



Episode #: 05 Title: Who Gets to Define "Normal" In The Workplace?

Guest: Debra Ruh

Guest Title: C E O

Date: May 25, 2016

Guest Company: Ruh Global Communications

Hello, this is Debra Ruh, and you're listening to Human Potential at Work. My topic today is who gets to decide normal. When our daughter, Sara, was born with Down Syndrome, the doctors explained to us all the things that she wouldn't be able to do, and really focused on the disability and her syndrome.

I remember thinking, "Why are we only focusing on what she can't do, instead of really looking at what her abilities are?" And then of course as she went through school, the teachers that stood out to me were the ones that really believed that they could set the bar high and help her achieve her goals. Each time a teacher did that, we found we just had amazing results.

And so, I see that in today's workforce as well. It's like, instead of assuming that people with disabilities can't add value to society and the workforce, what if we just focus on peoples' abilities? Which really is what we should be doing for each other anyway. I hope that when an employer interviews me, that they focus on what I bring to the table, the abilities that I have, the past experience, my qualifications, instead of focusing on things I can't do.

I'll give you an example. I never finished college, and I always wanted to. I went to college, but I never actually got an accredited degree. That always made me feel less than and I almost felt like I had to work harder, because I didn't finish my degree. But once again, I would hope that employers would look at my amazing past performance, the different projects that I've done, my global experience, my good attitude. I have a really great attitude, and I believe if you have a good attitude, I can learn anything with the right support.

So once again, instead of deciding that an employee or a potential candidate is not normal and they're not going to add value to the workforce, I think that we have the opportunity to really look at the qualifications, the requirements of the job and each of the individuals as individuals, as opposed to a person with a disability or without a disability or with different cultural beliefs than you or different religious beliefs. So I think we just have a really good opportunity to make sure that we're including everyone in the workforce, based on their abilities as opposed to focusing on their disabilities.

As a lot of you know, I'm very active on social media and I track a lot of hashtags. I remember tracking a hashtag one time, the Down Syndrome hashtag, and Richard Dawkins, a pretty famous

HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK Host - Debra Ruh

writer, BBC talking head and professor, I believe, at Oxford University, had Tweeted, "If you find that you have a fetus with Down Syndrome, abort it and try again." And I remember just being stunned and so hurt by that, even though I understand it wasn't meant to hurt me. But I thought, "What a real waste, if Sara Ruh wasn't in the world." She's inspired me to do so much, to make sure that people with disabilities are meaningfully included in the workforce and in society, and she's inspired her friends to become special education teachers and she works for Nordstrom's and the customers love her and her team loves her. She really actually is adding great benefit to society.

And a Tweet came later, a little while later, where he said, "If you do choose to have a child with Down Syndrome, you are a burden on society, so shame on you." And I thought, "Really? People can't really believe stuff like that. This is ludicrous that people would believe that." Because once again, just because a person has a disability does not mean that they're not normal, it does not mean that they're broken. It means they're human beings and disabilities are just part of life.

So I hope that you will join me in really trying to focus on individuals, including individuals with disabilities, and make sure that we all are tapping into the abilities that we bring to the workplace and to society. I really believe the only disability is not being able to see human potential. Thank you for joining me today. Bye.