

Creating a Level Playing Field for Disabled-Owned Businesses

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>> Welcome to Disabilities at Work Radio where every week we explore issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities, in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disabilities at Work.

MR. ZARDETTO: Hello. I'm Ray Zardetto and thanks for joining us today on Disabilities at Work. Disabilities at Work Radio is brought to you this week by two distinguished organizations dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled, first, the Kessler Foundation and, second, the New Jersey Division of Disability

Services. And we're going to talk some more about both of these organizations a little later in the show. But today we're going to talk about another distinguished organization, the U.S. Business Leadership Network, or as it's more commonly called, the USBLN, and the work they do advocating for the disabled. As part of that discussion, we're going to focus on some unique initiatives within the USBLN, one specifically known as the Disability Supplier Diversity Program, and to talk about that with us later on, we have the Aditi Dussault, who is the director of the program, and Jackie La Joie, Manager of Supplier Diversity at Merck & Company. But first I'd like to welcome John Kemp to the program. John is the Executive Director and the General Counsel for the USBLN. John is a principle at the Washington, DC, based law firm of Powers, Pyles, Sutter and Verville. This firm focuses on health law and public policy, among many other things. John graduated from Georgetown University, so he's probably not too thrilled with the way this year's NCAA tournament went down recently, but I'm sure he'll get over it. John is also a graduate of the Washburn University School of Law, and in 2006 received the Henry B. Betts Award, a prestigious honor certainly, given in recognition of distinguished leadership and service in the disability community. So John, I want to welcome you to the program.

MR. KEMP: Thank you very much. It's an honor to be with you.

MR. ZARDETTO: I appreciate having you on. I think the best thing

to do for the listeners is to start by talking about exactly what the USBLN is and why it came into existence.

MR. KEMP: Well, the USBLN is an employer to employer collaboration. Employers wanted to find how to solve some of the problems that they were facing by talking with other employers, and that's how they really came together. It was really brought about back in the '90s by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, a federal independent agency that was appointed by the President. And out of that, and an employer's committee, grew the USBLN. They converted the President's committee to the Office of Disability Employment Policy, appointed an assistant secretary, and the employers' committee decided to spin off and become its own organization, and that's how it got started in the early 2000s, and so today we have an incredible array of affiliates across the country and three in Canada. We have a total of 60 affiliates that touch over 5,000 companies. It is a movement that is really growing quite fast.

MR. ZARDETTO: I'm curious, you mentioned at the start of your description there that one of the impetus that, again, this whole thing was -- discussion about the problems, that different employers had. I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit. What kind of problems were being discussed?

MR. KEMP: Well, it's always been a challenge for -- for some

reason or another that employers who had difficulty finding out how best to find and then employ and retain people with disabilities. And so the USBLN came into existence as a result of employers talking to each other and really finding out how they can best solve some of the problems. You know, with the passage of both the Rehab Act in 1973 with Section 503 and Section 504 and then the A.D.A. in 1990, things became more litigious, and today I think employers have learned best practices, and that's what they really get from being a part of the USBLN. What are the best practices to employ and retain people with disabilities, to market to people with disabilities, finding out that we have spendable income we want to give to places that are accommodating to our needs.

MR. ZARDETTO: Right.

MR. KEMP: And now the newest is certainly procuring from disability owned businesses.

MR. ZARDETTO: I'm curious. Did it turn out to be a better thing or worse thing that the whole situation became more litigious?

MR. KEMP: Well, it usually happens when a civil rights law is passed, that you're still defining the margins and who is and who is not covered, what are some of the legal issues? We had a restatement after some civil rights cases reached the Supreme Court in the early 2000s, and now, umm, the A.D.A. amendments acts passed

in 2008 clarified what is discrimination and what is not. And I don't think our companies spend a lot of time worrying about that. These are progressive companies that do the right thing, are looking for talent to expand their applicant pool, to choose the very best people that they need to be a 21st century company, so I think we're -- we're talking to the enlightened companies already and learning how to do things better and better.

MR. ZARDETTO: So how would you describe a typical day at the USBLN? Exactly what happens on a practical level?

MR. KEMP: Well, on a practical level, we find companies calling in asking for answers to questions, asking to be connected up with other companies that are facing similar problems. How do they relate to the issue of, huh, various people with disabilities as customers who are coming to them? How do they communicate effectively with people who are blind or deaf? Some of the practical questions like that. The others are much broader questions, such as, who has the best practices on diversity and inclusion? How can we include disability as part of the diversity and inclusion movement? And that we value all people in our company, so how do we do that the best? So those are the kinds of questions we get. We also work closely with our affiliates, and I must say, we have a very good network of affiliates all across the United States, room to grow still.

MR. ZARDETTO: Uh-huh.

MR. KEMP: But we've gone from 36 to 60 affiliates in the last three years alone, so this is really -- really is a movement, as I said earlier.

MR. ZARDETTO: Could you describe for us then, what exactly is an affiliate? When you talk about the 60 or so affiliates that you have, what exactly is an affiliate?

MR. KEMP: In a community or a state, a lead employer will emerge who wishes to be the source of information and to convene meetings and to develop a set of programs that are needed by the -- by the employers in their state or their community. And so it usually takes a very outstanding company and an individual within that company to take on this leadership role. We have a tool kit that allows them to determine whether they want to be able to form an affiliate or whether they just want to have a loose affiliation at the time, so it usually starts with a lead employer, a committee, then it grows into a set of programs, and then probably towards an organizational entity.

MR. ZARDETTO: So are the affiliates grouped geographically around this primary employer who joins?

MR. KEMP: Yes. That's right. And in various places where the

BLN movement has really been a source of inspiration, like Florida, there are 15 satellite BLNs cooperating under the Florida BLN banner. In other places, it's still wide open and we're looking for lead employers.

MR. ZARDETTO: So this is a nationwide -

MR. KEMP: That's right. Nationwide, coast to coast, and I think we're in 36, 37 states now and three in Canada, so we are expanding.

MR. ZARDETTO: Well, if -- if someone were interested in becoming a lead employer or joining as an affiliate at this point, why don't you give them some information on how they could do, or the contact information for the USBLN?

MR. KEMP: Most definitely. They could go to infoatusbln.org. [Infoatusbln.org](http://infoatusbln.org). And they can go to our website, usbln.org and they can find out an awful lot of information about who we are, what we stand for, our programs and our services.

MR. ZARDETTO: And you do have a couple of -- actually very many interesting initiatives, and we're going to talk about the supplier one in a little while. But I also notice another one you -- you're involved in heavily. It's called the T.O.W.E.R. initiative.

MR. KEMP: Yes.

MR. ZARDETTO: And could you talk about that for a couple of minutes?

MR. KEMP: Absolutely. The T.O.W.E.R. initiative really is about including students and youth with disabilities to assist businesses in preparing for the world of work. We many times are asked, how do we find the next set of workers for our company what -- regardless of the industry. And we know that young people being prepared properly for work and with the expectation of work really are -- are appropriate for our services, so one of our fellows here, consultant named Gary Gooseman developed the T.O.W.E.R. program, which is an acronym, that stands for Tools on Work and Employment Readiness. These are tool kits that will be available very shortly on our website, funded by The HSC Foundation, and those tool kits are on apprenticeship programs, internship programs and also how to start a student advisory council at your affiliate.

MR. ZARDETTO: So do these also -- does this information, are these information packages also get shared with schools?

MR. KEMP: They do. The -- one of the -- one of the big stumbling blocks in the past has been the conversion from, or the transfer from, a -- a I.D.E.A. environment, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, kind of high school, grade school age kids growing up through the system of school and then converting to the vocational

rehabilitation system, which is an entirely different set of programs and services for them. Those transitions are now the heavy focus of coordination between the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education, and the local level schools are deeply involved in transition planning and transition programs, so that young people with disabilities see a future for themselves as opposed to going back home and sitting on the couch and not contributing to society or becoming financially independent.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's interesting. And now this is also going to be a -- a nationwide program?

MR. KEMP: It will be. And the materials will be both in print as well as on our website, and it was through the good graces of HSC Foundation that made this possible. So we are grateful to them.

MR. ZARDETTO: Well, that sounds like an awful lot of things that are going on. And what did you say, 37 states you're in now?

MR. KEMP: Yes.

MR. ZARDETTO: And also in Canada.

MR. KEMP: And DC.

MR. ZARDETTO: Yeah, that's an awful lot of progress that you've

made, and I'm sure you're all very proud of it. I'm wondering at this point, given everything you've done, what do you think is the biggest challenge you're facing at this point?

MR. KEMP: Well, that's a good question. I -- I think we are really looking at trying to be relevant to employers, making sure that the information that we provide, the services that we provide are what they want and need. We are very proud of the 43 corporate members, companies like Merck, our board of directors made up of just the -- the top and most progressive companies in the United States, Wachovia, Wells Fargo company, Walgreen's, which is certainly a model for their distribution centers and the way they employ people with disabilities, IBM, McDonald's, Motorola, Call Com, just amazing companies that have become part of the our board of directors and our corporate members, so we want to make sure that we're relevant to their needs, and so we are trying to listen carefully to what they want and need. One of the -- one of the items that we felt that we heard was missing was as companies were filling out their diversity and inclusion programs, their procurement officers were not finding a way to safely and securely and with confidence identify who are disability owned businesses. Many of these companies that I mentioned take their diversity and inclusion commitment quite seriously in the procurement area, and they were finding out that they could find women owned businesses, minority owned businesses, GLBT owned businesses, but they did not have a way in which they could identify disability owned businesses, and

I think you're going to hear that we are first to market with the certification program and it allows companies in this area to find qualified and certified disability owned businesses.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's a lot of good stuff. A lot of fascinating stuff. And I think we need to continue this discussion, and we will in just a couple of minutes. I'm speaking with John Kemp, the Executive Director and General Counsel for the U.S. Business Leadership Network. We have more to talk about with John, but we're going to take a short break, and before we do so, I would just like to remind everyone that if you'd like, you can join our tweam, our Twitter team at Disabilities At, D-I-S-A-B-I-L-I-T-I-E-S A-T, and you can friend us at Facebook. We're on Facebook at Disabilities at Work, and we urge you to do that. If you want more information about our program or other activities, you can also visit our website, www.disabilitiesatwork.org. And when we return, and we continue our conversation here with John Kemp, we're going to talk about some very interesting documents that his organization has put together that they share with perspective employers. It's an actual business case for hiring people with disabilities. Very fascinating. So stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto. This is Disabilities at Work.

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Welcome back.

MR. ZARDETTO: Welcome back to Disabilities at Work, and again, this show is brought to you this week by the Kessler Foundation and the state of New Jersey's Division of Disability Services. I'm Ray Zardetto and I'm speaking with John Kemp, Executive Director and General Counsel for the U.S. Business Leadership Network, about the wide variety of work the USBLN does to support and advocate for people with disabilities everywhere. I'd like to change the course of the discussion with John for a couple of minutes now. John is a co-author of a book entitled *Reflections of a Different Journey: What People with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew*. It's published by McGraw-Hill, and by the way, it's available on Amazon on the Barnes & Noble website, and at www.disabilitybooks.com, and I urge you to check it out. John, there's a number of questions I want to ask you about the book because I think it relates to the discussion we're having here. But why don't we start first, and give us some idea why you decided to write this book.

MR. KEMP: The idea emanated from my co-author and co-editor, Dr. Stanley Klein, who has spent a number of years looking at families with disabilities and really wondering, you know, what makes for a good healthy family environment, how do people with disabilities accept who they are and get on with their lives. And he was talking to me about, you know, what's really missing is a

role model book, people that have lived with their disabilities from birth as opposed to people who have acquired their disabilities. Interestingly enough, 83% of people with disabilities acquired their disability after birth and sometimes long after birth. They started as nondisabled children. I'm one of those who started my life with my disability, was born without arms or legs, and off at the elbows and knees, and got artificial legs when I was two, artificial arms when I was three, and went to regular schools in North Dakota starting at the age of four in kindergarten. So I grew up in a very inclusive environment, much like the workplace that we talk about today, the inclusive workplace. So I've -- I've lived an inclusive life, thanks to a father who believed in what I was doing. My mother passed away of ovarian cancer when I was about 15 months old, and so my dad raised three of us kids, and I actually have a younger sister who was just three months old when my mother died. So Stan felt that we really should be writing and asking people who have grown up with a disability, what kind of parents did you have? What made you so -- what did they face, and what advice would you give to young parents today who have just given birth to a disabled child? This we found out was a very important niche. An awful lot of people just don't know where to turn if disability becomes present in their family all of the sudden, especially in a baby. And it is a frightening experience for many, and once they get over the fear and the fright and they find that there is a future for their children, they feel much better and much more assured, so that was the purpose of writing this book, and we

collected 40 essays by really incredible people. Some were not all happy talk. Some of it was a little bit in your face. Some -- there was one author who chose to be anonymous, the only anonymous author in the book, but it was very clear that she had been wounded emotionally by the neglect that her mother, you know, had failed -- had failed to give her, that she had -- or that she had experienced from her mother. So it was -- it was one of those where a lot of really good information came out, but some truth came out as well about some of the things that didn't go right.

MR. ZARDETTO: And maybe not to dwell too long on the book, because we do want to get back to USBLN and everything, but is there a key one or two takeaways from the book that you could share with us at this point?

MR. KEMP: Well, I think what most people were saying that we got from our families -- what we got from our families was they loved and accepted us just as we are. They didn't try to change us. They didn't try to mold us. They didn't try to make us into something that we weren't. They let us fail, which is an important part of growing up, like every kid faces, but they also encouraged us to try things, and that's certainly true of my dad. He was always pushing me and encouraging me, and I did things that I never dreamed I would ever do because of him. And he only passed away about a year and a half ago at the age of 89, and I think he -- I think he did a great job of raising three of us kids by himself, so I think

just -- they let us grow up and be ourselves.

MR. ZARDETTO: Uh-huh. And that actually gets to one of the points that struck me in the book, which I think would translate into the discussion we're having about the disabilities in the workplace, and that's mentorship. You described I think your parents in some ways as mentors, and I think in the book you also talk about how important it is to have mentoring partnerships, mentoring relationships.

MR. KEMP: Absolutely true. We don't know quite what the exact age is of when young people start thinking about their careers. Many people have thought it might be as early as 14 and 12. You know, my feeling, it's much younger than that. I think they're watching their parents and their parents' parents, their teachers, other role models in the community. I want to be a public safety officer, a police officer, a fire person. I want to do something like that. They're thinking about it much earlier than we give them credit, so we have to make sure that people with disabilities, kids with disabilities, believe that they can grow up and do anything that they want to do. It's their choice to live a good life, and we hope that we give them hope for that.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's great. You mentioned before the break, as far as some of the activities with USBLN, that your organization has put together essentially a business case to share with employers

and prospective employers about hiring the disabled. Is that correct?

MR. KEMP: That's right.

MR. ZARDETTO: Could you talk a little bit about what that business case says and what the arguments are that it makes?

MR. KEMP: Well, the business case is pretty clear, and I'm sure that fellow guests here will know exactly what I'm talking about. We can almost -- we almost cannot imagine a world in which people with disabilities are not present. We might be really smart on one or two or three individuals with various kinds of disabilities, but we certainly can't appreciate all of them, and it takes a certain mind set to accept people just exactly who they are and the way they are and the way they present themselves, and the business case is really about there are sufficient numbers of people out there with disabilities with good educations who are ready and willing and able to work, and if we do not properly include them, recruit them, find them, include them in the applicant pools and promotion pools, then it is to the detriment of business, not to the advantage but to the detriment of business, not to be including them in those pools. There's a strong business case to be made that -- in a competitive, 21st century work force, people with disabilities must comprise a representative number in there.

MR. ZARDETTO: And are there actual economic figures that you use, financials that you use, in trying to make this case for employers?

MR. KEMP: Well, there are, and certainly in terms of spendable income, there could be well in excess of \$1 trillion in spendable income that's available through family and friends and people with disabilities, whether it be through their work or through other means of financial support, and companies that don't market their accessibility, their availability to the disability market, are missing out on a huge, huge market. We have spendable income in our pockets. I use a scooter wheelchair. I don't go to places that are not accessible. I don't try to get into them. I don't try to do business with them. I go to places that want my business. If I see that a website is not accessible, if a company is not talking to me in some way, I will go some other place and find hopefully a comparable product. So I think it's in the best interests of companies, and that's what our business case says, that the more you can make your products and services available and accessible to people with disabilities, the more you're going to get, and that includes the immediate people around the individual with the disability, their children, their brothers and sisters, their spouses, their parents, and the like. So it's -- it's a very significant market, the disability market, and I think only recently have marketers really taken hold of that.

MR. ZARDETTO: Good. It sounds like -- that's a nice segue to

bring in our other guests. But before I do that, just one other thing I wanted to mention for John to talk about with regard to the USBLN. You're going to be having your annual conference I believe in June?

MR. KEMP: It will be in September.

MR. ZARDETTO: September, I'm sorry. In Chicago, right?

MR. KEMP: September 19 to 22 in Chicago. There will be information, if it's not already up on our website, about the conference, and we would welcome any employer who -- or employee who works for a company that's really interested in this whole area of talent, finding talent, finding market share, and finding disability owned companies and how to procure from them. We would encourage them strongly to become -- be a part of our conference.

MR. ZARDETTO: And so if they are interested in doing that, would they contact you with the information you gave earlier?

MR. KEMP: Absolutely. They can do that and just keep an eye on the usbln.org website. Our conference theme is Aligning Disability with a Bottom Line, Talent, Market Share and Supplier Diversity, so we are looking at those three themes throughout our whole conference.

MR. ZARDETTO: And what are the dates again?

MR. KEMP: September 19 to 22 at the Westin Hotel on The Magnificent Mile in downtown Chicago.

MR. ZARDETTO: Right. And this is the 13th conference, I think?

MR. KEMP: I think so.

MR. ZARDETTO: And so about how many people do you get showing up at these now?

MR. KEMP: We hope to have in excess of 500, and these are going to be top-level company representatives and some representatives from government and the like who are very, very interested in what we're doing.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's great. For an employer who would go to this conference, you were mentioning that you spent -- or the theme of the conference is that you're going to align needs with the bottom line. How do you do that in terms of the information that you would provide to a prospective employer who would go to the show or needs information about it even if they don't go to the show? How do you do that?

MR. KEMP: Well, I think one of the things is that we use is a

number of effective speakers. We certainly showed -- this last year at our conference, one of the speakers was Randy Lewis, who happens to chair this year's conference. He is Senior Vice President for Distribution at Walgreen's, and his speech was all about how we are hiring 25 to 40% of the work force at two distribution centers, one in Anderson, South Carolina, and another in Windsor, Connecticut, and that they look to the disability market to be an answer for their talent needs, and they have never lowered their performance standards one iota, and they are finding many qualified individuals to fill all of those jobs. So it's been fantastic for people with disabilities, but as he says, it's been fantastic for his company as well. I think you're going to see this across the country. Also Microtel hotels and their president, Roy Flora, spoke at our conference last year about how after making his website accessible and making sure that the -- that there were adequate numbers of A.D.A. rooms at the Microtel Inns & Suites around the country, his sales of those rooms went up 270%, so it was good business for him to make his website accessible and his hotels accessible. It's these kinds of stories that are just rampant throughout the USBLN.

MR. ZARDETTO: All right. Well, we have to take another short break here on Disabilities at Work, and when we return, we're going to bring in our other guests, Aditi Dussault and Jackie La Joie, to talk some more about the USBLN and some of the very specific programs they have, including the Diversified Supplier Program, but

as I say, first we're going to have to take a short break. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work.

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Welcome back.

MR. ZARDETTO: This is Ray Zardetto back at Disabilities at Work, today's show sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled through the rehabilitation research done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through

the work it does via the Kessler program center which prepares the disabled for the demands of the workplace. And for more information about great work done by the Kessler Foundation, you can visit their website at www.kesslerfoundation.org. Also sponsoring our show today is the New Jersey Division of Disability Services, part of the state of New Jersey's Department of Health and Senior Services. One of the department's goals is to help people who have become disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their communities, and Disabilities at Work Radio thanks both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show. So now it's time to introduce our other two guests, and then continue our discussion about the USBLN and its innovative programs. First, let me introduce Aditi Dussault. She's the Director of Affiliate Relations for the USBLN, and she's also Director of the Disabled Supplier Diversity Network, which is the initiative we're going to spend some time discussing in just a couple of moments. Aditi holds a BS in economics from American University in Washington, DC, and she is the main point of contact for the 60-plus affiliate organizations that John described earlier in the show. So I think Aditi probably has some very busy days. Secondly, I'd like to introduce Jackie La Joie from Merck. She is the Director of Supplier Diversity, and she has the overall leadership responsibility for the development and execution of the world-class Supplier Diversity Program at Merck, and so I welcome you both to the program. Thank you for joining us. And Aditi, I think let's

start with you. If you would, could you give us a description of exactly what the DSDP, the Supplier Diversity Program is?

MS. DUSSAULT: Sure. It's a pleasure to be here, Ray, and thank you for the opportunity, and the Disability Supplier Diversity Program is a new program of the U.S. Business Leadership Network, and the program offers a certification to suppliers that are owned by persons with a disability. So these are small, mid-sized, large businesses that have 51% ownership, operation, management, and control by persons with a disability, and we work with them to increase their opportunities with major corporations across the country.

MR. ZARDETTO: Great. And the certification process you're talking about, can you describe that a little bit more in terms of, you know, how long it takes, what happens to a company that applies for certification?

MS. DUSSAULT: Yes. The first step for a company to go through the certification process is to learn about the program and if certification is a good fit for their business. And once they make the decision to apply for certification, it usually takes about 60 to 90 days to get through the entire process. The initial process entails filling out an application form and supplying some basic supporting documentation about your company to the USBLN, and from there, we do a site visit of the business, and then we make a decision

on the application of the company. So the required documentation for a company is basic business information, contact information, capabilities information, financial and government -- governance documentation of the company and really gives us a very good picture of what the company is and how it's structured.

MR. ZARDETTO: About how long does this whole process take?

MS. DUSSAULT: From the receipt of a completed certification application through the final decision, which is made by a committee, so there's an entire committee review process that usually takes about 60 to 90 days.

MR. ZARDETTO: And of course, I guess the obvious question that's begged of all of this, why certification? What's the benefit of doing this?

MS. DUSSAULT: Well, there are several different benefits for getting certified, and I'll mention the two highlights. The number one benefit is enhanced access to major corporations. Major corporations who have aggressive and good inclusion processes and programs have looked at their procurement as an area for a diversity inclusion as well. So going beyond employment, going beyond marketing and looking at where are our companies getting their goods and services from and making sure that their suppliers are also diverse, so you know, historically it's been -- companies have

worked with minority owned businesses, women owned businesses, gay and lesbian owned businesses and are now looking at disability owned businesses as a new category for what are called supplier diversity initiatives. So what -- the benefit from getting the certification is access to those supplier diversity programs within major corporations across the country. The second main benefit is being part of a business to business network. It's been discussed and studied many -- many different forum about how companies prefer to do business with similar folks and have -- people you have things in common with, and so we're really trying to put a face on the community of entrepreneurs with disabilities and help them network and grow their business with one another.

MR. ZARDETTO: And how long has this program be in existence?

MS. DUSSAULT: We formally launched the program at the beginning of year. So it's a very new program. We had done over a year's worth of research and exploration to make sure that our certification program followed the models of other certification programs that exist for minorities and women and their certification processes. So after about a year and a half of research, we started with a pilot of the program at the end of 2009 and really have opened up a program at the beginning of this year, 2010.

MR. ZARDETTO: I'm just curious, with regard to the research you did over that past -- in the 18 months before you activated as an

actual program, was there anything in the research you found that was particularly surprising or striking?

MS. DUSSAULT: Well, I would say, the number one thing that stood out to me that this hadn't been done before. The U.S. Business Leadership Network has been around for a while, and of course, people with disabilities and entrepreneurs with disabilities have been around a long time too, and given the programs that exist for minorities and for women, based on, you know, historical discrimination against those categories of people, it was very surprising that there was no third party certification out there already doing what the USBLN is now doing, so that would definitely be the biggest surprise out there.

MR. ZARDETTO: Do you ever wonder why that was?

MS. DUSSAULT: You know, I think that it perhaps comes from the fact that -- a few things. That the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, and there was -- there's all sorts of good legislation in place around the employment of people with disabilities, and so maybe there was a mind-set that this doesn't need to be done. And perhaps also a bias that people with disabilities are reliant on others and cannot actually run their own businesses and -- and don't do the things that entrepreneurs do, and in reality, it's that people with disabilities just do things differently and really are doing all the things that other

entrepreneurs are doing in running their own businesses and succeeding in their own businesses, and this program will help us find those companies and really get us to start telling the -- their stories.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's great. Umm, Jackie La Joie with Merck, how did you get involved in this program?

MS. LA JOIE: We were actually one of the companies that when they were thinking -- first thinking about starting this supplier diversity initiative that we met with and provided input and insight on what we would need from a supplier diversity program perspective as far as certification, was it worth -- was it something we would embrace if -- if there was a -- a pool of suppliers that we could draw from, include them in the program, so we were in very early stages of discussing the potential of doing this, and then when they launched it, of course, we jumped on board.

MR. ZARDETTO: And how long -- how long have you been on board?

MS. LA JOIE: Well, since the first of the year, when they reached out and said, are you interested in doing this, we did not hesitate and we said absolutely. Umm, we're really excited. I'm -- I think -- you know, Merck embraces -- we value all of our suppliers. We value all of our employees. So one of the things we really, really try to do is be inclusive, and if you want your supply base

to reflect your customer base, then it needs to include everybody.
Right?

MR. ZARDETTO: Right.

MS. LA JOIE: And so the USBLN and the supplier diversity certification is going to allow us to be able to now identify suppliers that are owned with five people with disabilities so that now we can actually do the right thing and be inclusive like we want to.

MR. ZARDETTO: So it's more than just a program for Merck. It's more part of a business strategy then.

MS. LA JOIE: It is, absolutely. And I think you'll find that in many, many of the large corporations that have supplier diversity programs that are doing this for more than compliance. You know, there's a business case out there for it, and you want to, umm -- in addition to your supply base, reflects in your customer base. It comes down to us. If you hear our executives talk, every time they'll tell you, it comes down to doing the right thing, and it's just doing the right thing.

MR. ZARDETTO: So you've -- you've been involved with it or Merck has been involved with it since January, so I'm just wondering if there are any perspectives you can share at this time with other

businesses just based on what you've seen or observed with it so far.

MS. LA JOIE: Well, to the businesses that are owned by people with disabilities, I would certainly say, umm, please look into the certification, and if your target market is corporation, then this can be the absolute best connection that they can have to get into those corporations, because major corporations that have supplier diversity programs have people that do jobs like I do. 100% of my time, every day, is focused on making sure that Merck is inclusive of minority, women, veterans, LGBT owned businesses and now businesses owned by people with disabilities. So there's a champion in each one of those corporations that those -- that those businesses may not even be aware of.

MR. ZARDETTO: Right.

MS. LA JOIE: And USBLN can be that connector. That's what I'm looking for from USBLN. I'm looking for them to show me where those businesses are so that I can then go back to my company and say, and look around and say, is there a place for this company to compete? So no business -- there's no gimmes in this world, right?

MR. ZARDETTO: Right. Actually, that leads to one of the questions I wanted to ask you, when you've got all of these different kinds of suppliers, how do you balance it all? You know, when you've

got three or four different categories of suppliers that you look to work with like this, how do you balance it?

MS. LA JOIE: We actually establish goals for each one of the categories. We do not have a goal for companies with -- owned by people with disabilities at this point. Once the supplier pool of potential suppliers gets large enough, we'll create a goal there as well. But what it boils down to is any time there's an opportunity or any time we're buying a good or a service, we go out and we expect our buyers -- this is part of their performance objective. We go out and we look for suppliers that could compete for that particular opportunity. So if they can compete, then they can include it. Now, they still have to -- they still have to offer the -- you know, provide the service and the quality and, you know, make sure that we have the goods and services when we need them, where we need them, and then they have to be competitive on price. But if we don't know about them and they're not certified, they're not going to get that far.

MR. ZARDETTO: Right. Your experience so far is that they are indeed competitive and they are responsive.

MS. LA JOIE: Umm, yeah. Well, you know, what -- the problem is today that we may be doing business today with companies that are owned by people with disabilities, and we don't know it.

MR. ZARDETTO: Yep.

MS. LA JOIE: We don't know it. So we can't even be their champion. So that's where USBLN comes in.

MR. ZARDETTO: Right. Interesting. And, umm, Jackie before we take the next break, huh, I was just wondering, when we come back after the break if, you know, you might be able to provide us some perspective on just how you think this whole supplier universe has changed in the last couple of years as a result of certainly the work of the USBLN, but, you know, other organizations as well champion, other minorities as you mentioned, and other kinds of suppliers, other kinds of businesses. So I'd like to open the discussion after the next break with that. But we do have to take one more break. And to our listeners again, I invite you to join us on Twitter at Disabilities At, D-I-S-A-B-I-L-I-T-I-E-S A-T, DisabilitiesAt, and also, if you can, friend us on Facebook at Disabilities at Work, or visit our website, which is disabilitiesatwork.org. As I said, when we come back, we're going to continue our discussion of the initiatives of the USBLN and then also broaden the discussion to talk a little bit more about how the entire business marketplace has changed with regard to people with disabilities. So stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto. This is Disabilities at Work.

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Welcome back.

MR. ZARDETTO: Welcome back. I'm Ray Zardetto. This is Disabilities at Work. And before we continue, I just want to mention that next week our show is going to be very interesting. We have a pair of businesses that were originally funded by the Kessler Foundation, and now they're run by people with disabilities, and both of these businesses have become very successful enterprises. It's a very interesting story. I think you'll find it very compelling and maybe even a little humorous at times, so join us on our show next week for that. We expect to have representatives from the Kessler Foundation and also from these two businesses to talk about -- to talk about what's going on. So please join us next week. But we also have a very compelling show this week and guests to go with it, John Kemp and Aditi Dussault from the U.S. Business Leadership Network, and Jackie La Joie from Merck, all still with us here and join us for our last segment.

Jackie, before we took the last break, you were talking about the connection or the important connection the USBLN has made for you with regard to supplier diversity, and I thought, you know, you could pick up on that point again for a minute.

MS. LA JOIE: Sure. When we do supplier diversity in a corporation, we have a lot of tools that we use to help us identify suppliers, and some of those tools have been around for many years because organizations promoting the utilization of minorities and women have been around for a long time, and if you have a government contract in your corporation, then you have government mandates, and so there are databases you can use there. When we get down to suppliers that are owned by people with disabilities, USBLN is the first organization that's creating a tool for us to be able to find those suppliers. So what I was really driving at was, I just can't encourage the suppliers enough to check out USBLN and become certified if their target market is the corporate world, because that's how we're going to find those companies that help -

MR. ZARDETTO: Yes, I think that's very good, which actually leads into a question for Aditi then. For anybody, companies, suppliers, businesses that want to find out more about this program and what they can do, what should they do?

MS. DUSSAULT: Well, I would recommend you head to your website. It's www.usbln.org. Again, it's usbln.org. And at that site, you

will see a link to more information about the program, and you can click through, and you can -- if you're a potential applicant for the program and are interested in applying for the certification, you can download the application, start filling that out. You can see what the requirements are for certification, as well as contact the USBLN with any questions you might have about the certification process or requirements. And if you're a corporation like Merck that is interested in accessing our list of certified suppliers and including certified disability owned businesses in your Supplier Diversity Program, we would also encourage you to visit our website and get in touch with the USBLN about how to become a partner with this program, just like Merck did at the beginning of this year.

MR. ZARDETTO: Great. For the remaining minutes of the show, I'd like to just broaden the discussion a little bit about people with disabilities in the workplace and just get each of your perspectives, because each of you have a different perspective on it. John? John Kemp, I'm just wondering, given your position and your experience and everything, what do you think has been the biggest change in the workplace in the last ten years when it comes to people with disabilities?

MR. KEMP: I think the biggest change has been one of attitudes, that we are over the sympathy, charity hump and we are now looking at talent. For those companies that are really serious about getting the very best people working for them and keeping the very

best people, people who might be aging out, they might want to keep them, and keep them around because they have tremendous experience and know a lot about their companies and their history. I think I've seen that companies now take us seriously, and that's been a big issue and one that I think begs the question of leadership, and I see now leadership at the highest levels. Merck is a great example with a chief diversity officer who happens to have a disability. People and companies are getting the fact that disability is an essential part of the makeup of a company.

MR. ZARDETTO: This question is for any of you really, at this point. I mean, it's always been my sense a lot of people sometimes are reluctant or a little shy to deal with people who have disabilities on a personal level. So I wonder, did that translate into business as well? You know, people weren't exactly sure how to deal with someone who they see has got a disability of one kind or another. Was that part of what had to be overcome?

MS. DUSSAULT: If I may. This is Aditi. I definitely think that that's an important issue for every professional out there, is to gain that cultural awareness of how to approach anybody who has a disability and treat them with that human aspect, just like you would anybody else that you encounter. You know, I've heard stories of, you know, HR professionals who have somebody who has a disability walk in for that interview and they weren't -- and that HR professional was not prepared for how to interview and interact with

a person with a disability. And, you know, if you can go out there and get educated, and there are many, many ways to get educated about the proper etiquette, it makes you a stronger professional. It makes you more capable of, you know, succeeding with the -- any circumstance you end up with, and I think that's a very important thing for everyone to consider.

MR. ZARDETTO: Do you think that attitude has been overcome for the most part, or do you think it's still there?

MS. DUSSAULT: You know, for me, I think it's still there. Not personally but I think that I've seen a lot of folks who consider themselves professionals and even diversity professionals that do not understand that disability is an equal aspect of diversity. It has actually been a very surprising discovery for me, is that folks who have focused on supplier diversity or diversity in inclusion, and major corporations have always focused historically on race and gender, and then thought about it a little bit more and became comfortable with perhaps the LGBT segment or intergenerational issues, and the fact that disability has taken so long specifically in supplier diversity to come around is very surprising to me, and I think the USBLN and this Disability Supplier Diversity Program is really going to help corporate America make great strides in this area.

MR. ZARDETTO: And at this point, if those attitudes do change,

what do you suspect, and again this is for anyone, what do you expect would be the next set of obstacles to overcome?

MS. LA JOIE: Well, I'll take that from a supplier diversity perspective. I think -- I think that's going to be a long road, so I don't want to set unreal expectations, only because I -- I think that, umm, this is a new organization, and people are going to learn to feel -- you know, corporations are going to have to learn to feel comfortable, and they're going to have to produce the certifications. Once they do that, and I feel 100% that we're on the right track here, I think that it's going to be up to supplier diversity directors and work force diversity and inclusion directors and leaders to coach people internally to recognize that these companies that are owned by people with disabilities have real value that they can bring to our companies. They have -- you know, innovation is often driven by need, and there's a whole set of innovation and new discoveries that can be brought to the table by these companies that have in the past been overlooked, so I think the hurdle is, it's probably not going to be fast enough, move fast enough to satisfy us.

MR. ZARDETTO: And just real quickly, I've got a minute left, John, do you want to talk a little bit about a little campaign you guys have called Back the Plaque?

MR. KEMP: Well, certainly there's a great one that the New Jersey

BLN has taken on, and for those companies that -- that really do commit themselves to hiring people with disabilities and becoming accessible, they can receive a plaque and be known publicly for their good efforts, and I really applaud New Jersey BLN, and I just also like to say a big thanks to you, Ray, for a great interview, but also to the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services. They have been outstanding partners with not only the New Jersey BLN but the USBLN as well. So you know, these are enlightened people who get it and understand that disability is a long way off from being equal but that we're doing everything we can at the fastest pace possible to catch up, and I think Jackie La Joie was right on the money with what she said.

MR. ZARDETTO: That's great. John, Aditi, Jackie, I want to thank you all for joining us. I think it was very spirited, very interesting discussion. Great topics. And appreciate your time in joining us today. And I also want to echo John's comments and thank our sponsors for this week, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services. And don't forget next week, another great show on Disabilities at Work. We're going to discuss a pair of businesses launched with funding from the Kessler Foundation and run by people with disabilities, both of which -- both businesses are doing very, very well, thank you. They're great stories. And as I said earlier, they're both interesting, also a little humorous, and I think you're going to enjoy hearing about them. So please join us for Disabilities at

Work next week. We're on the air every Wednesday at noon Eastern Time. I'm Ray Zardetto. Thanks for joining us today. This is Disabilities at Work.

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(Conclusion)