

Arizona's video transcript

Question: Why is employment important for you?

Yes. Uh, for me, I always wanted to have a job. I don't look at myself with just my disability I look at it like I'm capable of working. I'm capable of doing a job like anybody else. But what you have to do additionally, because you have a disability, you have to figure out—OK, I can't walk. OK. I have to have somebody to help me get there. I have to use public transportation. You have to figure out: How can I do this?

So first, you have to figure out where you want to work, what kind of job you want. Then you have to figure out: OK, I want to work at USF, without—well, what about—OK, I'll just be at my house and then on the bus. I have to have enough time to get dressed, bathed and have breakfast in the morning and whatever I need to have. And I have to make an arrangement with my transportation. So I need to be out of my house at least by seven o'clock and I need an hour to get there on time. And then when you get done with your job, you want to go back home. If you get off by five, you figure out [] and you'll be home by six. The point is that you have to plan your day out. From the time you wake up, your life will always be planned by you. What's your itinerary? Do you have an itinerary? You would follow an itinerary for your business. Or on the day you're going on an airplane. You want to fly but you have to plan an itinerary: What time do I want to leave? What time will I land? That's every day planning what your day is, what you want to wear, all actually planned out.

Question: What are some things that you think people should know about the employment services system? You sat on a cadre / committee about employment. Can you talk about what the cadre did?

Well, we got together and we sat around the table and we asked what do we need to do to help the employers understand our disabilities? OK. So if you have a speech impediment like I do, or you may be blind or you can't hear too well or whatever. First of all, you need to tell the folks: This is what I have. This is my disability. Let's work around that. First of all. Then, when you're looking for a job and you're talking to the employer, you remind the employer: This is what I have. I have cerebral palsy. The left side of my body is partially paralyzed. I have a speech impairment. But, I don't mind repeating myself as many times as I need to. Because again, it's not their fault that they can't understand. It's not their fault that they don't understand about disabilities. We are here to teach as well and educate. Your life should be an educational book. People are watching you to see how you deal with different issues as they come along. So when an employer is talking to you and he asks you: Can you do the job? Are you able to do the job? You have to assure him that you're capable of doing the job, that you'll be on time, and that you are dependable. And just because I have a disability, I'm still a human being that will like to work and I guarantee and I will show you that I will be on time and ... I will do the job right. And once you do that, you're going to talk about the accommodations, what kind of accommodations you need to do the job. A computer with a big keyboard, or big screen or like that, do you need an earphone or what? And based on the accommodations you need, the employer will help you get it or the job coach will help you get it. That way you can do your job better.

And we did a toolkit that will help the employers find that job that you want. And the job coach, a lot of job coaches, they are in the jobs but they don't really understand what you see. So you have to sit down

with the job coach and make him understand: I don't want to work at Walmart. I don't want to work at Target. Because they put you there because Walmart is very open to disabilities, Target is very open to disabilities. So they think: Oh, we're gonna get you a job at Walmart. Look, my ability out mans Walmart. My ability out mans Target. I want to work at a different job. Now I'm not saying that Walmart is not good, if that's what you want to do, where you want to work. But, if you want to do a different job, you have the right to pick the job that you want to do. So that's why we do the tiers and the toolkits. We find out what is your ability, what can you do, where can you work? How long does it take for you to get from one side to the other? Those things have to be out front. Do you do you drive or do you not drive? Do you use public transportation, do you know how to take the bus or do you need travel—travel training? All the accommodations in your life. You have to be clear and you have to be precise about what you want. You are the person they are here to help. It's not about what I want. It's not about what I want just because I was worried about how my job coach could be thinking about: Well, as a job coach, I have a quota to make. Well, I don't want to make a quota. I want to make sure that you have the job that you want and that you're happy and that you're able to do the thing and keep the job. That's what we have a lot of times: Oh, I'll get you a job at Walmart and then you come to find out two months later that you want another job.

Question: Can you talk about other roles you play, and what other things you are involved in?

Yeah. Uh, I am an advocate from birth. First of all, my mom is a retired nurse and she told me at an early age, she said: Son, one day I won't be here. I need to get you to a place where you're able to take care of yourself. Because we're all going to leave the world one day and I want to make sure that you are able to do things and speak up for yourself about how you want to be treated. Speak up for yourself. Your voice matters. You have a voice. Let it be heard. Yes, you have a speech impediment, but don't give up. If you have to repeat it over and over again, you repeat it over and over again until they get it. But that's—that's where I began to learn how to be an advocate. My mom says, "You have to stand up for your rights and be heard." Now I'm also an advocate because I am on the board of SANDS. I'm on the board of SANDS, I'm on the the [], I sit on many, many boards, the [] committee, the transportation committee, uh, I've been on the mayor's board and I used to be on the USF Disability board; I spent two years on that board. And I also have a nonprofit that I run. It's called New Horizons Support Group for People with Disabilities. And we teach people with disabilities to stand up for their rights. That's significant, that you have a voice, and that your voice matters. And don't let anybody tell you what you can and what you can't do. Only you know what you can and what you can't do. Now in my personal life, I have a lot of friends that is not disabled and they tell me all the time that I am an inspiration to them because I keep them going. I'm never home. I'm always on the go.

Uh, here in Tampa we have a place that they call Ybor City. Ybor City is the capital of St. Lawrence. I hang out there, I do everything that you would do but I []. And the vans (?) that I have, they're all older vans, 50 and up. I have them all, the Army and the Navy, the Marines have vans everywhere. I was on a float during the parade, on a [] when they had the parade. We had our very first [] float in the world. I love to hang out, I love to talk to people, people I don't even know, and they come up and say: Every time we come here, you're here. Do you own the place? And I say no, I don't own the place. But, there's my picture, my picture's in the window and I'm a long-time Tampa native. I was born and raised here in Tampa so I'm a native, 46 years old.

But let me tell you why I do what I do: Now when I was born, the doctor told my mom: If he lives, he won't live to be one year old. So do you want to give it up? She said: No, that's my baby, I'm not gonna do that. So I stand before you today, 46 years old. And that's  believe it or not, I also am a leader in the church. I say all that to say: Whatever you want to do, live your life to the fullest because tomorrow is not promised or given.