



Episode 6: Getting Active: Disability IN

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Audio commercial: Jenna Bert

This is Jenna Bert host of the Confessions of a military spouse podcast. Thanks for listening to the following broadcast on public health media.

[Upbeat intro music] Disarming Disability

Sarah:

Hey, huh. Hey, welcome back to disarming disability. We're excited to be here. This is, I am Sarah Tuberty.

Nicole:

And and I am Nicole Kelly

Sarah:

and we are your hosts of this really cool podcast talking about disability related topics and how we make the world better. That's it. That's all I want.

Nicole:

That's all I want the world. You're right, but let's do that. Let's talk about it. Great talk about before we hop into our expert today, which of course we're so excited about we again have the coolest expert. I don't know how every week we literally have the coolest expert but that's what happens around here.

Sarah:

I'm so thankful.

Nicole:

I'm so thankful to before we jump into that call Sarah. Can you please tell me about your week? What have you been up to what's going on? Um so lat

Sarah:

Have fun things are happening there. So I took a leave from American Airlines. I don't know if I shared that already. So I'm no longer working as a flight attendant just to try to

help keep the airline of flow and keep all of us have our jobs. So I'm on a leave but I still get my flight benefits, which is amazing and then my parents moved to Arizona.

So there were some things that were happening down here and I ended up coming in to help. So I've been spending the past week in just the sunshine of Arizona and it was sort of a sudden thing that I needed to come down here. So I only brought, you know sort of the leftover clothes that were clean and didn't have a whole lot of stuff so I didn't bring it up face wash and so I was able to go back to Philadelphia this past weekend's and sort of got a better collect myself.

And then it's my boyfriend Erik and it was his birthday on Monday. So we had a little birthday party which is really fun and Erik, thankfully really likes to make food. I have been very vocal about me not being the person that's going to make food at home. It's not my favorite thing to do and I'm like that is just like on the relationship application is "like Sarah will never be expected to like make food. So nobody's coming home to Sarah cooked meal." I just don't like it. There's other things that I like a lot more but Erik is all about making food. He makes a lot of really great food. He gets really excited about making food.

So because we are sort of existing in this COVID time that you know, it's not as easy to go to restaurants for birthdays, Erik was saying that he really wanted Sushi. We both really love sushi. And then I was like, well, why don't we try to make sushi? So we did this Sushi Extravaganza on Sunday and we got to go to really cool Asian market that are Erik really likes and we got we got so much stuff, which is really neat sort of exploring all the different types of foods, and we got the sushi grade salmon and tuna and imitation crab and eel and then we tried baking the salmon.

I'm sorry making the sushi and the first rule that we came out. The rice was stuff that I mean, this was a colossal roll. It probably was like 3 inches in diameter to like eat it in three pieces and Eric's like, "oh my God, I use like a third of the rice for this thing." And but it was just it was really fun. It was hard because you know, we're chopping everything nice and small to be able to get into their rolls.

Al's so it was quite an adventure and a lot of work making sushi, but once you had everything all set up then it was fun. We had the spicy mint we got real fancy. We like layered heel on top. We like put avocado on top. We had the little masago I think is what it's called. It's a little row a little eggs that are really salty. So we put those on your like spicy mayo and squeeze bottles that we got to drizzle over everything and eel sauce start and so it was really good and so much Sushi.

Nicole:

Sounds absolutely amazing. That's like a dream night. I'll I actually have never ever made Sushi and I've watched like videos of people doing it and it looks so fun and I love eating

sushi. So that's definitely something that's like on my to-do list to at some point. Try what it so it sounds like the pointers are don't use all the rice in the first roll.

Sarah:

Yeah don't use all of the rice in the first roll. Yeah and and commit I think we got really excited while we were having people over to so it wasn't just sushi for Erik and I but we got a lot of stuff and we had shrimp tempura shrimp that then we temperate. And so that was a thing too.

But yet don't use all the rice in the first thing make a really thin layer of rice and and then of course cutting the sushi roll was a little hard. Once that was together. We watched a video where she put Saran wrap on top of it. So then we're like trying to cut through the Saran Wrap and then there's Saran wraps just tangled. We weren't really great at that one, but it was really good and I'm really proud of what we made. So it was delightful.

So what's really cool is that when Nikki and I were talking about our speaker today Becky and sort of your organizing when we're going to do our call and sort of the different things that we want to talk about, Becky reached out and said that she had met this family that had a daughter that had a limb difference and got really excited.

They were flying on American Airlines and then Becky showed her the video that I had done with American Airlines that was sort of just like a "hey I'm a flight attendant. This is my hand looks" like and then they're just like, oh my gosh, this is really incredible. So when Becky reached out to us, she's like, hey, can we get him a shout out to this family?

And we're like, oh my gosh, of course, they're like, yeah. She is in Prescott, Arizona and I was like wait, hold on Prescott like Prescott Prescott. Arizona is like my parents live in Prescott, Arizona. I was like I happen to be here right now. I would love to be able to meet them and connect with them just because I know how important it is for me to be able to see people like me and see them in real life. And since I saw that video and like the video and thought it was really cool. We're like, yes, absolutely. So I'm meeting them tomorrow and I'm really really excited and just like so serendipitous right and sort of how connected and I'm so thankful that Becky met them. I'm so thankful that Becky sent that email just being like Oh, yeah, they're in Prescott because she could have just said, you know, can we give a shout out to this family?

She didn't say is she didn't necessarily have to put in where they're living and Becky didn't know that I was going to be in Arizona today. So that just ended up being really beautiful and I'm really excited.

Nicole:

It's so cool. I mean, what are the chances that Becky first of all met this family on an American Airlines flight which writes her to when she saw the video of you to send.

That to then you randomly being in in Prescott, which you've never, you know, we know that your every third day in a new city. So like the fact that you're there you know, like it's all it's that is what I love about. This world that were in in the connections that were making is that it just like is this such a beautiful community and these these moments that are happening are like the sweetest sugar that goes on top, you know what I mean? It's just like it makes it's so cool. It's so so cool. So I'm so excited for you.

And we absolutely were going to have to you know, next week on our episode will ask you how that how that meeting went. And yeah, we'll want the four one one on ya how it went.

Sarah:

I'm excited.

Nicole:

Yeah, it's so cool. So yeah, let's get right into it. Then. Let's get into our interview with Becky. Becky works for a company called disability in and you know, if you're learning about this disability Community, I think the most important

Important highlight for you to know, what's the biggest problem? The biggest problem is employment huge huge huge numbers of us face helped a ton of barriers getting some sort of solid and employment and Becky works for disability in which is specifically addressing that topic and creating on ramps with really awesome corporations in order to help people with disabilities get jobs, so she could not be in more of an active position which of course is what we're talking about this is like "getting active" and she's just so knowledgeable and so awesome. So with that being said, let's transition into our interview with Becky

Becky Kekula serves as the Disability Equality Index director at DisabilityIN. Becky received her Bachelors of Science and marketing from Providence College where she gained a passion for influencing change behind the scenes in the entertainment industry. She has worked for companies such as creative arts agencies.

CBS equal employment opportunity and SAG-AFRA. Becky has also had a hand in founding the Catalina film festival and disability in the media. Becky is a public speaker and has spoken at schools and corporations across the country for Becky's full bio. Please check out our website [disarming disability.com](http://disarmingdisability.com).

Sarah:

Hi Becky we are so excited to have you on our show today. We're really excited to see here the work that you're doing and sort of how you're making some really important

bridges for people with disability and sort of work that you're doing to really help in the workforce. So, can you tell us a little bit about you? And what does your career look like?

Becky:

Thank you. Thank you for having me. So I was born in Boston one of the reasons why its important is because I was born to average height parents and identify as a little person. I'm 4 feet tall also identify as part of little people community. My parents had no clue what to expect when I was born. They didn't know what the future meant for me and then fast forward to being able to grow up among my average high peers going to college getting an education that I needed to then hopefully get a job.

I was trying to enter the workforce had the internship experiences and face the stigma around my physical disability as I was entering the workforce. I sent out a thousand resumes for jobs low-level jobs that I was very much qualified to do and I went on a hundred interviews. So I got interviews for jobs that I was qualified to do and every time I walked in the door and those interviews, I was rejected based on my appearance and what I tried to do now fast forward 10 years later in into my career is trying to Advocate on behalf of people like me and all people with disabilities, since little people are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and we're celebrating that anniversary in July.

It protects the rights of people with disabilities and equality in the workforce. And I don't want people to get left behind and it even goes back to the day when I was born. I don't want new parents to be afraid when they're deciding whether or not to bring their child home from the hospital and a lot of that is lack of representation whether it's in the media or the workforce.

So the more people with disabilities we can put into those roles whether it's in the media or in the workforce and everyday life the more we can quote unquote "normalize." The fact that disability is a part of society twenty percent of the population and there's nothing to be afraid about and as we have been talking even people who acquire a disability later in life, they become part of this awesome community and we should all figure out how learn from each other but not have regrets about maybe how you looked at it in the past previously before you may have had that experience or acquire the disability.

Sarah:

Yes a so many snaps to everything that you had just said and I know that Nikki and I sort of have talked and shared about our own experiences trying to enter the workforce and and that we both have limb differences and and with that that became a pretty significant barrier as well, which was really fat and similarly and we know that this has become a very common story for a lot of people that identify with a variety of different disabilities.

Is that really experiencing those barriers to get the workforce and the amount of questions that people have asked me it's sort of the inappropriateness of questions that people ask me as far as what I'm capable of that was something that both Nikki and I sort of would we started our first jobs? It's like I had no idea that this person would ask me this and I didn't know how to respond to it. I didn't know what my rights were. I didn't know any disability history.

So just knowing that that is a huge gap and that a lot of people then feeling like they can't apply for various different positions or feeling like there's really those those barriers they're preventing them to get there. So that's really awesome that you are doing that. I'm really thankful.

Becky:

I had one interview. It was actually for a re add a recruitment agency and they were going to be the ones who would pitch me to jobs and right when I showed up to the interview, they asked me how I got there and they told me that I was so cute and they just kept rambling on and on and I was thinking "why would I want you to Advocate on my behalf and Pitch me for potential job opportunities because I have no clue what that conversation is going to be with any of those employers you're talking about me too"

So it was like, sometimes you have to put your foot down and say this person can't represent me and I know I need a job, but I'm not going to go with that desperate.

Sarah:

Absolutely.

Nicole:

I'm wondering if you would share with us, you know, Sarah and I were raised by able-bodied parents. Therefore, you know, especially pre internet their resources were much more limited coming from smaller areas. So I was raised to believe that I was an able-bodied person and it wasn't until you know, I was having all these cognitive dissonance moments where different things were happening in my life, but

I didn't have anybody there to help explain that that's part of a disability social structure and and I'm encountering microaggressions and I didn't have anyone there to help me through that and explain that until I kind of woke up to it later. So I'm just wondering maybe a little bit. Would you be willing to share a little bit about what you're growing up experience was and maybe how you came into your disability Pride.

Becky:

Definitely so my father is 6 feet 4 inches and no one even can tell that we're related because of the DraStic difference in height and I do have an older sister who's ever tight around 5. 4 and my dad always joked that my mom wanted one child and my dad

wanted to so they settled that one and a half. And he and the reason why I had a crazy sense of humor is because he wanted to try to get me to understand what the outside world is going to be like and help me build resilience when it came to dealing with those outside comments.

And then another thing that they did was when I was growing up going to school. They worked closely with the family friend who had a daughter who was my age and they had her in my class from preschool to seventh grade and I really think that helped prevent any potential bullying that could have happened and there could have been moments where people are making fun of me and I couldn't hear it because I had that friend and Ally by my side to protect me from whatever may be going on.

And I didn't feel like it was forced. It just felt organic like this is how it's supposed to be having a friend who can look out for you. And then things got a little bit harder as I was going into high school and a lot of my girlfriends close-knit group of girlfriends started liking guys and they didn't think that I could be around because of my difference and that was a really devastating time for me because we grew up together and we did everything together and then all of a sudden I wasn't getting invited to the social gatherings that took place through our junior year in high school and it was a year after I had had major back surgery and when I was out for surgery, I was I missed 29 days of school in tenth grade. Everyone was nothing but like so supportive. So it just felt like a switch went off as we transition to 11th grade.

And then by Senior Year everyone kind of got back together and I never wanted to be one that held long grudges there. Of course have been some comments that people make that sting really hard, but I want to try to find as many teachable moments as possible.

And then so that really made Senior Year feel like I was part of the crew again. We were all getting excited getting accepted to colleges all around the country. We also knew we wouldn't be around each other much longer since we were going to be going to college and then I chose actually Providence College in Rhode Island, because there was another little person in the cafeteria when I was going on a tour there. and I thought at least the school has seen one other little person and there's that exposure.

So let's let's choose this school because I know it'll at least be welcoming and just knowing that someone else like me is there and we actually weren't even that close of friends, it was just the knowledge of knowing that there was someone else like me there.

And then while I was in college, I came to the realization. There was a little people convention happening in Boston in 2003, and I decided to go and that was my first experience because growing up I was fine being the only different one among my friends I participated in sports just was a part of society with everyone else but I think

once I did attend that first Little People convention, I got to see even more people like me and I took some time it took about a year after that experience to decide if I wanted to stay committed, but now they're some of my closest friends in the world and I've also realized that there could be other people like me that I have nothing in common with as well.

So I'm not going to be friends with just everyone because of our having short stature, but I think it's finding those people you can get along with but also realizing face similar obstacles and when you're together, the outside world doesn't matter because those comments just you can work on together and kind of laugh at it.

I did live in New York City for a while and there were a lot of comments because there are 8 million people in that City and I would just have to choose to just kind of stay focused and stay in my lane and not react because if I do react to comments, then it could sometimes affect like how safe I may feel and I needed to make sure that I did not speak off-guard. And find those moments that could be teachable where I could educate people but then realize that there are moments where that person may still be using that term that I don't prefer and they're just going to keep going on but other people are going to catch them later.

Nicole:

So I'm wondering if you will tell us you work at for an organization called disability in can you give us a brief overview of what first of all disability in is what work they're doing and then we'll you kind of give us a jump start on what your position is there and what you do?

Becky:

absolutely and I think it ties in nicely to what you were just talking about. So in July 2018 just a disability in was the new name of the organization prior to that. It was called United States business leadership Network and we lost people at hello. They didn't know that we worked inclusion and part of the rebrand was also to strengthen the word disability.

There are so many organizations that have employee network groups that are ability other different abilities all different types of terminology, but we really want to people to embrace the word disability. We have to strengthen it in order for people to feel more confident about being a part of this community regardless of whether it's a disability that started at birth or later in life, and I've been with the organization since November of 2017.

So that was prior to the name change and I had come from working behind the scenes and the entertainment industry. I, right before DisabilityIN and was at SAG-AFTRA in the diversity department and I noticed as we were working in the diversity Department.

There's still a lot around if we're not going to hit box office numbers. Why would we authentic hire people?

And there was a lot of dancing around the table, even when some of the contracts required meetings to happen among casting directors and the legal Departments of the studios with the disability Community to try to talk about their commitment over the term of the contract and a lot of people were forced to go to those meetings because it was in the contract it wasn't because they wanted to be there.

And right before I started at DisabilityIN and had attended their annual conference, which was in August of that year in Orlando. It's so in 2017 and I showed up to the conference and I saw people who wanted to learn how to get better and learn from each other Microsoft is a big partner of ours where their CEO openly talks about having a child with a disability and that is integrated and their entire company. They want to make sure that they're including disability in their roadmap.

And it's really important to try to get executive-level people to talk about their relationship to disability because everyone has a relationship to disability the being in that room being a part of that environment. I got really excited because people wanted to be there wanted to learn from each other- also a free space to talk about your hesitations and things that you really want to learn more about in order to have more selling points for your upper management to make those investment decisions.

And DisabilityIN and as an organization in addition to having the annual conference where we bring together corporations to share best practices, we are businesses partner for Disabilities. We work very closely with the advocacy Community to make sure that their needs are being addressed but we are primarily business as partner to help them understand how to better address the community.

So we have over 200 Corporate Partners who work with us year round. They're our best practice sharing webinars that take place twice a month. Then we also have a next-gen leader program which our students in STEM Finance or business there either students currently or recent graduates and they go through the six month program and get paired with our corporate Partners who are mentoring them and then they have internship opportunities that take place and interview opportunities for internships and job opportunities that take place at our conference every now it is in July because it aligns with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

And we wanted to be able to celebrate that from a few years back on and then we also have a Supplier Diversity Program where businesses that are 51 percent owned and operated by people with disabilities or service disabled veterans or veterans disability people. They get certified two-year certification and then they can do business with our corporate Partners.

So mostly the corporate partners are Fortune 1000 companies.

So that the other thing with the next gen leader program, I think what's really valuable about that is giving that constructive feedback. A lot of people are afraid to give us constructive feedback because they're afraid of offending us and I think even when I was going through those internship opportunities, interview opportunities internship interview, I faced a lot of fear from the other side and I thought it was because of my physical difference in the way their body language showed that they were fearful of me but there could have been moments where I was terrible at interviewing.

Some days I was interviewing four times a day and by the fourth interview, I probably was not at my best but no one gave me that feedback. So I think that's what's really bad valuable about the next gen leader program. These mentors can say, you know, what like this is the real deal and we're going to tell you what we're looking for at this organization.

And it's also getting people focused even if their Mentor works at one company and they're not passionate about the mission of the organization no matter where it may be if it's a good-paying job that they could get access to you, want to make sure that they also are passionate about what they're applying to because that'll help make a stronger business case that they're going to do really well.

Nicole:

How do you how do you Source these students? Where are you finding them? They apply?

Becky:

We go through a lot of the University's Career Center's sure then we just tried to put it out social media as many places as possible. And then it's up to them to apply. I think we had over a thousand applications year after year and accept 210

Sarah:

Are they students who identify as having a disability?

Becky:

So the first question was "is do you have a disability" in order to apply. When we source them and then I think organically I think the program does encourage them to eventually openly talk more about what it maybe and maybe just with the prerequisites and encourages them to take pride in and even the mentorship relationship allows them to talk more openly and figure out how to talk more openly or when to disclose or wait to disclose just depending on what accommodation requests may come early on in their career later on.

Nicole:

That's so good man. It's so neat it like that is yeah such a gap being filled and and I know you know, of course Sarah and I understand kind of like the big three in the disability world is, you know, Healthcare issues housing issues. And then of course the big one is is unemployment. And it just feels like there's so many barriers socially and getting people to even identify initially to even get them plugged in.

And it just I think that's what I continue to like struggle with is just like wanting everybody to like come over to the other side and like celebrate and be Kumbaya because like that's finally how I felt when I came to the other side again, this is a comment not a question at all. Like I love that when people are in a space where they are there and they are ready to accept that these things exist.

Like there are programs that have the money and the resources and the correct people behind them that are actually doing the work. There are people doing the work! Like that's so exciting to me. So I just am very excited about that and everybody if you are in college listening to this, please do this.

Becky:

Yeah. Yes. I will make sure you guys have the information for next year, but I think what's another thing that we do a lot of is etiquette training making sure corporations are even if they say they're not prepared, get them prepared and that also ties into the Disability Equality Index which is the project that I manage. We're going into our seventh year and it was in 2013 business came to us and they said there's this index out there that exist for LGBT inclusion by the Human Rights Campaign the corporate equality index. Why isn't there an index for disability inclusion?

And all of our programming is influenced by what our partners are asking for. So we decided to get together a group of people from the advocacy community and the business Community because we weren't going to just try to do this on our own with the business Community when it came to creating the questions. We formed a partnership with the American Association of people with disabilities and really came up with this questionnaire or that's applicable to the Disability Community Fair. We always say it's a carrot not a stick because we don't want people be fearful of engaging with it, but it really is meant to help companies build a roadmap for inclusion.

It's putting, its making sure disability is part of the diversity statement on their website. If you're not talking about disability in the diversity statement, you're leaving behind an important population and it's intentionally putting it out there that you're willing to make accommodation. If you're willing to make an accommodation if someone asked for one, but you're putting it out there that they can ask for one. Rather than them having to come forward.

And then engaging with disability owned businesses and our supplier diversity section enterprise-wide access is all about building accessibility and website accessibility. A lot

of times companies are more accessible outward-facing trying to attract consumers. But what about if someone wanted to work at your company and someone who may want to work at your company may be the best solution because they can help you fix those internal sites as an employee.

And then we make sure that social media postings are except accessible. There's a whole it's a 50 page questionnaire self-assessment that corporations take this year. We had over 240 participating companies and most of them they all have 500 employees or more and they are just looking at figuring out how to get better in this space and it's also amazing to still see companies showing up during these crazy times.

and I think these crazy times allow for us to think about how disability has been an asset all along and that all of those people asking for accommodations, that one may have thought earlier were way too expensive and not possible. Now that everyone's working remotely things are a little different and hopefully we can view this time as a time to really tap even deeper into the disability community and one other pieces that we were able to do some research based on the data from the first four years of the disability equality index.

We partnered with Accenture they are a big partner of ours and they were able to find that there is a correlation financially companies who are invested in this space and do well in this space are also doing well financially.

Sarah:

Yes

Becky:

Yes, and in those box office conversations that everyone has a page about and income conversations. We are an asset and we just think about all the tasks we do to get out of the house and we're always problem-solving, but we're not asking people to feel bad for us.

Or to help us out we figure out how to do it. And those are skills that we can bring to the workplace and add more value and we know that we're going to be working harder than the person next to us. And those are skills that they're never going to have but because of society and stigmas they still may be looked at as the favored one. But hopefully at some point it shows up.

I think just one of my biggest pet peeves is when people say, "oh they weren't really good as an assistant, but they're a great manager."

It's like, how can you tell someone? They're a good employee if they weren't good and at any point and moving up in the organization, so I think it's hopefully a time where we can see more companies engaging in this space and our goal is not for people to engage

with the index and not hire at the same time. We want them to do both at the same time, but the index makes them think more about how can we get better and set up a successful environment for these people we want to hire and then when they say we don't know where to go to hire people. We have the next gen leader program that can help feed those people into those organizations.

Nicole:

So good!!

Sarah:

I have a comment on when we were talking about sort of the employers having accessible spaces somebody that I love and care for very much is on the deaf and hard-of-hearing spectrum and she has to do all of these training videos through her company and they're smaller organization, but there's no there was no closed captions on them.

So she's having a really hard time being able to answer the questions on the training module because she couldn't hear what was being spoken in the video components of these training modules, and then she wasn't able to answer the question because she didn't have access to that information. So we talked about it a little bit she reached out to me we chatted and then she drafted an email and she felt empowered sort of based on all the conversations that we're doing. She felt empowered to be able to talk to her employer about being able to make these accommodations and add closed captions to the videos to make them more accessible.

So she like sent her a letter to me we work through it and then she sent it and then ended up being a really positive result. They're like, "oh my god, of course, we can put closed captions on here" but it just was a really cool and a moment because she was sort of just entering her Pride on being proud of being somebody who's the deaf and hard of hearing community. So that was a really big win for her and she's just really proud to be like wait I can do this And and that we can get this positive result instead of constantly sort of feeling like she's missing all this information because she's not able to hear it and then that not being her fault because she's not able to hear it, right?

So that is just like yes, so proud such a proud win.

Becky:

There have been a lot of moments where people are about to risk their job. It's so it's like whether or not you speak up and ask for the accommodations you need or you risk not having a job. And we've seen a lot of things that have worked in the candidates favor once they ask I think a lot of and that's what the index is.

Also meant to get the index people thinking about those things. They wouldn't normally think about and hopefully on the other side we have more of those people who are saying we didn't even think about that. Thanks for having us look into that. We're going

to try to help you get the tools you need people often refer to accommodation requests and accommodations that one receives as productivity tools. They really are just a way to make someone more productive in their job.

Nicole:

Yeah, I like yeah.

Sarah:

Can you tell me more about like the scoring of the Disability Index and sort of what equates to perhaps like better scores? Is there a cut-off on there and then if somebody who it like is there a section as far as like, okay, so this is what you scored these are improvements that you can make like you scored pretty low in this type of area and these are suggestions or does that lend more of a conversation that you and the business Corporation would meet together to sort of reviewing how to make adjustments that are accessible for everyone?

Becky:

So there are multiple approaches in 2019. We did make a lot of updates to the index to support some of the things that the community was asking for like adding weights to questions that were always there but asked about or people getting paid fairly whether they're full-time employees or subcontractors and contractors. Do you utilize employees. Who are do you have employees to utilize supported employment so that someone who may start off with a job coach and then transition into not having one but giving those people those opportunities.

We try specifically not to call out any particular Community because we want all of this ability to be included but we know that some of those questions are more important to some communities and can be more helpful.

The scoring is there are six categories. The only category that is 20 points is culture. Because we really think everything starts with culture and then all of the cat the rest of the categories there are some subcategories within the categories, but each of those are 10 points.

So you either get the ten points or zero points for each of the categories. Depending on the criteria. So there may be five question sets. They may all be weighted meaning the count toward your score. But if you answer yes to three of the question sets, you may still get the ten points. So it gives room for improvement for the two more and then we made a promise early on that.

We work not to shame companies. So we did not publish scores below 80. So those companies scores eighty ninety and a hundred are named best place to work for disability inclusion. But we always say a hundred is never Perfection. It means that they're participating a lot of the best practices for disability inclusion in the workplace.

But by no means is it perfect. There's still a long way to go and in 2019 once we release the score reports. So it shows their score breakdown of the different categories and their scores and then it also had a scorecard where it compared how they did compared to those companies in their industry and those outside of overall participation. And the scorecard is just the multiple choice questions. So most of the questions start off with yes, no, no, but plan to in the next year or do not know.

And then we also have a new feature this year. We're on that score card. It'll show where they said no, some recommendations on how to improve. But then I do do some deep dive presentations with companies on how to help them come up with a plan to get better for the next year and they're the most effective when it's a cross-functional team and the organization and a lot of times employee resource groups can help facilitate that because if you don't get more the diversity and inclusion department or HR department engaged you're not going to make progress with those answers.

So you want to make sure you get the right people in the room and go through the results and figure out some of those low hanging fruit and then longer-term goals.

Somethings like the communications piece is like adding disability that your diversity statement. Hopefully, those are things that can happen faster.

Sarah:

Can you share with us? I'm sort of wondering about maybe more the specific questions on the workplace culture section, like what sort of things are you asking about in that space?

Becky:

So that the first ones about the diversity and inclusion statement and then the other one it talks about employee resource groups. And do you have an executive sponsor of the employee Resource Group because that can help move things along faster. And then do you have a hiring goal for people with disabilities?

A lot of companies are federal contractors. So they're required to have a 7% hiring goal, but others who may not be still or trying to find something that they can work towards.

Ideally we get to a place where 20% is the hiring goal because that's the proper representation and some companies are trying to do that and then the other so that yeah, it's mostly the ERG that the diversity and inclusion statement in the hiring goal.

And then just like do you have an engagement survey that gets people to self-identify and you have those numbers and a lot of companies aren't ready to share those numbers, but we're at least putting it out there to motivate them to start tracking.

Nicole:

It's so good. Like it's it's so good and I even knew like just kind of being in the kind of deaths of the Chicago disability Community. I knew about all the people that were going to conference and I had heard of DisabilityIN and it's just so cool to like go from knowing about it to being able to like hear all the details.

All of the work in the way again, like the thought process that's that's carefully going into actually building a structure that actually gives people a ramp into into these spaces that we may be necessarily weren't wholeheartedly welcomed into for a variety of reasons before now. So yeah, just like thinking and that you're doing

Becky:

and I think a big piece to what makes our conference stand out a little bit more than others is we are Disability inclusion conference, but we have people sitting in these roles in Corporate America who are the speakers on our panels. So a lot of companies and a lot of conferences end up having a lot of consulting firms as their speakers, which is great. But they're Consulting the companies who we want to hear from too.

So we're able to hear from these companies and how they're advancing disability inclusion. And there are so many times at our conference on panels where high-level Executives who happen to be there start telling their story because something flipped a switch when they heard someone else's story and that's what's the most powerful. We've got to keep the storytelling going.

Nicole:

I want to be respectful of your time, but I'm wondering if you can kind of finish out by sharing, you know, what did next steps will look what is DisabilityINand next steps. What are ways that you're looking to grow? How can people get involved with disability and if they're looking to do that, are you guys hiring like, you know what give us give us before one one on how to get connected?

Becky:

Absolutely so conference that disability and dot-org is the number one priority get people to come to our virtual conference, which is this summer July 13 through 16 and then we of course or just trying to navigate the waters in these crazy times, but fortunately there's still a demand for all of this work just doing a lot more things that we would have normally done in person virtually.

October is always a very big month National disability employment awareness month. I think it's important for conversations to continue throughout the year. We don't want it to just be that we celebrate this summer and forget about the 30th anniversary of the ADA or the importance of reducing the unemployment rate.

We have been working a lot within the investor community to get them to encourage companies that they invest with to engage in disability inclusion efforts. And if they don't they may lose their money because it's important and it's a priority.

We will continue to do more research to make sure that we're updating the data on whether or not the business case still appears to exist which will still prove to exist. And it's just getting people excited about just let's use this time as a time to reduce the unemployment rate and help people get better and help support each other along the way and definitely we're still a pretty small team, but there could be more things as we continue to engage in more efforts in the future that we could be looking for support.

Nicole:

Yeah. Well, I just find so much hope in like I said, like when I woke up to this realization and I was like who is doing this work? No, really? Like, where is it? What what is built what what functioning and in place and who are those people and again just as I like kind of trucked along and slowly met people and grabbed mentors. I just continue to learn that that you experts and these organizations they are there they are running the work is being done like it is so how can you connect into instead of starting the wheel all over again? How can you support the work? That's already being done. How can you connect into the communities that already have a rich culture within themselves? And yeah, how can you kind of like join the party that's that's already in place. I guess, you know, so.?

Becky:

We need to band together!

Nicole:

And it seriously seriously, thank you. So so so much for your time and for hopping on the call with us and being willing to chat and share your story. I'm just so excited like continue to get to know.

Becky:

This is just the beginning.

Nicole:

Yep. I love it. I love it so much that's been my favorite part of like randomly reaching out to strangers is because with all of the experts that we've talked to I mean some of them, of course, we had good working relationships before and like pulled them into be our experts, but we've done a lot of cold calls to and it's just been so fun to like really see those relationships that have started just really grow over time. So it's been really fun in that way, too. So, yeah. Thanks. Thanks for hopping on with us.

Becky:

Thank you.

Sarah:

Thank you for spending part of your day with us. We want to give thanks to our Network Public House media for intro beads to Jason birds with cybernetics. For our Logo Art, we want to remember Patrice. You can find his work at normal person's.com.

Nicole:

Be sure to follow Disarming Disability on Facebook and Instagram and lastly be sure to check out our website disarmingdisability.com where you can find all 13 episodes of season 1 links to resources transcriptions and discussion questions for each episode and

Check out our blog where we feature amazing Disability Advocates. See you next week.
Bye.