



Episode #: 08 **Title: My Journey To The U N**

Guest: Debra Ruh

Guest Title: C E O

Date: June 15, 2016

Guest Company: Ruh Global Communications

Hello, this is Debra Ruh, and you're listening to Human Potential at Work. Today, I'm really excited and a little pensive, because I get the blessing to speak at the United Nations next week. I'm speaking at an event for the President's office on Monday, and then on Tuesday I'm going to be at the M-Enabling Summit. I love that conference. It's an amazing global conference. And we're going to do a book launch on Tuesday for my new book, Tapping Into Hidden Human Capital. It is a story about corporations all over the world, the journey that they're all taking to include people with disabilities in the workforce.

Then on Wednesday, I head back to New York to the United Nations COSP, the Conference of State Parties, and I'm going to speak two other times: One for the International Labor Organization and another time talking about disability inclusion, how much we need statistics. G3ICT has done some very, very interesting surveys, really trying to understand where the data is and how we can use the data that we have, as well as get better data, to make sure that people with disabilities are being more meaningfully included in every aspect of society, education, employment, housing, transportation, but with an emphasis on I C T, internet, communications and technology accessibility, which is very important to bring down the digital divide.

So as I was thinking about the honor and the obligation that I have next week, speaking at the United Nations, I'm excited but I'm really nervous about it as well. I have butterflies in my stomach, and it feels like this is very important, I need to really make sure that I'm representing my community in as an empowering way as possible. I do have a lot of knowledge and I just -- I'm wrapping my mind about it, and very excited and nervous about it.

But it also made me start thinking about the journey that I've taken. It all started when my husband and I wanted to have children. It took me five years to get pregnant, and then our beautiful, perfect baby girl was born, Sara, and four months later they told us that she had Down Syndrome. And so, they didn't think she was perfect anymore. Of course they were wrong, she still is perfect, and Sara just uses different parts of her brain and she learns differently. The good news about her though, is that when she learns something, she's got it down.

So Sara does add value to the world, and at the time, I was in the banking industry and I was doing technology and training, and I really liked the work a lot. I really enjoyed the work. I like working with people. But I just felt that part of my journey had to include adding more value for people with disabilities, since that was now my community.

HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK Host - Debra Ruh

And so I started a technology company. How hard could it be? It's really hard, but I employed many people with different types of disabilities. I learned on the job. I learned to accommodate them. I learned to understand how to communicate with different people, even people that did not communicate in a traditional way. I learned the abilities that these individuals had. I learned a billion things about myself, from being exposed to these amazing, talented people. It's been a very interesting journey so far.

It started out as just a mom saying, well, I don't agree with you. I think my daughter does add value. I think that she adds value to the world, and I think the world's a better place because she's part of it. And I think a lot of other people with disabilities add a lot of great value, and I think society needs to make sure that we're doing everything we can, to make sure that people with disabilities are educated, that they are given a chance to participate in a meaningful way in their own education process, that they're accommodated, that adaptations are provided as needed, that they are part of the workforce, that they are part of the decisions about their own lives. There's just so many things that need to happen, to make sure that people with disabilities are more meaningfully included in society.

I also thought about each of our lives and how we contribute and how we look at situations. I know that some of my family members looked at us having a daughter with Down Syndrome as the greatest tragedy that they'd ever seen, and I disagreed with them. I thought, really, that it was a life-changing event for my husband and I and that we could learn great lessons from this little soul. And Sara has been a wonderful teacher to us. She gets things, in some ways, much, much better than I am. Sometimes I think she's a much better technologist than I am. She picks things up a lot faster than me, and she patiently explains things to me. "No, mom, you use the technology this way." And I'm pretty good with technology, but in some ways, she's more intuitive than I am. And that's just an example of one person with Down Syndrome.

And you start looking at all the different people with disabilities all over the world, and the value that these people, because they are just people, add to the workforce and to society, and I think you start seeing the opportunity that we have.

I'm really hopeful that employers are going to take the time to read my book and really digest the information and incorporate into their policies, these hiring practices that we know that are working all over the world. I hope that employers are going to really work harder to make sure that they're including people with disabilities in the workforce, but they're also retaining the employees that might acquire disabilities as they work with them. Because once again, being human beings sometimes means that we become disabled. It doesn't mean we're broken; it just means at that point we might do things differently, but we still add value to society and certainly the workforce.

It also made me think about not only my journey but other peoples' journey and following our passion, even though sometimes we don't know what we're doing and we fall down along the way. We pick ourselves up, we wipe the blood off our knees and our elbows and we're like, okay, let's keep going and what can I learn from those mistakes and how can I make the world a better place?

HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK Host - **Debra Ruh**

And that's what I'm doing. So I'm really, really excited about speaking at the United Nations next week, and going to the M-Enabling Summit, and my book launch. I'm also really humbled by the opportunities. I'm humbled to be a mother of this precious daughter with Down Syndrome, and my son Kevin is such a blessing and a teacher in my life. My husband is so wonderful, and I just am feeling very grateful. So even though I'm a little nervous, I'm also very, very grateful and humbled by the opportunity that I get to be part of these global conversations.

I hope that you'll take the time to really think about where you're going in your life and where you can add value and how you can change the lives of other people and you'll join me on this walk that we're all on, this human walk that we're all part of, and I hope you also will remember, the only disability is not being able to see human potential, because that's what life is all about, human potential, and really allowing people to tap into who they are. So I'm going to come back next week and I'm going to talk about what happened at the United Nations, and the book launch, and the M-Enabling Summit, and I really, really appreciate the time that you spend with me, and I'm very, very humbled and honored to be part of these conversations. So you have a great day, and I will talk to you next time. Bye-bye.