

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh



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**Guest:** Matthew A. Shapiro    **Guest Title:** Founder / Co-Host

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Debra: Hello this is Debra Ruh and you're listening to Human Potential at Work. Thank you so much for joining our program today. Today I am going to introduce our guest and talk a little bit about the subject and then I am actually going to do an interview with Matthew Shapiro. Matthew is a young man with a visible disability. He uses a wheelchair scooter, a very, very, talented young man. He is also an entrepreneur, he owns his own company and he does disability inclusion and accessibility as well. So you're going to hear from Matthew later on in the program. During the interview, the point I was trying to make when I was talking to Matthew was, why when he applied for so many different jobs and he has a really good resume, was there a reason he was not getting employed? We delve into that a little bit; we also talk about generational differences from baby boomers, to gen X's, to the millennials and Matthew is a millennial. But something that I wonder, I don't know this for sure, is that here is a talented young man, he's a good communicator, he is very, you will see when I interview him he is very vivacious and just has a really good personality which is why he'll be a very good entrepreneur. But he took the time to do everything society has told him to do. He went to school, he went to college and did very well in college. He will talk about his studies he has been a youth leader. He has been a mentor to other youth people, he's been in leadership programs with the United States Business Leadership Network or U S B L N. He has been on the board of the Virginia B L N or V A B L N for many years. He has volunteered, he has done advocacy work in Washington D.C. and in Virginia. He has been on a commercial, he was on the same commercial my daughter was on. My daughter, Sara Ruh, born with Down syndrome. Talking about voting rights and how people with disabilities and also older people could show how we can make sure the polls are fully accessible to them in the commonwealth of Virginia. He's just a really

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

interesting, talented young man. So, why after many, many, interviews did he not get a job? Is it because he is in a scooter and a wheelchair or honestly is it because there's a lot of very talented people that have applied for jobs and have not gotten them? So we explore this topic and I wanted to do this introduction to Matthew because I suspect that partially some of the reasons why he's had such a hard time acquiring a full time job is because he is a person with a disability, a visible disability. I'd like to hope that wasn't true, I still think we have a lot of work to do in not only the United states, but countries all over the world. I was very eager to interview him and really ponder these questions and sort of dig into them. So I hope that you will enjoy this interview with Matthew he speaks from his heart. He speaks very poetically and I ask him some hard questions and you will tell very quickly that Matthew has a mind of his own. Which, once again, would lead him to be a very good employee. Now he has chosen the path of entrepreneurship which I think is, I am an entrepreneur myself, so I think it's a really good decision, I still wonder if after doing everything that society told him to do, go to school, go to college, get good grades, give back, volunteer, be a leader, all the things we tell any person that is getting a job to do, why this young man could not get a job. Is it just a fluke? Or is it because he has a visible disability? You can decide, thanks again for joining and we're going to move on to my interview with Matthew Shapiro and Doug Foresta who is my partner and my producer is going to join us in this episode as well so thanks again for joining us and I look forward to interviewing Matthew.

Theme Music

Debra: Hello This is Debra Ruh and you're listening to Human Potential at Work as some of my listeners know I have been doing, I am beginning to feature millennials that are making a difference and when I thought about the series the first person that I thought of was my guest that is on today Matthew Shapiro. I am really excited about having him on the program. I have also asked Doug Foresta, my producer to join the program because I believe that Doug always adds such wisdom to these programs. So I am excited about Doug and I having this opportunity to interview Matthew. So fist let me welcome Doug and Matthew to the program.

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

Doug: Thank you Debra, always a pleasure!

Matthew: Hi everybody thanks for having me, I'm so excited to be here today.

Debra: Yes, we are excited to have you too. So I'm going to start and then what we do Matthew is Doug and I will go back and forth and will ask you different questions. we are looking forward to having a really fun conversation. So Matthew, tell us a little about who you are.

Matthew: Of course, I am 25 years old and live in Richmond, Virginia and I am a person who lives with cerebral palsy and because of my CPI use a wheel chair, a power wheel chair, for mobility purposes and I graduated from Virginia commonwealth University in the Fall of 2013 with a double major in interdisciplinary studies. So I created my own degree and that degree had components of sociology, psychology, special education and political science. So that was my one major and then I was also able to double major in sociology because of all my sociology credits. Then I also minored in psychology and I was two or three classes away from being able to minor in political science, but by the time I realized that they told me, I was getting ready to graduate and I couldn't take the three classes. I'm not bitter about that or anything, but you know it'll be ok. So I had a very wide array of experiences in college with my degree tracks. Since then just been doing a lot of advocacy work and staying very, very, busy.

Debra: So Matthew I know that you are an entrepreneur. Why don't you tell us a little about the name of your company and tell us what you're doing now?

Matthew: Sure, be glad to, so I will give you a little bit of back story before I jump into that. So I was having some challenges when I graduated from V C U in the Fall of '13 finding employment. So, you know, I did all the job interview thing. Did all the right things that anybody is supposed to do, but wasn't getting the requisite offers that I was looking for. So in my attempt for me to try and make a living and things I decided to start my own disability consulting company and that's where 6 Wheels Consulting was born. It's called 6 Wheels because there are 6 wheels on my wheelchair. There's 4 main ones and there's 2 tiny ones in the front that not a lot

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

of people think about. So that's where 6 wheels came in and 6 Wheels is an organization that tries to teach really anybody and really any type of organization. So it could be a school, a non-profit, a business, a government agency anything that wants to learn more about disability. We try to educate them on disability things with or disability pieces with common sense and cost effective approaches to make the world more disability inclusive. I think so often people think that disability has to be this hard and complex, you have to solve the disability problems with these hard and complex things like renovating a building that costs fifty thousand dollars and it doesn't usually happen because a lot of businesses don't want to make that type of investment. But there are simple ways to make something more inclusive or make a building more accessible and I try to shed some light on that with my work and so I do that in two ways. I have a consulting side of life where I do different projects. Like I'll go in and I'll do a common sense assessment of a building. As we all know, the ADA is kind of the standard bearer of disability legislation. But I tell people often that it's kind of the bear minimum of what's required to be accessible and as a person who's lived with a disability for 25 years there are plenty of times where something will be quote unquote ADA compliant, but still not user friendly to an individual with a disability, so I go in and I try to when I do these assessments I try to think about things that will help user friendly, help a place be more user friendly to people with disabilities. So there is that piece of the consulting then I also do like webinar development or resource development for organizations to think about how to include people with disabilities into society, into the work world, all of those types of things. So that's the one side and the other side is my public speaking work. I currently have a sensitivity training that I offer businesses and I am working right now on a show that's sort of talking about getting out of your comfort zone and it can be for people with disabilities, it can be for really anybody too. So it's about one of my journeys of how I've been able to sort of get out of my comfort zone of my disability and grow as a person.

Doug: Matthew I have a quick question for you.

Matthew: Please.

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

Doug: So I am really fascinated by as not just a person with a disability, but as a millennial. I'm really fascinated you said I went out and we were chatting a little before the podcast and you know, one of the things that's clear is you said you did everything society asks you to do to get a job.

Matthew: Absolutely, absolutely.

Doug: But at some point you made the decision that this isn't happening. I'd love to hear more about, was there a moment or you know, when did you decide, enough is enough, I'm going to go off and do my own thing and not pursue looking for a J-O-B job?

Matthew: Yeah, that is a really good question and to be honest with you, the whole idea of a consulting company sort of popped into my head when I was lying in bed at night and I couldn't sleep. So, up to that point I had had I believe 3 or 4 different interviews with different work opportunities. You know, I had an interview for something up in Washington D.C. that I got really excited about and thought that I had a really, really, good interview with them and was feeling really good about the whole process and then I never really heard anything back from them. So obviously, just like anyone would, you get a little bit discouraged and quite frankly you get a little bit frustrated because like you've said I did everything that I possibly could have done. You know, I went to school, I got my degree. My resume is very, not to brag, but my resume is very impressive, I've done a lot of things I'm proud of and so like you said I did everything right and the success and the reward really wasn't coming about. So, before I really thought about entrepreneurship I had always been involved in youth initiatives here in Virginia working with young people to think about self-determination and empowerment and all of those types of things. So I had probably eight to ten years of experience kind of in that space and so in thinking one night I was like, well why don't I take my experiences, first of all of living with a disability for twenty-five years and my, you know. Excuse me, my youth program experiences and turn it into something where it can be a career. Because and I'll be honest, there were some other factors that sort of came into my mind, as I was thinking about this. I knew I wanted to get into the advocacy space, but so often when somebody is in those jobs they don't leave those jobs.

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

So when something like that comes open its very rare, it's very rare that they come open. So one I knew if I started my own consulting thing I'd have job security. Because unless something really weird happened I don't plan on firing myself anytime soon.

Debra & Doug: (Laughter)

Matthew: And I wouldn't have to worry about like a budget cut or anything like that in an agency or anything like that and pretty soon there-after I am out of a job and I'm back to square one.

Doug: Debra, I'm just interjecting here a minute just to say, just because I'd love to hear your perspective on this Debra. I'm older than you Matthew, I'm a Gen Xer and what's really fascinating to me and I think is so great from the human potential aspect is when I was in college there was never, it just wouldn't have been in our mindset, I didn't know anyone who was an entrepreneur or especially someone coming out of college to become an entrepreneur, start their own business. The internet didn't exist yet and so I'm curious, Debra for someone like you did you have any sense when you were of this age did you have any sense of, well if I get a job I can start my own business I can make a go of it myself?

Debra: No I defiantly did not. I always thought, like Matthew said, I tried to do all the right things that we were told. Do this, do this, do this and you'll get a job and it never occurred to me to become an entrepreneur. Until, actually when Sara was in middle school and there were no opportunities for her so then I thought this is ridiculous. I was in the banking industry and I decided to become an entrepreneur. I'm fascinated, like you are Doug, that Matthew thought ok I don't know what's going on here. I bring all these amazing talents to the table, experience, grounded, really good experience, good college degree. I'm doing everything I'm supposed to be doing and yet, when I'm interviewing and doing a good interview I'm still not getting hired. So I think a question that I have for you Matthew. I ask this question often when I am speaking. I know that you've done leadership, you were part of the USBLN leadership you were part of the Virginia BLN leadership. You are part of the youth leadership form, you did internships. You did

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

all of these things that typically when you do that they can lead to, certainly they enhance the resume, but at some point they're going to lead to a job. So why do you think, why do you honestly think Matthew, that you were not getting these jobs, even though you're probably over qualified for a lot of the jobs that you applied for?

Matthew: That's a really good question and to be completely honest, I don't know if I have the best answer. I mean, I have sort of thought about it, I don't know if its whether these industries just don't know how to hire people with disabilities. I certainly would hope that's not the case with all of the work we have done over the last hand full of years to really push hiring of people with disabilities. It may have been something I said in an interview, I'm really not sure I never really contemplated that.

Debra: I will just say that Matthew that is one thing I love about you, is that you have such a good attitude. I know that Southwest Airlines said one time if it is someone with a good attitude we can teach them anything, if you don't have a good attitude you're not really for Southwest Airlines. I love your attitude and I love that you're just assuming that maybe you did something wrong. I am really, I disagree with that because I believe instead society is still not there, the work force is still not there. If somebody takes a look at your resume and sees all the leadership that you have done, you've done commercials for voting. I mean you have done a lot of things right. You have gotten your degree. You have just done everything right, but I would and Doug you do a lot of work with the workforce, you will probably agree with me; I would think that in some cases it might be that you are in a wheelchair. Which by the way, I hate to think that, I'm sure you hate to think that Matthew. But, I know that you were qualified for all these different jobs, you did everything right, you went to these internships, you stuck with them, you got mentors. So I think it says a lot about society that you did not get employed.

Matthew: I think the other piece too to that Debra is it is kind of a two-way street too right. So I did these interviews. Like I said I thought they went really well, but then I started thinking about on my end. One of the jobs I was kind of looking at and they were kind of selling me on sort of ended up being like a data entry type job in the government and nothing against that type of work, but that is not where I thrive. So I sort of had to make, not only did the company have to

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

think about things, but on my end I had to think about would job x be the best fit for me? Am I utilizing my strengths to my best ability? I think that's really where this consulting has really been great for me. Because I don't know if you guys have picked up on this quickly, but I am a really good talker. I like to talk, my ability to talk and communicate has always been my greatest strength so I always try to put myself in situations where I am using that. Whether I am talking to a client that I am working with on a consulting project or I am doing a public speech that is where I am most comfortable because that is where I am utilizing my greatest strength. So I was always sort of weighing, all of the jobs I was looking at, I was sort of weighing would this be something I would be passionate about and enjoy and two would it allow me to use my strengths to my fullest potential?

Doug: We're not saying that everyone in the world is bigoted and they're trying to hold back people with disabilities, I don't really, I don't believe that. I think what happens is that unfortunately if we don't have these conversations, if we don't question what's possible then we take for granted lazy assumptions about what people are capable of and so again Matthew; I just give you a lot of credit for seeing the potential in yourself and saying I'm going to go ahead and live out this potential. I'm not going to wait for somebody else to give me permission to live out my potential in the world. I'm going to go out and do this.

Matthew: I've always been somebody who was very much a self-starter. I've always had high expectations of myself. I think that was bred in me by my parents and my family and my friends. To try and do incredible things, you know, I've done two internships in D.C. I've done all these things and I don't want to say all, but a lot of them were self-motivated. Because I had those high expectations for myself and I wanted to see myself be successful. So I've always been driven to do the next thing and do big things. I'm a person that doesn't like to sit still, in terms of letting things come to me, as you've mentioned. I'm always looking for and striving for new and more amazing opportunities.

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

Debra: And saying that we are going to wind down the interview and so if a company or organization wanted to have you speak or do consulting work for them because you've shown how brilliant you are. How would they get hold of you, tell us what your website is?

Matthew: Absolutely, so if you go to my website it's [www.6Wheelsconsulting.com](http://www.6Wheelsconsulting.com) all my information is on there. I'd love travel and go to places. I am also all over social media with 6 Wheels, I have a Twitter, I have a YouTube channel, I have an Instagram, I have a Facebook page all over there. They can check out my website, they can give me a call or they can e-mail me. I'm everywhere and would love to work with more businesses and really start talking about this whole common sense approach to disability to really shift that mindset about disability.

Debra: Also, Matthew are you a certified disabled owned business from the United States Business Leadership Network?

Matthew: I am not.

Debra: Ok

Matthew: That is something that I want to work on in the future. I don't have enough years under my belt yet to go for those things yet, but as I get older that is defiantly a plan.

Debra: Ok and for our audience [www.usbln.org](http://www.usbln.org) has a certification program for entrepreneurs with disabilities that own businesses. So if you're a corporation and you're listening, Matthew is going to become a certified disabled business owner, but that's a good way to get involved as well, make sure the vendors that you are selecting are disabled owned and certified. So thank you Matthew and Doug both for being on the program today. I think that Matthew without a doubt you prove that the only disability is when people don't see the human potential, so thank you so much for being on the program and thank you Doug for joining us today.

Theme Music