

## **Dissed-Ability**

### A Handicapped Workforce

When one reads the term ***Equal Employment Opportunity***, or rather, ***Equal Opportunity Employer***, used so often upon the many applications for prospective new recruits, one could conclude it is exactly that - an equal opportunity.

It has been a long, heavily debated discussion throughout **American** history, as to just how equal our opportunities are and to whom are they afforded to. The various groups within our society, whom have been labeled minorities, though collectively formulate the majority, are left to fend for an equal share of a pie that has already been rationed. And it is of no secret that discrimination has been a sport played by many affluent businessmen throughout the years, constricting the influence of people of color, women, the elderly, and perhaps even persons with opposing political or religious views. As important as these and all communities are to our success and growth as a united nation, there is one group that I'd like to highlight. The ones who are still to this day, taken advantage of because of their disadvantages. Our neighbors **with disabilities**.

As defined by the **United States Department of Labor**, a person with a disability has at least one of the following conditions:

- *Is **deaf**, or has difficulty hearing* (That's me, and my grandmother.)
- *Is **blind**, or has difficulty seeing - even while wearing glasses* (That's half the people I know.)
- ***Serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions because of a physical, mental or emotional condition*** (Hello to everyone on Facebook.)
- ***Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs*** (Because having difficulty alone - without the *serious* attached - isn't enough to be eligible.)
- ***Difficulty dressing or bathing*** (Although I can understand the plight of those afflicted with Arthritis or Rheumatic diseases, I hardly believe this makes Flava Flav a person with a disability. It's his disruptive behavior disorder that does.)
- ***Difficulty doing errands alone*** - such as going to the doctor's or shopping - because of a physical, mental or emotional condition (E-commerce is alive and well.)

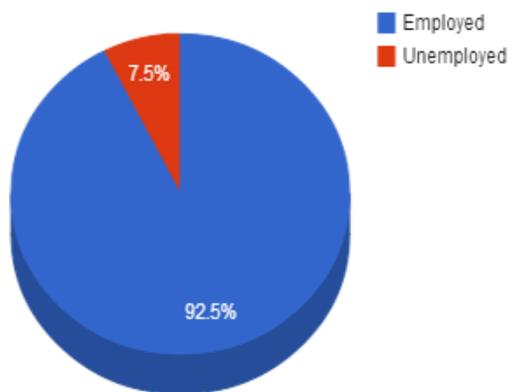
The irony here is that most of these conditions are vague enough for just about anyone, as pointed out, to claim upon themselves. Does this ultimately mean that if I was an employer looking to fulfill a position, I could hire Flava Flav and satisfy my **diversity** quota amongst my employees? Would I then be making my company look good enough on paper to silence those in charge of the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**? And what about those with physically evident ailments, such as **Down Syndrome**, Advanced **Multiple Sclerosis** or **Cerebral Palsy** - are they too awarded equal opportunities?

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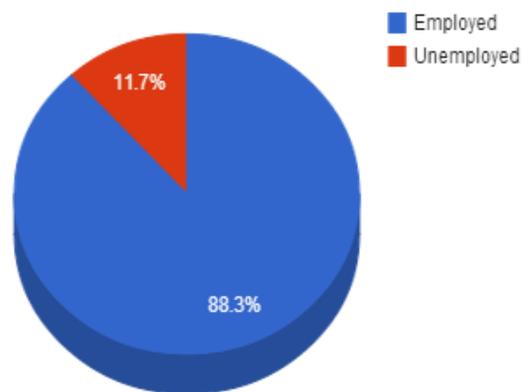
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Our friends over at the United States Department of Labor have forged some insight and provided anyone who cares enough, some cold, hard data to sink their capable teeth into. Below you will see I have painstakingly translated their discouraging numbers into the following pie charts (tasty), which breaks down the employment rates for persons with no disability, and for persons with:

Persons w/ No Disability: 149K



Persons w/ a Disability: 6K



Not sure how the reported figures were compiled, but the data collected was grossly disproportioned, with a survey reach for *persons w/ no disability* of **149,000**, and a bare **6,000** for *persons with a disability*. This gap is not impressive at all - especially when there are an estimated **54 million** Americans who are disabled. The crunched numbers thereafter show an unbalanced snapshot, unsurprisingly in favor of those who are endowed with no disabilities. Almost twelve percent of those whom have a disability, are unemployed - and that's not counting the other 53.99 million who have not been assessed.

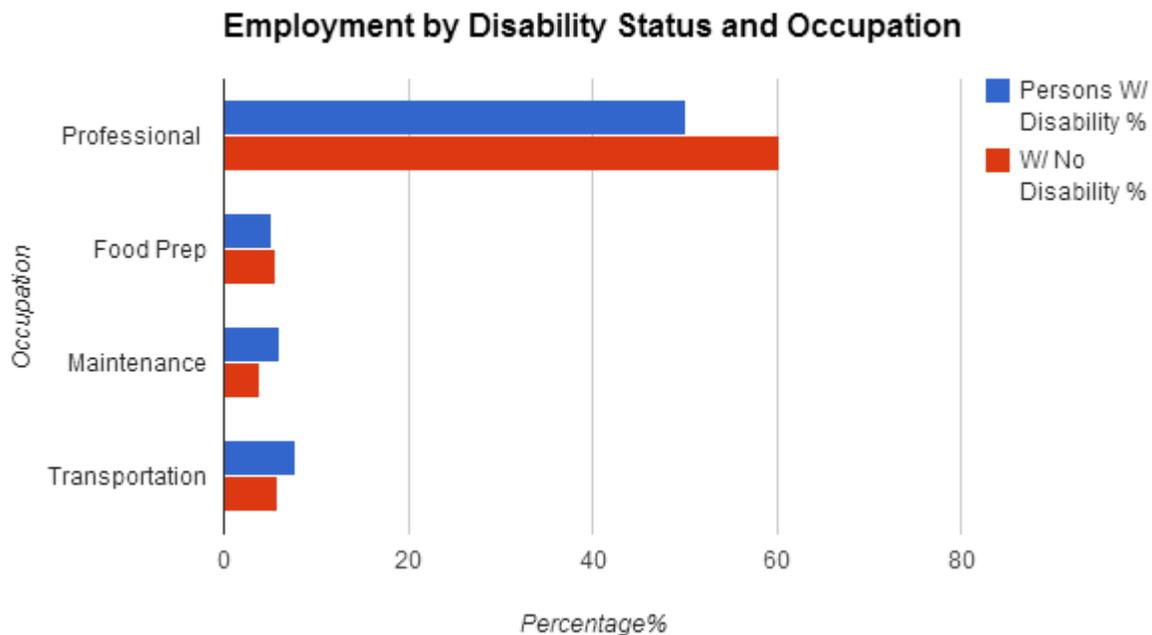
From a distance this could make some sense, being that we, as a society, are conditioned to think that a person with a disability is probably not as capable as one without. As someone who has had the honor of working with many talented, disabled folk, I can attest to the fact they *are* just as, if not **more capable** than some of the less than competent, able-bodied colleagues, who out of a clear lack of discipline, CHOOSE not to be efficient. Imagine that! Some people with the actual use of all their limbs, have groomed themselves an audacity to take the act of making a living, for granted. Sure jobs may not be as scarce as they were just a few years behind us, but they aren't exactly bountiful either. And for a person with a disability, having the opportunity to contribute to the success of our society is not just about making a living, **it's about living**.

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It is said that today's workforce includes about as many people with disabilities as it did 23 years ago, when the **Americans with Disabilities Act** was established. Many unfulfilled doors are still closed to those with disabilities. This, in my opinion, does not appear to be opportunity, never mind equal. Who exactly is policing the policies in place today, set to deter **intentional employment discrimination**? Let's take another look at some more data provided by our unhinged friends at the United States Department of Labor, shall we:

According to these numbers, for those with disabilities, about 50 percent are employed in **professional occupations** including business, finance, technological, legal and education



professions, versus 60 percent of those without disabilities. Though this may not seem like a big startling difference, we are still working down from data that include **25 times more** people with no disabilities. Though the food prep industry looks fairly equal, there still remains a difference of **140,000 disabled civilians** counted. The most interesting find in these shoddy numbers, is the calculation that more of those with disabilities are employed in physical labor - such as in maintenance and transportation occupations. Is this in some way an admission, that our disabled comrades are in fact just as *capable*, but we are incapable of accommodating their needs!?

The National Council on Disability hit it all on the head: "**For Americans without disabilities, technology makes things easy. For Americans with disabilities, technology makes things possible.**" The bottom line is that there really is no thin line between qualified and capable. You either are one or the other, and/or both - despite your ailments. The other hard truth is, that people

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with disabilities may not be an ideal addition to many business owners because their businesses aren't **adequately accessible**. Most are content with their establishment consisting of just one reserved parking space, or the one extra big stall at the end of their bathroom, never realizing how important a ramp or extra railing could be as well. Other than the hiring of a person with a disability, any improvements made to accommodate them, are simply **great investments**.

Our disabled neighbors are often **marginalized**, in society and especially in the workplace. It is arguable that some of these same people with disabilities were in fact, injured on the very job that once employed them. Consequently, they are now unwanted and expendable. Our fellow friends may be impaired to some extent, but certainly not disadvantaged or incapable. Quite the opposite. If it were not for these brave Americans, that include both **civilians** and **military personnel** alike, shuffling through their day, side by side with those who carelessly take their full capabilities for granted, it would have to be someone else in their place. And who better than somebody like you or me, who clearly, are not strong enough to walk in their valiant shoes.

It is expected that a recruiting manager is allowed to exercise their right to hire at their discretion, through a thoughtful and engaging interview process. What is not expected, and should never be accepted, is a conclusion based on biases, opinions or beliefs that someone with a disability could not be as proficient as someone without. We should expect after all, that a person with a disability or not, has in fact, an equal opportunity. An equal opportunity that will allow him or her to uphold their employers brand and policies. One thing that can be understood about our workforce - constructed on the ideals of equal opportunity - is that without the **inclusion** of our brothers and sisters with disabilities, we are all **disadvantaged**.

For more information about programs and services for those with disabilities, visit the following:

<http://www.emhorizons.org/>

<http://www.togetherwerock.com/>

<http://www.afb.org/default.aspx>

<http://downsyndromefootprint.org/>

<http://nod.org/>