

Adam's Story: Disability in the Workplace



In this piece, Adam Bishop, Manager of Talent Attraction at BC Transit, shares his story, tells us how BC Transit is committed to supporting job seekers with disabilities, and offers some great reflections on making BC Transit an even more inclusive workplace.

Disability in the Workplace seems like such a daunting topic, and the truth is that it is—it's dauntingly complex, while at the same time, exceedingly simple. In my estimation this topic is complex because everyone's understanding and experience with disability is vastly different.

The word "disability" covers such a wide spectrum. Many people, employers and job seekers alike, don't even know where to start.

Having said that, I'd suggest that the place to start is with vulnerability (on both sides), and then through that vulnerability, trust can be built. See what I mean? Complex, yet simple!

To demonstrate, let me begin with my story.

As a result of some complications at birth, I was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy (CP) when I was close to 2 years old. If you were to Google CP, you'd learn that it can be caused by numerous things and manifest itself in a multitude of different ways (cue the complexity!)

In my case, my fine motor skills are impacted, along with my balance, and my muscles are extremely tight. In laymen's terms, don't ask me to do anything requiring precise movements (no neurosurgery for me), or ask me to walk long distances (unless we all need a good laugh).

At the time of diagnosis, my parents were told that if they pushed me hard, I had a chance to live independently using a wheelchair, otherwise be prepared to care for me for the remainder of my life. Thankfully they chose option A.

Even with supportive family and friends, life was not easy, as almost every societal construct is built with those who are able-bodied in mind.

So how do both employers and jobseekers get comfortable with disability in the workplace?

For me, it was about being honest and open about both my limitations and what I've accomplished in the past. Whether you've got a visible disability (like me) or an invisible one, I've always found honesty and transparency as both a job applicant and a hiring manager to be key.

When I interview for a role, I pre-empt the curiosity by talking about my disability. It allows me to control the narrative, educates the employer, and often dispels stereotypes the employer may have. It also leaves the employer with a favourable impression most of the time!

If the employer doesn't react well, then I know I don't want to work for them. Win-win in my books. As a hiring manager, this transparency builds trust with both parties, and allows me to work closely with the candidate to explore potential job accommodation(s) for they've applied for.

As the Manager of Talent Attraction here at BC Transit, I'm proud of how we approach disability in our recruitment process.

We've had some amazing successes in places like Asset Management, for example, when we've chosen to not view someone's disability as a barrier to employment. We've shown that people with disabilities can bring value to BC Transit just like their able-bodied colleagues.

But we're not even close to perfect. We need to continue educating ourselves on disability, and question the stereotypes and assumptions we (including me!) make about people with disabilities.

I have hope, because representation matters.

My challenge to everyone is to continue to allow yourself to be uncomfortable as we strive to normalize employment for those with disabilities.