



**Episode #: 07** Title: How to Speak So Employers Will Understand

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Hello, this is Debra Ruh, and you're listening to Human Potential at Work. Today, I want to talk about the language of business. In a lot of ways, I think a lot of employers listening to the program will say, well, I know all those things. But I sometimes find that service providers or voc rehabilitation associations or really, organizations that are trying to help employers find and retain talented persons with disabilities, sometimes it seems like we're talking different languages.

And so, I have done a presentation multiple times. I'm actually going to do a webinar for the Department of Labor on this topic, and it appears that there are ways that we can improve the way that we talk to each other about this topic of employing persons with disabilities, that might allow us to bridge some of the gaps that we're seeing in this topic.

I believe it's very important, when you're talking to an employer, that you use certain language, and the language that the employer is going to understand. Of course, hiring persons with disabilities and making sure we're using the right language, this is something that we've seen in a lot of fields. I know that when I was doing work in the past to support veterans in employment, wounded warriors, we wanted to make sure, how do you translate what a service person has done in the military to in a way that employers can understand. So you're not using military jargon; you're using language that an employer can say, oh, yeah, yeah, that would add great value here, and that makes a lot of sense for this position. It's sort of that same type. We always need to make sure that we're using the right language, so that employers can understand how they can actually employ persons with disabilities, and once again, this is about retaining current employees with disabilities as well.

So when we're talking about the language of business, what am I talking about? I'll tell you a little story. One time, I went to a meeting, it happened to be about veterans, making sure that we were employing veterans with disabilities, or wounded warriors, in the workforce. I arrived a little late to the meeting, and a service provider that was working with employers to make sure that veterans with disabilities/wounded warriors were being given good options and lots of opportunities, was very frustrated and he was saying, well, employers don't want to hire these service people that have given so much to our country and why don't they want to hire them, and he was just very frustrated.

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So I said, well, why don't you start a discussion with me? Why don't you pretend like I'm an employer? Why don't you start a discussion? And I actually was an employer at the time, but I had arrived late and I had not introduced myself, so he didn't really know who I was. So he said, okay, well the first thing I'm going to say to you is, do you have any barriers to employment? And so I said, okay, well, I'm going to smile at you and I'm going to listen to you, but the conversation in my mind just ended. And he said, well what do you mean? And I said, well, if I'm in the United States and you ask me that question, you just threatened me. You just threatened me with the Americans with Disability Act and maybe you threatened me under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, Section 503, and I started throwing out these laws. And he's like, okay, whoa, whoa, stop. I don't really start the conversation that way.

The problem is, we actually are starting the conversations that way. We are going into employers and we're saying, we need you to carve up these jobs and we need you to hire these people with disabilities, and sometimes I think the way we put it, it sounds to the employers like we're saying, well, these people aren't qualified to do your jobs and you're going to have to carve your job all up and we're going to send in job coaches, which by the way are amazing, but sometimes employers look at that and think, okay, I've got to find a place for the person I'm hiring and then I've also got to find a place and a computer for the job coach, and it can sometimes cause problems.

So it's just language. It's the difference in the language. Sometimes, employers don't know to use, for example, people first language. A person with a disability instead of disabled people, or a person that is blind, instead of blind people. And so there's things that we want society to know and understand, but we put such burden on employers, sometimes they just are not exactly sure how to really meaningfully include people with disabilities in the workforce.

So if you are a service provider and you are talking to an employer about including people with disabilities, you need to make sure you're using language they understand. Qualified candidates. This is a good fit for the employer. This is not just about employing persons with disabilities; it's about retention. We believe these qualified candidates can provide a solid return on investment to your workforce. A solid ROI, or return on investment. This helps you, employer, be an employer of choice, and we know that you really care about being an employer of choice. Well, including a diverse workforce that includes persons with disabilities is a good way to tap into your employer of choice initiative.

Once again, make sure if you are a service provider working with an employer that wants to employ people with disabilities, that you really think about understanding the needs of the employers, partnering with those employers, learning about their business, leaning about the job openings they have, learning about the skills that they need, helping them be successful so the employees with disabilities can also be successful, becomes a win for all of us.

So I look forward to continuing this conversation, and I really appreciate you all tuning into the podcast today. I really believe the only disability is not being able to see human potential, and I hope you agree with me and you will join me in changing the world so that people with disabilities can really, truly be meaningfully included in the workforce.