly tokenistic in an attempt to look good on paper. Although workplace equity is a challenging task to tackle, it is a worthwhile investment that leads to many benefits, including increased innovation, employee engagement and retention, financial performance and contributing to the bottom line. The catch is that, in order to reap the full benefits, companies cannot just be equitable on paper. They need to dedicate time and effort to understanding the needs and challenges of certain employee groups and work to bridge those gaps while aligning their business goals. Only then can companies create an equitable and inclusive environment that attracts diverse talent and brings out the true potential in each employee.

---

**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.

**The alternative?** Waiting 8 – 10 years or more for home & community-based services.

**WE CAN DO BETTER.**

Learn more and help The Arc fight for the right to community inclusion at [thearc.org/homeliving](https://thearc.org/homeliving)
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New York Metro
October 1-3, 2021

Toronto
Nov. 12-13, 2021

Dallas
Dec. 3-5, 2021

Los Angeles
March 4-6, 2022

Chicago
June 24-26, 2022

Houston
August 5-7, 2022

Phoenix
Sept. 9-11, 2022

Miami
Nov. 4-6, 2022
Focus on Ability: Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities

As employers well know, the job interview plays a critical role in the hiring process, allowing them the opportunity to identify the individual who possesses the best mix of knowledge, skills and abilities for the position available. Below is information that may assist employers in ensuring maximum benefit from an interview when the person being interviewed happens to have a disability.

Preparing for the Interview

Ensure that your company’s application and interviewing procedures comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits asking disability-related questions before a job offer is made. Check that your application forms, employment offices and interviewing locations are accessible to persons with a variety of disabilities. Be willing to make appropriate and reasonable accommodations to enable an applicant with a disability to participate in the interview, explaining ahead of time what is involved in the process. For example, if an applicant who is blind states that he or she will need help completing forms, provide that assistance. Provide an interpreter as an accommodation or other assistance that is reasonable for an applicant who is deaf, if he or she requests assistance in communicating. Provide details or specific instructions to applicants with cognitive disabilities, if this type of accommodation is required.

Inform applicants ahead of time if they will be required to take a test to demonstrate their ability to perform actual or simulated tasks so that they can request a reasonable accommodation, such as a different format for a written test, if necessary. (Such tests are permitted under the ADA as long as they are uniformly given to all applicants.)

Conducting the Interview

Relax and make the applicant feel relaxed. If the applicant has a visible disability or reveals a disability during the interview, concentrate on the individual, not the disability.

Treat the individual with the same respect you would treat any candidate whose skills you are seeking. Likewise, hold individuals with
disabilities to the same standards as all applicants.

Ask only job-related questions that speak to the functions of the job for which the applicant is applying.

Concentrate on the applicant’s technical and professional knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and interests.

Do not try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant’s disability. He or she has mastered alternate ways of living and working. If the applicant has a known disability, either because it is obvious or it was revealed by the applicant, you may ask him or her to describe how he or she would perform the job.

It is important to note that medical examinations are prohibited under the ADA at the pre-employment offer stage. However, a job offer may be conditional based on the results of a medical examination if all employees entering similar jobs are also required to take an examination. If, after the medical examination, the employer decides not to hire an individual because of a disability, the employer must demonstrate that the reason for the rejection is job-related and consistent with business necessity.

**Resources to Assist**

A number of resources can assist employers in understanding their responsibilities relative to interviewing job applicants with disabilities.

**Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**

1-800-526-7234 (voice/TTY)

JAN is a free, confidential service from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) that provides information on job accommodations for people with disabilities, the employment provisions of the ADA and other related legislation.

**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**

1-800-669-4000 (voice); 1-800-669-6820 (TTY)

The EEOC enforces the ADA’s employment provisions. The section of its web site titled “Disability Discrimination” provides access to resources that can answer employers’ questions about how to ensure their hiring process is inclusive of people with disabilities.

**ADA National Network**

Ten regional ADA Centers sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research provide ADA information, training and technical assistance across the nation.

**Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)**

EARN is a free, confidential service from ODEP that connects employers seeking workers with qualified candidates with disabilities and offers technical assistance to employers on issues relating to hiring and employing individuals with disabilities.

Source: Office of Disability Employment Policy
Employers across the United States are receiving accommodation requests from employees who have recovered from COVID-19 but have long-term effects. As a result, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) received questions about whether COVID-19 is a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and what accommodations might be provided.

**COVID-19 as a disability under the ADA**

It is possible that a person with COVID-19 or its long-term effects could meet the definition of disability under the ADA. Employers who receive requests for accommodations from employees with COVID-19 or its long-term effects can use the process laid out in the ADA to determine whether they are required to provide accommodations based on an employee’s current limitations. This determination should be made on a case-by-case basis. Employers can also consider providing temporary accommodations without determining whether an employee has a disability under the ADA until more is known.

**Accommodations**

Accommodations can vary depending on the specific limitations an employee has, as well as the job duties and work environment, but the ideas below can serve as a starting point for exploring accommodation ideas.

Employees who currently have COVID-19 typically need leave or may ask to telework if they are able to continue working.

Employees who have recovered from COVID-19 may be able to safely return to the workplace, but may have long-term limitations such as shortness of breath with exertion, extreme fatigue, brain fog, insomnia, tachycardia, joint pain/body ache and headaches.

Here are some accommodation ideas to explore for each of these limitations:

**Shortness of breath with exertion**
- Provide an alternative mask
- Allow removal of mask when appropriate
- Allow rest breaks
- Reduce workplace triggers, if any
- Allow time for medical treatment such as use of a nebulizer or inhaler
- Restructure the job to remove marginal job functions
- Develop a plan of action to deal with sudden exacerbations
- Allow telework

**Extreme fatigue**
- Provide an ergonomic workstation
- Allow a flexible schedule
- Restructure the job to remove marginal job functions
- Develop a plan of action to deal with sudden exacerbations
- Allow telework

**Brain fog**
- Provide a quiet workspace
- Allow use of noise cancellation or white noise
- Provide uninterrupted work time
- Provide memory aids such as flowcharts and check lists
- Allow the use of apps for concentration, memory and organization
- Restructure the job to remove marginal functions to allow focus on essential job duties

**Insomnia**
- Keep the workstation temperature on the cool side
- Allow cold drinks at the workstation

**Tachycardia (fast heart rate)**
- Control the workstation temperature
- Allow time off for treatment
- Develop a plan of action to deal with sudden exacerbations

**Joint pain/body aches**
- Reduce the physical demands of the job

**Headaches**
- Provide alternative lighting
- Reduce glare

Additional accommodation ideas are available at JAN’s A-Z by limitation or by contacting JAN for a one-on-one consultation at askjan.org.

Source: Job Accommodation Network
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).
Fostering Disability Inclusive Workplaces Through Employee Resource Groups

What is an ERG?
Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are internal organizational structures within individual businesses designed to address the unique needs and issues of today’s diverse workforce. Also known as Affinity Groups or Business Resource Groups (BRGs), they are found in 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies and are gaining additional business support across the country. These groups offer employees an opportunity to network, address common issues and concerns and receive support from those who share similar backgrounds, experiences or interests.

How Do Companies Typically Approach ERGS - Particularly Those Related to Disability?
While ERGs are usually open to all who wish to participate, they are often created for a variety of groups with common interests, including military veterans, African Americans, Latinos, LGBT individuals, women and individuals with disabilities. In the case of people with disabilities, there are four common types of ERGs — employees who are born with or who have acquired disabilities, maturing employees with age-related disabilities, veterans with service-connected disabilities and employees who have children with disabilities or are caregivers to adults with disabilities. Some companies choose to create a separate ERG for each group, noting that employees in each of the situations typically have very different concerns.

How Can Disability-Related ERGS Benefit Employees and Employers?
ERGs are beneficial for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- **ERGs can promote self-disclosure by people with disabilities.** Many employers — including federal contractors meeting responsibilities under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act — are seeking ways to create a workplace culture in which people feel safe to self-identify as people with disabilities. In a 2013 survey conducted by Cornell University’s Employment and Disability Institute and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), 26.1 percent of respondents indicated that the existence of an ERG was a very important factor in their decision to self-disclose.

- **ERGs can assist in the recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.** ERGs clearly demonstrate an employer’s commitment to a diverse workforce and can position them as an “employer of choice” for employees with disabilities. As such, job candidates with disabilities may feel more comfortable accepting a job offer from such employers since they know their needs will be understood. (In the case of federal contractors covered by Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, these applicants may also be more likely to self-disclose when invited at the pre-offer stage.) Once they’re on the job, ERGs can be a valuable resource to new hires with disabilities, because members can serve as mentors, offering advice on everything from how to navigate the building to career development.

- **ERGs boost productivity.** ERGs signify a commitment to inclusion, and research indicates that the sheer perception of inclusion in the workplace impacts employee job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. Those employees who participate in an ERG tend to be engaged, loyal employees who feel connected and committed to organizational strategy.

- **ERGs can promote and educate staff on disability-related issues.** ERGs are excellent sources of advice on issues related to workplace supports, such as accommodations, accessible technology, physical accessibility and how the overall work environment suits employees with disabilities. ERGs can also help their
companies develop disability etiquette and awareness training for staff.

- **ERGs can help companies improve their products and reach new customers.** Disability-related ERGs can assist their business in tapping the power of the disability market, which by some estimates is the largest minority group in the U.S. Members can provide valuable feedback on the development of products and services tailored to people with disabilities, and act as “brand ambassadors” to the communities they represent.

- **ERGs can support important projects and initiatives.** People with disabilities are well equipped to help their employers identify key factors to consider as they manage company operations. For example, disability ERGs have helped companies ensure that their emergency preparedness plans are fully inclusive, and that they’re meeting the needs of aging workers who want to stay on the job as long as possible.

**Where Can Employers Learn More About Exemplary ERG Practices?**

For employers wanting to learn more, AskEARN.org features a helpful resource called the Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups. This resource helps employers understand the benefits of ERGs and the steps involved in establishing or enhancing one. It is available at askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/erg_toolkit.pdf

This publication was developed by the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) under a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and Cornell University.

Source: EARN: Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion

**Working Works.**

Ensuring workers can stay on the job or return to work following an injury or illness is essential to America’s economy.

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

WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org
A Deep Dive into the Paralympics

By Natalie Rodgers

Just about every person from every country in the world is at least somewhat familiar with the multi-event Summer Olympics, but too many people are still unfamiliar with the Paralympics, another global event focusing on athletes with varying disabilities. With the recent wrap-up of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics, let’s take a look at the history and importance of the Paralympic Games.

Background

The Paralympic Games or Paralympics are a periodic series of international multi-sport events involving athletes with a range of disabilities, including varying muscle powers, varying passive range of movements, limb differences, short stature, hypertonia, ataxia, athetosis, vision impairment and intellectual differences. Similar to the Olympic Games, the Paralympics has a Winter and Summer season and occurs on the heels of the Olympic Games finals.

Though officially gaining a more global recognition in the 1960’s, the Paralympics was actually founded in 1948 by Dr. Ludwig Guttman in Britain. Designed for World War II veterans who had undergone spinal chord injuries in the war, Dr. Guttman hosted the 1948 International Wheelchair Games to serve as an equally elite sports competition for those with differences that prohibited them from attending the Olympic games. The competition would go on to be reserved exclusively for athletes in wheelchairs until 1976 where it was expanded to include other disabilities. As the event gained more and more international traction every four years, it grew from about 400 individuals from 23 countries to thousands of individuals from over a hundred countries.

In 2001, the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee joined forces, contracting that host cities for the Olympic Games must also host the Paralympic Games. The former temporary contract is still in place to this day.

What’s the Big Deal?

Even though the Olympics have been occurring since at least 776 B.C, the games didn’t showcase any known individuals with
disabilities until 1904 when an individual by the name of George Eyser competed with an artificial leg. Aside from a handful of disabled athletes, there wasn’t really a place for athletes with disabilities to showcase their superb athletic ability until the Paralympics was founded. Especially since its partnership with the International Olympic Committee, the Paralympics has created a space that allows for inclusion and representation of more individuals with varying disabilities while maintaining the similar competitive stakes and athletic standards as the Olympic Games. The Games also show people who do not identify with having a disability that the differences of those who do does not necessarily prohibit any kind of ability to compete.

The equality the Paralympics holds to the Olympic games was best stated by the International Olympic Committee in saying, “The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.”

This statement was followed up by the 2012 Chairman of the London Organizing Committee, Sebastian Coe, when he said, “We want to change public attitudes towards
disability, celebrate the excellence of Paralympic sport and to
enshrine from the very outset that the two Games are an integrated
whole."

What’s Next for the Paralympics?
This year’s Paralympics was one of the most inclusive events in its
history, hosting more women and openly LGBTQ+ athletes than ever
before. At least 42 percent of the over 4,400 athletes were women
and thirty identified as being a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

With the conclusion of the 2020 Summer Paralympics, we can
now look forward to the 2022 Winter Paralympics in Beijing and
the 2024 Summer Paralympics in Paris, France. The International
Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee
will continue to have their ongoing contract to be hosted by the same
cities up until 2032, but will most likely continue far into the future
given the popularity of the games and what it does for inclusion,
equality and representation.

Meet the Paralympians
In tandem with the mission of the Olympic and Paralympic
Games, all individuals regardless of ability, gender, race, religion,
sexuality and so on are encouraged to compete. That being said, here
are some of our favorite Paralympic athletes who competed this year:

Scout Bassett: USA, Track and Field
An amputee since she was a newborn and a runner since she was a
small child, Scout Bassett attended the Paralympics for the second
time this season, having first qualified in 2016. She placed in fifth
and tenth place in the 2016 Paralympics for the 100m and the Long
Jump respectively. She is currently the world record holder in the
400m T42 and American holder in 100m and 200m for the World
Para Athletics Championship. She also took home a gold medal for
the Women’s Long Jump T42-44/T61-63 at the Parapan American
Games in Peru.

Chuck Aoki: USA, Wheelchair Rugby
Chuck Aoki, a legendary wheelchair rugby player with hereditary
sensory autonomic neuropathy, is one of the most well-known
Paralympians from the United States. 2020 marks Aokis’ third
consecutive time playing for the country’s wheelchair rugby team
in the Paralympics, having previously led his team to victory with
a bronze medal in 2012 and a silver medal in 2016. This year, Aoki
was one of the two flag bearers, along with Melissa Stockwell, at
the 2020 opening ceremonies. His presence at this year’s games was
especially impressive as Aoki just finished his sixth leg surgery since
February of this year.

Zahra Nemati: Iran, Para archery
Both a Paralympian and an Olympian, Zahra Nemati has quickly
become one of the greatest names in archery. Following a paralyz-
ing car accident in 2003, Nemati took up archery in 2006, finishing
in third place for the National Championship in just six months. In
2012, Zahra Nemati took home the gold medal at the Paralympics,
becoming the first Iranian woman to win the gold in either the Olymp-
ics or the Paralympics. Her abilities won her a qualifying position
in the both the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics, making her the first
person to ever do so.
Diversity and Inclusion are the principles that bind us together. At Alight we are committed to building a culture where; diversity is visible, valued and sustained, we drive awareness, accountability and community. This commitment extends to building upon the inclusivity and diversity of our suppliers whose business values are aligned with ours. We are actively pursuing diverse suppliers to ensure our suppliers provide competitively high-quality products and services. To learn more go to alight.com/supplier-diversity.

Thrive together

Zoe Newson: Great Britain, Power Lifting
Zoe Newson, who was born with a growth hormone deficiency, has become one of the Paralympics’ best power lifters. In 2012 and 2016, Newson won the Bronze for lifting 40 Kg and 45 Kg respectively, about 88 and 99 pounds. In May 2021, Newsom lifted her personal best, 60 Kg (132 pounds) at the British Finals, making her the Champion in her class.

Daniel Dias: Brazil, Swimming
Swimmer, Daniel Dias, who has malformed upper and lower limbs, is coming back to the Paralympics for a fourth time where he hopes to break the record for the most gold medals won by an athlete in the games. Currently, Dias is the holder of 24 Paralympic medals, 14 of which are gold. Dias has also won an abundance of medals across other world events, including the IPC Swimming World Championships, and has been named Sportsperson of the Year twice for his achievements in the Paralympics.

Melissa Stockwell: USA, Triathlete
Returning for her third Paralympics, Melissa Stockwell is one of the most renowned Paralympic triathletes in the game. She has taken home countless medals of all statuses in the ITU Triathlon World Championships and won a bronze medal in the 2016 Paralympics. Stockwell is an amputee and a U.S. Army Officer, losing her leg to an explosion during her service. Stockwell was also the first Iraq Veteran to ever participate in the Paralympics and has served as a flag bearer for either the opening or closing ceremonies of the Paralympics several times.

Employment Supports for People with Invisible Disabilities

Whether you’re looking for a job or already have one, if you’re one of more than 50 million U.S. adults who live with a mental illness, the workplace can be a challenging environment. Searching for the right job can take several tries. Once in the workforce, you may worry about being treated differently by an employer or coworker or fear losing your job if you choose to disclose your disability. The good news is that you have rights.

For three decades, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has opened doors for people with disabilities, protecting them from discrimination in all areas of their daily lives, including the workplace. Whether you have an observable disability or an invisible one, this law helps you access the same employment opportunities and benefits as individuals without disabilities. Not only are you protected from discrimination based on your disability, you may also be able to seek reasonable accommodations so that you can participate in the job application process, perform the essential functions of a job or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.

Mental Health in the Workplace

Your mental health, including emotional, psychological and social well-being, can affect how you think, feel and act. Your mental health also affects your responses to stress and how you interact with others at work. Similar to people with physical disabilities and health conditions, people with mental health conditions may need support and can request reasonable accommodations to help them succeed in the workplace.

But how do you know if your mental health condition qualifies as a disability protected by the ADA? According to the National ADA Network, a disability is any physical or mental health impairment that significantly limits one or more of your major life activities. If your mental illness makes it difficult for you to perform important tasks at work, accommodations such as adjusting your work environment or the way you perform a task can allow you to better perform the essential functions of the job.

For example, someone navigating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may struggle with anxiety and have difficulty focusing and making decisions at work. This can be stressful because they never know when their symptoms will show up. To help manage such stress, workplace accommodations could include requesting written instructions to help address memory issues or modifying the break schedule to accommodate a therapy appointment.

Other examples of workplace accommodations for individuals with mental health conditions include:

- Allowing noise-cancelling headphones to help reduce distracting noises
- Having access to apps for anxiety and stress
- Using wall planners or a color-coded system to help with time management and managing confusion
- Discussing flexible scheduling or options for working from home

How Can I Request Reasonable Accommodations?

In order to receive an accommodation, you’ll need to discuss your disability with your employer, but talking about disclosure doesn’t have to be difficult. If you have a mental health condition and want to work, knowing your symptoms will help you communicate your needs. To have a productive discussion with your employer or future employer, think about:

- The part(s) of your job you’re having difficulty with due to your mental illness
- How your disability makes it difficult for you to perform these tasks
- Your recommendations for potential solutions

The ADA requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities unless doing so would cause the employer significant difficulty or expense. When you decide to disclose your disability to your employer, keep it simple. You don’t have to explain every detail. You can talk to your supervisor, HR representative or ADA coordinator and also put your request in writing to document your request.

If you have additional concerns about mental health support and maintaining employment while coping with mental illness, find out if your employer has an employee assistance program (EAP) that allows you access to mental health professionals and counseling. EAPs also offer tools for identifying triggers, tips for stress management and general coping skills. EAPs are usually offered at no cost to you as the employee; however, there may be a limited number of sessions available.

Source: Ticket to Work
STRONGER TOGETHER

Building a diverse workforce and creating an equitable and inclusive culture have been long-standing principles for Michelin North America, Inc. Each and every day, Michelin strives to create an environment where employees feel accepted, valued and respected. By building and retaining a workforce that reflects the world around it, Michelin creates a culture where new and different ideas flourish and innovation thrives.

When Melisa Anderson joined Michelin more than 30 years ago, she had 25% of her hearing intact. Melisa was diagnosed with hearing loss at an early age and, by the time she hit middle school, she wore hearing aids and read lips to be able to communicate with her peers.

"Being new to a company is daunting on its own," said Melisa. "When you have a disability, it can be overwhelming. I knew working in a production facility was going to be a challenge, but I was up for it."

Melisa excelled as a production operator and moved on to a role as a tire study coordinator, then into site personnel. She is now responsible for recruiting at one of Michelin’s largest production facilities in North America.

By early 2000, Melisa only had 10% of her hearing left. Through the advocacy of her manager and Michelin’s benefits team, she received two cochlear implants.

"Due to my disability, I had low self-esteem and feared stepping out of my comfort zone," said Melisa. "My manager at Michelin saw my potential and taught me to believe in myself. I am so grateful for this support. I have been able to reach new heights in my career and now I strive to use that experience to empower others."

Michelin North America, Inc. is honored to be selected by Forbes magazine as one of its "Most Diverse Places to Work" in 2020 and ranked as the top tire manufacturer for the second consecutive year by FORTUNE magazine among the “World’s Most Admired Companies” for 2021.
How Vocational Rehabilitation Can Help Your Career

If you have a disability that makes employment hard for you, you may be eligible for services to help you prepare for, obtain and maintain a job.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a U.S. Department of Education funded program that provides these services for all disability groups in every state, territory and many Native American Nations.

Currently, a variety of federal services exist to facilitate vocational rehabilitation in the United States. The Department of Disability Services has a dedicated set to vocational rehabilitation services where applicants are provided with a counselor to develop an individual plan for employment. The Office of Disability Employment Policy further facilitates employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Vocational rehabilitation generally includes assistance in finding employment, career planning, education and counseling services and help to increase and improve workplace skills.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers vocational rehabilitation programs specifically for veterans whose disabilities are related to their years in active service. Such programs include employment assistance, business assistance and job retention. All veterans are provided with a vocational rehabilitation counselor to create a rehabilitation program. These counselors tend to dictate the success of individual rehabilitation programs, particularly through the relationship developed between the veteran and the counselor.

To be eligible for services, an individual must:

- Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially impedes their ability to secure employment, and vocational rehabilitation services are required to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment consistent with the applicant’s unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests and informed choice;

If your disability is so severe that you might not be able to benefit from DOR services, the DOR can arrange a trial work experience. This is an opportunity to work in a realistic work setting to demonstrate if you can benefit from DOR services. If you are receiving Social Security Administration benefits or if you have a valid “Ticket to Work,” you are presumed eligible for DOR services.

What services are available from vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation is an individualized employment program. Participants may receive diagnosis, an individualized rehabilitation program, counseling and guidance, training, job placement and services to support job retention. Many applicants are referred by schools, hospitals, welfare agencies and other organizations, but you may apply directly for service.

How do I apply for services?

Applying for services will vary depending on your home state, but many of the requirements will be similar in every state. In California, for example, one must:

- Request services by completing and signing a DR 222 - Vocational Rehabilitation Services Application, visiting an America’s Job Center of California rehabilitation services or requesting services from the DOR.
- Provide the DOR with information necessary to begin an assessment to determine your eligibility and priority for services.
- Be available to complete the assessment process. This includes activities such as attending the initial interview, watching an orientation video, participating in the evaluation of your skills and capabilities and completing your part of any actions you and your counselor agree upon.

To see how these steps may differ in your state, contact your state’s vocational rehabilitation office or the American Job Center network.

Source: Wikipedia, CareerOneStop, California Department of Rehabilitation
Attracting and retaining employees with disabilities is a part of PNC’s culture. We believe everyone’s unique differences and perspectives strengthen our company. To support this belief, we offer an accessible workplace, enabled through technology, that allows all of us to learn, work, and achieve together without barriers.

In 2021, PNC Bank made significant accessibility-centric upgrades to its productivity tools to equip employees with the tools and technology to thrive in the workplace. One example is the Accessibility Hub, an innovative digital platform that provides employees with solutions to customize their workplace, and the tools and resources needed to enhance their productivity.

PNC’s commitment to its employees is also apparent in its community initiatives. As a proud sponsor of Disability Mentoring Day, PNC hosts mentorship activities to promote career development for students and jobseekers with disabilities. Participating students from regional schools and various disability organizations have the opportunity to experience “a day in the life at PNC”, learn best practices for resume writing and virtual interviewing, and network with PNC professionals. At this annual occasion, students and job seekers gain new tools and skills to own their career journey. Kick start yours at PNC.

Visit www.pnc.jobs to learn more about our culture and career opportunities.
Talking about Disability Disclosure

By Melanie Whetzel, M.A., CBIS Lead Consultant, Cognitive/Neurological Team, Job Accommodation Network

Many people struggle with the idea of disclosing their disabilities in the workplace, and for many good reasons. Disclosure involves giving out personal, medical and/or disability information to an employer. It can be overwhelming and scary.

How much information should I provide? When is the best time to do it? Will my employer keep the information confidential? Will he or she use it against me? These are all valid questions that may run through the mind of an applicant or employee trying to determine if he or she needs to disclose a disability.

If you need reasonable accommodations in the workplace or for the application or hiring process, disclosure is a very real and necessary step in the accommodation process. It is the first and sometimes most difficult step. So, what exactly is involved?

When disclosing personal information about a disability, it is important to provide information about the nature of your disability, the limitations involved and how the disability affects your ability to learn and/or perform the job successfully.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers have a right to know if a disability is involved when an employee asks for accommodations. Although there is no specific time frame under the ADA for requesting an accommodation, you should disclose a disability and request accommodations before you have difficulties on the job, or at least before they become too serious.

Let’s look at 3 reasons why someone with a disability may choose to disclose to their employer:

**Accommodations**

The main reason to disclose a disability is to ask for accommodations. Accommodations, which are changes or modifications to the way things are usually done, aren’t just necessary for the completion of job tasks; they are often helpful during the application and interview process as well.

For example: Matt is an automotive tech recovering from treatment for cancer. He is ready to return to work and is interviewing for jobs. He has a difficult time when the interviews are in the late afternoon because he feels tired and not at his best later in the day. If no morning interviews are available, he may have to disclose and request an earlier slot where he can better represent himself and his abilities.

**Benefits and privileges of employment**

A second reason to disclose a disability in the workplace is to receive benefits or privileges of employment. The ADA requires employers to provide accommodations so employees with disabilities can enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities. Benefits and privileges of employment include, but aren’t limited to, access to employer-sponsored trainings, transportation, credit unions, cafeterias, auditoriums and social functions.

For example: Jake is an employee who has difficulty hearing well in large group trainings. He asks for the accommodation of being allowed to take part in training electronically while remaining in his office. His disability limits his ability to make sense of what goes on in the large group.

**Unusual circumstances**

A third reason to disclose in the workplace is to explain an unusual circumstance. For instance, Ty was corrected after a meeting with clients where he interrupted and added his own personal opinions, unrelated to what was being discussed. Before he got into further trouble, Ty decided to explain that the cause of the impulsiveness is his mental health impairment and that with accommodations, like working with a job coach and using role-play scenarios to demonstrate appropriate workplace behavior, he should be able to control his impulsiveness during meetings.

**Finding help**

As you can see from the examples above, accommodations can help individuals with disabilities perform their job duties. Being honest with your employer about disclosure and the need for accommodations is a direct and effective way to handle issues that may arise. And open communication can help you get the tools you need to succeed as you start a new job and complete workplace assignments. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) may be able to offer you more information, answers and support. Learn more about JAN and start finding accommodations information at askjan.org.

Source: Ticket to Work
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Google Commits to Hiring More People with Autism

By Natalie Rodgers

In a partnership with Stanford University, Google is enhancing its procedures to create a more neurodiverse space within their corporation.

In late July, President of Global Customer Operations for Google Cloud Rob Enslin announced the launch of Google Cloud’s Autism Career Program, a division dedicated to hiring and supporting people with autism. Stanford University’s Neurodiversity Project will be aiding Google’s management team by training nearly 500 Google Cloud managers on the proper hiring procedures for people with Autism. Stanford University will also be providing support services to the applicants once they have been hired.

About two percent of all people have been diagnosed with autism and of that two percent, only 29 percent have experienced any kind of paid work in their lives. Many times, this is due to an unconscious bias that manifests during the interview process where hiring managers can mistake different ways of communication as the inability to work in a professional setting.

Enslin, who has firsthand experience in working with individuals with autism and their families, decided to establish the program when he saw repeating patterns in the difficulties of the hiring process.

“The foundation promotes acceptance and inclusion for people on the spectrum, helping them live independently and find jobs that harness their talents and skills,” Enslin stated. “The organization’s focus on autism in the workplace resonated deeply with me due to the rich experiences I had working with individuals with autism over the course of my career.”

Additionally, through the Autism Career Program, Google will be changing its interview process to provide proper accommodations for those seeking a job, and better training for those doing the hiring. Reasonable accommodations will include, but not be limited to, extended interview time, the option to interview in writing instead of verbally and the provision of questions in advance.

“These accommodations don’t give those candidates an unfair advantage,” Enslin went on to say “It’s just the opposite: They remove an unfair disadvantage, so candidates have a fair and equitable chance to compete for the job.”

While autism is defined and exhibits differently for every person, hiring people with autism has shown a tremendous amount of benefit for both sides. Those being hired gain job experience, expand their career interests and gain confidence while corporations gain employees who attribute some of the best qualities in the workforce, such as dedication, focus and detail-orientation.

Source: Google Cloud and BBC
Want to change the world?

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Your Accommodation Request Was Denied. Now What?

By Tracie DeFreitas and Anna Saab

You’ve requested an accommodation at work, but your employer has denied the request. What do you do now? Do you have options under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? If you work for an ADA-covered entity, you do.

Learn More About Why the Accommodation Was Denied

When an employer denies a request for an accommodation, it can be frustrating and it might seem like there’s nothing you can do about it. Just like any other situation when someone says no, you might be curious about why your request was denied. While there’s no requirement under Title I of the ADA for covered employers to provide a written explanation for why a request for accommodation was denied, nothing prohibits an employee from asking for a reason. Individuals working for federal executive branch agencies can expect to receive a written denial in accordance with Executive Order 13164.

Learning more about why the employer denied your accommodation request will help you determine whether there’s any recourse for receiving a reasonable accommodation. One strategy for doing this is to follow up with the employer by email to request a reason for the denial. It can be useful to formalize your effort to request further information and to receive a documented response.

There are various reasons why an employer may choose to deny an accommodation request made under the ADA. It is possible that by asking about your employer’s reasons, you might be empowered to change the outcome of the situation. For example, maybe the employer needs more information about your disability and how your limitations or restrictions affect your ability to perform the essential duties of the job. Or perhaps the accommodation you requested isn’t reasonable or will cause an undue hardship for the employer. If the employer can’t provide the requested accommodation for these reasons, there’s still a responsibility to work with you through the
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ADA to explore whether there is an alternative accommodation that is reasonable and effective. JAN (Job Accommodation Network) can support this process by helping you and your employer explore accommodation solutions.

Consider Appealing the Accommodation Denial

If your employer denied the accommodation, but you believe the accommodation is reasonable or the reason given by your employer is not valid, it might be possible to appeal the decision. Some employers have an accommodation appeal process. This process might include completing a form to be submitted to and reviewed by human resources or an accommodation appeals committee, for example. Check your employee handbook or contact human resources to see if the employer has a policy in relation to this type of process.

If the employer doesn’t have a formal appeal process, you might try going up the chain of command to ask for a formal appeal of the decision (e.g., send an email to a manager and/or human resources requesting reconsideration of the decision). Some employees might be able to receive support during the appeal process from a union representative, if applicable. State and local government employees might contact their ADA coordinator for assistance. Federal employees might contact the EEO Counselor at their agency to learn about an internal agency appeal process.

Engage Advocacy or Legal Services for Support

Ideally, asking for information about why an accommodation was denied and/or appealing an accommodation denial should lead to further engagement in the interactive process under the ADA, and a fair outcome. But sometimes it doesn’t. If this is true, you might ben-
benefit from advocacy or legal support to resolve the situation. Consider reaching out to your state protection and advocacy agency for this assistance. They have the authority to provide legal representation and other advocacy services to individuals with disabilities under all federal and state laws. JAN offers a state protection and advocacy directory where you can search for contact information for the agency in your state.

Summarizing some strategies to consider when an accommodation request was denied:

- Ask the employer to provide an explanation for why the request was denied.
- Offer and/or request to explore alternative accommodation solutions if the original request is not reasonable or will pose an undue hardship for the employer.
- Provide additional disability-related and/or accommodation information if it was indicated that more information is needed to approve the original request.
- Contact JAN for assistance exploring alternative accommodation solutions.
- Engage in a formal or informal appeal process or determine whether other strategies are available within your place of employment to resolve the situation internally (e.g., involve the chain of command, seek union support, etc.)
- Reach-out to protection and advocacy agencies for advocacy and/or legal assistance, if desired.

**When All Else Fails, Explore Complaint Options**

If you’re not satisfied with the employer’s response to your request for accommodation and no resolution has been achieved working with the employer directly through an appeal process, or there is a retaliation or discrimination issue, the final option for resolving the matter is to file a formal complaint under the ADA. Individuals working for covered entities under Title I of the ADA may file a formal complaint with the federal agency that enforces the ADA — the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). A charge can be filed electronically through the EEOC Public Portal after an online inquiry is submitted to the agency, or you can contact your nearest EEOC office or EEOC headquarters directly.

Employees of the federal government must follow a different complaint process under Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act. To learn about the procedures for filing a complaint of disability discrimination against a federal government agency employer, see the EEOC resource Overview of Federal Sector EEO Complaint Process.

Trust that you do have options if your accommodation request is denied, but consider what strategies for resolving the situation are right for you. Keep calm, ask why the request was denied, gather more information and know your rights under the ADA. Explore your options — there might be a more ‘appealing’ option than you realize!

Source: Job Accommodation Network
For many years, while it wasn’t impossible for a person who uses a wheelchair to become a licensed pilot, the barriers to them leaving their chair for the pilot’s seat was more a pipedream than a reality.

That is, until 2006, when Charles Stites founded the non-profit group, Able Flight, for the purpose of giving those accustomed to wheels a new pair of wings. Able Flight is the only non-profit of its kind in the United States and provides full-ride scholarships to people who have physical disabilities for the purpose of obtaining a Sport Pilot license.

DIVERSEability Magazine had the pleasure of talking with Stites about the inspiration behind his non-profit and how it’s changing people’s lives.

DIVERSEability Magazine: What was the inspiration behind Able Flight and how did you get started?

Charles Stites: In 2006, I was an aviation writer and photographer for a U.S. magazine and also contributed to a number of European aviation journals. I became aware of a British non-profit organization that made it possible for people with physical disabilities to train to become pilots. Wanting to highlight a similar non-profit here in the states, I did some research and found there wasn’t one. Then I recalled that an aircraft distributor had recently shown me a set of adapted hand controls that could be used by people who could not operate the rudder and brakes on a particular airplane. And just before that, the FAA had instituted a new pilot certificate that would make it far easier for people with disabilities to qualify medically. I realized these elements provided a unique opportunity to create a new non-profit flight training scholarship and mentoring program here in the United States, and within a few weeks I had founded Able Flight.

DM: How do you change lives “through the challenge and the freedom of flight?”

Stites: Learning to fly is a very serious endeavor, with both physical and mental demands. So, when a person is successful in making it through training and earning their pilot’s license, they know what they have earned. They know that the moment of their first solo flight, when their instructor gets out of the plane and says, “It’s all yours,” and when they’re totally in control of that flight without anyone else to depend upon, that they became a new person; a pilot in charge of their fate. That’s a life changing moment.

DM: What does “Life Without Limits” mean to you?
Stites: In the context of becoming a pilot, it would be easy to say that it’s not possible to describe that experience as life without limits, because the FAA places many limits on what a pilot can do through a great number of regulations. But that would be short sighted, because it isn’t the individual regulation or rule that limits a person, it’s how they see themselves. And if they see themselves as capable, and with the determination to succeed, they have begun the journey of removing self-imposed limitations from their life.

DM: What has changed in people’s reactions and support from when you started your organization to now?

Sites: In the beginning, it was difficult to bring some people on board with the idea that a person with a physical disability can meet the same training and testing standards required of all people who go for an FAA check ride to determine if they will be granted a license. But now, 15 years later, it almost never comes up, and there is a simple reason for that. Over 75 people have earned a pilot’s license through our program, people with paralysis and those who are amputees or have other significant physical challenges. One hundred percent of the people we have sent for a check ride are now licensed pilots. The numbers tell the story.

DM: What projects are you working on right now that excites you most and what’s the number one thing you would like to share with our readers?

Sites: Currently we are growing our program to a second training location that will allow Able Flight to offer even more scholarships. And we are working with aircraft manufacturers to encourage them to offer adapted controls for their airplanes. When we started this program, there was one such adapted trainer, now there are four and more to come.

For more information about Able Flight, visit ableflight.org.

The number one thing I would like to share with your readers is that early on, when we spoke about our program, we often led with the idea of how challenging it is, and it truly is. But when we began to have more and more people go through our program and their lives were changed by meeting those challenges, the first word they most often use when describing their experience is “freedom.”
Josh Sundquist has walked multiple paths and found success in many diverse professions during his 37 years. He was a cancer survivor and subsequent amputee by age thirteen then, less than ten years later, became a Paralympian in ski racing. Today, he represents the United States internationally as a member of the U.S. Amputee Soccer Team. During his time as a professional athlete, Sundquist has also gained a significant following and reputation as a comedian, New York Times bestselling author and motivational speaker. Yet, one of the most surprising and unique titles he holds is as a viral Halloween costume designer. Sundquist’s fans look forward every year to see how he can creatively incorporate his physical disability into fun, festive costumes.

From Luxo Jr., the Pixar lamp mascot that famously opens each film from the Pixar Animation Studios, to Genie from Disney’s Aladdin franchise, a Dairy Queen Blizzard and even a foosball play piece, Sundquist has spent years using this fun hobby as a way to promote disability inclusivity, awareness and acceptance. It was an honor for DiverseABILITY Magazine to take the time to speak with him about all that he does to be a change agent promoting diversity, equity and inclusion for those with disabilities.
bring joy to people around the world. I never could have imagined they would resonate so much with so many people, whether or not they have a disability like mine.

DiverseABILITY: How did you get into doing these amazing costumes that incorporate your physical differences? What do you think seeing these ideas mean for your fans and followers?

Sundquist: It’s funny that Halloween has become such a big part of my life because I didn’t actually celebrate it growing up! So, it wasn’t until after college that I dressed up as a partially eaten gingerbread man that I got my first taste (get it?) of how fun it is to go all out on Halloween. My costumes have increasingly gotten a little more complex each year, haha. As far as incorporating my physical differences into the costume, I’m always thinking of interesting shapes that only my body can make. It makes me so happy to see that my costumes bring joy to people around the world. I never could have imagined they would resonate so much with so many people, whether or not they have a disability like mine.

DiverseABILITY: In your speaking engagements, you often talk about living by the words 1MT1MT: One More Thing, One More Time. What does that phrase mean and why has it been so important for you to share it with audiences over and over again after all these years?

Sundquist: It means doing one more thing than you feel like doing. If you’re in a com-
petitive environment like a sport or something, it means doing one more lap around the track, one more training session or one more mile on the treadmill. Maybe it’s also recognizing when it’s time to rest and taking one more hour or day to take care of yourself.

**DiverseABILITY: What does “Life Without Limits” mean to you?**

**Sundquist:** It means not letting your past mistakes, regrets or challenges define your future.

**DiverseABILITY: The biggest topic of this year’s Summer Olympic season is arguably mental health in sports, specifically when it comes to pro athletes. As a Paralympian, what has been your biggest takeaway from everything that is happening, and what would you hope people learn from this Olympics?**

**Sundquist:** Managing my personal mental health has been a major part of my routine for years. I’m so glad that some of the world’s biggest athletes like Michael Phelps and Simone Biles were vulnerable enough to share their own struggles with mental health. They bravely initiated a tough and complex conversation on a global stage, which is the mark of true leadership. Things like talking with a therapist on a regular basis, taking medication as recommended by my doctor and daily exercise are just a few of the ways I’ve managed my mental health, and I hope that people learn that even Olympians have a hard time getting out of bed some days. We all have difficulties, whether it’s something visible like my disability or something harder to see like depression or anxiety.

**DiverseABILITY: What projects are you working on right now that excite you the most, and what’s the number one thing you would like to share with our readers?**

**Sundquist:** Well, my next book will come out in 2022, so that’s something I’m looking forward to sharing. I’m also working on a couple projects that will come to streaming platforms in the next couple years. I’m excited to be a part of increasing representation of people with disabilities on screen!

For the latest news, information and costumes from Josh, be sure to follow him on his social media pages @JoshSundquist (on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) or visit his website at joshsundquist.com.
Luv’s Brownies Founder Finds Sweet Success

From the time Andrea Lacy was in elementary school, she knew she wanted to go to college and work for Hewlett Packard, but at the same time, she knew that there was something different about the way in which she processed information. Her high school counselor went as far as to dissuade Lacy from applying to college. He told her due to her lack in math requirement, she would not get accepted to any university. Ignoring the advice of the counselor, Lacy applied to San Jose State University through the Equal Opportunity Program, where she was officially diagnosed with dyslexia, working with university administrators to replace some classes with other course requirements to help raise her grade point average. “The experience taught me the following important lessons,” Lacy says of her diagnoses, “Never let anyone tell you what you can and cannot do. Put your mind to whatever you want to accomplish, make a realistic plan and timeline and start working toward your goal.”

Turning challenges into opportunities

Between the ages of 17 and 20, Lacy worked three jobs at a time to pay her tuition, rent and car payments. “I was a Sears bill collector, a DoubleTree hotel phone operator, a Macy’s handbag salesperson and a salesperson in the Nordstrom Brass Plum department and in credit card new accounts,” she shared. Along her journey, she met some wonderful people who believed in her, even met someone at SJSU who helped her land a job at Hewlett Packard.

As a thank you gift, Lacy baked this friend some brownies that baked thicker and different than what she was used to. It wasn’t until after her diagnoses with dyslexia that she discovered that her dyslexia had transposed the numbers in the recipe she had used. That very fortunate mistake led to Luv’s award-winning brownies.

Now through her successful business, Luv’s Brownies, not only does Lacy get to share her brownies to a wider audience, but she has a bigger platform to help those with a wide range of disabilities. Over the past 25 years of running her business, Lacy has always given back to her community. She teaches students marketing and entrepreneurship skills at her alma mater, and is even involved in the Black Leadership and Opportunity Center’s African American College Readiness Program, which helps Black and African American students prepare for the next steps in education.

Earlier this year, Lacy decided to take her desire to help others in a similar direction and created the Andrea R. Lacy Grit Award Scholarship — three $500 scholarships designed for students who have shown tenacity in overcoming challenges, and who now wish to build on their success by pursuing higher education or vocational training. A portion of all sales from Luv’s Brownies goes to support these scholarships.

“I developed the high school seniors’ scholarship fund because I wanted to recognize other hard-working individuals who were working on pursuing their educational goals,” Lacy says, “While I was earning my undergraduate degree, I was hustling to figure out why I failed the same math class five times, struggling with dyslexia all while working three jobs to afford books, tuition, room and board while managing to study. When I think about all the people that have supported me over the years, I am so thankful for their kind words, prayers, counseling, mentorship and financial assistance. The scholarship foundation is my way of giving back.”

To learn more about the scholarship program and about Lacy visit luvsbrownies.com.

Source: Luv’s Brownies and Andrea Lacy
Francine wanted more from her workplace.

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Getting DOBE Certified: What You Need to Know

What is a DOBE Certified Business?

A disability-owned business enterprise (DOBE) is a for-profit business that is at least 51 percent owned, managed and controlled by a person with a disability, regardless of whether or not that business owner employs person(s) with a disability. By becoming officially certified as a DOBE, your organization will have access to the same contracts and opportunities that are often provided to large scale corporations. The DOBE certification will also help your business to gain the attention of larger corporations in national, state, and local supply chains.

The benefits to certification additionally include:

- Nationally recognized
- Exclusive information and resources
- Networking & business matchmaking opportunities
- Policy advocacy
- Access to private sector corporations
- Special certifications for Veteran Disability-Owned Businesses and Service-Disabled Veteran Disability-Owned Businesses are also available through organizations such as Disability: IN.

How To Certify Your Business

Depending on the organization you use to certify your diverse-owned business, there will be unique requirements to become certified. For instance, providing proof of a disability which substantially impairs major aspects of your day-to-day life is required to
Executive Summary
Commitment
Community
Commerce

Supplier Inclusion
Creating value through synergy

For more information visit corporate.walmart.com/suppliers/ or email us at supplierinclusion@walmart.com
become certified as a DOBE. However, some of the commonalities across certifying organizations include:

- Being the primary decision-maker for your business.
- Owning a business that is independent from other businesses in operation.
- Proof of ownership of at least 51 percent of your business through official documentation.
- Willingness to submit business and financial information used to privately analyze your eligibility.
- Advantages may be available to you if you are already certified as a woman-, minority-, veteran-, or LGBTQ-owned business.

**Required Documents**

Specifics on documentation will vary depending on what kind of business, enterprise or partnership you are running, but across the board, there are some similarities. Usually, a processing fee is required upon application as well as proof of citizenship and disability status. A passport, driver’s license, green card and/or state ID card may be required for eligibility.

Other required documentation may include:

- Operating business license and/or permits
- A brief history of the company
- Owner resume
- 3 years of tax returns
- Third party agreements (if applicable)
- Certified documentation of current board members
- Signed agreements with partners
- Meeting minutes
- Company bylaws

If you are applying to be certified as a service-disabled veteran, you may also be asked to provide specific veteran documentation. Assistance is available through the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

No matter what kind of business you operate or what the specifics of your disability may be, DOBE certification can allow you advantages, opportunities and partnerships that will help your company to thrive.

Source: Disability:IN

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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
The Basics of Paying Yourself as an Entrepreneur

By Drake Forester

For the most part, there are two main ways to pay yourself an entrepreneur salary— with a regular salary or through owner’s draws. The salary method is essentially just like getting paid in the workforce at large. You’re paid on a regular schedule, either based on hours worked or at a flat rate.

Owner’s Draw or Salary?
The method you use to take funds out of your business depends, in large part, on your entity type.

If you’re a sole proprietor, a partner in a partnership or a member of a standard LLC, you’ll likely pay yourself with an owner’s draw. This is the most flexible payment method, allowing you to withdraw cash from your company’s equity account (your business earnings plus any capital you’ve invested in the business) at any time.

If you’re the owner of a business taxed as an S-Corp or a C-Corp — and you’re actively involved in running the company — the rules are bit more rigid. The IRS requires employee-shareholders of corporations to be paid reasonable compensation for their work, in the form of W-2 wages.

In the process of starting a new venture? You’ll want to reflect on your preferred method of taking funds out of the business before you settle on an entity type.

If you need the flexibility of any-time cash withdrawals, operating as a sole proprietor, a partnership, or an LLC with default taxation will allow you to use the owner’s draw method.

If you prefer the stability of a regular paycheck (and would rather pay taxes on your earnings up front rather than later on), forming a corporation or an LLC taxed as an S-Corp or C-Corp will make it possible for you to pay yourself as a salaried employee.

Business owners looking for a middle ground should note that there is a little leeway when it comes to S-corps. In a business taxed as an S-Corp, owners have the option to supplement their regular salary with an owner’s draw.

Guidelines for Sole Proprietors, Partnerships & LLCs

As noted earlier, being a sole proprietor, a partner in a partnership or the owner of an LLC means using an owner’s draw to pay yourself—at least in most cases. While this may be the simplest way to take money out of your business, you should be aware of a few guidelines and best practices for each business type.

Sole Proprietors

For business owners operating as sole proprietors, the owner’s draw is the only legally-allowed payment method.

You can take funds out of your business at regular intervals (or anytime they’re needed) by writing yourself a check, making a cash withdrawal at the bank or transferring a sum from your business account to your personal one.

Careful record-keeping is critical: Each time you withdraw cash from your business for personal use, be sure to note the amount on your company’s balance sheet. Maintaining a clear separation between your business and personal finances will give you a clearer picture of your company’s profitability and remaining equity.

Planning ahead for tax time is also key. Any money you receive from your business in the form of owner’s draws will be taxed on your personal income tax return, at the self-employment rate of 15.3 percent. This means that for each cash withdrawal, you’ll need to set aside this percentage for your annual or quarterly tax payments to the IRS (most business owners pay their taxes quarterly).
WE GET DIVERSITY MATTERS.

CDW is committed to supporting disabled-owned businesses.

Ours is a commitment that reaches well beyond our coworkers, the customers we serve and the communities we live in. Partnering strategically with qualified businesses enables us to keep providing the industry’s best experience, while contributing to economic growth in diverse communities nationwide.

Learn more about our commitment to diversity at CDW.com/SupplierDiversity
Partnerships

Partnerships are pass-through entities — each partner’s share of the business profits flows through to their personal income tax return. As with a sole-proprietorship, you’ll use an owner’s draw to pay yourself, and will owe self-employment taxes on these funds come tax time.

Where partners differ from sole proprietors is that each partner’s equity is distinct. You can only withdraw funds up to the amount of the capital that you, as an individual, have contributed to the business.

In addition to taking an owner’s draw, partners have the option of being compensated through guaranteed payments. These are regular payments made to an individual partner for their services or investment in the partnership, made regardless of whether or not the company is successful. Unlike an owner’s draw, a guaranteed payment is considered a deductible business expense and reduces the net profit of the business.

LLCs

By default, LLCs are generally treated like partnerships in terms of taxation, and owners (called members) cannot be compensated with W-2 wages. As an owner of an LLC, you’ll pay yourself with an owner’s draw.

To safeguard your liability protection, you’ll need to do your best to keep personal and business accounts separate. This means carefully recording every owner’s draw you take.

If you’d prefer to pay yourself a salary or wages as an LLC owner, this option is available to you. However, you would first need to apply for S-Corp or C-Corp tax treatment — which may have other tax implications for your business.

There’s more to paying yourself with an LLC than meets the eye, and you’ll want to sit down with your accountant or tax professional to determine the method that will result in the greatest tax savings and business growth.

Guidelines for S-Corps and C-Corps

If your business is taxed as a corporation, you’re required to pay yourself W-2 wages, and these wages will be subject to tax withholding.

Unfortunately, the IRS doesn’t provide a clear-cut definition of what constitutes “reasonable compensation,” so it will be up to you (and perhaps your accountant or tax professional) to determine a reasonable wage based on what other companies are paying their officers.

Keep in mind that reasonable compensation is based on the value of services provided, not the company’s profitability.

Outsourcing your payroll to a third-party provider can help to take some of the guesswork out of paying yourself (and any other employees) and set you up for an easier tax season.

S-Corps

In addition to paying themselves a reasonable wage, owners of S-Corps can supplement their income with an owner’s draw (referred to as a distribution, in this case).

However, things can get tricky if an S-Corp has multiple shareholder-employees, and if distributions between all shareholders aren’t equal. This is because S-Corps are legally required to have only one class of stock, and the IRS views disproportionate distributions as evidence that a corporation has a second class of stock.

If the IRS believes this is the case with your company, you could be taxed as a C-Corp (at the rate of 21 percent).

C-Corps

As the owner of a C-Corp, your salary needs to meet the IRS guidelines on reasonable compensation mentioned above. If you need to withdraw money from the company (above your salary) it must be paid out as a dividend, as the owner’s draw method is not legally allowed.

Another option available to you is supplementing your income in the form of bonuses. A bonus, like your salary, is a tax-deductible expense and will lower your corporation’s total taxable income.

Just be careful to not pay yourself “unreasonably high” compensation (via your salary or bonuses), as the IRS views excessive compensation as disguised dividends, which are not tax-deductible.

Tax rules for corporations are complex — once you’ve mapped out your personal expenses and have an idea of what you want to pay yourself (and how you want to do so), work with your CPA or tax professional to ensure your corporation is tax-compliant.

Source: Score.org
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Learn more at cvshealth.com/aetna
Growing Your Business with Contracting Assistance Programs

If you are looking for ways to grow your clientele in 2021, consider doing business with the federal government.

The federal government aims to award at least 23 percent of all federal contracting dollars to small businesses each fiscal year. The federal government exceeded this goal in fiscal year 2019, awarding 26.5 percent or $132.9 billion in federal contract dollars to small businesses.

Federal agencies achieve small business contracting goals in a few ways. For starters, to help provide a level playing field for small businesses, the government limits competition for certain contracts solely to small businesses. These contracts are called “small business set-asides.” Some set-asides are open to any small business, while others are open only to small businesses that participate in SBA contracting assistance programs.

Geared toward specific sub-sets of business owners, contracting assistance programs help small businesses win federal contracts through mentorship and exclusive contracting opportunities. Many small business owners have used SBA’s contracting assistance programs as stepping stones on their path to success. For example, SBA’s 2020 Small Business Prime Contractor of the Year Diana Lewis Jackson, president and CEO of Action Facilities Management, Inc., was a former participant in SBA’s 8(a) Business Development Program, which provides technical assistance, business training, counseling and more.

Learn about SBA’s contracting assistance programs and consider whether one could be a good fit for you:

- Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contracting Program: Specifically intended for women-owned small businesses (WOSBs), this program helps participants tap into the 5 percent of contracting dollars that the federal government aims to award to WOSBs each year.
- 8(a) Business Development Program: This program is geared toward small businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged people or entities — a group that the federal government aims to award 5 percent of contracting dollars to annually.

- Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business (SDVOSB) Program: The federal government aims to award 3 percent of contracting dollars to SDVOSBs each year.
- HUBZone Program: This program fuels small business growth in historically underutilized business zones (HUBZones) with a goal of awarding at least 3 percent of federal contract dollars to HUBZone-certified companies each year.
- All Small Mentor-Protégé Program: This program enables small business owners to get valuable business development mentorship from an experienced government contractor. The program benefits both parties because mentors and protégés in the All Small program can form joint ventures together. This allows the mentor to qualify for set-aside contracts that the small business protégé is eligible for.
- Natural Resource Sales Assistance Program: The government sells large amounts of natural resources and surplus property. The SBA works with federal agencies to channel a fair share to small businesses through small-business set-asides. This program covers five categories of federal resources, including timber, royalty oil, and more.

How to get involved in SBA’s contracting assistance programs

If any of these programs sound like a good fit for your business, check SBA size standards to determine if you qualify as a small business for federal contracting purposes. Then, find out if the program you are interested in requires a certification. Each program has its own standards and processes for certification, so make sure to learn about the specific program and contact the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development with any questions.

If you don’t qualify for SBA’s contracting assistance programs but would still like to pursue government contracting, there are still plenty of opportunities to get involved. Review SBA’s federal contracting guide and consider meeting with an SBA resource partner to start working on your contracting plan today.

Source: U.S. Small Business Administration
How to Become a Verified SDVOSB and DVBE Business

Program Details
Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB): This is a term used by the federal government to designate a company that is owned (at least 51 percent) and controlled by a veteran with a Service-Connected Disability rating from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The business also must qualify under the SBA’s Small Business Standards for their particular industry. For more information on SDVOSB certification, see below.

Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE): This term is used by the State of California, public utilities and many private corporations to designate a company that is owned (at least 51 percent) and controlled by a veteran with a Service-Connected Disability rating of at least 10 percent from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Additionally, the veteran must reside in the state of California.

If the definitions of SDVOSB and DVBE above sound very similar, that’s because they are. However, there are some very key differences in the requirements:
- SDVOSB requires a VA Disability Rating of 0 percent, while DVBE requires a VA Disability Rating of 10 percent.
- DVBE requires the veteran to live in the State of California.
- SDVOSB requires the business to meet the Federal Small Business Requirements for their industry (example: commercial building construction revenues are less than $36.5 million averaged over the past 3 years).

SDVOB/DVBE Certification Information
“Certification” is a term that gets used frequently in the small business world, but is often misunderstood. Our goal surrounding certification is two-fold:
- Help you determine if certification is right for your business. While we generally recommend getting certified, ultimately, it may not be necessary for your business needs.
- Help you find your way through the certification process. Certifications range from “self-certification” where you check a few boxes, all the way to full-blown audits of your business filings and financial information.

Is certification right for your business? Depending on the customers you are trying to reach and the products/services you provide, certification may or may not be right for you. A good place to start is to ask yourself these questions:
- Do large corporations or government agencies purchase my goods or services?
- Does my company have the necessary insurance, bonding and administrative capabilities to perform work for the government or large corporations?

If you answered “YES” to these questions, getting certified will likely open up new opportunities for your business.

Finding Your Way Through the Certification Process
If you plan on doing business with the federal government, being certified as an SDVOSB can open many set-aside contract opportunities for your business. The Federal SDVOSB certification comes in two parts:
- Self-Certification via SAM (System for Award Management): If you are a Service-Disabled veteran who owns at least 51 percent of your company and controls day-to-day operations, you can self-certify online by selecting the correct Representations and Certifications in your profile at SAM.gov. It’s that easy.
- CVE Verification via the Department of Veterans Affairs: This certification, also known as “verification,” requires the business owner to submit many business and personal documents including tax returns (3 years), articles of incorporation, bylaws, meeting minutes and various other documents in order to verify that the Service-Disabled veteran actually “owns and controls” the business. If you want to do business with the VA or take advantage of the “Veterans First” legislation, you will need to complete this process. For more information, please visit the VA’s information page.

“Depending on the customers you are trying to reach and the products/service you provide, certification may or may not be right for you.”

Service’s Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) program. This is a valuable certification if you are looking to do business with state agencies or public utilities. For more information visit: https://caleprocure.ca.gov/pages/sdvbe-index.aspx

New York State SDVOB Certification: The Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Act, signed into law by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo allows eligible veteran business owners to get certified as a New York State Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business (SDVOB). The 6 percent goal encourages and supports eligible SDVOBs to play a greater role in the state’s economy by increasing their participation in New York State’s contracting opportunities. This program is open to all SDVOB’s nationwide. For more information visit: https://ogs.ny.gov/veterans/

Source: VIB Network
Be Inclusive

We believe that a diverse supplier base is integral to company profitability and strategic objectives. For more than 50 years, IBM has championed diversity and equal rights for everyone – including its suppliers.

Find out more: ibm.biz/globalsupplierdiversity
YellowBird Achieves Disability-Owned Business Enterprise Certification

YellowBird, a nationwide gig economy marketplace that matches vetted risk and environmental, health and safety (EHS) professionals with businesses on-demand, has been certified as a Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE) through Disability:IN™, a national non-profit helping businesses drive performance by leveraging disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace.

By joining the Disability:IN™ Supplier Diversity program, YellowBird becomes part of the nationwide community of disability-owned businesses meeting the needs of organizations seeking to diversify their supply chain. To qualify for the national certification for disability and service-disabled veteran business owners, Disability:IN™ requires companies to show at least 51 percent ownership, management and control by an individual with a disability as defined by the first prong of the Americans with Disabilities Act. YellowBird’s CEO and Founder Michael Zalle, who was born with a limb disability, matched the criteria, qualifying YellowBird to be certified.

“Building an inclusive economy for all Americans isn’t just morally right, it also drives business growth,” said Zalle. “As an individual born with a disability, I feel honored to join the DOBE community and excited about meeting the needs of companies across the country that value the partnership with a DOBE organization.”

Promoting inclusion is at the core of YellowBird. Zalle founded the company in 2019 after he realized that the $55-billion global risk and safety industry was losing significant knowledge due to the wave of retiring Baby Boomers. He saw an opportunity to leverage technology to connect professionals with companies in need of expertise for short-term projects. By doing so, YellowBird also offers EHS workers the ability to apply their expertise to jobs beyond retirement age and creates an extra income opportunity for young professionals.

Today, YellowBird provides businesses in insurance, construction, manufacturing, oil and gas, risk management and other sectors with access to over 2,000 vetted and insured EHS professionals in all 50 states.

“Disability:IN™ is advancing business opportunities and supply chain inclusion for entrepreneurs with disabilities, and we take pride in helping innovative and dedicated individuals with disabilities grow their business,” said Jill Houghton, Disability:IN’s president and CEO. “We are excited to welcome YellowBird into the Disability:IN family and can’t wait to witness all the growth that YellowBird will unleash now through the DOBE certification.”

By doing business with a DOBE certified organization, employers help bridge the gap between business opportunities and the community of people with disabilities nationwide.

Source: Yellow Bird
Investing in diverse entrepreneurs for over 25 years

For the last quarter century we have opened new opportunities for diverse business owners, creating a positive impact on the communities we serve together. Their success is critical to our success as a business.
What Kind of Businesses Do People with Disabilities Start?

By Kim Cordingly

At almost every event or conference I attend, one of the questions I’m frequently asked is, “What kind of businesses do people with disabilities start?” My response to the question tends to reframe it, because almost any type of business you can imagine a person without a disability might want to start, is just as likely to be a business idea we’ve consulted about. I’m continually amazed at the creativity, vision and resourcefulness these aspiring entrepreneurs reveal in their ideas.

While all information provided to JAN is confidential, and people are understandably protective of their unique business ideas, I’d like to share in general terms some of the business ideas JAN callers have contacted us about over the years. All the names used in the examples are pseudonyms.

WELDER/ARTIST – “Ken” had extensive experience in welding as a technical career, but also wanted to develop his artistic side. His plan was to contract out his welding services while also producing works of art using welding techniques and leftover metal materials.

PET SUPPORT FOR SENIORS – “Nellie” wanted to provide support services to seniors and their pets — specifically handling those tasks a senior may no longer comfortably be able to do such as walking the dog, taking the pet to vet appointments and so on.

BOOK ILLUSTRATOR – “Angela” had extensive experience in the publishing industry, but preferred to do the work as a contractor on a project-to-project basis. In such a specialized field and with a background in specific types of detailed illustrations, this made for an excellent self-employment transition.

EVENT PLANNER/WEDDING SITE – “Alex” owned beautiful rural property conducive to a wedding venue so wanted to build on this asset and develop additional wedding services to compliment the use of the site.

PROFESSIONAL SCIENCE WRITER – “Margaret” had extensive academic training in the sciences and wanted to parlay this into a professional writing career. In particular, she was interested in writing about environmental topics of importance to her.

BOUTIQUE/COTTAGE FOOD PRODUCTION – “Paul” had family recipes he felt were delicious, regionally unique and
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Merck is proud to embrace diversity in all its manifestations | EOE M/F/D/V
marketable. With the growth of farmer’s markets and a focus on buying local, he believed customers would be very interested in his products.

TECH SUPPORT – “Keith” had been providing tech support to friends and friends of friends for years, but was now ready to turn it into a business where he would be compensated. He also wanted to focus on providing computer support to small businesses in his community who may not be able to afford their own IT person.

COUTURE WEDDING GOWNS – “Cathy” had over the years developed great design and sewing skills and was interested in a business making one-of-a-kind, couture wedding gowns for her clientele.

MOBILE AUTO DETAILING – “Donna” planned a business where she would go to people’s homes or businesses and detail their cars. No need to drop their car off — she would go to them.

BLUEBERRY FARMER – “Carl” was a savvy farmer who had over the years developed a blueberry bush that could withstand variable climates and soil conditions. He planned to sell them across the U.S. via mail order catalog and online.

FOOD TRUCK VENDOR – “Mike” saw a need for a food truck vendor at kids’ baseball games, local flea markets, and other community events. He wanted to offer a delicious but healthier alternative to french fries and cotton candy.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CONSULTANT – “Tom” had extensive experience in the alternative energy sector and wanted to consult with small businesses and homeowners on how to make their building more energy efficient and better for the environment.

RV AND CAMPSITE OWNER – “Sandy” and her family wanted to turn their property on a lake into a RV park and campground that would focus on the accessibility of the site for vacationers with disabilities.

ONLINE TUTOR – “Alice” was a former teacher with an excellent math/science background who wanted to tutor secondary school age adolescents in these disciplines. She would also help prepare students for college entrance exams.

RECORDING ENGINEER (CONTRACTOR) – With the proliferation of sophisticated computer and audio technology, “Sam” would use his skills and his own equipment to work with independent musical artists to create sound recordings.

JEWELRY DESIGNER – “Sue” designs nature-inspired jewelry and wanted to expand her business beyond her local market to include online sites such as Etsy. This would also allow her to do more specialized custom design work.

COACHING/CURRICULUM DEVELOPER – “Naomi” wanted to use her extensive oratory experience to work as a private coach for clients who had difficulty with public speaking, constructing effective presentations and general assertiveness training in the workplace. She was also interested in developing an online training curriculum on these topics.

Choosing self-employment or starting a small business in many cases enables an individual with a disability to build workplace accommodations into the design of their business. This ability to customize is one of its key benefits. At JAN, we can address both inquiries about the business development process, as well as specific accommodation questions.

Source: Job Accomodation Network

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Please visit our website at: www.novartis.us
For more information about our supplier diversity efforts, visit: www.supplierdiversity.novartis.com
Disability Inclusion Findings in the “New Normal”

By Jill Houghton, president and CEO, Disability:IN

We just wrapped up our 24th annual global Disability:IN conference, or what we call our family reunion. Not even a global pandemic could keep us away from each other. In fact, the pandemic has brought us closer together, and we gathered with over 4,000 business leaders with disabilities along with allies from nearly 50 countries.

A couple of my personal highlights from this year’s conference:

- Receiving an email from Bristol Myers Squibb that they extended a job offer to a Disability:IN NextGen Leader and the individual accepted.
- 515 NextGen Leaders engaged in Matchmaking with Disability:IN partners that will lead to internship and career opportunities.
- 300+ certified Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBE) participated in matchmaking with corporate partners that could lead to contract opportunities.
- Recognizing 11 Inclusion Award winners
- Publishing the 7th Disability Equality Index (DEI) with 272 Top-Scoring Companies in partnership with the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

One of the hottest topics at the conference this year was returning to the workplace 17 months after the start of COVID-19. We find ourselves entering a new normal unlike anything we have seen before. The job market is tight, talent is migrating and more workers are reassessing their jobs and field of work.

Companies, too, have become more conscious about creating safe and culturally engaged workplaces, marketplaces and supply chains. Our DEI found that the most disability-inclusive companies are actually benefiting from having implemented the changes disabled workers want and are demanding. By increasing benefits and providing accommodations, inclusive companies have stayed competitive and are able to attract new talent.

Some interesting stats from the 319 companies that participated in the 2021 DEI:

- Enterprise-Wide Access: 82 percent of DEI businesses are committed to ensuring individuals with disabilities can access digital content, but only 59 percent of participating companies have a requirement to ensure digital products are accessible and usable to employees with disabilities.
- Employment, Education, Retention & Advancement: 79 percent of businesses have retention and advancement programs focused on or inclusive of employees with disabilities, but only 48 percent have a written retention and advancement statement that includes disability.
- Culture: Although disclosure is tied to job satisfaction and engagement, only 5 percent of employees on average disclose their disability.

The reluctance around implementing disability-inclusive policies is due to the perception that it can be expensive. But turnover is costly too: A recent BBC article noted that “workers are taking decisions to leave based on how their employers treated them — or didn’t treat them — during the pandemic. Ultimately, workers stayed at companies that offered support, and darted from those that didn’t.” There is alignment between what current job seekers want in their next place of work and what people with disabilities have demanded for years — flexible work hours, the ability to work from home and an inclusive environment that prioritizes worker well-being.

If you’re a company leader looking to build out your disability inclusion roadmap, here’s what I suggest:

1. Make sure you have a Disability Employee Resource Group and that it’s championed by a senior executive. Assemble a cross-functional team from across the business to join the ERG.
2. Read our 2021 DEI findings to benchmark your efforts and accelerate measurable, tangible actions towards disability inclusion and equality across leadership and culture; enterprise-wide access; employment practices; community engagement; supplier diversity; and non-U.S. operations.
3. Register now for the 2022 Disability Equality Index (DEI).
4. Participate in our new Global Disability Equality Index Pilot to make headway in countries where you operate.
5. If you’re a CEO, consider joining 65 other CEOs to sign the CEO Letter on Disability Inclusion.

The 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act was July 26. While we have much to celebrate, there is plenty of room for improvement. For example, only 20 percent of Fortune 1000s took the DEI this year!

I encourage all companies to treat disability inclusion as a business priority. We can succeed if we work together to measure progress and drive the business investments needed to scale change.

Source: Disability:IN
“Engaging with fellow neurodivergent colleagues to build community and promote disability awareness through inclusive practices has been a peak experience at Berkeley Lab. I am proud to work at an institution where the range of experiences, backgrounds, abilities, and identities in our community are both embraced and celebrated.

— Misha Gonzalez, Facilities Architect

“Berkeley Lab has 90 years of innovation, and we are continuing to adapt as a forward-thinking institution. We’ve been a testbed for accessible virtual meetings, and are working towards being an even more accessible workplace of the future.

— Phil Novak, Electrical Cabling & Infrastructure Technical Lead

“Our ability to bring science solutions to the world depends entirely on how well we value and harness the diversity of our teams. When we implement universal design principles, we make Berkeley Lab better for all — our employees and beyond.

Aditi Chakravarty, Interim Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer
Disability Supplier Diversity Program
**DISABILITY-OWNED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (DOBE®) CERTIFICATION**

Disability:IN standard DOBE® certification. Application is available to any business that is at least 51% owned, managed and controlled by a person with a disability.

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**SERVICE-DISABLED VETERAN DOBE (SDV-DOBE™) CERTIFICATION**

Certification for a business enterprise that is owned by a veteran with a disability, whose disability is related to their time in service. The SDV-DOBE certification aligns with the Veterans Administration (VA) verification program.

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**VETERAN-DOBE (V-DOBE™) CERTIFICATION**

Certification for a business enterprise that is owned by a veteran with a disability, and the disability is not related to their time of service.

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**Q** **DOES MY DISABILITY QUALIFY?**

**A** 1 in 5 Americans are living with a disability. A disability is a physical and/or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity or major bodily function.

There are over 70 disabilities listed in the Americans with Disabilities Act (First Prong) and therefore recognized by corporations and government agencies. Not all disabilities are visible.

Note that your disability is kept confidential in the certification process.

Disability:IN corporate partners recognize the opportunity of working with people with disabilities. In fact, they are actively seeking to do business with you!

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**CONNECT WITH FORTUNE 500-1000 COMPANIES**

DisabilityIN.org/SupplierDiversity
NBC’s newest project and official streaming platform, Peacock, has released a new original series exclusively focusing on business owners with various disabilities.

The ten-part series, “Born for Business,” is a powerful reality docuseries that spotlights the untold stories of entrepreneurs with disabilities. Each episode tackles the complexities of their individual business while giving viewers an insider’s look at what it takes to launch and run a thriving small business. Just as each entrepreneur is on the brink of success, they must navigate the challenges of being a small business owner amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

This season of the show will focus on four different entrepreneurs, all with different businesses, disabilities and experiences:

- Qiana Allen of Culture’s Closet, a fashionista with lupus who opened a plus-sized boutique which quickly became one of America’s top plus-size clothing stores.
- Collette Divitto of Collettey’s Cookies, a baker with Down syndrome who owns a successful cookie brand that employs people with disabilities.
- Chris Triebes of The Congregation Presents, a single father with spinal muscular atrophy (type III) who is making waves in the music industry with his concert production company, two venues and music festival ticket service.
- Lexi Zanghi of Always Reason, a millennial entrepreneur with anxiety who runs a three-year-old fashion brand that will soon expand to its first physical location.

Audiences are hoping that the show will not only increase representation in media for people experiencing various disabilities, but will additionally create awareness of what employment and self-employment looks like throughout the community.

According to surveys done by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with disabilities are much less likely to be employed than those without. In 2019, 66.3 percent of people with disabilities claimed to be employed, a massive increase from the 19.3 percent of disabled persons who claimed employment the same year. Of those between the ages of 16-64, the typical years in the United States for employment, the data showed a similar trend as about 74 percent of people without disabilities were employed and roughly 30 percent of those with disabilities. The study also showed that people with disabilities were less likely to be employed across age groups and education status than those without disabilities and people with disabilities were more likely to be self-employed.

Peacock released all ten episodes of its first season in late August, available to stream on their network exclusively. The show is co-produced by Shopify Studios and Bunim/Murray Productions, best known for producing the hit reality show, “Keeping Up with the Kardashians.” Of the show, Shopify President Harley Finkelstein also said, “We’re creating a world where entrepreneurship is accessible for everyone. We are elevating these untold stories of entrepreneurship to make dreams a reality.”

Sources: NBCUniversal, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Shopify

“For too long, people with disabilities have been shut out of the workplace. With Born for Business, we are showing how people with disabilities have long been using entrepreneurship to create an economic livelihood for themselves.”

— Jonathan Murray, one of the show’s producers, as quoted to Shopify Inc.
Recognizing Learning Disabilities

Many children have trouble reading, writing or performing other learning-related tasks at some point. This does not mean they have learning disabilities. A child with a learning disability often has several related signs, and they don’t go away or get better over time.

Please note that the generally common signs included here are for informational purposes only; the information is not intended to screen for learning disabilities in general or for a specific type of learning disability.

Common signs that a person may have learning disabilities include the following:

- Problems reading and/or writing
- Problems with math
- Poor memory
- Problems paying attention
- Trouble following directions
- Clumsiness
- Trouble telling time
- Problems staying organized

A child with a learning disability also may have one or more of the following:

- Acting without really thinking about possible outcomes (impulsiveness)
- “Acting out” in school or social situations
- Difficulty staying focused; being easily distracted
- Difficulty saying a word correctly out loud or expressing thoughts
- Difficulty learning new words (vocabulary), either while reading or hearing
- Trouble learning foreign languages
- Difficulty learning songs and rhymes
- Slow rate of reading, both silently and out loud
- Giving up on longer reading tasks

Assessment should be sensitive to differences that may be due to dialect.

Below are some common learning disabilities and the signs associated with them:

**Dyslexia**

People with dyslexia usually have trouble making the connection between letters and sounds and with spelling and recognizing words.

People with dyslexia often show other signs of the condition. These may include:

- Having a hard time understanding what others are saying
- Difficulty organizing written and spoken language
- Delay in being able to speak
- Difficulty expressing thoughts or feelings
- Difficulty learning new words (vocabulary), either while reading or hearing
- Trouble learning foreign languages
- Difficulty learning songs and rhymes
- Slow rate of reading, both silently and out loud
- Giving up on longer reading tasks

**Dysgraphia**

A child who has trouble writing or has very poor handwriting and does not outgrow it may have dysgraphia. This disorder may cause a child to be tense and twist awkwardly when holding a pen or pencil.

Other signs of this condition may include:

- A strong dislike of writing and/or drawing
- Problems with grammar
- Trouble writing down ideas
- Losing energy or interest as soon as they start writing
- Trouble writing down thoughts in a logical sequence
- Saying words out loud while writing
- Leaving words unfinished or omitting them when writing sentences

**Dyscalculia**

Signs of this disability include problems understanding basic arithmetic concepts, such as fractions, number lines and positive and negative numbers.

Other symptoms may include:

- Difficulty with math-related word problems
- Trouble making change in cash transactions
- Messiness in putting math problems on paper
- Trouble with logical sequences (for example, steps in math problems)
- Trouble understanding the time sequence of events
- Trouble describing math processes

To find out more about learning disabilities and what you can do to combat these issues, visit nih.gov/health/topics/learning-disabilities.

Source: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
In the News

CODA Raises the Bar for Disability Inclusion

In the new Apple Original Film, CODA, actress Emilia Jones portrays Ruby, the only hearing member of her all-deaf family. The film focuses on the experience of CODAS (Children of Deaf Adults) and those who are hearing impaired through Ruby’s point of view. Though Jones herself is not a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults), every member of Ruby’s family is portrayed by an actor who is actually deaf – Marlee Maitlin, Troy Kotsur and Daniel Durant. Director and writer Sian Heder expressed that having deaf actors portray the deaf characters was crucially important to her film, as well as portraying accurate depictions that many hard of hearing people experience.

VA to Begin Processing Disability Claims Due to Particulate Matter

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it will officially begin processing disability claims surrounding asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis for veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations beginning Aug. 2, 1990 to the present, or Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria or Djibouti beginning Sept. 19, 2001 to the present. This decision came after researching the numerous cases of the three symptoms of veterans who experienced these conditions after serving in these particular regions. The VA’s review concluded that there was sufficient evidence to presume that these veterans have been exposed to particulate matter, making them eligible for compensation on medical bills surrounding their condition.

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Source: Va.gov

Luca Praised for Disability Representation

In Pixar’s newest animated film, Luca, the franchise features a character with a disability that is being praised for its proper representation and normalization. While many films in the past have utilized disabilities to more forward a storyline or to define a personality trait, Massimo Marcovaldo, the father one of the three main characters, has a disability that is only briefly talked about and is normalized throughout the film. Marcovaldo, who has only one arm from birth, explains the story of his arm briefly to the story’s main characters, but then is characterized by his interests, emotions and aspirations rather than falling into the classic trope.
The Vale: Shadow of the Crown Designed for Blind, Low-Vision Players

Falling Squirrel, an Indie video game developer committed to improving the inclusivity of video games, has created The Vale: Shadow of the Crown. The game is specifically designed for players who are visually impaired and will focus on an all-audio experience. Though this is not the first attempt for a video game to include this kind of accessibility, this is the first time that a game is receiving mainstream attention and has the most promise of actually being accessible. The game is finally available in stores after positive reviews and over two years of curation.

Source: Screenrant and Flying Squirrel

Val Kilmer Gets His Voice Back Thanks to New AI Technology

In 2017, renowned actor Val Kilmer went into tracheotomy surgery for throat cancer and as a result, lost his voice. Now, using an AI prototype from Sonantic, Kilmer is able to speak again using archived recordings of his own voice. “I’m grateful to the entire team at Sonantic who masterfully restored my voice in a way I’ve never imagined possible,” Kilmer said in a statement to People Magazine. “As human beings, the ability to communicate is the core of our existence and the side effects from throat cancer have made it difficult for others to understand me. The chance to narrate my story, in a voice that feels authentic and familiar, is an incredibly special gift.”

Source: People

Las Vegas Special Education Teacher Named 2021 Teacher of the Year

Juliana Urtubey, an educator for 11 years currently teaching at Kermit R. Booker, Sr. Innovative Elementary School in Las Vegas, has been named the 2021 Teacher of the Year for her work in pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade special education settings as an instructional strategist developing supports to meet students’ differing academic, social-emotional and behavioral needs. “The privilege and honor to represent our nation’s brilliant students, diverse families and resilient educators brings me unending joy,” Urtubey said of the recognition. As National Teacher of the Year (NTOY), Urtubey will spend a year representing educators and serving as an ambassador for students and teachers across the nation. She advocates for a “joyful and just education” for all students, one that is inclusive and celebratory of all students’ identities, families and communities.

Source: Council of Chief State School Officers
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Why Pursuing a Certificate in College (Instead of a Four-Year Degree) May Be Better for You

By Brooke Mickler

Your heart pounds as an e-mail from your dream school suddenly appears in your inbox. You open it and discover you’ve been accepted. You scream with excitement, ready to pursue a degree in the field of your choice. Nothing stands in your way — not even your disability.

This is where I scream “don’t fall for it” like an audience member watching a horror movie. If you’re a disabled student whose freshman year of college begins in the fall, you should pursue a certificate instead of a degree. If you already know that your disability is going to affect your college attendance (meaning, you won’t be able to be a full-time student), pursuing a certificate instead of a four-year degree will save you a lot of time and money. I know this from harsh experience.

Less Financial Aid, More Problems

The greatest financial aid myth when it comes to planning for college is that all you need are good grades and the money will come rolling in. I didn’t receive any financial aid despite the fact I earned straight As in high school. The income my dad earned as a firefighter disqualified me from financial aid. After I submitted my Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), I received a confirmation e-mail from Federal Student Aid on February 22, 2013. The e-mail revealed schools utilize an Estimated Expected Family Contribution (EFC) index to determine a student’s financial aid amount.

According to salliemae.com, “The EFC factors in a family’s taxed and untaxed income, assets, and benefits such as unemployment or social security.” A family’s size and the number of current college students in it also indicates their financial aid amount.

So, this proud only child of an Indianapolis firefighter was left empty-handed.

At this point, I thought I could at least gain scholarships from firefighters’ associations. However, I couldn’t even apply to them. According to the Firefighters Credit Union College Scholarship Application, an applicant needs to be enrolled full-time in an accredited college or university. The Police and Firemen’s Insurance Association’s website, pfia1913.org, discloses the same criteria.

I’m wheelchair bound with mild Cerebral Palsy, which Merriam-Webster defines as, “a disability resulting from damage to the brain before, during or shortly after birth and outwardly manifested by muscular incoordination and speech disturbances.”

If you already know that your disability is going to affect your college attendance (meaning, you won’t be able to be a full-time student), pursuing a certificate instead of a four-year degree will save you a lot of time and money.
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When One Door Closes, Another One Opens

Despite the financial and physical obstacles I encountered, I still attended classes at IUPUI. I took one on-campus class and one online class per semester. After trying that schedule for a year, I dropped out because the amount of money and time it would take to receive a Bachelor’s degree at that pace was astronomical. With college no longer an option, I tried to launch two different businesses between 2015 and 2018. Neither launch took off. When creating products failed, I started creating stories. I researched creative writing courses and eventually found Taylor University’s online Professional Writing Certificate. After taking guest courses in 2019, I was accepted into the certificate program in 2020. I’m three classes away from finally graduating in 2022.

Saving Time and Money

In addition to the fast completion time, enrolling in the Professional Writing Certificate program also saved me money. The Professional Writing Certificate costs $8,800. On the other hand, Taylor University’s online Associate of Arts in Professional Writing ranges from $25,600-$26,800, according to taylor.edu.

The Associate of Arts costs more because it requires forty-seven General Education credits. On the contrary, the Professional Writing Certificate doesn’t contain a General Education requirement. The only courses needed focus on various types of writing.

The More Certificates, The Merrier

Another reason you should pursue a certificate is more universities will start offering them, thanks to the Coronavirus pandemic. According to insidehighered.com, Moody’s, the credit ratings firm, announced this prediction on August 26, 2020.

On August 30, 2020, Louisiana Tech University confirmed this when they announced five new undergraduate certificates. The certificates are in Audiology, Criminal Psychology, Geographic Information Science, Information Assurance and Cybersecurity Management and Learn Six Sigma. LouisianaTech.edu said the Learn Six Sigma certificate gives students the expertise to answer complicated problems at their workplaces.

Bachelor’s No More

The final reason to pursue a certificate is less employers are requiring Bachelor’s degrees for entry-level jobs. Harvard Business Review reports that since the COVID-19 outbreak started, those listings decreased by 45 percent.

Bottom Line: If your disability affects your future college attendance, see if there’s any degree alternatives like certificates in your chosen field or any other areas that interest you. It will help you achieve your career goals in a much faster and less expensive way.
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Whether you’re heading back to a physical campus or attending all virtual classes, there are an abundance of resources available for individuals experiencing any kind of disability or need additional assistance to make the most of their education. Here are some resources that you might not know about:

Your Legal Rights
Public colleges and universities in the U.S. are required by law to make reasonable accommodations to promote an accessible environment for students with disabilities, as protected by the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986. Specifically, these laws state:
- **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)** — Title II of the ADA covers state funded schools such as universities, community colleges and vocational schools. Title III of the ADA covers private colleges and vocational schools.
- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)** — Schools receiving federal dollars regardless of whether it is private or public is also covered by the regulations of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requiring schools to make their programs accessible to qualified students with disabilities.
- **Air Carrier Access Act of 1986** — The Air Carrier Access Act prohibits discrimination in air transportation by domestic and foreign carriers. Contact the Department of Transportation, Aviation Consumer Protection Division for questions about air travel.

What to Look For
Before you even consider what school to attend, you want to make sure that they are already offering the proper tools that you will need to succeed. Checking for the availability of online classes, website accessibility, the school’s dedication to diversity and access to support groups can all be indicators of if the school you want to attend will be right for your education and experience.

The Disability Services Office
The Disability Services Office, Disability Student Services, the Disability Resource Center and a variation of other names are used to name the building that just about every campus has to accommodate students with particular needs in the college environment. If you haven’t already, make sure to register yourself with the office to gain access to accommodations ranging from testing and exam assistance, assistive technology and interpreters to housing and classroom reconfiguration and adjustments. Some Disability Services centers even offer counseling, therapy, training for faculty and staff and email lists that will inform students of temporary inaccessibility to certain buildings and amenities.

Loans, Grants and Scholarships
If you have an intellectual disability, you may receive funding from the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant and Federal Work-Study programs. To be eligible for these grants, students must be enrolled or accepted into a CTP program, maintain academic success and meet basic student aid eligibility requirements. Specific schools may also have specific scholarship opportunities available to students with disabilities and can often be found on the school’s scholarship resource website.

Extra-Curricular Activities
In addition to the Disability Services Office, many schools offer extra-curricular organizations specifically designed for those with disabilities. Advocacy groups, Wheelchair sports teams, intersectional groups and disability specific groups are just a few examples of likely clubs that may be available on your campus. Schools known for being especially accommodating to disabilities even offer help for students searching for jobs after graduation.

Outside Organizations
No matter how inclusive your school is to students experiencing disabilities, there are always outside organizations designed to help. Some of these organizations include:
- **Diversity Abroad**: The mission of Diversity Abroad is to ensure that students from diverse economic, educational,
ethnic and social backgrounds are aware, have equal access and take advantage of the benefits and opportunities afforded through global education exchanges.

- **Disability.gov**: A government run resource hub for individuals with disabilities and how they can best find what they need.

- **Autistic Self Advocacy Network**: A group run by and for people on the autistic spectrum dedicated to equal access and opportunities to educational and professional spaces.

- **Mobility International USA (MIUSA)**: Mobility International USA empowers people with disabilities to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development.

- **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**: The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) is the leading professional membership association for individuals committed to equity for persons with disabilities in higher education.

- **The Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH)**: SATH is an educational nonprofit that works to raise awareness of the needs of all travelers with disabilities, remove physical and attitudinal barriers to free access and expand travel opportunities in the U.S. and abroad.

- **United States Government Support for Persons with Disabilities**: The United States is committed to advancing empowerment, dignity and equal rights for persons with disabilities. We believe that all people, in every country, deserve full and equal access to all spheres of society. These include specifics from the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs and the U.S. Department of Education.

- **ADA National Network**: The ADA National Network provides information, guidance and training on how to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in order to support the mission of the ADA to “assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.”

Learning and experiencing is different for every individual. No matter what the specifics of your circumstance, there are resources you can take advantage of that will help you to thrive in the educational, professional and social spheres.

Sources: Education USA, College Choice, Federal Student Aid and USA.gov

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Find jobs at higher ed institutions committed to diversity and inclusion.

Access our job board and career resources at [HERCjobs.org](http://HERCjobs.org)
Amy Purdy
Living Beyond Limits
By Brady Rhoades
“So many of our limits are mental because we often believe we can’t do. I have always been about getting creative and finding a way to continue doing the stuff you love one way or another.”
If you were to read Amy Purdy’s medical history, you’d be introduced to a journey that, for many, could feel incredibly daunting.

If you were to check out her accomplishments as a snowboarding champion, a renowned motivational speaker, a dancer, an actress, a model, a podcaster, a *New York Times* bestselling author and a philanthropist, you’d be introduced to her toughness and will.

And if you watched her shredding the slopes on her way to medaling in the Paralympics or ball-rooming her way into America’s hearts on “Dancing with the Stars,” you’d start to see the big picture.

Purdy’s mantra? “Live beyond limits.”

“Live beyond limits became my mantra very organically. I personally never liked being told what I could or couldn’t do,” said Purdy, 41. “I always wanted to figure out what the possibilities were. Snowboarding, for example, felt impossible at first, and I could have just walked away but I got creative, made my own feet and figured out a way to not just do it again but to excel at it. I’m so grateful that I never gave up.”

Amy Purdy signs copies of *On My Own Two Feet* at Bookends Bookstore in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

“Dancing With The Stars” Season 18 finalists Amy Purdy and Derek Hough perform at ABC’s “Good Morning America” at Times Square in New York City.
Amy Purdy and Oprah Winfrey pose on stage at Oprah’s The Life You Want Weekend in Seattle, Washington.

Daniel Gale (L) and his wife, paralympic athlete Amy Purdy, attend the 2016 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Awards at Wynn Las Vegas in Las Vegas, Nevada.

(L-R) Chris Evert, Brian Boitano, Amy Purdy, Nick Buoniconti, Jr., Marc Buoniconti, Delfina Blaquier, Ignacio “Nacho” Figueras attend the 33rd Annual Great Sports Legends Dinner, which raised millions of dollars for the Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis at The New York Hilton Midtown in New York City.
The Fight of Her Life

Born in Las Vegas in 1979, Purdy was just 19 years old when she contracted bacterial meningitis. She was given a two percent chance to survive. She lost both of her legs below the knees, lost both of her kidneys and her spleen (she later received a kidney transplant from her father).

Purdy met the challenge head-on, weathering unthinkable surgeries and rehab, teaming with medical experts, designing her own prosthetic feet and legs (through trial and error, sometimes with chunks of wood) and never losing sight of her goals.

“There’s always going to be something preventing you from your goal, whether it’s a loss of legs or anything else, but you’ll never be happy if you surrender to circumstances,” she said.

Purdy’s immediate goal after her initial diagnosis was to snowboard again. After getting prosthetic legs, she achieved that. It turned out to be the start of big things.

Purdy eventually won a bronze medal in snowboarding at the 2014 Paralympics and a silver in 2018. She formed a non-profit organization — Adaptive Action Sports — along with her husband, Daniel Gale, who is also a competitive snowboarder, to get snowboarding included in the Paralympics. Adaptive Action Sports, a chapter of Disabled Sports USA, targets those with physical disabilities who want to get involved in action sports (snowboarding, skateboarding, surfing). Their organization, founded in 2005, also trains athletes with physical disabilities to qualify for the U.S. Snowboard Team. Purdy believes part of her mission is helping others with health challenges.

“It was an evolution from losing my legs, relearning to snowboard, helping others learn to snowboard and finally getting it into the Games.”

Purdy began snowboarding seven months after she received her prosthetic legs. About a year after her legs were amputated, she finished third in a snowboarding competition at Mammoth Mountain.

On Her Own Two Feet

In 2003, Purdy was recruited by the Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) as a spokesperson. At the time, she didn’t live far from the CAF headquarters, as she and Daniel had moved back to San Diego to pursue surfing. In San Diego, she continued her pre-amputee profession as a massage therapist. She also started working for Freedom Innovations, a prosthetic feet manufacturer, as its Amputee Advocate.

On top of all that, Purdy has numerous television and film credits. In 2012, Purdy and her now husband Daniel Gale participated on the 21st season of The Amazing Race. After nearly winning the first leg of the race, they were the second team eliminated and finished in 10th place out of 11 teams.

In 2014, Purdy was a contestant on “Dancing with the Stars.” Paired with five-time champion Derek Hough, Purdy was the first double amputee contestant to ever appear on the show. Hough was, at the time, fresh from winning his fifth Mirrorball trophy and did not plan on coming back to the show. However, he changed his mind when Purdy joined the show as a contestant. Purdy wowed judges from the get-go, and kept improving.

She never received a score lower than 8. She received her first perfect score (40 out of 40) for her eighth dance, the Argentine tango, after having an intense back injury the week prior. She eventually made it the finale, where she finished as a runner-up to Olympic gold medalist Meryl Davis. In 2015, Purdy was featured in a Super Bowl advertisement for the Toyota Camry. The ad showed Purdy snowboarding, dancing and adjusting her prosthetic legs to a voiceover of Muhammad Ali’s “How Great I Am” speech.

Purdy has penned a memoir titled, On My Own Two Feet: From Losing My Legs to Learning the Dance of Life (HarperCollins), created a podcast (“Bouncing Forward”) and carved out a lucrative and inspirational career as a motivational speaker.

Among her accolades, along with two Paralympic medals, are being named one of ESPNW's Impact 25 and one of Oprah’s SuperSoul 100 visionaries and influential leaders.

Purdy says that healing is never a linear
Gold medallist Brenna Huckaby of USA (center) celebrates with Silver Medallist Amy Purdy of USA (L) and Bronze Medallist Cecile Hernandez of France (R) during the medal ceremony for the Women's Snowboard Cross SB-LL1 during day three of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea.

Moving Forward

After experiencing medical setbacks — including an injury to her popliteal artery — in 2019, Purdy has undergone 10 more surgeries, including amputation revisions on her left leg.

“Phase one of my journey was all the surgeries and trying to find stability with the injury and phase two is getting legs that I can live comfortably in,” she said of her latest plight. “Once they are comfortable, then I’ll be able to snowboard again.”

Meantime, she continues to move forward on myriad other projects. She continues, in other words, to live beyond limits.

“I’m currently excited to be planning the second season of my podcast “Bouncing Forward,” and I’m always looking for new ways to help others live their possibilities,” she said. “I have a handful of projects I’m working on in TV that I can’t talk about yet and some that are online. With COVID, I went from doing many live speeches to doing virtual speeches, which has been fantastic, although I want to go to even a deeper and more immersive experience with my community. I’ve been so grateful to connect with so many amazing people in real life and on social media that I’m really inspired to create ways to connect even deeper. That’s what life is about: living, learning and growing, and helping others do the same.”
SPIRIT Club: A Gym Where Everyone Belongs

For everyone out there, eating properly and exercising regularly is essential to maintaining a healthy and happy life. Unfortunately, many people with disabilities have limited access to appropriate fitness and wellness activities. SPIRIT Club’s goal is to make exercise available to everyone, regardless of their circumstances.

SPIRIT Club provides services to people with and without disabilities, and its vision is to create an integrated environment where EVERYONE can exercise together, side by side. SPIRIT Club spreads its fitness philosophy through in-person and virtual group classes and personal training.

SPIRIT Club offers a style of fitness that is created based on the concept of universal design, maintaining that exercise and wellness should be available to ALL.

Origins of the Program

After graduating from the University of Maryland, Jared Ciner began working two jobs: One as a fitness trainer at a local gym, and the other as a support counselor for adults with disabilities. At the cross section of his two jobs were people with disabilities with health and fitness goals. Unfortunately, none of the classes offered by the gym where Ciner worked were equipped to provide the supports or modifications necessary to accommodate all members of the community. Ciner soon learned that this was the norm across the industry.

To combat this, he began teaching his own fitness classes and personal training sessions that included exercises based on the concept of universal design so that people with and without disabilities could participate successfully together. It became clear to Ciner that providing this type of supportive fitness was a necessity, leading to the creation of SPIRIT Club.

The Early Years

For the first eight years of its existence, SPIRIT Club had two primary services: In-person group classes and personal training. SPIRIT Club’s group classes allow people of all backgrounds to be together in a social setting and to take part in supportive fitness classes. SPIRIT Club’s personal training sessions customize a routine to best target a member’s goals and most positively impact their day-to-day life.

As the company grew, Ciner recognized the need to hire additional trainers to support the increasing number of SPIRIT Club members. In order to build a skilled staff, he hired certified personal trainers and sponsored them to receive training from the Developmental Disabilities Administration. He also believed that the people taking SPIRIT Club classes should be reflected in those who teach them. Because of that philosophy, Ciner hired and empowered numerous people with disabilities to lead classes.

In addition to working with individuals, SPIRIT Club taught private classes for organizations. By early 2020, SPIRIT Club was working with about 350 individual members and 25 organizations on a weekly basis.

2020 to the Present

In March 2020, SPIRIT Club faced the biggest challenge of its existence when the Coronavirus hit. It was forced to shut down its gym and stop doing all in-person services with little notice. SPIRIT Club quickly pivoted to virtual services in order to continue to safely meet its members’ needs. Because of the virtual nature of Club’s programming, it was no longer geographically limited. Within a year of converting to a virtual company, SPIRIT Club’s classes were being watched by over 4,500 individuals in 38 different states per month.

Virtual Classes

SPIRIT Club offers 12 virtual classes per week in the forms of fitness (both English and Spanish), yoga, Zumba, boxing, meditation, healthy cooking and more.

The Club’s virtual classes have been designed with the following attributes:

- Flexibility: After airing live, SPIRIT Club classes are available on-demand so
they can be watched at any time. They are designed to be completed without any equipment so they can be taken from anywhere.

- **Accessibility:** Classes are taught with multiple trainers on screen simultaneously, each leading a different modified form of the same exercise (standing, seated and advanced). This ensures that at any point, there is a trainer on screen teaching a version of the exercise that is appropriate for any member. The exercises themselves are explained in simplified 1- or 2-step movements to make them easier to follow. Along with physically demonstrating exercises, trainers focus on increasing their verbal description so that people who are blind or of low vision can participate. The classes have the option for closed captions so that people who are deaf can participate as well.

- **Affordability:** For its virtual services, SPIRIT Club simply asks its members or partnering organizations to pick a price that fits within their budget using its Pay What You Can Plan.

**Next Phase for SPIRIT Club**

Today, a year and a half since SPIRIT Club initially closed its gym due to the coronavirus, the Club is excited to continue offering its virtual classes while also offering in-person services in a safe manner. SPIRIT Club’s vision is to ultimately have a hybrid presence throughout the world where any person can have access to supportive virtual and in-person services. This will allow members to be able to choose how they want to incorporate fitness and healthy lifestyle programs into their lives.
Improving the Software Experience for People with Invisible Disabilities

By Sheri Byrne-Haber

Did you know that 70 percent of disabilities are mostly invisible? This can include issues such as traumatic brain injury, intellectual and developmental delays, epilepsy, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, autism, migraines, some forms of hearing loss and early stages of multiple sclerosis and Parkinson’s disease, just to name a few.

People familiar with designing software to be accessible know that the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1 Level AA is the go-to standard for making software work for people with disabilities. However, the majority of the WCAG focuses on vision loss. There are many invisible disabilities that are not addressed in the current version of WCAG, though a couple of items will be added in the next two updates WCAG 2.2 (due by the end of 2021) and WCAG 3.0 (probably end of 2023 or early 2024).

However, you don’t need to wait for these standards to be updated. Here are a few things that you can do today to improve the situation for users with invisible disabilities:

Don’t use flashing or optical illusions, ever

Animation and multimedia flashing can trigger epileptic seizures. Pseudoflashing (black and white optical illusions) that don’t actually move but appear to be moving can do the same. Someone who seizes might fall, which can cause a skull fracture. This is literally the only WCAG guideline where failing to follow it can result in someone’s death.

Don’t use parallax or excessive movement unless you provide the ability to easily turn it off

Anything that feels like “movement” can trigger nausea for someone with motion sickness. The best way to lose a customer is to use a web element that makes them feel like they are going to be sick.

Don’t offer dark mode as the only alternative

Some people love dark mode, but others with dyslexia or glaucoma can’t use dark mode at all. In addition, dark mode is much harder to make comply with the color contrast guidelines. It’s fine to have dark mode as your default, as long as users can quickly and easily change to light mode and your profiles remember that change. The ADA did not make stairs illegal after all. It just requires that you have an elevator and ramp to connect people with mobility issues to all the places that stairs go. Think of dark mode as the stairs, and light mode as the ramp and elevator.

Don’t use countdown clocks

Countdown clocks distract people with ADHD and can also trigger anxiety

Don’t use dark patterns

Dark pattern is a term coined by Harry Brignull and is “tricks used in websites and apps that make you buy or sign up for things that you didn’t mean to.” An ethical design would never contain a dark pattern. Dark patterns disproportionately impact users with vision loss (because things are made intentionally difficult to find) and intellectual and developmental delays (because language is made deliberately complex).

Avoid overly ornate fonts, italics and right justification

Overly ornate fonts can be difficult for everyone to read, but especially impact people with reading-related disabilities. A sans-serif font like Arial or Helvetica is always a better approach. Furthermore, italics and right justification create additional obstacles for people with dyslexia.

Use breadcrumbs navigation to help people to figure out where they are

An example of breadcrumb navigation would be something like: Home -> Pictures -> Summer 2019 -> Canada, where “Canada” is your current location and “Home,” “Pictures,” and “Summer 2019,” are links that will take you directly to those locations. If you don’t find the pictures you want in the Canada folder, maybe they were from your trip to Ireland. If the trip to Ireland was also in the Summer 2019, you would click on Summer 2019 link, and then click on to Ireland. If the trip to Ireland was in the Fall 2018, you would click on the Pictures link, then go to Fall 2018, and then click on Ireland.

Use “plain language” whenever possible

You do not want to use language in your website copy that is more complicated than your average reader. Replace “savor” with “taste,” “purchase” with “buy,” and avoid passive tense, double negatives and unexplained acronyms.
I chose to work at ORNL because it's where science that matters is done. It is also the most diverse lab I have ever worked in. For our science to matter, we need a diversity of perspectives.

Christa Breisford, Research Scientist National Security Sciences Directorate

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TECH BYTES

Thereabouts™
Brand: A Fully Inclusive Clothing Line
JCPenney’s newest fashion line, Thereabouts, is a new inclusive line of kids apparel that celebrates the diversity of all shapes, sizes, styles and abilities. Every item in the collection is available with adaptive features, whether it be for sensory sensitivities, the ability to put on the clothes or adapting the clothes to fit around a wheelchair or other device. Though this specific brand is designed with children in mind, JCPenney has teamed up with other adaptive clothing lines to create similar adaptive clothing items for adults as well.

Photo and Description Source: Business Wire and JCPenney’s

Mask Adaptor to Avoid Snags
Many face-mask wearers experience frustration when they take off their face masks and the mask strings becoming entangled with ear worn devices, such as behind the ear hearing aids. EZ-OFF™ LLC has developed a simple, easy-to-use device that solves this nagging problem. EZ-Off™ is a small plastic insertion that can be worn behind the ears that will hook onto your mask and prevent snagging on hearing devices. As many continue wearing masks, this device is a great solution that makes the process easier.

Photo and Description Source: EZ-Off LLC
Adaptive Wheelchair Backpacks

As part of Target’s various back to school releases, one of the most notable are the Embark and the Cat and Jack wheelchair-accessible backpacks. Though these are not the first backpacks of their kind, they are the first wheelchair-accessible backpacks that are easily available to purchase at a large chain department store at affordable prices. These backpacks are modified with different mounting options, tuck-away straps, easy-to-use zippers, accessible compartments, access ports and much more to make the carrying and accessibility of backpacks a less stressful process for wheelchair users. The Embark backpack comes in blue, purple and black, and the Cat and Jack backpacks take on a more kid-centered approach, designed with cartoons of sharks, dinosaurs, unicorns and more.

New Abilitech Assist™

New Abilitech Assist™ restores independence for those with neuromuscular weakness from Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, Spinal Cord Injury and stroke injury. Everyday tasks, such as brushing teeth, eating and opening doors, may now be possible because the Assist 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 up to 12 ounces. Telehealth assessments are available to qualify for the device by visiting the Abilitech website at abilitechmedical.com.

Rescu Medical Services

Rescu, an emergency alert app that connects people directly to certified emergency dispatchers, is the first and only Personal Emergency Response System (PERS) in a non-hardware platform. Already teaming up with over 30,000 local emergency agencies, Rescu allows users to silently send for help in Rescu’s mobile app interface if an intruder enters their home, or a user can request an ambulance in the event of a medical emergency, without needing to speak or hear. Rescu leverages the first emergency dispatch API and is the only affordable emergency alert app that has its own private dispatch center.
When Christopher LaMarche picked up a copy of Disabled American Veterans Magazine while he was in school in Colorado back in 1982, he never could have imagined how much his life would change for the better. The Navy veteran had severe binaural progressive hearing loss that eventually led to total loss of hearing.

LaMarche was later set up with cochlear implants, an electronic device that partially restores hearing, but it was in the magazine where he learned about the life-changing Hearing Dog Program (now known as NEADS World Class Service Dogs).

“I am originally from Springfield, Mass. and NEADS is based in Princeton, Mass., so I got in touch with them,” LaMarche said. “They had a dog named Fitzgerald that was my first Service Dog and he was with me for 11 years. They told me to forget everything I know about dogs and trained me how to handle the dog and how to treat the dog. The only problem I had with Fitzie was that he was a chick magnet [laughs].”

NEADS World Class Service Dogs has trained over 1,900 Service Dog teams since its founding in 1976 and offers the widest array of Service Dog programs in the industry, from Service Dogs for adults and children with a physical disability to Service Dogs for children with autism or other developmental disabilities. They breed, raise, train and place each dog after a rigorous training program for both person and dog.

When a Service Dog is fully trained, it will learn 50 to 60 different commands. “We have always served veterans throughout our history,” said Katy Harrison Ostroff, manager of client services for NEADS World Class Service Dogs. “We do an in-depth interview to understand a person’s physical needs and hearing needs so we are sure to match the right vet with the right dog. For example, some dogs are happy in a quiet life while others love a busy life. There is steady documentation for training so we understand the dog as well as we do the veteran. We start working with a dog when it is born and train them until they are 18 to 24 months old when they are matched.

It’s quite an involved process.”

Today, LaMarche’s fifth Service Dog named Masie, a black Labrador, is the new “boss” in his life. She is able to alert him to a knock at the door, an alarm clock sounding, a cell phone ringing, keys being dropped, the sound of his name being called or a smoke detector sounding.

“She tells me about sounds because I am totally deaf without the implants and can’t sleep with them,” he said. “She is trained to alert me to sounds and goes to the sound. I live alone and being deaf is very frightening without a Service Dog. When you lose your hearing, you don’t realize what you could be missing. If someone hits the doorbell, she tells me someone is coming. If ever there was a fire, she would let me know. She gives me the independence I need so I don’t have to worry that I am going to be in a dangerous situation. Life is much tougher without a dog and it would be more dangerous. She replaces my ears as her usual signal is to bump me. She’s very bossy, like a drill instructor in the Navy.”

NEADS receives limited federal government funding and relies on the support of individuals, foundations, corporations, service organizations, bequests and workplace campaigns. If you are interested in donating, volunteering or would like more information on Service Dogs, please visit neads.org.
Going for the Gold!
Trevon Jenifer,
Paralympic Athlete and Secret Service Employee

The United States Secret Service is an organization known for its concurrent missions of protecting the nation’s leaders as well as its financial infrastructure. Casual observers attribute the success of the assignment to the men and women wearing earpieces and sunglasses standing ready to defend our nation. While these individuals are certainly critical, it is the agency’s hiring of the “elite and the worthy” in every position that enables the Secret Service to be truly effective.

One such employee is Personnel Security Specialist Trevon Jenifer. In addition to being part of the Secret Service’s Security Management Division (SMD), Jenifer is also a three-time member of the U.S. Men’s Paralympic Wheelchair Basketball Team who recently competed in the Tokyo Olympics and won gold.

Jenifer was born with a disease called congenital phocomelia which caused him to be born without legs. After watching his siblings be involved in various sports, Jenifer began playing wheelchair basketball at the age of 4 in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

He qualified for his first national team right after graduating college and in 2012, made his Paralympic debut in London, England, where the team won a bronze medal.

In 2016, Jenifer and the U.S. Men’s Paralympic Wheelchair Basketball Team exchanged their bronze medal for gold in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The joy and privilege of competing on the world’s stage continues to humble Jenifer. “This is an honor,” he said. “Some people don’t get this opportunity and they train their entire lives for it. I’ve just been blessed that this will be my third games.”

In addition to representing the United States as an athlete, Jenifer has the unique experience of serving his country by working for the Secret Service. He first learned about the opportunity to join the Secret Service while attending an event for individuals with disabilities and is approaching his one-year anniversary in September.

“This has always been my dream agency to work with. You are representing so much more than yourself when you are out there playing,” said Jenifer. “You are representing your family, the organization and the agencies we are working with. It’s an awesome feeling to know that you have that behind you. Working in SMD is an awesome experience. The people I work with are phenomenal and they make the job easy.”

His coworkers are equally as prideful and dedicated to him.

“Since joining the Secret Service, Trevon has brought into our workforce the same work ethic and teamwork mindset that has made him an extremely successful USA Paralympic athlete,” said SMD Chief Michael Mullen. “He is an extraordinary person and incredible employee, and we are very proud to have Trevon as a member of this agency and, more specifically, the Security Management Division.”

For information about how you can join the United States Secret Service visit careers.secretservice.gov.
The Transformative Power of Adaptive Sports Programs

For many years, people with disabilities have been using sports as a therapeutic tool. It helps them overcome serious injury or illness and is a means of recovery. They fight their personal battles on the track, in the pool and on the court. Their drive to overcome, recover and push through obstacles sends a powerful message: Serious injury or illness does not interrupt the pursuit of a meaningful and productive life.

Recognizing this, the Department of Defense and the United States Olympic Committee created the Warrior Games. This inter-service adaptive sports competition showcases the resilient spirit of today’s wounded, ill and injured service members. Athletes from all branches of the military compete against each other in a range of adaptive sporting events. Having overcome severe injuries and medical conditions, the service members embody the warrior spirit. They serve as role models for other survivors worldwide.

The United Kingdom’s Prince Harry founded the Invictus Games after attending the 2013 Warrior Games in Colorado. He saw the impact that sports played in the recovery of service members and was inspired to launch a similar event. He designed the Invictus Games for wounded, ill and injured military members and veterans from around the world. It also uses sports to promote healing and support recovery.

Warrior Games, Invictus Games: Sports as medicine

Many athletes say that participating in adaptive sports:

● Boosts their self-esteem
● Improves their mental and physical health
● Increases their strength
● Makes them more resilient

Recently, scientists began to purposefully measure the effects of adaptive sports programs. They want to determine adaptive sports programs’ role in rehabilitation.

A holistic approach to recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration

Adaptive sports and other reconditioning activities help service members come to terms with traumatic injuries or illness by inspiring them to realize what is still achievable by focusing on ability. Adaptive sports promote holistic growth and achievement by addressing several factors, including:

● Being part of a team promotes a sense of belonging and peer support, of knowing you’re not alone in your struggle.
● The opportunity to renew the power of service to country and strong desire to pursue a higher purpose that have always inspired
service members in combat and life.

- Competition rekindles the sense of passion and determination of the warrior spirit that is part of a service member’s DNA, the courage to move forward despite barriers and obstacles.
- The chance to be celebrated and recognized, supported by family, friends and people from around the world, boosts self-worth and self-efficacy.
- Adaptive sports engage service members and veterans mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically and socially. It helps them find hope and strength through their common experiences.

According to the Defense Health Agency’s Warrior Care Recovery Coordination Program, the benefits of physical activity for ill and injured service members also include:

- Reduced stress
- Increased quality of life
- Lowered blood pressure
- Improved weight management
- Enhanced rehabilitative process
- Finding an adaptive sports program

The Defense Health Agency’s Warrior Care Recovery Coordination Program oversees the Military Adaptive Sports Program. MASP provides reconditioning activities and competitive athletic opportunities to all wounded, ill and injured service members. The program empowers wounded, ill and injured service members through physical and mental activities that engage, stimulate and inspire recovery. Offerings include:

- A weekly calendar with suggestions for activities service members can do by themselves or with their families to improve their skills and stay connected.
- Virtual clinics in swimming, cycling, archery, wheelchair rugby, track and field, healthy mind and body, powerlifting and cooking.
- Access to healing arts initiatives.

Each service branch also offers their own Wounded Warrior Program:

- Army Wounded Warrior
- Army Recovery Care Program
- Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment
- Navy Wounded Warrior
- Air Force Wounded Warrior Program
- Special Operations Command Warrior Care Program (Care Coalition)

In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events co-sponsors adaptive sports clinics and competitive events for disabled veterans of all ages and abilities. This includes the grants for Adaptive Sports Programs, which provides grant funding to organizations to increase and expand the quantity and quality of community-based adaptive sports activities for veterans with disabilities and members of the Armed Forces. To find out more, visit the VA National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events website.

Source: MilitaryOneSource
Calendar

**OCTOBER**

City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
See Calendar

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

GMIS National Conference
Virtual Event
October 11-22
greatmindsinstem.org

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

Hispanicize Virtual Summit
Virtual Event
October 15
hispanicize.com

FROM DAY ONE
Virtual Event
October 20
fromdayone.co

AFWA
Virtual Event
October 20-22
afwa.org

MVJ First Annual Conference
Virtual Event
October 21-22
mvj.network

SCIFEST All Access
Virtual Event
October 18-24
usasciencefestival.org

NAWBO National Conference
Virtual & In-Person
October 17-19
New Orleans, LA
nawbo.org

ABAOC Bizcon
Virtual Event
October 20
Abaco.org

CA STEAM Symposium
Virtual Event
October 21-23
cdefoundation.org

NMSDC
Virtual Event
October 25-28
Nmsdc.org

America’s Warrior Partnership Annual Symposium
Virtual Event
October 25-27
americaswarriorpartnership.org

SACNAS Conference
Virtual Event
October 28-30
Sacnas.org

Abilities Expo
Los Angeles, CA
October 29-30
abilities.com

HACU National Conference
Virtual Event
October 30-November 1
Hacu.net

**NOVEMBER**

City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
See Calendar

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

National Veteran Business Matchmaking
Virtual Conference & Vets Night Out
Virtual Event
November 3-4
Nvbdc.org

CSAVR Conference
Virtual Event
November 1-3
csav.org

Events subject to change. For the complete conference calendar, visit diverseabilitymagazine.com. Send your conference announcements to partnerships@diversitycomm.net.
HBCU Career Fair & Conference
Virtual Event
November 2-4
hbcucareermarket.org

Linkage’s Women in Leadership Institute
Hybrid Event
November 2-5
Orlando, FL
Linkageinc.com

NVSBC Vets 21
November 2-4
Orlando, FL
Nvsbc.org

SKY BALL XIX
November 4
Arlington, TX
airpowerfoundation.org/skyball

5th Annual National Veteran & Military Spouse Awards
Hybrid Event
November 4
therosienetwork.org

SHPE Career Fair
Virtual Event
November 5
Shpe.org

Utah Stem Fest
Virtual Event
November 8
utahstemfest.com

VIBN Conference
Hybrid Event
Sacramento, CA
November 8-9
vibnetwork.org

USPAACC Business & Procurement Conference
Virtual Event
November 10
Uspaacc.com

SHPE Convention
November 10-14
Orlando, FL
Shpe.org

ABRCMS Convention
Virtual Event
November 10-13
Abrcms.org

FROM DAY ONE
Virtual Event
November 17
fromdayone.co

NGLCC B2B Summit
Virtual Event
November 17-19
Nglcc.org

NGLCC Gala Dinner
November 19
Washington, DC
Nglcc.org

DECEMBER

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

Abilities Expo
Dallas, TX
December 3-5
abilities.com

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Conference
Virtual Event
December 7-8
conference-board.org/us

FROM DAY ONE
Virtual Event
December 15
fromdayone.co

JANUARY

SVA NATCON
January 6-8
Orlando, FL
studentveterans.org

FEBRUARY

GEO Week
February 6-8
Denver, CO
www.geo-week.com

AEC Next Technology Expo & Conference
February 6-8
Denver, CO
www.aecnex.com

APRIL

Small Business Expo
Multiple Events
See Calendar
thesmallbusinessexpo.com

City Career Fair
Diversity Employment Day
Multiple Events
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CBOF55 Conference
April 22
Chicago, IL
Nfbpa.org
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