Pay Me What I’m Worth: Valuing the Work of Disabled People

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Expectations for Today
- The Disparities of Employment for Disabled People
- Barriers to Employment
- My Personal Story to Employment
- Overlooked Issues We Face
- The Value of Our Work
- Why Working Shouldn’t Define Your Existence

Who Am I?
- Forever a spoiled Grandkid to my Christmas Angel
- Boldly disabled – OI, little woman, & hard of hearing
- Proud Southerner
- She/her pronouns & IFL
- Winthrop U Alumna
- Macro social worker
- Aspiring children’s book author
- Lover of words and people
- Unapologetically & fiercely Black

Why Care About Disabled People & Employment?
The road to employment is, for many of us, uncertain and full of twists and turns
The complications to gaining employment, whether systemic, organizational, or personal, cannot be ignored by the broader society

Numbers Don’t Lie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Disabled</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Numbers Don’t Lie
Unemployment Rate Based on Race & Disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers Don’t Lie
Unemployment Rate Based on Gender & Disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why These Numbers Matter
In 2017:
- Across all age groups, the employment-population ratios were much lower for disabled people than for non-disabled people
- Unemployment rates for disabled people were higher than for non-disabled people across all educational attainment groups

Why These Numbers Matter
- In 2017, 32% of disabled workers were employed part time, compared with 17% of non-disabled workers
- Employed disabled people were more likely to be self-employed than non-disabled workers

Barriers to Employment
- Disabled people aren’t expected to work, and are penalized by government policies if we do (SSI/SSDI, possibly losing healthcare benefits)
- The fact that some organizations/companies discriminate against disabled workers is telling to how we are excluded

Barriers to Employment
- Erroneous “fear” of how much accommodations may cost versus actual costs
- Do not perpetuate the “inclusive”/“diverse” environment they harp on - if you’re missing disabled workers, your workplace is NOT diverse or inclusive
Barriers to Employment

- People still are in "awe" of disabled people who work
- Educational system: certificates versus diplomas, and how the former hinders us from acquiring the post-secondary training and education we desire

My Employment Story

Frustrations led me to graduate school
Figuring out what I wanted to do with my MSW
The inaccessibility of social work job requirements

My Employment Story (Cont.)

Carving my own niche
My first job at 30
Currently doing
My aspirations

History of NDEAM

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) dates back to 1945, when Congress declared the first week in October "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week."

- In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities
- In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Why NDEAM Matters

Workplaces that make it a priority to retain and sustain the talents and abilities of disabled people are imperative to the collective efforts to build an inclusive workforce and strong economy
**Why NDEAM Matters**

Refusing to not only hire, but pay disabled workers an equal and/or competitive wage, weakens our economy.

Yes, in 2018, there are disabled people who are paid BELOW minimum wage.

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**The Wage Disparity that Goes Unnoticed**

**How it is legal to pay us less?**

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 created the provision of a minimum wage for American workers… except….

DISABLED PEOPLE!

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**The Wage Disparity that Goes Unnoticed**

Section 14(c) of the Act included an exception pertaining to disabled workers - they could be paid less than minimum wage.

The exception was thought to “sweeten” the buy-in to get employers to hire disabled workers.

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**States Are Finally Paying Attention**

On the State Level:

Several states, including Alaska, Maryland, and New Hampshire, have passed legislation eliminating subminimum wages to disabled workers.

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**Federal Level Attention**

On the Federal Level:

In April, seven senators wrote a letter to Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta requesting information about the DOL’s oversight of employer minimum-wage waivers under FLSA Section 14(c).

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**Exploitation of Disabled Workers**

Disabled workers are not only legally exploited by 14(c), but are also exploited from an unlikely source:

**Within disability activism**

Many of us are expected to work for free by our own organizations who are suppose to fight for us.
Exploitation of Disabled Workers

We are expected to:

● Write
● Public speak
● Consult, etc

ALL FOR FREE!

Exposure is Meaningless

Never give your talents away to entities and interested persons for free

Your work has value, and you should be compensated for what you do

Exposure DOES NOT mean a thing - it is a manipulative tactic

The Pressure to Work

If you desire to work, then you should, and your work should be valued and respected fully

HOWEVER, if you do not desire to work due to factors that impact you, then that is valid and should be respected as well

Working =/= Determine Your Value

● There is a gross expectation of proving one’s “worth” or “productivity” in our society
● People who are able to work are valued/viewed differently than those who cannot work or do not desire to work
● Being able to work or not work should not be a litmus test as to who is worthy

References

BLS Labor Force Characteristics for 2017
https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm

More Information about Subminimum Wages
https://www.dol.gov/whd/specialemployment/

SHRM article: Lawmakers Work to End Subminimum Wages for Workers with Disabilities

History of NDEAM
https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/
Resources
USA Today article: “Does my wheelchair make you uncomfortable? How my disability may have cost me a job”
Employment Issues for People with Disabilities

Resources
Your Employment Rights as a Disabled Person
https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/ada18.html
Bottom Dollars - documentary about employment and subminimum wage
https://www.rootedinrights.org/videos/employment/bottom-dollars/

Where You Can Find Me Making the “Good Trouble” in Activism
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