



My name is John Robinson, owner and founder of Our Ability, Inc. here in Albany County. For the past 15 years, we have developed a business that utilizes generative AI technology to assist individuals with disabilities in matching to open positions. Our job board and AI technology reached 180,000 people in 2024 and expanded to 380,000 people in 2025.

We find the need for employment opportunities in New York State to be great. There are two great hurdles to overcome in achieving the opportunities for individuals with disabilities we seek. The first hurdle is embracing technology, and the second hurdle is breaking down barriers in translation. I'll explain:

1. Technology – in 2019, Microsoft approached us to see if we would accept an AI for good grant and disability and employment. After six months of conversation, we agreed to accept and to move forward in building generative AI that would understand the skills and interests of individuals with disabilities, present those skills against existing jobs and show that our community of people with disabilities have the skills and ability that match to existing positions today.

I bring this up because Microsoft saw a gap. While they owned LinkedIn at the time, they saw a barrier in the utilization of technology within the disability space. While businesses use advanced applicant tracking systems, existing disability organizations today still “place people where they are best placed.” There is a gap on how we help our community. Our Ability, Inc. invested years and dollars to bridge that gap. The reason we have people coming to our website is because we do that. We urge existing organizations to embrace technology and the way that businesses already have. Almost all of the businesses we work with around North America have applicant tracking systems, and those systems have typically not included individuals with disabilities. But with the work that we do and other others, we can help VR, disability, service providers, and other state agencies and utilization of technology. Each and every one of us has our phone in our pocket or on front of us right now. It's the utilization of that technology. They can allow us to recommend a job to each and every one of you at a moment's notice. That's what we can do. This explains the opportunity.

But if we want access to that opportunity, then we need to also break down barriers between disability and business.

2. Translation – all too often, disability organizations spend time and explaining their processes – job coaches, job development, tax credits, job, carving, etc. to businesses. Each and every business I’ve ever dealt with does not have the time to understand all of the nuances within our community. Additionally, we have the added challenges, individuals with disabilities on whether to disclose our disability or not. From a business standpoint, the language we use is around job accommodation and accessibility. Self disclosure and accommodation are the same conversation. It’s just how it’s considered. And, the systems in place for our community of people with disabilities such as coaches and development are extremely similar to recruiting and retention. When we put disability employment into the language of business, that’s when we succeed.

Accenture (2018, 2023) — in partnership with Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities — found that companies championing disability inclusion dramatically outperform their peers:

- **28% higher revenue** on average over four years.
- **30% greater economic profit margins.**
- **2.6x higher net income.**
- **4x more likely to outperform peers in total shareholder return.**

Return on Disability Group (2016) research revealed that:

- For every **\$1 invested in accommodations, companies saw an average ROI of \$28.**
- Most accommodations cost **around \$300** or nothing at all (Job Accommodation

Our plea. It’s time for New York State to speak business to business. To work with the Economic Development, Business Council, chambers of commerce around the state to speak in the language of business about the workforce that we have available. The over 4 million individuals with disabilities in New York State of working age that have self-disclosed. The over 120,000 students in New York State community colleges, colleges, and universities that have disclose disabilities that will be looking for employment.

And, to break down the existing stereotypes around disability employment through disability systems. When the typical New York State citizen thinks about disability employment, they think about entry-level employment because that’s what we’ve been told. All we’ve seen are images of landscaping and janitorial services, but that’s not the only thing that we can do. We must highlight all levels of employment for individuals with disabilities.

We must eliminate sub minimum wage/14 C in New York State law. The community think and what does a business think when disability organizations still employ individuals with disabilities under a sub minimum wage law, and yet ask businesses to hire people with disabilities in the community? It's modern-day slavery and it needs to stop. And it's peak, we had 50,000 people under Southern minimum wage contracts, and today we're down to 1200. We can eliminate it.

If New York State is going to be a leader in disability employment, we must invest in technology, we must invest our precious resources in speaking business to business, and we must follow through and eliminate the existing laws and biases that remain in New York State. We cannot be a state that places people where it's easy, but rather lifts up individuals to our highest ability.