

People with Disabilities as Entrepreneurs

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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.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Hello. I'm Ray Zardetto and welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio here on the VoiceAmerica Business

Network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities At Work explores the issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations that involve the workplace and people with disabilities. And the show discusses with prominent members of the business, government and disability communities ideas for improving this.

Disabilities At Work Radio is brought to you this week by two distinguished organizations dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled; the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services, and we will talk a little more about these two institutions later in the program.

During the first half of today's show, however, we are going to be talking with Robert Stack, The founder, president and CEO of Community Options, a national not for profit dedicated to developing homes and employment support for people with developmental disabilities.

Uh, Mr. Stack started Community Options with one phone, one table, and one compelling idea which he has turned into this national program that now spans over 70 locations and helps thousands of people. So, Robert, welcome to the program.

>> ROBERT STACK: Thank you very much and I appreciate it.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Glad to have you here. Um, you know, the famous social reformer Henry Ward Beecher said a long time ago, but I think it still resonates today, that the ability to convert ideas into things is the secret to outward success. So, I would start the show by asking you how did you come up

with this idea of Community Options and then how did you convert it to the success it is?

>> ROBERT STACK: Well, thank you very much. I -- when I was a kid I worked with children with disabilities because I was involved in a seminary. And I went to study to be a priest when I was 13 years old. So, you know, I wasn't really smart in school so they -- we had to go to school six days a week, but we got Wednesday afternoon off. That way you took math six days a week, you took French six days a week and you took Latin six days a week, but you got the afternoon off on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday afternoon. And I was lousy at sports, so they said you can volunteer. So I volunteered at a place with kids with disabilities and then I went to college and graduate school and I realized that, hey, I kind of like this. And, uh, so I started getting involved in the field.

Honestly, a long story short, I, um, worked for other nonprofits and I saw what I thought was good and I also saw what I thought wasn't that good. And, um, I created a paradigm, I think, that is a lot different than other non-profits and it worked out really well. As you say, I started it from my house and it's built up quite extensively.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: How would you define the paradigm that you were just mentioning?

>> ROBERT STACK: Well, from a business -- our mission is to develop employment and housing for people with disabilities.

And it's kind of funny, this is just, uh, interesting, early this morning I had breakfast with someone that I hadn't seen in nine years. They said, gee, you have not deviated one bit from the mission, which is true. But the paradigm is different because if you compare it to a lot of other non-profits, a lot of other non-profits that do what we do, they have separate incorporated entities. So let's say they are a national organization, they have a bunch of separately incorporated entities with separate boards of directors and separate ways that it works.

My whole organization is based on nothing more than one paradigm where it's one organization and the one organization is responsible for, um, the whole entity. In other words, we, we have one set of financial statements which lists all of our affiliates. We have one Board of Directors. We have one CEO, which is me. We have one CFO. And we have one personnel policy and procedure manual, et cetera, et cetera. We have -- so everything is kind of based in just one uniform kind of thing.

So when the economy is a scare, it makes things cheaper to buy things. It also -- your administrative costs are lower because you don't have -- you know, we are purchasing things from one central entity and so, you know, there is a reason Chase Manhattan merged, you know, a long time ago and this is the same exact thing. We merge banks. Why do they do it?

Because they save administrative costs and they can give better service to their customer and more uniformity.

The other thing I saw, and this is honest, is that some non-profits have the same names and the services that they provide. For example, in California, it might not be the same kind of services that they provide in Texas or New York.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> ROBERT STACK: All of our -- all of the services are the same. The cultures might be a little different in a sense that the people that work at the -- and certainly the culture of Dallas, Texas, is a lot different than Manhattan, but the actual philosophy and the belief on people with disabilities to be given treatment with dignity and grace is all the same.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So let's talk a little bit about the services then. In a nutshell, what exactly are the services? What do you do on a general basis? What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

>> ROBERT STACK: Well the general - the -- what we do, we provide housing and employment for people with disabilities, as I said. So that boils down to we literally, either from the most complicated environment where we literally go out and we will, we will meet with families, either families who are living in the community or families that are living in -- or a person with a disability living in an institution, and we will say, okay, do you want to live in a small house and get a job,

or do you want to live in a small house and try to do something that is a lot more meaningful?

If they say yes, then we say, okay, we are going to work with you and we are going to try to hook you up with two or three different other people and we will go purchase a house with them and helping to screen it. And we will put three to maximum four people in a house.

And now what we do, we work with another nonprofit entity that we are connected with and they physically buy the house and we have the house and we have a mortgage and we take three or four people with disabilities and they live in that house. And we provide the staff. The staff is, depending on the needs of the person, could be anywhere from very limited to 24 hours a day, 24/7, where there is literally a person there from seven to three, three to eleven, eleven to seven overnight. In case there is a fire, you have somebody awake.

And then we have, you know, vehicles and the people will go and they'll do various things. They will get jobs. We have lots of people in different jobs ranging from, you know, from all of your retail environments to manufacturing, to a lot of hospitality types of stuff. And we also have developed entrepreneurial businesses for people that haven't been able to historically make it into the regular job market right now.

And when I say that, I mean like we have a flower store we own in New Brunswick, and people with disabilities like to

deliver flowers, cut the flowers. Maybe all they can do is wash down the refrigeration unit, but there is something they can do. Maybe they can take the orders, because they happen to be in a wheelchair and they can't -- they can use a computer and they can wear a headset and they can take all of the orders.

You can call 877-VASEFUL. Or go to vaseful.com and you can get us. We deliver all over the country. We are telefloral and we have got fourteen people with disabilities working on different shifts there.

So that is just one example. But we have a variety of different entrepreneurial businesses for people with significant disabilities working and all of them make minimum wage or better.

>> ROBERT STACK: Yeah, and so you created the business, the flower shop as an entrepreneurial initiative on your own?

>> ROBERT STACK: Yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: As part of Community Options?

>> ROBERT STACK: Yes, I created it as -- I bought literally, like ten years ago, the business from a guy who owned the flower store, and I was able to do a composite bond which is another complicated thing, but we did a composite bond and we also have done, you know, tax exempt bonds and we bought buildings. We have buildings -- we have a building called the Daily Planit, which is P-l-a-n-i-t, where your business is the

center of our universe.

And what it is, it is an office environment. So you could have, you know, Ray Consulting Inc. And they'll answer the phone, Ray Consulting Inc, and you have an office. And everything, the entire infrastructure, is all done by people with disabilities. They answer your phone. They shred your documents. They help with you if you need to have a mailing. They will, if you're going to have -- we have a conference room if you want to have a conference, and if you need catering we will do that. We even do, you know, hospitality. We will go to the dry cleaners for you, we will go pick up a sandwich for you. Uh, we will clean your office. We will provide you with DSL line. All of the infrastructure is done by people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I'm just wondering, because you also talked about getting employment for someone, how do you approach prospective employers?

>> ROBERT STACK: Well, what we found is that - we have, everywhere we are we have -- we are in nine states and we have 29 offices. Every office that we have, we have what we call a business advisory committee. And what we do there -- they are a group of people and they are people that the local executive director knows who is indigenous. So she or he might live in, for example, might live in Wayne, New Jersey, and they go okay, uh, you know, the executive director gets her -- the person who

runs Wayne, New Jersey, she, um, she lives in Glenrock and her parents own a restaurant in Glenrock. So, she has somebody from there on this committee, this business advisory committee. She has somebody that does her dry cleaning. She has somebody that does a variety of different kinds of things like that.

And we have a person who is in charge of Community Options, uh, who does job development and they will literally bring a person there. The person will come there with a disability, with however scanty or complicated a resume might be, and they will say hi, guys, this is Joe, and this committee meets once a month, here is Joe, Joe really needs a job. And they will brainstorm and they will say, you know, because we all know the worst place to find a job is through the want ads. The best place to find a job is through friends or through contacts.

So they will say, what are you looking for? So, you know, this particular person is looking for a particular job. Well maybe the dry cleaner might say, well, you know, have him come over to see me. Or, you know what, I am dry cleaning and I heard Joe down the street saying that in his, you know, in his manufacturing -- at his body shop he needed somebody to do something in the parking lot or whatever. Then we network that way. So it's a very grass roots, one on one kind of thing and each local executive director throughout the country does that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So it's a lot of relationship development as

well?

>> ROBERT STACK: Exactly. In fact that's the name of the game. It's relationship development.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Well, we need to take a short break at this time, when we come back we will talk more with Robert Stack about Community Options. And we are also going to look at the impact of the most significant piece of legislation that just celebrated its 20th anniversary, the Americans with Disabilities Act. So stay with us, I'm Ray Zardetto, and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: Welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. The show this week is brought to you by the Kessler Foundation and the state of New Jersey's Division of Disabilities Services.

I'm Ray Zardetto and today I'm speaking with Robert Stack, the founder, president and the CEO of Community Options. But, Robert, I wanted to broaden our discussion a little bit

now to talk about the Americans with Disabilities Act. The twentieth anniversary of that Act just took place a couple of weeks ago. And I'm sure that is something that caught your attention and, uh, I was just wondering in the twenty years since this law past, what's changed most prominently for you?

>> ROBERT STACK: Well, it's been -- first of all, the experience of the Americans -- I happen to be one of the lucky ones, I was invited at the -- on the annual anniversary, which is the 26th, to the White House. And I was in the south lawn with the president of the United States, uh, and with Senator Harkin and with Dick Thornburg who is a wonderful -- was the governor of Pennsylvania who was the Attorney General. And Elizabeth Dole and some very prominent people who -- I was saddened that the President, George Herbert Walker Bush couldn't come because it is getting to be kind of weary for him to travel. But since he signed it twenty years ago, it's really done a lot, I think, there is a lot more to go. But, I mean, you know, think about it, most places you go now you don't have steps or you have elevators. It's a pretty obvious kind of thing.

Any time anyone builds anything new, it has got the same sort of accessibility as a casino or -- if you are from New Jersey there are casinos, or as a hospital, um, and the accessibility is one of the major things that has really helped.

And in the realms --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: In terms of how the Act has helped in terms of people, you know, with disabilities looking for employment.

>> ROBERT STACK: Well that's, again, there is a lot -- first of all, it's very hard to get a job if you can't get up the stairs. So that's the first thing. So the physical barriers to unemployment or employment were very, very positive.

Uh, the other thing, you know, that it did, you know, it created the whole anti discriminatory sort of thing and it heightened the awareness of people with disabilities relative to them being able to do work.

The truth of the matter is, you know, one of the things that everyone realized and one of the things was -- the Americans with Disabilities Act when it was past twenty years ago, it was really a systematized methodology of everybody getting together trying to push, you know, various legislators for this to have happen. And the saddest part was a lot of people that were responsible for signing it are dead now. You know, Justin Dart, some of the people who were around, Evan Kemp and George, the president was there, but I think the way that it is eased, it's given -- it's created some sort of incentive from employers to hire people and it's also taken away that whole idea that people with disabilities can't work.

And the other thing, one of the silliest things like I'd like to defuse, people think that people with disabilities are

the last to be hired and the first to be fired, especially with the recession.

You know, one of the things that I laugh at, I have 2,500 employees and when I get an employee who is at a job level that is supposed to get people disabilities and they say anything about, well, it's a recession, that's ridiculous. In a recession, the person that is laid off is the person who is the senior executive vice president in charge of long-term planning on Wednesdays, not the guy that gets you the cup of coffee. Not the guy that cleans, you know, your office. Not the guy that makes your copies. Those are the guys they need. And the infrastructure people are the ones that we help with.

And the other thing is all of -- I read the book the World is Flat, you know, the book -- it's a very interesting book. Where the administrative assistant is conducting all of the CEO's work in Mumbai, and they are talking about how computers can make and they are talking about how all of the airlines, when you call and book a flight, that somebody is answering it from a different country, et cetera. And that is true.

However, the Baby Boomers have gotten a lot older, and we all need somebody to help us carry our suitcases up the stairs. We need somebody to wash our cars and do our laundry. We need somebody to provide an infrastructure of support to us that we are not going to get from a computer.

So we need the people here. You know? And I just want to say one other -- there is all this stuff about immigration and this and that and the other thing. People with disabilities, still two thirds of people with disabilities who are American citizens are still unemployed or underemployed.

So if there is a problem with trying to build up the workforce, I urge the corporations of this world to take a serious look at us. We are certainly, certainly one of the biggest -- when I was at the American of Disabilities Act, the major player who really has done a tremendous job, and I'm not giving them a commercial, I'm just stating a fact, is Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart has gone out of their way. They have created certain -- because they know they need people physically in their stories in order to do the job.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah. And I want to talk more about the Act, but as long as you are talking about this part of it as you are now, if employers, prospective employers are interested, how and when and where do they get in touch with you?

>> ROBERT STACK: Oh, thank you, thank you for that plug.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Sure.

>> ROBERT STACK: I am -- first of all, we have got -- I'm a pretty, pretty technologically astute guy. So, you know, obviously, you know, you can go to our website and I'll give you that in a second. But the simple thing is if you go on Google and you type in Community Options, boom, there we are.

If you type in Community Options in the state that you are in, Community Options in New Jersey, Community Options in New Mexico, Tennessee, whatever you want, they are all there, it doesn't matter. But if you just go Community Options Inc. You will get us.

But our website, for those of you who want to do it, its www.comop.org. And, uh, you can get us anyway you want there. And you know, if you want to -- if you need flowers, vaseful.com or 877-Vaseful, and we will pick up the phone. And it's v-a-s-e-f-u-l.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You got that one in the second time, good.

>> ROBERT STACK: Vaseful. As I said to Governor Chris Christy of New Jersey, who is a wonderful man, because he looked at me and said v-a-s-e-f-u-l? I said yes, governor, you have to leave the last "L" off for love.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: (Laughter).

>> ROBERT STACK: He kind of that was a little corny, but he liked it anyway.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And he remembered it.

>> ROBERT STACK: You know what? He will remember its Vaseful.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Exactly. To get back to the Americans with Disabilities Act for a moment, if Congress or the president or someone were to call you and say, Robert, what is the one single biggest thing the Act still does not cover and we still need to do, what would be it?

>> ROBERT STACK: There has to be, again, there has to be a better -- one of the -- the Medicaid - I mean, I read the Wall Street Journal every day and right now the major thing they are talking about is how they got to cut Medicaid, how they have to deal with all of the budget cuts and this kind of thing.

One legislator came in and she was actually -- it was actually in the Wall Street Journal recently where she was comparing her decision making to Sophie's Choice and I'm like which is kind of a horrific analogy when you think about that. That was a movie or a book about a woman who was going to decide who was going to live.

The truth of the matter - because she said it's between food stamps and people with disabilities. The truth of the matter is, and this is a very important truth, there are still 50,000 people with developmental disabilities living in large congregate, state run institutions throughout the country. There are twelve states that don't have any. And there are the remaining states still do.

The cost to keep a person in a large facility like that is literally double that of living in a community based environment. And the quality of life is doubly as bad. So, I urge Congress, the president and anybody that can hear me to look at trying to create better incentives to get people with disabilities out of institutions and put them in the community.

Institutions that have been closed all over the country,

they have got great other uses. They have been using them as prisons. In -- the Western Center, which was closed in Pittsburgh, they sold it to a developer, he made big condos. They put that back on the tax roles. And the University of Connecticut, UCONN, they took a bunch of institutional buildings and they used them to augment their classrooms. So, again, in Texas, they do some of the tough love for kids that are stuck trying to get off drugs or working in a rehabilitative mode.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: In fact, you have one close to home with the North Princeton Center, didn't you?

>> ROBERT STACK: Yes. North Princeton Developmental Center, Governor Christy closed that facility and that was very, very important. And all those people, the quality of life for those people is unbelievable.

We have taken - I personally, I know a guy that came out of an institution, he was blind, he was considered cognitively impaired and they were going to put him in another institution because he had all these disabilities and he now has a full-time job. He owns his own condo. Now we had to sign a, you know, like a co-sign, but he has owned that condo by himself. It's a two bedroom condo, he lives by himself. He takes a bus to work. The other bedroom has a bike and a treadmill in it.

And the only real reason -- he has this job and he was

making decent money and the only reason why we had to sign for him was because the bank said, gee, we are leery about giving him a mortgage because we don't know how we would ever foreclose on him if he defaulted.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah.

>> ROBERT STACK: And I said, well, that's ridiculous. But they ended up, because how can you kick out a guy with a disability that is blind? He has been in that condo for over twelve years. He came out of the institution and he has got a job and a meaningful life. And he is blind and he's cognitively impaired and he has friends.

That's the other thing. When you take a person out of a facility, and this is what the Americans of Disabilities Act has to push this, because literally, if they close these institutions throughout the country, the savings yearly would be in excess of five billion dollars.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And that probably doesn't even calculate in how much more productive all of these people with disabilities are because they are now working.

>> ROBERT STACK: Nor does it take into account all of the houses you are going to buy. Nor does it take into account all of the (inaudible) economic growth from hiring a staff in the community, from buying local.

I mean, you know, I'm not an economist, I have an MBA, but I'm not an economist and I'll tell you something, if anyone

really factored in all that other stuff I bet you it would be a ridiculous amount of money.

And I personally talked to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, she called me back from her plane and I was saying - and I gave her a position paper on this, they said they would look at it, but I still have not seen any kind of a real strong push from the White House or anywhere to get these people out of these facilities.

And when the president was -- came and everybody was excited, he signed a piece, an executive order, but the executive order, which was a lot of bull, was to try to -- was an executive order to make the internet more accessible. And that's a great idea, however, that is, you know, it's kind of like a very, very, very small thing where the heavy lifting is to literally create methodologies to have incentives for Medicaid to get people out of the institution so that they can work and live in the community.

So I think that is the major thing that has to be pushed.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Thank you. I want to, in fact, it's been a fascinating conversation, Robert. I think, um, not only is the idea compelling, it just seems to make a lot of sense for everybody, both financially and from a social and economic point of view. And I appreciate your thoughts and your sharing them with us today. And congratulations, by the

way, on the work you do.

We have to take another break, um, and when we return we are going to bring on an international entrepreneur by the name of Phil Jones and talk a little bit from his perspective about how people with disabilities at work is viewed in terms of the higher corporate circles he is usually involved in and also to bring an international perspective to it.

But, first, let me thank my guest for the first half hour, Robert Stack. That was a great discussion, Robert, we appreciate your being with us.

And also, before we break, let me also just remind everyone in the audience, um, please join our tweam at DisabilitiesAt and also friend us at Facebook at Disabilities At Work Radio. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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Welcome back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And we are back on VoiceAmerica's Business Network and this is Disabilities At Work Radio and I'm Ray Zardetto. And today's show is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation and, again, the Kessler Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled through its rehabilitation research which is done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through the work done via the Kessler Program Center which helps prepare the disabled for the demands of the workplace. For more information, please visit www.kesslerinstitute.org.

And I also want to acknowledge today, our second sponsor, the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services which is part of the State of New Jersey's Division of Human Services. The division focuses on helping people who have become disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their communities. And Disabilities At Work Radio wants to thank both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show.

And as we move into the next portion of our show, I'd like to introduce international entrepreneur Phil Jones. Jones is the president and founder of what he calls the Presidential

Inner Circle. And he has experience and involvement in a variety of businesses over the years ranging from security and telecommunications to real estate. And Phil joins us for the next portion of our show. Phil, welcome.

>> PHIL JONES: Thank you so much. Great to be here.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Glad to have you, thank you. And I have I got that right about your experience so far?

>> PHIL JONES: You have got it pretty well summed up, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Good. And why don't you tell us quickly, um, what is the Presidential Inner Circle, and what exactly that entails?

>> ROBERT STACK: The Presidential Inner Circle is a private members club where we basically work with business entrepreneurs and business leaders, politicians and dignitaries doing power breaking, connecting them with, um, high levels of knowledge and influence and the ability to really expand the markets of their businesses.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And this Presidential Inner Circle involves executives from, I assume, many different countries. It's not focused just on the U.S. or just any one particular country?

>> PHIL JONES: Yes. That's correct. It really is a worldwide movement. Obviously we have got the bulk of business and entrepreneurs we are focusing on the U.S. side, but people right throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East, you know, the South Pacific, are all part of the Presidential Inner

Circle.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. As you know, our show here focuses on people with disabilities in the workplace and I thought you might be able to bring us a couple of different perspectives than we normally get, or at least, you know, uh, in terms of both your international experience and also your experience dealing with the higher level of the C-suite executives as we call them these days. From your discussions and your involvement with senior business leaders, um, what do you think their level of awareness and commitment is to supporting programs that help people with disabilities who are looking for and looking to find work?

>> PHIL JONES: I think there is an increasing recognition of the value that people with disabilities play in the workplace. And I think in the last few years the economy has been tough, uh, people are becoming more transient and staying in jobs for shorter periods of time because they are looking to sort of move from one position to another. And business owners are really looking for how do I get longevity of employment and, you know, I have got to say that I think people with disabilities seem to have a much longer longevity in the work place and I think entrepreneurs are starting to realize that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And do you think, um, from your conversations with these senior executives that they see that now as a, if not a business case, almost a business imperative as they look

to fill their worker roles?

>> PHIL JONES: Yeah, I think that they are looking for stability, you know, in an unstable economic environment, they are looking for stability and, you know, people with disabilities seem to be much more stable, much more committed, much more loyal, you know, to the business. And so, you know, although they have a disability in one area, I think they have a number of other pluses and benefits that, you know, far often outweigh the smaller limitations that they may have.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And from your own experience, are you aware either of, um, from each your own personal experience or the experience from some of the colleagues that you work with in the Inner Circle, the Presidential Inner Circle and others, are you aware of some particular examples of where people with disabilities, you know, were able to stand out in terms of getting jobs or working with some senior executives?

>> PHIL JONES: Definitely. You know, I had a situation recently where one of our clients had a PA, she was serving him for a period of time and he had to replace her, he has moved to a virtual assistant. Somebody that is disabled that works from home can provide the exact same skill set, has got, um, everything that he needs. It's just a really nice fit.

He is looking for somebody that understands his needs and is prepared for work with him for over the long-term. You know, and that person is able to do that with a much greater

level of assurance, you know, than an able bodied person that maybe is doing it for six or twelve months before they try and move on to, you know, something better.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I don't know if you would be able to answer this question directly based on that example you were just giving, but, um, were you aware when this executive or this person was looking to find a new person, was he or she actually consciously looking for a person with a disability to fill the job or did it just happen to that be this person came along and so the executive said let's just give this person a try?

>> PHIL JONES: I don't know that you consciously look for somebody with disabilities, but I think that, as an entrepreneur, you have to be open and aware that they certainly have strengths in areas that able bodied people sometimes don't. And so, you know, like anybody, when you are evaluating a number of people that apply for a role, you look at their strengths and weaknesses and I think that, um, disabled people in many areas have strengths that able people don't. And I think that they display traits that often able people don't. So it does certainly give them an advantage in a number of areas.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. You have used the word entrepreneur a number of times in the interview and I know that is, um, your roots in many ways, in, in the business circles that you deal

in now. You yourself are an entrepreneur as you defined yourself and I think that would be accurate.

>> PHIL JONES: A [inaudible] entrepreneur, probably, yeah.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: (Laughter). In terms of people with disabilities in entrepreneurship, I mean, if there are people with disabilities who want to be as aggressive or as successful of an entrepreneur as you are, what would you say to them?

>> PHIL JONES: I think being an entrepreneur is about being mentally tough and I think people with disabilities, you know, have already proven that they can overcome limitations. I think the reality is that everybody has a disability of some description, whether that's physical, mental or any other way. Everybody has strengths and everybody has weaknesses, and I think disabled people often have a tougher mental attitude than others because they have come to terms with their limitation and they are looking beyond it, they're looking past it and they are not letting that hold them back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You say that being an entrepreneur, being a successful one, requires a certain mental toughness, expound on that thought a little bit more, what kind of toughness do you mean?

>> PHIL JONES: Well, you know, I think there are two types of people in the world. There is the positive and there is the negative. And you don't get any points for pointing out all of the faults with everything that is going wrong.

Entrepreneurs are people that go out there, look at how the world is and find a way to make it better, find a way to launch a product, find a way in a down economy to get a business going and growing or moving forward. So they seem to be optimists, they tend to be dreamers, and, you know, they seem to be people that can connect all the dots and put it together and put it in place and execute it.

And, you know, able bodied people have got that skill set, but it's the toughness that when you get the rejection, uh, you know, when you have to overcome the nerves and knocking on door after door after door and getting the no, I think that's where a disabled person really has an edge. Because they are used to, you know, people of viewing them in a negative way and they have dealt with that rejection and I think that they can have a huge, huge, huge ability for the mental toughness perspective.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: From a general business perspective, given both the U.S. and the global economy since, you know, since the recession two, two and a half years ago now, would you say it's easier to become an entrepreneur or is it tougher to become an entrepreneur in this environment?

>> PHIL JONES: Um, I think it's, you know, I don't know that it's easier or tougher. I think the job of an entrepreneur is to out think the marketplace. I think a tough market place is healthy because it forces people to go back to what they call

business. It causes them to get rid of the fluffery that they may have built in the business over the good times. And I think it also gives them the opportunity to go back and to reassess their priorities in the business. What really is important? Who needs to be there? Is the marketing plan working or is it not? And I think that's a healthy process. And I think a lot of businesses have benefitted by the market being tougher in the last couple of years.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Because it's made them get back to the basics essentially.

>> PHIL JONES: Yeah. It's made them get back to the basics. It's made them appreciate what really is important. And it's made them, I guess, um, refocus with a laser rather than operating like a shotgun and focusing on lots of things, focusing on the three, four or five things in the business that really do work well and really are the pointed difference in the marketplace.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And entrepreneurs, generally, are involved in startups or whatever. So usually you are looking at smaller companies and certainly looking to watch their costs, uh, probably maybe a little bit more aggressively than the larger companies might be. But, for an entrepreneur or start up, are there particular advantages you can think of that they would want to consider in hiring people with disabilities?

>> PHIL JONES: Um, there are. There are specific roles where

people with disabilities tend to operate in those roles better than able bodied people.

You know, in New Zealand where I came from there was a big factory and it is set up solely for disabled people because they are able to come in there and they are able to perform a task all day long. And often, in a way, where an able bodied person either wouldn't appreciate the job or, uh, would get bored with the job, a disabled person is quite happy to come and be able to perform that job and enjoy it. So there certainly are roles which work brilliantly.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Very good. Um, it's an interesting discussion when we take it from the entrepreneurial point of view like this rather than from the larger corporate point of view, and I want to continue that in a little bit. I also want to, Phil, talk to you in the next segment a little bit about the international perspective regarding hiring and people with disabilities looking for work, not just in the U.S. where very frequently we are focused on in this program, but how, how this works, how this is perceived overseas and in other countries. I think that would be a good discussion.

>> PHIL JONES: Definitely.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah. We will pick that up in just a moment, but we have to take a quick break. And when we come back, more with Phil Jones, president and founder of the Presidential Inner Circle. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At

Work Radio.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: And we are back to Disabilities At Work Radio and we will talk again, with Phil Jones in just a moment. But remember, ladies and gentlemen, that Disabilities At Work Radio can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Time on VoiceAmerica Business Network.

Now back to our guest, international entrepreneur Phil Jones, president and founder of the Presidential Inner Circle. We have been, for the last segment, at least, talking about people with disabilities and the perspective of entrepreneurs.

And what I'd like to do now is talk a little bit about the international perspective. I mean, we talk frequently with people who have a U.S. perspective on this show, Phil, so I thought maybe you might be able to give us a little bit more of an overseas or international perspective, you know, programs to help people with disabilities at work, how does those work in,

say, Europe or Australia or New Zealand, in the area that you are more familiar with?

>> PHIL JONES: You know, in the country that I come from, there really is a recognition, you know, to be able to train people and get them the right skill sets, um, to be able to put them in an environment and in a culture where they are supported and to really match the role to the person with the disability. And, you know, in many roles, if you match it correctly the disability doesn't feature in the role at all.

And so there is really quite a big focus to be able to, um, treat people in a respectful way and get them involved and engaged in a role which is meaningful and, uh, something that is really fulfilling for them.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And just to clarify, I'm not sure whether we mentioned earlier; you are a native to New Zealand, correct?

>> ROBERT STACK: Correct. I'm a native of New Zealand, you know, population of four million people and the last stop before the ice at the bottom of the planet.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: (Laughter). In America, about twenty years ago, they passed the Americans with Disabilities Act to help foster and to, you know, further engage people with disabilities in the workplace and to help along that way. Are there similar kinds of legislative actions that took place in your country to do the same thing?

>> PHIL JONES: There isn't really anything in terms of

legislative action that I'm aware of. There really is a movement in the community, you know, to say use a person's skill set regardless of what their limitations are, use their skill set. Focus on their strengths, don't focus on their weaknesses.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm.

>> PHIL JONES: Um, and I think that's more of a social initiative where it's, you know, don't begrudge anybody for, um, you know, for the circumstances that they have.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And who is leading that charge in New Zealand?

>> PHIL JONES: You know, there is a number of associations that have been very vocal and very positive.

You know, New Zealand has got a fantastic role model and there is a gentleman by the name of Tony Christianson who was just exceptional. He was a young boy and he lost his legs in a train accident. He is a motivational speaker worldwide and, uh, some of the stuff he has done as a disabled person able bodied people would not be able to do. So he has really set the bar as a role model for others. And he has really engaged a whole movement around him to say, you know, stop looking at the limitations and start looking at what we really can do.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And to your knowledge, uh, would you say that there is similar actions or similar initiatives afoot in Australia and other parts of the world as well that are similar

or reflect similar goals?

>> PHIL JONES: Yeah, there definitely is. And I think people are really looking at how can you become more competitive internationally with business. And the engagement of disabled people, I think, as an entrepreneur, is a key component that increases your competitiveness on an international scale.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Do you find that, um, I mean, you are fairly familiar with the U.S. business environment here, so I'm wondering if you can provide for us any perspective or comparison on how the U.S. initiatives are moving forward relative to what you have seen in Europe are not in Australia, New Zealand or other parts of the world.

>> PHIL JONES: Um, yeah, I think in the U.S., um, you know there is a much -- there is a heavy legislative approach. I think in the U.S. and maybe in some respects people have got a victim mentality where in some of the other areas they don't sort of have that victim mentality and people are -- but in the U.S. there are also more -- there is more government structured projects to move people in. Where I think in some of the other countries it's much more voluntary or there are private associations that are helping out to empower people.

And, you know, I think that is good because both are heading in the right direction. But I think government taking the lead role here; I think certainly has an advantage.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. I was just wondering if you think, I

was just going to ask you, in fact, if you thought the legislative or the decree approach, what the U.S. does, versus the more social activity kind of approach that you were describing in New Zealand, I was wondering if you thought one was more effective than the other?

>> PHIL JONES: Yeah, I think both are effective. I think both empower people. I'm a fan of leading from the top, but also engagement from the bottom. I think it's good to have a legislative framework that pushes people in the right direction, but I think that you can't lead them with a stick. You really got to encourage them and I think that is where the social engagement and getting a support movement around you, you know, making it not just, uh, legislative requirements, but making it a culture within the community. I think that's what creates a big difference.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm. And this culture that you look to create, I assume, it one that focuses again on the business case to be made for hiring people with disabilities as you were talking about earlier, the benefits of it, the loyalty, their stick-to-itiveness, the mental toughness they bring to the job and things like that.

>> PHIL JONES: Yeah, and I think in a lot of cases people don't have a disability, I think in a lot of cases where, you know, somebody has a physical issue with their leg, that's not going to stop them from doing office work from home. That's

not going to stop them contributing and functioning, just as a normal able bodied person will. So, I think you just have to match the disability with the role because, often, the disability doesn't feature at all.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm. To get back for a couple of minutes to the Presidential Inner Circle that you described at the top of our discussion, um, in your discussions with the senior leaders that are part of the circle and the leaders that you deal with frequently, um, I'm just wondering, does this conversation, does this topic come up frequently or much at all?

>> PHIL JONES: It does. It does. And often you have CEO's, often you have senior people, and in fact I know [inaudible] recently replaced an able body person with a disabled person because there was significant benefit and the longevity of the service of that person and their attitude as well in terms of what they were doing. Um, so I think there is a real recognition, particularly because the economy has gotten tougher in the last couple of years, of the strengths and values of disabled people.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah. And I'm wondering in the discussions or anything you heard them talk about, um, we hear very frequently with the guests that we have on our show, that as much as people are trying move this initiative forward, that there is still a kind of reticence sometimes, there are

hesitations about hiring people with disabilities or the kinds of things that you might have to do to accommodate people with disabilities in the workplace and everything. Does that ever come up in the discussions that you have had or that you have been part of?

>> PHIL JONES: To be honest, in the circles that I move in it doesn't, because people are very open and they are progressive and they are looking at how they get the edge in business and how they move forward and that means that you need to be solution focused rather than problem focused.

And, you know, I think that, yes, do you need to accommodate people sometimes? Absolutely. And I think it's just a simple trade off. It's a financial equation as a business owner. Is the cost of me accommodating this person and making some specific conditions to help them get engaged in the workplace going to be paid off by their productivity, their longevity and their commitment in the extra mile that they go in the workplace? And in most cases, the answer is absolutely yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. We have a couple more minutes left, I was just wondering with regard to your Presidential Inner Circle again as you described it, the kind of a club or a members kind of club for senior executives, senior business leaders, successful entrepreneurs, what kind of activity takes place in the Presidential Inner Circle?

>> PHIL JONES: Basically what we do is that we get people involved in doing deals that are high level with one another and educating them, making them more aware of how to make their businesses competitive, get them access to people and exposure that can take your businesses to the next level.

We have got a couple of questions that we ask people coming in for membership and that's, if we can get you in front of ten people in the next twelve months that would it change your business or your life, who would those ten people? And our job is to power break and get you in front of those people. And so it really is almost an empowerment movement for successful people to take them to the next level.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And anyone interested in information about the Presidential Inner Circle should do what?

>> PHIL JONES: They should go to www.presidentialinnercircle.com. And have a look at our website and give us a phone call, we would love to talk to you.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Very good. Alright. Well my guest for this past half hour has been Phil Jones, president and founder of Presidential Inner Circle as we were just discussing, also a successful and international entrepreneur. Phil, I appreciate your coming on, uh, I appreciate you sharing your perspective with us for the past half hour. Thank you.

>> PHIL JONES: A pleasure.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Also again, I want to take these weeks'

sponsors, the Kessler Institute and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services.

That's it for this week's show. Please joining us again next Wednesday at noon for another version of -- or another edition, of Disabilities At Work Radio. I'm Ray Zardetto, thanks for joining us. Again, this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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