

How to Make a Possibility Out of my Disability

By J

As per Canadian regulations, ASD is formally recognized as a disability. The kind of challenges that I face as a member of the society and especially of the workforce became plainly evident when I became aware of it. I do not want to continue the debate if the disability exists or if it is a result of our society's rules. I rather prefer to focus on how to manage those challenges and make the best possible outcome out of them.

I can see the ability to manage a disability like ASD is heavily dependent on both the individual and the organization he or she belongs to. Both need to work collaboratively on minimum things starting with accommodation arrangements that most likely will need to be requested and provided. Organizations should push for learning and awareness of working with people with the disabilities. Like any processes, it requires organizational change management, and the sooner you start with it, the better it works. It is very challenging to ask managers and co-workers to be accommodating. A sudden overnight request to start treating a person with disabilities with care and compassion is not the best recipe for success.

Let's check about events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which affect everybody but, in particular, people like me with a disability. They are usually at the end of the rope in terms of financial security, personal relationships, and health shape. A recession triggered by a pandemic like COVID-19 invariably will hit those who are less wealthy harder and therefore, with a thicker cushion to manage a full or partial income reduction. People with mental disabilities could struggle more under quarantine or shelter in place orders. Having said this, some people could benefit from staying at home situations, if there are no proper physical or other accommodations at work. And let's not forget that people with some mental disabilities like Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder are several times more at risk to catch the virus.

My ask is that our society should consider making accessibility a priority and ensure proper adaptations to be available to everybody. Good accessibility is not just beneficial to those with a disability but also to the public in general. Accessibility improvements for people with physical disabilities, e.g.: ramps, automatic doors, etc. are usually very well received for those without disabilities. Likewise, accommodations for those with mental disabilities are also good for those without them. For example, common accommodations for people with ADHD and ASD like detailed procedures or noise reduction devices are also good for people without these mental disabilities.

Inclusive language by peers and colleagues have also a tremendously positive effect on my experience at work. It really makes a big difference. Being inclusive is not only for people with disabilities but for everybody. Sometimes is just a matter of listening without judgemental thoughts.

Some of the ways employers can be more inclusive and understanding of those with disabilities include simple but powerful strategies to close the gap: awareness, education, and training. Let's say, providing general awareness to the company stakeholders, including

suppliers and customers, education campaigns for all the teams on the organization and training for managers and co-workers of those with disabilities.

Finally, I wish regular people could know more about resources like Disability ERGs (Employee Resource Groups), or just about disabilities in general. A person with a disability is first and foremost, just another person. Sometimes there are physical or mental differences (visible or not). However, they should not be treated with more caution than people who switch from an iPhone to Android. The result is the same, you can place calls and go online with either of them. There are just subtle differences than can and should be managed.

Understanding my strengths and challenges is the key to managing my ASD.

About the Author

“J” is one of Autism Canada’s newest Autism Ambassadors and Newsletter Contributors. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome J to our team and we look forward to sharing J’s perspectives with our community.