David: We've come to learn slowly and now hopefully a little more rapidly with our colleagues here, is this incredible talent pool of people and disabilities has too often been marginalized. And I would just reflect as a young man, I was in my 20s, I was a divisional President, for reasons that were white maleness and not my talent, by the way, and ADA was passed and I remember quite well. And I remember getting my corporate memo that said, you know, stuff changed here, there's new regulations, and thinking that if I complied with the regulations, I was doing what I should do, and not realizing how ignorant I was and how many biases I had.

So I've been in a long journey until I met Jennifer and RespectAbility, trying to understand that you have to go way beyond the law. You have to go into your heart, into your head and you have to unlearn and relearn. So we're proud to be a partner with RespectAbility. We're proud to be a partner with the city and to really challenge ourselves as we've done with foster youth, with justice involved youth, many different populations that we've been trying to work harder and harder, and making sure that every person has a route to successful employment, into a successful life, and that we have to fight stigmas and biases. So we started off, thank you - just this last week, Candice and Tatiana did an in-service for my own staff, because before we sort of go out and tell Chamber members to think differently, we have to say look at yourself - oneself first. I would ask you all to think about that question. And it was scary, because you challenged us to understand that a lot of times we thought we got right and we weren't at all. And so it was good and super healthy and my staff super appreciate it. So thank you again to Candace and Tatiana for that in service. You should want that.

And so I'm going to turn it over, but let me just say - we're on a mission now. Jennifer has us, there's no turning back. You have us and we're going to challenge our employers, businesses, and all sectors to really think deeply about the next stage of the way they hire, the way they promote and the way they support their employees that is free of bias, is free of stereotypes when it comes to anybody with a disability - and frankly for us it's anybody, whether it's race or income or any kind of characteristic - but today it's about this. It's about this kind of situation. So welcome again to all of you and now I'm gonna turn it over to my colleague. We're so grateful to this mayor. Mayor Garcetti and his department of rehab so Jaime is going to now, as our partner in this endeavor, further welcome you. So please welcome Jaime.

[Applause]

Jaime: Good morning. You know I wanted to thank you all for taking the time to come out here. I know it was early and I particularly want to thank the private sector, of course, who showed up to this event. We have a lot of community folks, we've got community colleges here. We've got a lot of partners. But it really is critically important that we expand the number of folks who understand the work that we're doing here. As for those private sector partners who showed up here, for the board members, we really appreciate your attendance here. We've got a great panel today and I'm really excited about this. And I want to thank a number of folks around the room but I'm not going to do it because they're going to speak. But I do want to say two things. Robert Sainz is the assistant general manager for the city's economic and workforce development department with a primary focus on workforce development. Definitely, if you have an opportunity to sit down and meet with him - Jose Perez is with the County Workforce Development Agency and Community Services Department, our counterpart. This is really a regional approach. This is not focused on a single entity. This is sharing the way we do work across multiple municipalities. Jose will say that we're one of 88 cities within the county, we'll say that they're our sister agency and we'll leave it at that.

[Laughter] [Inaudible]

When I first accepted this When I first accepted this position, the first person I came to was David Bradshaw and I told David I was going to be moving on over to the department of disability. And I wanted to ensure that workforce development was a key component of what occurs in the city's department of disability. It had not been a primary focus but it needs to be a primary focus. We're on a mission here to educate and to dispel myths and misconceptions about disability. So with that, thank you. Jennifer, I really want to thank you and your organization for helping put this together. We have a great partnership. And for those of you who don't know, RespectAbility has an accelerator grant from the California Workforce Board. The accelerator grants are grants that really focus on developing new initiatives. This particular initiative is around the entertainment industry. Broadening the presence and the acceptability of people with disabilities in the entertainment industry. This is a key focus for us in Los Angeles as you well know. We will continue to work with RespectAbility, with the chamber and its members, private sector, educational institutions and the community folks Whatever you do, don't be nice to these folks. They came down here and they should be challenged. We need to make sure we have our partners at the state level, in the private sector, at faith based organizations, we need to make sure that they're working alongside with us. So thank you. I'm going to pass this over to Candace Cable.

[Applause]

Candace: I'm just really honored and excited to be here and to be a part of this whole three-way project that we have going on. I am. My name is Candace Cable.

[Woos]

I'm a native Angelino, so I'm local. And I am new to RespectAbility in the last year and when I met Jennifer, I had a lot of excitement because RespectAbility was really doing a lot of good work and getting stuff done. And that's really what we need, right? We need to get stuff done and we need to do it the right way. And they had a lot of good ways to do things. So when this started to come forward this accelerator 7.0 that Jaime mentioned, they asked me if I wanted to be a part of it, and be the California Workforce program manager here, and work with Philip Kahn-Pauli, our director of public policy in DC, and that we would have an office here for the very first time in Los Angeles.

Now RespectAbility has worked in Los Angeles for a few years now on their Hollywood projects, which is getting people jobs in front of and behind the camera, and educating production and all the different studios and different casting agencies about disability which is - you heard David speak about how we did a Disability 101 education here.

First and foremost I want to thank the LA Area Chamber of Commerce as well as the LA city department on disability, collaborating with us on this. Because this really is - we're thinking, we don't know for sure, so don't put it in the news yet - but we think this could be a groundbreaking collaboration that hasn't been done before.

RespectAbility, I want to tell you a little bit about it, is a nonprofit that's a nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C. And they work in entertainment, policymakers, With educators, self-advocates, nonprofits, employers, faith-based organizations, philanthropists, journalists and online media to fight stigma and advance opportunities for people with disabilities. We're led by a diverse group of disabled and non-disabled individuals, and we would educate on good and promising practices as well as develop different trainings and webinars and going out into the environment to work with people on what can really work and and how it can happen. This accelerator 7.0 grant is a project that is going to be around employment. And we heard them speak about the entertainment industry. But it's also going to be in private industry. So really looking at all the different aspects of it, we're doing some environmental scans of what's working and what's not working and where the gaps are. And then also, we're working on civic engagement - bringing people with disabilities into those areas - on boards, volunteering, in the environment - because we need people with disabilities in the spaces to be able to work with this whole inclusion piece that comes forward.

So, I'd like to acknowledge Jennifer Mizrahi here, our president, Lauren Appelbaum, our vice president of communications. She's been hitting up the Hollywood piece. We also have Matan Koch, whose on the board here, who is our senior advisor, and we have Tatiana Lee who I'm going to introduce as our moderator today, so again I'm just so proud, I'm humbled, I'm excited, I'm motivated, I'm energized working here with everyone, because I love L.A. And I really want us to be a leader in this, and we have a lot of things coming in the future that are super exciting so we have a lot of opportunities.

So without further ado, Tatiana Lee, our moderator, is an award-winning actress, model, and speaker, as well as a social-media influencer in the area of beauty and lifestyle. She is also the founder and curator of AccessibleHollywood.com, a website which aims to make Hollywood entertainment accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Tatiana is the Hollywood inclusion for RespectAbility and I am really honored to call her my colleague on this project in LA, and my friend. Tatiana, take it away.

[Applause]

Tatiana: Thank you! So I am going to introduce our amazing panelists that we have here today, and thank you Candace so much for all of that. I nod those sentiments of everything, I'm so excited to be working on this project and to do this work. It's very very exciting and I couldn't be happier. So first, good morning everyone and thank you very much for joining us. We are meeting today to share a conversation about how to capitalize on the talent of workers with disabilities. Yes, capitalize. We have lots of talents and we want to be able to use them. In total, Los Angeles is home to nearly 1 million residents with disabilities including a hundred and eighty four thousand students with disabilities enrolled in public schools. And only 37 percent of those five hundred and sixty-six thousand working aged Angelenos with disabilities has a job/ 37 percent. This is a huge potential workforce that, with the right training and support, can meet the evolving labor demands of the industries across Southern California. And so with that, I'm going to introduce our panelists.

So first we have over here Joe Xavier, who is Director, Department of Rehabilitation. He has over 34 years of experience in business and public administration, as well as many years participating in advocacy and community organizations. As an immigrant a blind consumer and a beneficiary of the DOR services, Joe has the experience in understanding the challenges and opportunities available to individuals with disabilities, and the services required to maximize an individual's full potential. Joe believes in the talent and potential of individuals with disabilities, and investing in the future through creativity, ingenuity and innovation, ensuring decisions and actions are informed by interested individuals and groups, and pursuing excellence through continuous involvement and preserving the public's trust through compassionate, responsible provisions of service. So that's Joe.

Next we have over here my buddy Matan, who's the Senior Advisor at RespectAbility a nonprofit organization fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities. A longtime national leader in the disability advocacy, he is on the front lines in RespectAbility's work with disability inclusion in philanthropy and nonprofit, Jewish outreach, impact, leadership, legal affairs, and RespectAbility's LA work. A graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School, Koch began his legal career as counsel to Proctor and Gamble Company, where he rose to become the primary legal support for a two billion dollar portfolio of brands. He was a senator confirmed Obama appointee to the National Council on Disability for a term that ended in 2014. An inclusion expert, he has developed trainings and materials from many Jewish organizations including Hillel International, the Union for Reform Judaism, and combined Jewish Philanthropies. He has also spoken and taught at various law firms and at Johnson & Johnson. He currently serves as Advisory Council on the Jewish vocational services in Boston as their disabilities subject expert.

Next we have John Dunn, who's the assistant secretary for apprenticeship and work training at the Labor and Workforce Development Agency. Primarily focused on apprenticeship policy implementation coordination between government agencies and increasing access to apprenticeship programs statewide. He previously was responsible for apprenticeship funding and policy at California Community College chancellor's office in California Department of Education. Prior to driving a test for the state of California, he taught multiple subjects as a high school teacher for ten years.

Then we have Vincenzo Piscopo - works as the community and stakeholder relations director for Coca-Cola Company, where he manages the relationships with disability, veterans and Hispanic organizations, as well as United Way and hands-on Atlanta. Vincenzo has worked for the coca-cola company for the last 27 years in different areas of organization, including finance, IT, marketing and innovation. He has a bachelor's degree in economics and an MBA from Carnegie Mellon University and a master's in creativity from Buffalo State College. He is the president and founder member of the Ability ERG for the Coca-Cola company, and the founder and president of the wheels of happiness foundation, where he uses his expertise to help people with motor disabilities in disadvantaged areas of the world. He is a member of the Board of Directors of RespectAbility, and is a member of the Business Advisory Council of the United Spinal and United Way worldwide. He was born and grew up in Venezuela. He's married and has four kids and in his free time plays wheelchair tennis, teaches Sunday school at his local church, and spends time with his wife and four kids. So that is just an introduction of our amazing panelists.

Vincenzo: Hello and welcome everybody, it's an honor to be here, and Jennifer thank you for allowing us to show this video. We're very proud of this work at Coca-Cola. We just launched a campaign with our Diet Coke brand that is called Unlabeled, where for a limited production of the cans, we removed the labels of our Diet Coke, with the intention of creating conversations about labels and about stigmas and about you know the issues that labels and stigma create, not only for people with disability but for all the minorities communities like LGTBQ, African-Americans, etcetera. So those videos we're trying to show is you know - our videos are part of this campaign where they showed as some individuals within, from the different communities talking about their labels and what those labels have done, you know, for their lives.

[Video plays]

So the next one is just featuring one of - one of the person with disabilities.

[Video plays] [Applause]

Tatiana: Thank you! So we're going to go into - I'm going to ask you the first question. So recruiting employees is a long journey, not a short process. As such can you talk about Coca Cola's own journey in recruiting and retaining and promoting more employees with disabilities, and what are some key organizational policies and practices a companies needs to do to succeed?

Vincenzo: Yeah, so - can you hear me? So excellent. So first of all, we are on a journey at Coca-Cola. Right? So I wish I could say we are a best-in-class of recruiting and retaining people with disability. But I am very proud to say that we are in that journey and we have a commitment so we do succeed in that journey. So one of the things that I always say, one of the things that we've done at Coca-Cola is actually - it's a process, it's a 360 strategy, right, that starts inside and continues outside. So from the inside perspective it's actually being able to create awareness within the Coca-Cola company of the power and value that people with disabilities bring. Right? So we've been doing a lot of work inside featuring our employees with disabilities, bringing speakers as successful people with disabilities and featuring them, so that we remove that stigma from Coca-Cola - you know, from people with disabilities, and also allowing people to be more comfortable around people with disabilities because unfortunately stigma itself and - it was very interesting, in one of the sessions yesterday they were sharing a research that says if you have a person with disability in a room, normally people will speak like - two feet away from them just because of that uncomfortableness, that the statement creates on people when they're around people with disabilities. So removing that is very essential, so that people feel comfortable having people with disabilities around. And it's a lot about that stigma. And the fact that I became disabled in the middle of my journey at Coca-Cola, so they've been able to see the before and after, and that there is no difference between before and after, and that has been very eye-opening for the company. So that's the first thing - how creating that big awareness in the company had a powerful - and the power that people with disabilities bring.

Second has been on making sure that we are ready to really allow people with disabilities to be successful in the company. It's just not the intention - you really have to make it happen, right? So making sure that from a disability -- from an accessibility perspective we are ready to have people with disability and allowing them to be very successful, and that's the journey. So we started with a very small internship program where we're hosting five, six kids with disabilities and allowing them to actually be our police in the sense of, you know, you're going to spend two and a half months with us, I want you to be successful. At the end of the internship I want you to tell us what didn't work, because we don't know, right?

So we -- and one of the things that Jennifer said that is very important - it's not about compliance, it's beyond compliance. Because we know that we're being compliant, but that's not enough. Right? It's not enough for us to be able to leverage and capitalize on the power that people with disabilities bring. We cannot stay with just compliance. That's not gonna get us there. And a way for us to be able to know that is to have people with disabilities in the company. For them to say, hey, listen, you have -- everything is accessible, but I am deaf and I'm not being able to actually share my knowledge, share the impact of the things that I can do, because you guys are not buying it. So that's the other thing. And then having campaigns like the Unlabeled one. We're showing that world - hey listen you, here at Coca-Cola, we are being very vocal about the fact that we value people with -- we value people of minorities. You know, we are a very diverse and inclusive company. And that has allowed us to -- with all those powerful people that we have out there -- to come to us and say hey listen, I want to work for your company because I can see that you are very welcoming. So it's a journey. We're not there yet. We're not there yet. It's a long journey, and we have to stay focused on it. But I think little by little we are getting there.

Tatiana: Thank you so much. I think that's really really great, everything that you were saying. And I feel like that's a lot of the work that we are doing here with getting people comfortable with disability and then also going beyond just the protocol or what it is and going further than that. So with that, my next question is for John. So what does the education and the workforce system need to do to ensure that job seekers with disabilities have the skills, the certification, and the credentials needed to succeed in the labor market?

John: That's a lot of stuff. Thank you all for letting me be here today too. Is it on? I'll use my teacher voice. Well, that's a lot of stuff and I want to start with what scope -- we'll use apprenticeship. That's my whole goal here. Governor Newsom would like to see five hundred thousand apprentices by the year 2029, and you have 90,000 right now, and most of those are in the building trades and firefighter occupations. So we have an awful lot of opportunities to expand in exactly this way. The workforce system - to me, as an educator, apprenticeship really speaks to casting a bigger net, allowing for more mentorship on the job.

And if you're not familiar with how apprenticeship works, the quick version iis there's classroom instruction that is more theoretical maybe, but it's contextualized and connected to work. There has to be work involved. It has to be an on-the-job training component. And it really speaks to our friends in the building trades, they do this very very well. You have mentors on the job, and that's how apprenticeship works. That mentor helps the newbie to gain skills and to practice in a little more safe inclusive environment, rather than being just chucked into the job and figuring it out. Because all of us have probably been chucked into a job and had to figure it out. And so, that's what I think the workforce system -- now that we're really focusing on apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship and it's great to see how it unifies with Joe here, and some other folks from the K-12 community and community colleges that are -- we have expanded pre-apprenticeship opportunities. We've created a registered pre-apprenticeship program for the state, rather than just apprenticeship. And a pre-apprenticeship allows you to cast a bigger net, to get a bigger funnel to have more people being trained to prepare for work to go into those apprenticeships. And I think that's what we're trying to do with -- these accelerator grants are a great example of that too, the mentorship that comes with that - so I'll stop there because I know there's lots more questions. I can keep going but I'll stop for now.

Tatiana: Thank you so much. I do think apprenticeship is very very important. I will say that I haven't finished school but - and I haven't had a lot of office work experience, and working with RespectAbility has been really really great. Lauren and Jennifer have really put their arms around me and kind of helped train me in the areas where I needed support in everything, and Candice -- They have been really really great, so I feel like they're such great mentors to me in my endeavors and my career. So that is really really important to have those people that can really put their arms around you and really support you and move you forward and see the potential that you do have within you.

So I'm gonna go over to my buddy Joe over here. So Joe, my question for you is we have a -- you have a wide range of resources to prepare job seekers with disabilities and support companies that want to hire individuals with disabilities, and to ensure those workers contribute to the bottom line. What do LA area businesses need to know about working with DOR?

Joe: Well thank you. First of all, thank you for being here and thank you for putting this forum on. There's not enough of them that take place because, to make the change that we're looking to make in society, we need to continue to have this conversation and elevate this conversation. So let me touch base on that question -- but I think it's important also to have a little bit of a sense of when we talk about this, what are we looking at from the Department of Rehabilitation. And the first thing that I would say to you is a lot of times we think of disability as the people who are in this room. Right? Which is easy to say - it's us who are the people that have a disability.

But as a video pointed out you have people who are going to acquire a disability tomorrow. That infant who's going to be born today with the most significant disability. The driver going home was [inaudible] The person serving our country, they don't list -- that was described on the film and that's a major part of how we approach our world, because we need to think of all disabilities, including the distinction between the visible disability - myself as a blind person - versus somebody who's suffering from a mental illness or any other cognitive or mental disabilities that are true impediments to the workplace. So when we look at this we need to think of the programmatic, the physical, the digital accessibility - the social acceptance that I think makes a huge difference, and getting people into the workplace.

So what do you, the business community, need to know about the department of rehabilitation? First of all is that we have a rich and wide talent pool of people with disabilities who want to go to work and they're looking for that opportunity to go to work. Here to the Greater Los Angeles area we have nearly 30 officers. And so [inaudible], you're sitting into the room, please raise your hand and wave because this is the lady you need to get to know in the Los Angeles area when you're looking for talent and you're looking for partnerships in making your differences in your companies. We provide any services that is necessary for an individual to become ready for employment, but we also provide services to companies to help individuals stay at work.

And I'm sorry, I don't recall your name from Coca-Cola - as you were saying, you incurred your injury while at work. So our department provides the kind of supports and services that would help an individual who acquires an injury, however they acquire it, to stay at work. And then we also provide a lot of other resources to help the business community have a welcoming and accepting workplace for people with disabilities, reasonable accommodations - how do you accommodate somebody who's blind? What is it that we would need to do? And one of the big myths is, "oh my goodness, it's going to break my bank. Most reasonable accommodations are just common sense minor adjustments, whether it's work schedule, whether it's flexibility, or even the approach in how people give work. So like for me maybe I won't handwrite your report, but I might type it, you'll actually be able to read it. [Laughter] So it's that kind of thinking, it's the kind of services that we provide across a wide spectrum, to help you get the employee, keep the employee and allow that employee to advance in employment within your organization.

Tatiana: Thank you so much. So, speaking on the topic of acquired disability and staying at work, this question is for Matan. What are some strategies or interventions appropriate to assure that current workers can stay at work? What do you think?

Matan: Thanks. It would be redundant for me to thank RespectAbility since I work there so instead I would like to thank all of you for being here because -- and the chamber for hosting us, because there would be no point in my being here if you weren't here to talk to and to listen to. It is you all that make this event something to come to, and where we will build the tremendous collaborations that will radiate out from LA, from the chamber here that is partnered with chambers all over the country to really roll out these ideas. And what I want to say is when one looks at the question and, full disclosure I'm not a person with an acquired disability so I'm speaking of this from a professional knowledge perspective, not from a personal one. When one looks at the question of you know, how do we help someone with an acquired disability stay in the workforce, continue to contribute those talents that they have been contributing so successfully, I think it really comes down to overall model. If we have already designed a workplace that, because we are excited about the talents that people with disabilities can bring, reaches out to every employee, understands the barriers that they're facing to deliver those talents, and works with them in a proactive way to maximize talent delivery, then as traumatic as it can be to acquire a disability in your personal life, for work it's just one more employee facing a new challenge, just like an employee that suddenly has a new challenge with commute or with childcare or with some other necessary thing in order to deliver the talents that were so exciting to get. If we can build a culture that says, we are so excited about your talent that whoever you are we're going to find a way to overcome that challenge, then acquired disability, as scary as it can be to learn to live with new life realities, is not scary for your managers when you get back to work, because the attitude is we got this.

The key is going to be, and I think you'd hear this if Enzo told you more of his story -- the key is going to be that as a company, as an employer, you already have a laser focus on what talent that person brings to your organization. You already know why they're there, as it were and what you are doing is figuring out ways - many of them as John, sorry, as you jus said, cheap and easy - that can allow folks to continue to succeed. And the numbers show us that they do succeed. Companies that set up wide-ranging programs to work with people with disabilities, there was a recent study - accenture and Disability:IN shows us - they are more profitable, greater productivity, greater bottom line. And some of that is diversity of perspective, but I think some of it is also just the knowledge and the mindset that comes with being an innovative company that knows how to help your employees give your best. So as I'm sitting here thinking about the partners in the room, the chamber and the way we're going to - thought process, I want us to think, how can we help every business be more successful by adapting the way we think about employees, barriers and obstacles to maximize everyone's talents and contributions.

Tatiana: Thank you so much.

[Applause]

So next, I'm going to go to Vincenzo. So I have a question. With you at Coca-Cola, and you guys are doing such great work, what are some of the successes you have achieved, and what are some of the challenges that a firm might encounter when they develop strategies to include disability hiring?

Vincenzo: So let's see, the successes. I think that, for us, the success has been the willingness to -- having been able to develop in our senior managers, and hiring managers, the willingness to learn and to hire, and to be open to hire people with disability, and I'll just give you an example. So after all this campaign of awareness and all that that we've done in the last year or so, when we started talking about having an internship program for people with disability, you know we say let's start very very small, like probably a couple, because we don't know how easy it's going to be. Because obviously, you know, each department that will host a student will have to pay for another salary and they're, you know, moving expenses and all that stuff. And it was incredible how so many departments jumped up on the opportunity. They want to have one, I must have one, I really want to have one - so instead of having two, I had like 8, 10 departments that wanted to really have a student in the internship program. And in fact, I was trying to say right now you cannot have them because we are starting small, but that was an example of saying -- of showing that all the awareness, all the training that we've been doing is actually having a result. So that's, you know, it's a very small win for us, but I think it actually, you know, once we are able to have the students and they show that it's not a big deal but the benefits are huge, we will have more people, more managers, willing to actually give people with disability the opportunities.

So as for challenges, that -- I mentioned that in another talk -- is, you know, we have to realize that this is a long journey and as I said there is an elephant. You know, it's a big elephant that we have to eat to be able to be successful. And what we have to know it that we cannot eat the elephant all at once, we have to eat it pieces by pieces, because there is a lot to do. There is a lot to do inside the company. But also outside. There is a lot of things that we have to worry about to help remove the stigma and to help make people realize that people with disability - do not need charity they just need opportunities. And that is very very important but we have to digest that. It has to be realized. And also, there is a lot of -- with that, there is a lot of work that we need to do and I'm glad that RespectAbility is doing it through the work, Tatiana, you're doing in Hollywood, because Hollywood has a lot of voice, right? Because many many people see it, that the impact and the power that people with disabilities bring. Right? You know, having people with disability in front of and behind the camera allows people to realize that, hey listen, they're just people that add value. There is nothing strange about that. You know, just feel comfortable. So it's a huge elephant and we cannot let ourselves overwhelm - we have to eat it little by little but we have to make sure that we eat it. So the challenges are general -- The workspace is a challenge for Coca-Cola, it's a challenge in general.

But one -- I'm gonna take this opportunity real quick to say it -- all of you guys, as I said yesterday in another session, people with disability -- you know, hiring people with disability is probably 20% the right thing to do. Right? Because, you know we are part of this world as much as everybody else and we have the same right as everybody else. But it's 80% about the smart thing to do. And it's the smart thing to do because there's a lot of talent, and there's real talent. I'm not talking -- as I said a few weeks ago it's not might, the talent that I bring but it's the talent that like people like Matan bring to the table. You know, people that have done so much, that having brilliant minds that fortunately the world has been able to leverage Matan's brilliance. But there is a lot of people like Matan, and there's a lot of people out there that are brilliant, and because of that stigma, they're not being leveraged. And with that the community's losing. The country's losing. The world is losing. So that's something that we really really need to work with. [Applause]

Tatiana: Thank you so much. So my next question is for John. So in your apprenticeship programs, what are some great things that non-traditional apprenticeship program roles, will roll into opportunities for competitive work opportunities?

John: I think we keep hearing it today it's about talent development. That apprenticeships in these non-traditional roles, to leverage that learning process and the bigger net and the ability to identify talent, and support it and nurture it in a -- it doesn't have to be in a set amount of time. An apprenticeship can be a longer period of time if needed, it can be shorter, we have competency-based -- so I think when I'm really hearing today and what I saw when I was a teacher was that there's an awful lot of talent that isn't getting the opportunity or doesn't know about these opportunities. And one of the goals that we have in setting up apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities in non-traditional areas is that there are lots and lots of people that would be really good at these jobs, and public sector jobs and private sector jobs, and I really want to set up a training pathway that's recognizable, that people can identify earlier in their journey to work, to a career.

We're living a long time folks, and it'd be great to identify people at a younger age that have those skills and those talents, and prepare them and -- but also create a welcoming on-ramp. And I say on-ramp because we've worked a little bit with LA city about that with their local hire initiative, and I'm stealing all those ideas. That's an easier on ramp for folks in LA to get into jobs, and I think that's a model that allows for folks that maybe wouldn't see that opportunity, wouldn't know about that, but also the employers to take the first step. If they're not ready in their minds for more people on with disabilities, maybe let's create an option for them that's easier for them to understand, because those jobs don't happen unless there's an employer at the other end, so...

Tatiana: Thank you. So speaking of all that, now we know that people with disabilities are talented, we're amazing, we work, all those other things. So now we're hired, and the next thing is reasonable accommodations, and things of that nature for us to do our job. So my question for you. to build the most inclusive workforce possible, companies need to understand issues such as reasonable accommodation, etiquette, and disclosure procedures. What are the most essential things that companies need to understand and how can your partnership help them with that? You touched a little bit on it earlier.

Joe: So what you need to know about reasonable accommodations and how do we help become a partner -- one of the things you need to really think about when it comes to reasonable accommodations is we've all heard of the ADA, right? The Americans with Disabilities Act? But one of the most effective things to do, when it comes to accommodating individuals with disabilities, is starting with asking -- you notice something. "Joe, what is it that we can do to support you in doing the functions of your job?" You'd be amazed at how much that breaks down on the barriers and the myths around that. I mentioned accommodations, that they're not this big myth that we all hear about -- that the job access network provides -- 50% of the accommodations are less than 500 bucks. Right?

Most of the accommodations are things like a flexible work schedule. Maybe you're supposed to show up at 8, but you have a little bit of a late start so you show up at 8:15 and you need to take breaks. So a lot of it is just everyday common sense. But what happens is we -- a lot of times in the workplace, we get into we want to be standard and consistent, right? So what we do for one, we must do for all, assuming that all have the same need, start at the same place, you know, same pathway and what have you. So it's just really thinking through that it and again, if I can do nothing else but say to you, we're a partner in helping you identify.

Where we don't have the expertise or this skill set, we know who to direct you to, whether it's for a specific accommodation, or getting a specific accommodation, or the identification of a resource to help find what's the right accommodation for those individuals. And again, I think it's really important that when we talk about this we think of the accommodations as for somebody with a visible disability, a physical disability, myself who's blind, Tatiana who's in a chair, whatever it may be. But remember, individuals with hidden disabilities need those accommodations. You heard it over and over. You set the right attitude, the right tone, the right environment in the workplace, and that is very needed, as much as it is for the physical and other disabilities.

Tatiana: Thank you. So we're gonna go into our last question, and then we're going to go into a little bit of Q&A, so, you guys, get your questions ready. So we talked a little bit about reasonable accommodations and sometimes it's just time, but sometimes it may involve assistive technology. Matan, can you talk a little bit about assistive technology, and when that is involved with reasonable accommodations, and some thoughts about that?

Matan: So I love being asked about assistive technology, because I love to hijack the question about assistive technology

[Laughter]

and this is meaning one of my favorite things to do. So I am, as many people with disabilities are, a user of assistive technology. I use a voice recognition program to really produce all of my written work. I -- because my disability predates voice recognition, I was taught to laboriously type five or ten words a minute, but since the onset of voice recognition, we don't do that anymore. But here's the interesting thing about it. And I actually researched this at one point, because I wanted to be able to offer it. So, the average college-educated untrained typist types about forty to fifty words a minute. The average trained typist, i.e., the diminishing folks that have studied actual secretarial skills, type at about a hundred words per minute. The average person speaks at about 150 words per minute. So here's a question that I pose to you. Voice recognition software at this point is less than two hundred dollars, can be run on just about any computer you purchase. Why wouldn't you offer it to any employee whose job it is to produce written work?

[Laughter]

The opportunity to produce that work at one hundred and fifty words a minute instead of fifty words a minute.

[Applause]

We talk about assistive technology as if it's some odd, out there, pie in the sky thing that only people with disabilities need. My voice recognition is universal. My second best technological accommodation? I have a smartphone, so that I don't have to be physically in the place where my work needs to be done every time I need to take a call or send an email. Well guess what? I think we finally learned how to make smartphones universal. But when I think about assistive technology, I think, "what can we do again to make our workplaces workplaces that are maximizing everyone's talent?" Even if you start to move to technology like screen reader technology, okay, you probably don't need an actual screen reader unless, for some reason, reading the text on the screen or seeing the text on the screen is difficult. But it turns out that designing your web pages to be screen reader accessible also makes them work like 10 times better for all of the now automated fill out apps that everyone likes to use, and the various quick registration apps. So why wouldn't you want to design your website that way for everyone?

And so when I look at assistive technology, I say, let's have a business revolution around technology. And I'm now going to hijack the question even a little further for a second and come back to the question of accommodation and say, even in things like flexible schedules and telecommuting, and things that we don't call assistive tech, but are very common accommodations for people with disabilities. Well, assuming you can put a system together that works well for people with disabilities, meaning you have real ability for people to have functional remote offices, you re-prioritize your workplace around deliverables and expectations and deadlines, and not around face time, so that you're really functioning with these accommodations and not just struggling with them -- again, why wouldn't you extend them to any employee whose job is amenable to not needing to be sitting at a desk, in a particular cubicle, faced in their particular direction, at a particular time, tethered to the landlines no one uses anymore, and you get a desktop but instead we all carry laptops...there's just no need to do it.

So I look at each of these accommodations -- I don't like the word accommodation. Accommodation - I am a lawyer, the word accommodation is something the law came up with. But the way that I think about it is these are strategies to help people deliver their best talent to our workplaces, and they're strategies that we can use for everyone. So that's the way that I would answer that question.

[Laughter and Applause]

Tatiana: Well thank you so much, we've learned so much, and now I want to open it up to you guys. Do you guys have any questions?

Audience Member: Yeah, is that Matan's first time sharing that story?

Matan: I am assuming that was a little bit facetious?

[Laughter]

But to give the actual background because it's worth knowing, I joined up with RespectAbility about six months ago but for the last five years I've been professionally working with companies all over the country to look at how to maximize their talent acquisition, and utilization of the people with disabilities. So I admit it's a bit of a canned speech when it comes to the discussion. But the reason I'm glad you asked it and I'm actually going to take a minute to answer it, it's a canned speech that works, its an idea that works. It's a focus that when companies grab in and do it, it works.

And so to go all the way back in time, it is something that worked for me. It's so interesting to sit here on the panel, I wouldn't be here with voc rehab, in my case, the Connecticut Department of voc rehab that was so instrumental in making sure that I got to college and law school and got through it. And I wouldn't be here without employers like Procter & Gamble and Kramer Levin, that, long before we had standardized any of these ideas, made a really critical point. And I still remember the day the chief employment counsel at Procter & Gamble said, when he was trying to encourage me to be more expensive in asking for what I needed. He said, "we hired you to be a successful lawyer. If there's something that's going to make you a more successful lawyer, ask us for it so that we can give it to you. This is not minimalism. Don't try to get by with just what you think you absolutely can't hide or not ask for. Tell us how we can make you succeed, because that's what we want you to do. And so that's what I take forward and that became the speech many years later.

[Applause]

Tatiana: Any questions?

Audience Member: Hi I'm Vicky with Ability magazine and Ability Jobs and maybe you can help me because I'm really new with this company and new to the field. But when I contact employers to find out if they want to post jobs on our job board, our online job board, if they want to participate in our job fairs, our virtual online job fairs, I get from HR people, "well, if they're qualified" I'd ask them "Do you hire folks with disabilities?" "if they're qualified." And, you know, I want to reach through the phone but I don't. But anyway, if you could, Coca-Cola, or any of you - if you have a response that I could maybe use when I'm talking to these employers and there's obvious discrimination against folks with disabilities?

Matan: So I'd flip that right back around and I say "absolutely. We don't want you to hire anyone that's not qualified. Let me talk about how many wonderfully qualified people we have that are waiting to work with your company. And like, have four or five examples ready, just to blow their mind. Just pick five random qualified people here in Los Angeles. It's not going to be hard to find them. Have them at your fingertips and say, "I absolutely agree. We don't want to hire anyone who's not qualified. Let me tell you right now about five people that are qualified to work at your company, and that's the tip of the iceberg. We can give you five hundred more. And you can just respond right there. Because what they're actually saying, and they're not saying it directly, but this is the subtext -- Well, we don't think there are qualified people out there, not to work at our company, not to do our job. And so your response isn't to take issue with their stated words, it's to get at that assumptions and say, absolutely. Qualified. Here's some qualified folks. Does that help?

Audience Member: Somewhat.

[Laughter]

My response is why would you hire someone that's not qualified?

Matan: Exactly.

Audience Member: But I don't have the people to say, here you go.

Matan: But these people in the room do. Connect with them and we can get them to you.

John: That's exactly right and one of the things that we talk about with employers right now, when they don't want to do an apprenticeship or they don't want to try something new, and at the same time they're complaining that they can't find skilled people. Pick one. You know? I get a little frustrated.

[Laughter]

I'm coming with the solution to their problem, no offense to the employers in the room, but sometimes we get that and I go, well, you know, I got a solution for you. Let's try that, because the other thing's not working.

Audience Member: Good morning. I don't have a question. I just want to thank the state Workforce Development Board and the State Department of rehab for the steps program, the investment for young adults with disabilities to come into the workforce. So we were able to receive the grants this fiscal year and rolling it out too, so do let the folks know that we do have opportunities for at least 100 individuals that we're placing into our workforce. We think that's a tremendous on-ramp for our apprenticeship programs and all of our other target-local hire and all of our programs that we have within the city to be able to provide those opportunities. So I just want to say thank you for being innovative and having the foresight to make that investment.

Joe: Yeah you know, thank you for making that comment because I think there's something that didn't come up earlier in the Q&A that's really important is what are we doing to prepare youth with disabilities for employment? Right? We need to continue to pay a lot more attention to that, because when we have expectations from the earliest age that a child with the most significant disability will go to work, the question is not if, it's how or where. But that's true for every youth, not just the ones with disabilities. So we need to continue to -- the other thing is that employment, independence and equality - it's not just my job, the panel, RespectAbility, it's all of our jobs.

And there's a collective partnership that needs to continue to evolve to really make a difference. We have folks here today from our independent living community that help people learn how to live independently because you need to have that skill set to become employed. We have folks from education that help prepare. We have folks from workforce. So it's this collective partnership, that can have a collective impact that no single system can have, that we need to continue to tap into.

Matan: I wanted to - it's 10 seconds - and say the last part of that collaboration and we're sitting in this room is the chamber, and it's so exciting that we're sitting here with the chamber, because you have, within your membership, and how many members? How many member organizations?

Audience Member: 1600.

Matan: 1600. And that is from the LA chamber that could be brought to the table as a part of this discussion. Coca-Cola is great, we're so glad you're here, but we need the other 1599 [laughter] to come along with us and be a part of that discussion and we need to bring it out to chambers all over. You know, you'll be the trendsetter, the example that the rest of them follow.

Vincenzo: Just to add to the whole conversation - I related to the question that you asked. One of the things that I tell people when I talk to people with with disabilities that you know -- use every opportunity to educate. So I know that you were saying that you wanted to like get out of your phone and strangle them. What I would say is that, you know what, just breathe in and take that opportunity to educate. I know you said -- that's a statement, let me explain it to you and educate. And I tell that everybody to, you know that people with disability say, "oh my god, I'm so mad they did this to me" - Take that opportunity to educate. I mean things you know -- as people ask you why are you using the handicap stall, don't get mad at that. Just stop. and say - breathe and say excuse me sir, You know the reason why there is handicap stall is not for your convenience. It's not for your comfort. It's because people like me can not get in. But you using that -- you're stopping me to going to the bathroom. And because a lot of people don't know it, it's just ignorance, and the only way to combat ignorance is with education and we all have a role in that.

Tatiana: Well that's all we have for today. I hope you guys can mingle and we ran out of time, so I'm sorry. But I want to say a few things that we can take with us is we are very talented, we are ready to work, accommodations help all, actually help us work - even everyone - a lot easier, and it will help your bottom line, so those are some key things that I can probably take home, and so thank you so much for all being here and I hope you enjoy your morning.

[Applause]