

Background:

Hello. I am Frank Kineavy. I am a screenwriter, coach, mentor, local political advocate. I am a proud Jersey Shore lifer, who loves music and college football. I also happen to have cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a congenital disorder of movement, muscle tone, or posture caused by abnormal brain development. The US sees less than 200,000 cases per year. I am here today to give you an overview of my journey in the professional world, the pitfalls I encountered along the way, and what I feel needs to be done for the disabled community to be more of a player in Corporate America.

I graduated from Villanova University in 2014 and have been trying to navigate the job market ever since. Just like any college graduate who starts their job search in the slow summer months, I found it difficult to obtain a full time job. With that being said, I found an additional roadblock that most of my college peers didn't meet: my disability. I sent out more than 15 applications a day, and got little to no responses. Any interview I did get was riddled with questions regarding my skill: I was met with a lot of people asking, "well, what can you even do?". My answer was, I could do anything everyone else could do, but I just do it differently. That answer didn't seem to suffice. I would go on the typical job fair circuit to prove in person what I was capable of, only to have hiring managers give me shirts and pins, never engaging in a serious dialogue about hiring me, but always ensuring me they would "Keep my resume on file". It was incredibly discouraging, until finally, someone took a chance on me.

For the first 5 years of my career, I was a journalist - first for the Athletic Department at Rutgers University, where I wrote features on student athletes. Then in the news division of Diversity INC, a consultant for Fortune 500 companies regarding diversity and inclusion, I was responsible for writing 10 articles a week on trends and policies pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities. For the first year of my career, I would go to work alone and use an adaptive keyboard to use the laptop. While this method seemed on the surface to enable me to be more independent; it would turn out to not be the best method for me. The way I type is how most people type the first time they are in front of a computer, one letter at a time. This was not a problem when I was navigating the web but when it came time to write my articles, it would tend to be cumbersome and inefficient. To give you a reference, one simple email would take 2 hours to compose. Given that my main charge was writing, this slowed down my production. I would spend the whole work day composing a quarter of an article and pay someone to come to my home and finish. I knew that if I could only have that support during the workday, I could be churning out multiple articles a day.

After 3 months of going to work on my own and using all of my energy merely to operate the computer. My department was forward thinking enough to hire a student to come 5 hours a week to transcribe my articles for me. This worked wonders. I was able to focus on improving my craft and get creative with the stories I would pitch without having to waste so much unproductive time. Another unexpected benefit of having my scribe was I got my work done earlier and was able to get hands-on experience with other facets of the business. This was the time when I learned the type of work I flourished in. I was lucky to have two of my former subordinates from a prior internship on the management team. They trusted the work I had done for them and saw my potential. Once I got my feet under me with my main responsibilities, they exposed me to a whole different space of the business when I suddenly was forced out of my comfort zone. This led to me growing professionally and widened my skill set. I think employers get into this habit of limiting people with disabilities to 1 or 2 tasks they know they could do. While it is great to have a speciality, it tends to put people with disabilities in boxes they can't break. Not only could this be limiting to the career of people with disabilities, it stunts

the potential for the whole company. At future stops along my career, this feeling of being pigeon holed became prevalent and it prevented me from reaching my full value.

After my positive experience at Rutgers is when I experienced the pitfalls that many people with disabilities face in the workplace. Thankfully, to my knowledge none of my coworkers have ever explicitly questioned my validity, which is too commonly placed on people with disabilities. I feel I have missed out on many opportunities to grow professionally because of my disability. For example it is very common for professionals to have a yearly review. Where they sit down with their employees and grade their performance. During this time, the employee gets a better sense of where they are and what steps are needed to improve. I was with one company for 5 years and never sat down with my superior to hear what they thought of my performance. I was given this opportunity and lost my job 3 weeks later. I am at the point in my career where I have enough positive and negative experience to help corporations better utilize a block of talent that represents 20 percent of the population. I look forward to having a discussion with all of you today on how to improve the employment of people with disabilities.