

## Customized and Supported Employment

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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: I'm Ray Zardetto and welcome again to Disabilities At Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica's business network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities At Work

Radio explores the issues, ideas, initiatives and the innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and we discuss them with the prominent members of the business, government and disability communities.

Disabilities At Work Radio is brought to be this week by the Kessler Foundation and by the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services; two institutions who are dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled, and we will talk more about them later in the program.

For now, however, we go back to 1962, when a new business called Custom Industries was established in Bellevue in the State of Washington. And three year later, just to the east of that, a recycling business named Community Enterprises of Issaquah, Washington, came into being. And why is that important to today's discussion? Is because in 1998 these two enterprises merged to form a unique new business called AtWork! That is A-t-W-o-r-k with an exclamation point. AtWork! And it's stated purpose of AtWork! is to help people with disabilities learn marketable skills and to find and keep good jobs in the community and to earn the wages and benefits that help them to escape poverty or dependency.

So AtWork!, while it is spaced in the State of Washington, has a unique approach that, I think, has national implications that we need to examine and we are going to do that right now with the CEO of AtWork!, Chris Brandt. Chris,

welcome to the program.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Thank you.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Did I get the basic history right there?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Yes, you did.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Before we get to the actual workings of AtWork! I'm curious why those two particular companies, Custom Industries and Community Enterprises, um, made the right combination of things to morph together to become AtWork!

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Community Enterprise of Issaquah and Custom Industries each had unique talents and expertise that together made AtWork! stronger, a larger nonprofit that could be more efficient and effective in providing its services. And Community Enterprises of Issaquah in the early 80s had launched a supportive employment program that was placing people with disabilities in the community. And AtWork!'s board of directors and leadership recognized that that was a direction of the future, looking towards including people with disabilities in the community, helping them get jobs in the community was a direction that we wanted to go early on in our history. And putting those two organizations together allowed us to have the resources to be able to focus in that direction.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And so, that was in 1998 that AtWork! came into being and that's a little bit more than ten years ago. So I think, um, when you talk about AtWork! you talk about a little different philosophy in how you approach,

um, the work that you do. So do you want to talk about that a little bit?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Sure. People with disabilities in employment have traditionally been served in sheltered workshops. For decades, our society has been, um, creating separate and isolated and segregated kinds of programs for people, with good intentions. Um, people were often sent to institutions to live, um, they went to segregated schools or to the classroom at the end of the hallway, and if there was an opportunity for them to work as an adult, they went to a sheltered workshop where the majority of their coworkers were people with disabilities and they were being paid some minimum wages based upon how fast they could get the job done.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Am, I'm sorry, what do you mean by sheltered workshop?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: A sheltered workshop, um, is a business, like a social enterprise, that may do packaging and assembly, like the sheltered workshop that AtWork! has operated in the past has done. Or other kinds of manufacturing and assembly where the predominant workforce, the direct labor, is being provided by people with disabilities.

So people with disabilities are coming to a place that is set aside separately for them where they are working maybe with 50, 60, a hundred other people with disabilities and having very little opportunity for true integration, having

very little opportunity to get to know coworkers who don't have disabilities and often being paid sub minimum wages. Based upon a law, Fair Labor Standard Act, allows sub minimum wages to be paid to people with disabilities who work in sheltered workshops. Um, and that law is, um, is, you know, coming under question now.

As a society we are really are looking at equal opportunity for people with disabilities and employment since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act twenty years ago this July. And also beginning to recognize that when people with disabilities are looked at as individuals and we look for their unique talents and their unique strengths and we become a conduit between them and businesses in the community that can benefit from their talent and productivity, that people with disabilities are much more successful.

In the past we only knew them as one of a group, and their only peers and their only role models were other people with disabilities. So society has started to open its eyes. There is a big inclusion movement moving across the country. Many states are looking at not, um, using government tax-payer dollars to fund sheltered workshops model, but are looking to support people with disabilities and customize and supported employment which really gives them an opportunity to truly have a job that can be a career where they can earn wages that help them to escape poverty and help them to become self efficient.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I was going to -- I'm sorry, I just wanted to interject here because you used the phrase supported employment and I have seen you -- I have seen your website and some of your literature talk about both that and customized employment. And I wonder if you might fill us in on what those two exactly are?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Customized employment is a way of supporting people with disabilities in jobs that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor. If you go on their webpage and type in customized employment, you will find a lot of information about that. It allows employers to look within their workforce for unique opportunity for a person with a disability.

What we do is we go into a business and we look at their workforce needs. We look at where they might be having problems with high turnover. We look where there might be an opportunity for a person with a disability to bring a talent or a skill to that workforce that would allow it to be more productive. We look at opportunities where accommodations and universal design might help that business to be more efficient and we essentially customize or carve out a job that fits the skills of a person with disability and contributes significantly to the bottom line of the business.

And the business can then look at paying the person a wage that is above federal or state minimum wage, but may not be, you know, \$30 an hour that they may be paying someone with

higher technical skills because this person may be more in a supportive kind of role.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Uh-huh.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: And supported employment and customized employment both use the job coaching model, where a provider like AtWork! and there are many employment providers across the country who support a person with disabilities and discovering their talents and making that connection, that conduit, to the employer and then provide job coaching and training on the job, not only to the person with the disability, but this is where it's really unique, also to the business and the employees and managers of that business so that the person with disabilities can be truly integrated in the workforce and can take advantage of existing training programs and existing supports within that workplace and the business can learn new skills and how to foster teamwork, how to have a diverse workforce and get the best productivity from all of their team members. So it's really a win win.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. And so how do you actually approach a business with this proposal?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Sometimes it's hard to get the door open because --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Why is that?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Because people with disabilities have been isolated and stigmatized in our society, and employers don't

have every day experiences with employing them, and -- so they have some fear because of lack of knowledge and experience.

They think that, um, people with disabilities might cost them more, might lower their profit margins, that people with disabilities might be sick more or have more days of absenteeism or have more workplace accidents. And all of those are myths.

There have been studies conducted that demonstrate that people with disabilities have higher retention rates, um, than people who don't have disabilities, and that their number of workers compensation claims are similar to participants who don't have disabilities and, you know, that they do stay on the job longer, um, because they are really matched to their skills and their interests. You can find more about those studies, um, by going to the Office of Disabilities Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor webpage. There are a lot of studies that cite examples of why those are truly myths.

So the key is getting that door open, and one of the ways that we do that is by the great testimonials and support that we get from our employers who currently employ people with disabilities. We work with about a hundred employers throughout the greater Seattle area and many of them are so pleased with the employee with disabilities and the support they receive from AtWork! and the changes that have happened in their workplace as a result of the new diversity that they have

brought to their workforce that they are really willing to help us, um, market.

We also have an active board of directors, they are looking for opportunities. They are talking to the property manager where -- in the high-rise condo that they live in, in Bellevue, and opening a door for a person to be hired there. They are talking to their health club and opening doors for us to come in and talk about how a person with disabilities who folds towels and checks to make sure that people have the current month pass can really contribute to their bottom line. Um --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Go ahead. I'm sorry, go ahead.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: I was just going to say that in one in three people, um, is impacted or has a disability, and that represents one trillion dollars in earnings and a significant amount of discretionary income.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Say that again. Say that again.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: One in three people, um, either knows someone or has a connection to someone with disabilities. And those people in aggregate, um, their income tops one trillion dollars in the United States.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: That's, um, you know, in this day and age with the economy the way it is and everybody hurting for sales and customers and good works and everything, that's, that's a very difficult statistic to just pass over.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: When employers hear that they are like, whoa. And, you know, 220 billion of that is discretionary income. And, um, there was a study that was done that asked employers how -- that asked people what they thought about businesses that employed people with disabilities, and 87 percent of the public would prefer to do business with companies that hire people with disabilities. That was a national survey that was done by the University of Massachusetts in 2005. So, it's a marketing tool. You know, it's a marketing opportunity for businesses.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. And actually, that makes a nice segue for us because, um, certainly the proof of the pudding is when you take a policy or strategy and turn it into a successful enterprise as you have done with some of the businesses in the Seattle area, a couple of which will join us in the next few segments to talk about some specific ways that AtWork! has worked for them. So please stay with us, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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

I'm Ray Zardetto and I have been speaking with Chris Brandt, the CEO of AtWork! about the unique strategies for gainful and lasting employment for people with disabilities that they work in the Seattle area. And as I said before the break, there is no better litmus test for a strategy than to see how it works in the real world. And so to look at some of that right now we are joined by Bob Hargadon, the vice president of human resources for Drugstore.com. And, Bob, let me first welcome you to the show, thanks for joining us.

>> BOB HARGADON: Pleasure to be on the call.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Good. And why don't you just tell us really quick, Drugstore.com, what exactly does Drugstore.com do?

>> BOB HARGADON: Sure, Ray. Drugstore.com is an online retailer born out of the dot com ages. It's an eleven-year-old company with about a thousand employees, and our focus is health, beauty and wellness, even though we carry 55,60,000 products online, we center really around health, beauty and wellness. That's our core focus and we are strictly online.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And you are located in Bellville -- I'm sorry, Bellevue, Washington?

>> BOB HARGADON: Yes, our headquarters here are in Bellevue where we employ about 250 people. Uh, we have a distribution center in New Jersey and a couple of other facilities, including a call center in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. And so, how did you link up with

AtWork!?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well, we linked up with AtWork! almost casually, but certainly very effectively. Last holiday season, holiday seasons for retailers are the busiest time, we, uh, one of our employees had heard some of the work that -- one of our employees here in Bellevue had heard of some of the work that we had done in New Jersey with people with disabilities and said wouldn't it be, um, appropriate or wouldn't it be neat if we did the same thing here? We had a very specific need, which is to help with some product labeling, and we put a call into AtWork! and they mobilized a team and within a week we had eight people here helping us out for -- on and off for a couple of weeks. It was a tremendous response and, uh, that is what got us started.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And that was about a year ago?

>> BOB HARGADON: It was last holiday season, so last November.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Uh-huh. And have you expanded since then?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well, we --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: In terms of work with AtWork!?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well, what we have done is actually gotten a little bit more focused around it rather than expanding it, meaning that rather than a series of one off and focusing in that way, we then said look, we want to have a more permanent solution here, a more permanent partnership with AtWork!. And we got a little creative and we put together a set of needs

that we had that led to two people with disabilities spending more time with us and starting to become more part of the fabric of Drugstore. And one of them, Margaret Pedeia, is -- has very much done that. She works with us two days a week, is almost part of the family now. It's really pretty terrific to see.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And what exactly does she do?

>> BOB HARGADON: She does some important routine tasks on all three of our floors including work with supplies and making sure that supply rooms are properly inventoried and we are -- have enough supplies for everyone. She helps out in the restroom area, the break room areas by keeping it clean and organized and just general basic routine tasks.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so, do you have a feel or sense of how many people with disabilities you know have employed through AtWork!?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well, through AtWork!, we have Margaret who is here almost as a full-time, part-time, and we continue to tap into others on an as-need basis. Through our partners in New Jersey, the Ability Center of southern New Jersey, we have ultimately hired a dozen or folks to continue to be on staff. So we look to -- we look for ways to expand the partnership of AtWork! and certainly our first trial with Margaret has been -- has exceeded our expectations.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so I am curious, before the employee

brought the idea of this to your attention as you described last year before the holiday season, had you ever even thought about, considered, or had anyone else ever talked to you about the idea of hiring people with disabilities in this way?

>> BOB HARGADON: Um, yes, uh, indeed. One of the folks on my team, who had initiated this effort while he was in New Jersey, um, had brought it up and we hadn't quite found the right opportunity to do that. I think as Chris pointed out earlier, I think, uh, this organization, Drugstore, was not a lot different in terms of some of the going-in biases that folks have around people with disabilities. And it really takes, I think, an advocacy and a sponsorship as a starting point, which we had, through an individual on my team to really jump start it.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Actually, that's interesting. Can you share with us some of the ways that you fight that bias? How do you rip down those stereotypes?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: -- about people with disabilities.

>> BOB HARGADON: Yeah, I mean, I think the best way is really when you look at the interactions and the results that Margaret and others have brought, uh, and shown. You know, it doesn't take a lot for that first effort, which is to bring people in on a particular project or initiative to demonstrate to skeptics that, that folks with disabilities are, in fact, very

productive, and can add to the fabric of the organization.

So I think the way you do that is by some people may call it taking a leap, but just using an opportunity to try it out, to trial it. And, uh, I think that can be done with very little risk and I think people can see the upside of that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm just wondering, how do you respond to employers or perspective employers who might be listening to this and think, well, it's a good idea and everything, but I'm just thinking in terms of what additional accommodations I need to make, how much it may cost me for that. Do I need to carry additional or different kinds of insurances for employees or people with disabilities, things like that? When they start running through all these other possibilities in their head, I mean is that something they need to be concerned about to a great degree?

>> BOB HARGADON: I think this is something they need to consider, but not be concerned about. In some cases, there needs to be some changes to the work station or workplace to facilitate it, and that's what we did in our New Jersey distribution center. We created a work space area where they, in fact, could effectively conduct their work. But we have found that the roadblocks are really perceptions more than reality and, you know, we have given Margaret a work space that is no different than any other of our employees and it just seems to work. So I think there is -- and Chris hinted at

this, there is just some built up perceptions that I think are legacy views that, that need to be broken down.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And then, again, just to clarify, so since last holiday season when you really started to go at this a little more as a strategic kind of an initiative, what kinds of tasks and work have you had people with disabilities helping you with over the course of this year?

>> BOB HARGADON: Well, beyond what I described Margaret doing in terms of some of the routine maintenance tasks, we continued to use or take advantage of some of the folks from AtWork! to help us with some labeling, some assembly, some very softly put together special bags that require product to be put in them. So, again, very important and as much as the end product goes to customers, so we have wanted to and continue to use them for those types of projects.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Great. Well, Drugstore.com is not the only success story that we can talk about today. We have more to talk about with; in fact, we will bring another representative from another company in the Washington area on in our next segment, a retailer with a national reputation. We will talk about how they are also using AtWork! and people with disabilities and will do that right after our next break.

And before we go to the break, let me invite all of your listeners to join our tweam at DisabilitiesAt. It's D-i-s-a-b-i-l-i-t-i-e-s-A-t. And let me also invite everyone

to friend us on Facebook at Disabilities At Work Radio. And we will be back to talk more about the great work going on in the State of Washington right after this break. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> You are listening to Disabilities At Work Radio. We welcome questions and comments from our listening audience, which you can send to us on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt or on our Facebook site, Disabilities At Work. Also, visit [disabilitiesatwork.org](http://disabilitiesatwork.org). Welcome back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And we are back on VoiceAmerica's Business Network, this is Disabilities At Work Radio and I'm Ray Zardetto. Today's show is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. It does so through the rehabilitation research done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through the work of the Kessler Program Center which prepares the disabled for the demands of the workplace. For more information, please visit [www.kesslerfoundation.org](http://www.kesslerfoundation.org).

Our show today is also sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services, part of New Jersey's Division of Human Services, and this 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 thanks both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show.

We have talked so far about AtWork! and how it applies to Drugstore.com, a -- an online retailer in the Seattle area. We will expand the discussion and the scope a little bit of what we are talking about now. And I'd like to welcome to the program Guy Silver. He is -- He works for Costco, who I think most all of us know. In fact, he is Costco's Employee Communications Director. And, uh, let me just, Guy, give you a minute to talk about Costco and what you do there.

>> GUY SILVER: Thank you, Ray. I'm pleased to be here with Chris and Bob.

Costco Wholesale is a warehouse membership club where people pay, uh, to shop with us. So our shoppers we call our members. And we have 56 million members worldwide. We currently operate 569 warehouses, which many people call stores, we call them warehouses because of the way they are designed and built. We have 569 of them in eight countries around the world.

We employ roughly 150,000 employees of which we hire about 30,000 people every year. And we just closed the books on our fiscal year at just over 70 billion dollars in sales. So that averages about 200 million dollars per warehouse store. So, a lot of volume, a lot of merchandise, a lot of members, a

lot of employees and we are pleased to be on the program and active in our communities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And is Costco in all 50 states?

>> GUY SILVER: We are not. I don't have the state count off the top of my head, I should have that. But I'm going to guess, I'm going to pin us somewhere between 30 and 40 states.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: But you are coast to coast though?

>> GUY SILVER: We are coast to coast, yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And then, um, in terms of how Costco deals with the issues of people with disabilities and employing them, um, do you have either local policies or national policies?

>> GUY SILVER: Well, you know, we definitely have guidance and we have philosophy. Uh, we don't have policies in place that require us to hire from any particular, uh, class of people. What we generally -- the guidance that we give our locations is that each building should be reflective of the community in which they are doing business and that guidance and that philosophy includes our employees with disabilities. And so, uh, each location is expected, um, you know, to be an active participant in the community in that regard.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I'm wondering whether it's, um, you know, you personally or colleagues of yours at Costco, um, when did you, um, have your eyes open to the idea of hiring people with disabilities, that people of disabilities was a furtive or a

fruitful workforce to, to go after?

>> GUY SILVER: Well, I guess I could speak on both sides of that story, both my colleagues and the company and myself personally. Our company has, I mean, for us, it's been a seamless experience, hiring people with disabilities. I mean, we are a store, right? So we work with the general public. And we have -- each store is similarly situated; we have tasks and responsibilities in front of the registers, at the registers and behind the registers.

So you have people who greet our members on the way in, you have a membership counter where you can buy memberships, you go out on to the sales floor where there are, you know, forklifts and merchandise stacked floor to ceiling, you have the back of the building which is a receiving dock and various ancillary businesses like meat and bakery. And so, in each of those -- and then the cash registers -- and each of those stations has opportunities and restrictions for everybody. And what I mean by that is that there are any number of jobs that require essential job functions, and not everyone can perform all of the job functions of all of the positions in a building.

So when we consider hiring people with disabilities, you know, the first question is, like any applicant, is, are you able to do the essential functions of the job with or without accommodations? And if the answer is yes, then we clearly are interested in you through the application process, so we keep

going, and that has been our way of doing business for years and years. There was never, in my knowledge, of the history of our company a conscious thought that we would interview applicants in any other way.

For me, personally, my eyes were opened -- ten years ago, I became the employee development manager for Costco. And my job was to go around the country and open, help new locations open by engaging in a mass interviewing process. And I was in El Paso, Texas, helping that location open and we were paying at the time, I think, 10,10.50 an hour starting, when the average starting wage in El Paso at the time was somewhere around 6 bucks. And so when we -- we didn't know what we were getting into and we had about 8,000 applicants show up to a singular hiring event, which overwhelmed the staff of 20 interviewers, as you might imagine.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah.

>> GUY SILVER: During that experience somebody came up to me, to all appearances, they looked ashen white to me, they were just -- the blood had left their face because somebody pulled up, an organization, a local organization that works with people with disabilities pulled up and a bus of about 18 people with disabilities, both cognitive and physical and learning disabilities, came off of the bus and wanted to be interviewed.

And, you know, it was one of those situation where, you know, this is my first experience, this is, again, about ten or

eleven years ago, and I was the corporate resource of this organization, how am I going to navigate this, right?

And so it was a very wonderful, pleasant, easy conversation with the manager of that location and the executive director who brought her clients with her. And it would not have been fair to put these people at the back of an 8,000 person line, nor would it have been the right thing to do, which is generally what guides Costco. We wanted to be more thoughtful and more collaborative with this particular organization.

And so, essentially, what happened is we took this person's business card and that group of people returned when the store was up and running and open and we could more easily evaluate our positions and the opportunities that this group was offering us. And so that is, you know, its how we would, how we navigate something. To have put them in a line of 8,000 people without having any frame of reference on what we do and how we do it would not have -- we didn't feel would be a fair way of navigating this particular situation.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right.

>> GUY SILVER: And that also insures that we are staying connected to the community in a variety of ways, and in this case, an organization that ultimately provided us with employees who were of great value.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I'm curious; we were talking in the last

segment about the, um, viewpoint, the stereotype in some cases, of people with disabilities and whether or not they would, you know, make good employees, which obviously everybody on this program would advocate that they certainly are.

I'm curious, because your business deals so much with the general public on the front line, do you find that there is any resistance or question or discomfort on the part of just your every day members, customers that come in and see or have to deal with people with disabilities in the store?

>> GUY SILVER: Um, yeah, the -- we look at that as interactive conversation with the person who we are hiring. Generally, and what I mean by that, is that, you know, many people, whether they have disabilities or otherwise, have certain qualities about their personality that are going to interact with our membership base. And what we do is we try, we have an open, honest, interactive conversation about how are we going to best interact with our member.

I have so many stories that I don't have time to share, so I'll just pick two. One is that we have a cashier who is impaired and he uses a series of flip cards. You know, he has like a paddle that he holds up. And we worked with this employee to determine what he would feel comfortable with, right? We said, how will you communicate with our employees? He said I could hold up a paddle -- I could hold up a paddle that has directions on it.

So it says, you are about to be helped with someone who is hearing impaired, I may not always give you eye contact because I want to look at the register to make sure that I charge you appropriately. Is there anything else that I can, you know, do to serve you? And he cycles through these cards and then helps the members, and he is one of our busiest lines.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Wow. I know you said that you have another example. I'd like to get to that, but we have to take another break first. So, let me interject here and say we will be back to talk about that and some other issues with regard to people with disabilities in the workplace. And we will do that with Guy, Bob and Chris when we return. So stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: And welcome back again to Disabilities At Work Radio. Remember that this Disabilities At Work Radio can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Time on VoiceAmerica's Business Network.

And let me welcome back my three guests for today. Chris Brandt, the CEO of AtWork!; Bob Hargadon, the VP of Human Resources at Drugstore.com; and Guy Silver, Employee Communications Director at Costco.

And we were talking with Guy before the last break about a couple of examples of people with disabilities working at Costco and, Guy, you had one other example you wanted to bring up.

>> GUY SILVER: Thank you, Ray. I think the one that delighted me and should put a smile on the face of other retailers is a person who I interviewed, and she, uh, was hearing impaired and was working through an interpreter. And the answers that she -- the questions that we had about retail were, you know, better than probably the 500 people that I had interviewed before her. And this is another person who was at this particular opening that I mentioned earlier in El Paso.

And she was talking about, uh, blocking merchandise, stacking items high for sale, mapping out products, customer service conflicts and how she revolved them. And, essentially, she flew through this interview process and was hired on as a supervisor in our organization. And then she talked about ways that she communicates with managers and customers in spite of her, uh, disability. And probably one of the best interviews that I have ever had and a great hire for Costco.

I have been speaking to you, Ray, and to your listeners about the national -- my national experiences as manager at Costco, but our company does a lot of work at the corporate offices in Issaquah, Washington, and we work with AtWork! and Chris Brandt's organization. And I'd like to give her some

stage because we are doing some amazing work that, frankly, as a national person I don't have local experience with, but I think your listeners would like to hear.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Sure. Chris?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Um, Costco has been really innovative at their corporate headquarters here in Issaquah and allowing us to really discover the talents of some people with some really significant and multiple disabilities, people who have both cognitive and intellectual disabilities, people who have autism, who don't communicate verbally, who may have some, um, behaviors that we need to study and learn how to accommodate in the workplace.

So, at Costco Corporate, there is a recycling crew of eight to nine people, um, and that crew, um, offers opportunity for people to come in and do a work trial. Students that are transitioning from high school who have disabilities, who need some opportunity to get some work experience before we find them a job, Costco opens doors for that opportunity in a very innovative way.

Their longest employer -- employee with disabilities at the corporate headquarters that AtWork! supports has been there for 18 years. He just had his 50th birthday and his coworkers pulled together and sent him on a trip to Hawaii because he has been such an integral part of their team and they have all developed such close working relationships and friendships.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Wow. Well, that is really great. I think, you know, being able to illustrate specific examples of how this works is the best way to get the message across for, you know, for what you do and for what the companies do.

Um, we have a few minutes left in the program today and I'd like it go back to something Chris referenced, uh, in an earlier segment about the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I believe in July we marked that 20th anniversary. And, I'm just wondering, from each of your points of view, whoever want to start, you are welcome to do so, um, what's been the biggest change or the best improvement as a result of the passage and implementation of this act, do you think?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: I can go ahead and start. This is Chris, again, obviously, that it has raised awareness that people with disabilities can be productive. Um, so, there has been more opportunity. While the unemployment rate for people with disabilities remains really high, only four out of ten, um, of the 21 million working age adults with disabilities are working. It also has brought up, I think, an opportunity to talk about some of the key myths, because the ADA has made some employers afraid that I can't fire someone, when, in fact, you can, and, in fact, an organization like AtWork! will help you do that in a way that makes sense and find you a better job match. You don't have to be afraid of that under the Americans

with Disabilities Act.

Another fear is the accommodation, which we touched on a little bit earlier. There was a study done by the Job Accommodation Network between 2004 and 2009 that said that 56 percent of accommodations cost absolutely nothing, and while the rest only cost about \$600. So, I think what it's done is given us an opportunity to educate and to bust some of those myths while there is still a great ways to go in, um, reversing the unemployment rate for people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah, and I'm curious based on that, do you think we would have made the progress we have made in the workplace for people with disabilities had that act not been passed?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Probably not. You know, it's historic legislation, um, people with disabilities, self advocates, people would have been in the movement for many years would see it as one of the last great equal rights movement in our county. And the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act really gave credence to the fact that people with disabilities have been, um, discriminated against in our society in the past.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Mm-hmm. Bob, I'm wondering -- I'm sorry, was somebody going to say something?

>> BOB HARGADON: Yeah, I was just going to agree with that, Ray, with what Chris said. I think that the act as been a

stimulant. I think we couple that with organizations like Costco and like Drugstore and many others who are very much connected to the community in the broadest sense and the need to, this was pointed out earlier, to be inclusive and reflect the community that they are in. I think that sensitivity has heightened and I think it has aided the process.

And I would say that kind of a third leg on this is really the organizations like AtWork!, uh, not only because of their advocacy and their sponsorship, but certainly what we have seen here is the ongoing coaching work that is part of the, uh, partnership, the coaches that come with folks who are developmentally disabled, without that, um, it's hard to get traction, and certainly we have seen that. So I think the act has been a stimulant. I think other things have helped take it to the next level.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And based on, based on the progress we have seen due to the act and some of the ancillary legislation that has come along with this, where do you think the biggest gap is at this point? What is the biggest thing that still needs to be addressed?

>> BOB HARGADON: I would say that there is this residual fear, Chris talked about it, the uncertainty, uh, how do I make it work, will it work, um, that it's just a legacy that, over time, through examples and through, you know, kinds of things that Chris has talked about, that over time will break down the

barriers that are still there in many organizations around us.

>> CHRIS BRANDT: And, you know, I think if we can continue to provide the kinds of supported employment and job coaching services that we do, but also look for opportunities, you know, there are tax credits that employers can get for hiring a person with a disability. Um, you know, which a lot of employers, that's not the primary reason, but things like that that give the employer an incentive just to try it, because I think once a person with a disability gets in the door and they really see what they can do, and they can come to trust the support that they can get from a supported employment provider, you know, then the deal is made. So it's what, you know, the gap is what -- getting those doors open, getting the word out. This radio show is a big help for that. And whatever incentives we can put in place that just get them to try it.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Great. I'm coming down to about the last minute of the show. And, Chris, I wanted to give you the chance, if an employer or a prospective employer out there, you know, is looking for some help in your area or whatever, do you have a website or a phone number or some contact information that you want to give them?

>> CHRIS BRANDT: Sure, absolutely. It's really easy to find us. Our webpage is the best place to go, and its [www.atworkwa.org](http://www.atworkwa.org) and our phone number is 425-274-4000. We would love to talk to you about your employment and workforce

needs and make you a perfect match with a person with a disability.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alrighty. Well, I think we will leave it there. I want to thank Chris Brandt, CEO AtWork!; Bob Hargadon, the vice president of Human Resources at Drugstore.com; and Guy Silver Employee Communications Director at Costco for a very good discussion here today, very enlightening. Thank you, all three of you, and hope we get a chance to speak to you again.

I'd also like to thank this week's sponsors, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey with Division of Disabilities Services.

Don't forget next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time we will be back with another show that explores the ideas, innovations and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. So join us next week again. Until then, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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