

JOHN D. KEMP

Co-Founder of the American Association of People with Disabilities

DISABILITY FRIENDLY

HOW TO MOVE FROM
CLUELESS



to

INCLUSIVE

FOREWORD BY CAROLINE CASEY

Founder, The Valuable 500

WILEY

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Praise for *Disability Friendly*

“In *Disability Friendly*, John Kemp offers a personal, direct, and practical masterclass for anyone looking to make the call for equity and inclusion real for people with disabilities. This exceptional book provides a distinct roadmap for all of us to take action in our own lives and workplaces to redress the intractable problems of exclusion, unemployment, stereotypes, and discrimination that have befallen people with disabilities in recent times and throughout the ages.”

—**Peter W. Thomas, JD, Managing Partner, The Powers Law Firm**

“Every CEO who has issued a public statement around their company's commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion needs to read this book. There is no one more credible to take a stand on the subject, and yet Kemp uses openness and curiosity instead of recrimination and rebuke. *Disability Friendly* is a wonderful tool for leaders today and in the future; I expect it to become required reading as more and more organizations recognize that the time for action is now.”

—**Charlotte Dales, Founder & CEO, [Inclusively.com](https://www.inclusively.com)**

“As Secretary of Labor, I witnessed the power of employment to not only sustain Americans financially, but to enable them to pursue their ambitions and strengthen their sense of dignity and purpose. Unfortunately, people living with disabilities are still held back from fulfilling careers despite employers having more options than ever to make their workplaces fully open and accessible. Thankfully, John Kemp, one of the most passionate and prolific champions in the disability movement, has written this illuminating and entertaining guide to empowering people with disabilities. John directly addresses the misconceptions and excuses that still keep employers from taking practical steps toward supporting disabled employees. He also reminds us of the extraordinary achievements that are possible when we give every person the opportunity to succeed. *Disability Friendly* should inspire our nation to enable every American to reach their highest potential.”

**—Elizabeth Dole, President, American Red Cross;
US Senator; Founder and Chair, Elizabeth Dole
Foundation**

“For any leader who wants to better the workplace to include people with disabilities in their DEI initiative, this is a must-read book. John artfully combines his personal experience with professional knowledge and translates them into actionable recommendations. It is more than learning the best inclusion practices, but about understanding and relating to another human being authentically. Very powerful.”

—Frances West, Founder, FrancesWest&Co

“Disability Friendly should be required reading by anyone who thinks they are serious about equality. The publication comes at a critically important time, as advocates pointing to the Disability Equality Crisis must now struggle even harder to have their voices heard, in a world that still thinks treating you unfairly because you have a disability is completely different (aka not so serious) as treating you unfairly because of any number of other, dare one say competing, identities.”

—Susan Scott-Parker, Founder of Business Disability International; Founder, Disability and Ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI) Alliance

“Drawing on his deep experience and unique insights, John gives organizations the blueprint they need to engage business leaders, equip them with the knowledge they need and deliver success. It's the why, what, who and how to transform organizations and generate valuable business, social and community benefits. Thank you, John, for this wonderful guide that will help businesses to get it right—because when they do, everybody will win.”

—Suzanne Colbert, AM, Founding CEO (former), Australian Network on Disability

“John Kemp's new book, *Disability Friendly: How to Move from Clueless to Inclusive*, lays out a strong rationale for disability inclusion and provides its readers with a Blueprint for accomplishing it! When John Kemp visited Japan as my guest, he delivered this strong message of disability inclusion to Japanese business leaders who embraced his approach well. I strongly urge you to buy this book and use it in every business and organization in every country of the world, as John Kemp lays out an inclusive approach that will work everywhere!”

—**Hiro Itoh, Founder and President, Japan Abilities Care-Net, Inc.**

“Diversity, equity and inclusion is an important trend in society today. John adds disability inclusion to the mix, so we can all benefit from the skills, talents, and commitment of disabled people in our places of work and play. Disability inclusion truly benefits everyone.”

“I'd love to have John spend time with my grandkids who have disabilities. His message is one of hope, courage and legitimacy. And those are the themes of this must-read book.”

—**Bill Novelli, Founder, Porter Novelli Agency**

“John Kemp is like a fine wine. He has aged with growing knowledge and continues to be driven to make significant changes that are benefiting our society and others around the world. John is a dynamic speaker who draws people in thus enabling to learn both about the barriers disabled people are facing and the reasons why breaking down barriers in the workplace and society overall makes us all stronger. This book will enable you to learn from John's experiences as well as encourage you to think about what you have done in the past to advance or impede the inclusion of disabled people.”

—**Judith E. Heumann, International Disability Rights Advocate; author of *Being Heumann* and *Rolling Warrior***

John D. Kemp

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is Available:

ISBN 9781119830092 (Cloth)

ISBN 9781119830214 (ePub)

ISBN 9781119830221 (ePDF)

Cover Design and Image: Wiley

I dedicate this book to my wife, Sameta ("Sam"), with whom I share an extraordinary life of love, laughter, family, friends, and fulfillment in every way.

Foreword

People with disabilities make up an estimated 1 billion, or 15%, of the world's population. About 80% are of working age. The right of people with disabilities to fully participate in society, live as full citizens, as productive employees is often hampered by discriminatory practices and negative stigmas. There's not one aspect of life where people with disabilities should not expect to participate in every way.

From my global vantage point, I know this “exclusion” remains the costly mistake of today. Representation on all levels remains scarce but we are at a global tipping point in which our stark absence within positions of leadership is no longer being overlooked. I am an award-winning social entrepreneur, dangerous dreamer, and founder of the Valuable 500—a global business collective made up of 500 CEOs and their companies, innovating together for Disability Inclusion.

Over the past two decades, I have set up several organizations and initiatives centered on disability business inclusion. I was recently appointed president of the IAPB, and I sit on several diversity and inclusion boards including L'Oréal and Sky. John Kemp and I have been friends and colleagues for more than 20 years, and this book provides a wonderful insight into how institutions can embed Disability Inclusion practices into their fabric to ensure that people can unapologetically show up to their place of work, education, or retail outlets as their whole selves without fears of it being inaccessible.

It is nonsensical that some employers are willing to forego recruiting disabled talent by maintaining inaccessible build environments or inaccessible websites. There is a vast

untapped pool of disabled talent looking to work and many people with disabilities are reliable and skilled individuals with the potential to belong fully to the world of work in all industries and types of positions. Moreover, it is also nonsensical that retailers would intentionally jeopardize the profits that could be made from sales to people with disabilities as well as their friends and families. It is no longer “acceptable” for companies to not address the impact of their “exclusionary” policies. The savviest companies understand the high cost of exclusion and are aware that Disability Inclusion positively affects their bottom lines.

Disability Friendly is high-level learning about Disability Culture and how it translates into empowered people with disabilities who merely want to live lives of opportunities. For businesses engaged with the Valuable 500, they understand that people with disabilities must be an essential part of their workforces, their customer bases, their supply chains, and people with disabilities expect to be included as well. Undeniably “inclusion for all” is not a linear path, but the first step is to acknowledge that balancing individual and collective needs requires us to share. We need to eradicate the psychology of scarcity and the notion that “if I give to you, I take away from myself.” It has been proven time and time again that diversity has significant organizational benefits. You do not get to pick and mix inclusion—it is either in its entirety or not at all. Inclusion is about choice, equitable investment of resources, and leadership.

For Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion executives, this book explains why issues of disability, and people with disabilities, are an absolutely necessary component to advancing their employers' goals. To leave people with disabilities out of DEI initiatives is highly negligent as disability affects all of us. In fact, 83% of disabilities are

acquired, whether due to an accident, illness, or genetic condition. Organizations that include Disability Inclusion in their D&I agenda are better prepared to support employees through life's events. That's because they have initiatives and tools in place to help employees adjust to new ways of working and living. Empathy, tenacity, and resilience are just a few of the characteristics associated with disabled people. By including disability in the D&I agenda, businesses are better placed to attract and retain such talent.

At 28, I finally came out of the disability closet. It was my leap into the world. I could no longer hide my limited eyesight and quite frankly I was exhausted. I vowed to be proud of my capabilities, that I would never apologize for having a disability, and I would fight for every disabled person's right to be included fairly and equitably. I want everybody's true nature to be able to shine. While my advocacy journey has not been easy—I've had several doors shut in my face and a multitude of barriers to break—it has never caused me to veer away from pursuing equity, economic independence, full societal participation for well over one billion people with disabilities like John and me. We will never stop using our inherent powers and we will never stop speaking up and out about wrongs that can so easily be righted.

As a society, we need to stop putting so much emphasis on labels because labels are for jam jars. We are extraordinary, different, wonderful people who are not defined by the box we tick. Currently, disability is often considered as something more akin to being weak or dependent but there is a wealth of talent that is not being utilized for their insight, innovation, and potential. By moving past the medical model of disability and recognizing the societal structures that serve as a barrier for many we can truly begin to balance the playing field.

Enjoy delving into *Disability Friendly*. John has interwoven key gems wrapped in his humor, and I am certain you will learn a great deal from the following chapters!

Caroline Casey
Founder
The Valuable 500

Acknowledgments

To the many corporate leaders and disability leaders and influencers who have guided me and even hired me, I still learned more than I was able to share with you, and I synthesized from all of you the wisdom you shared with ease and confidence, I thank you! Frances West, Felicity Spowart and PJ Edington (deceased); Delta's Ed Bastian, John Laughter, Dana Folsom, Alison Lathrop and Donise Hall; Michael, Carole, Amy Marks Dornbusch, and Justin Marks; Iris and Saul Katz; Ralph and Lucy Palleschi; and Michael and Chris Pascucci, Sheryl Buchel, Mike Caprara, Dr. Chris Rosa, Victor Calise, Russ Cusick, Candy Cucharo, and Beth Daly.

To my law partners at The Powers Firm, Peter "Lloyd" Thomas, managing partner, and Bobby Silverstein, partner and lead author of the Americans with Disabilities Act; thank you!

To my global family of extraordinary disability advocates and leaders: Paul Hearne (deceased), Kathy Martinez, Jim Weisman, Patricia (Pat) Wright, Judy Heumann, Andy Imperato, Caroline Casey, Susan Scott-Parker, Jill Houghton, Deb Dagit, Jennifer Sheehy, Lori Golden, Charlotte Dales, Sarah Bernard and Charles Trunz of Inclusively, Justin (deceased) and Yoshiko Dart, Michael Morris, Susan Constantino, Ed Mathews, Duncan Wyeth, Amena El-Saie and Ramez Maher (Egypt), Axel Leblois, Jenny Lay-Flurrie, Hiro Itoh (Japan), Susan Scott-Parker, US Senator Tom Harkin, Suzanne Colbert and Dr. Dinesh Palipana (Australia), Maria Town, Claudia Gordon, Jonathan Young, Dr. Glen White, Justin Constantine (deceased); Col. Greg Gadson, Dr. Satendra Singh, Jim Gibbons, Susan Daniels (deceased), Deb McFadden, Mark Johnson, Mark

Wafer, Dr. Rory Cooper, Neil Jacobson, Marlee Matlin, Susan Sygall, Lex Frieden, Rosangela Berman Bieler, Cong. Jim Langevin, Michael Stein, Carol Glazer, Gordon Skinner, John Garrison, Meg O'Connell, and so many others, thank you!

To my dear and most distinguished friend of 53 years, Senator Bob Dole, who passed away while I was writing this book. Your wisdom and wit, your brilliance in policy and strategy, and your political acumen nearly lifted you to the US presidency, thank you for our sincere friendship. And to his magnificent wife, Senator Elizabeth Dole, for our friendship and the honor of serving on your foundation's board, thank you!

To my colleagues at Wiley—Richard Narramore, Julie Kerr, Jessica Filippo—and drafters/researchers Matt Conlin and Jenna Lamm, who worked endless hours to assist me in finalizing this book, and to my Lakeshore Foundation colleague Brittany Elkins and Lakeshore Foundation Board Chair Greg Johnston, our Board members, and executive staff, for your strong support that allowed me to complete this book, thank you!

Finally, I owe unlimited gratitude to my wife, Sameta (Sam), who has guided and supported me to conceptualize and complete the writing of *Disability Friendly*, and through a career in law and national nonprofit organizations' leadership. Sam committed her life, long before we first met, to empowering people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, every day and in every way. There's no finer, better, smarter, more beautiful, or stronger person with the highest character and greatest personal integrity than Sam. These words will have to suffice for the tremendous respect I hold for you and how you have contributed so completely to the quality of my life,

and our lives together. I thank you for this book, and for the wonderful, incredible life we enjoy together.

For all that my dad, my sisters, Kathy Lehmann and Mary Harding, have meant to Sam and me, along with their spouses and families, I express my sincerest thanks and, I promise, I didn't include anything that could embarrass you, though I did try! Thank you to my dear friend Steve Nauheim, and the very best advocate and "Lloyd" who's ever lived, Paul Hearne; another "Lloyd" and friend, John Lancaster.

May our life's work be enhanced by the adoption of these ideas and may people with disabilities flourish in full employment in the months and years ahead.

Introduction

Disability Friendly is bold, hip, clever, funny, edgy, and conversational; it differs somewhat from scholarly writings in that it's based in practicality, pragmatism, and proven practices. It requires a new way of thinking about the capabilities of people with disabilities to contribute at all levels of an enterprise, whether in a for-profit organization, an NGO, or the public sector. It requires fundamental changes in the way nondisabled people regard people with all types of disabilities, and how we all work to increase substantially the currently dismal rate of labor force participation by people with disabilities.

There are many in the business community who have not yet fully incorporated disability into their diversity and inclusion strategies and practices and those who want to be better at it. These professionals span the C-suite executives; diversity and inclusion officers; diversity, equity and inclusion officers; senior HR executives; and chief technology and/or information officers. This book will provide the background and context for what has occurred over the last 50 years in moving (inching, really) Disability Inclusion forward, and offer a blueprint for now and the future for all professionals as well as all the dedicated employees and entrepreneurs who want people with disabilities to be included in all aspects of corporate and societal life, where we rightfully belong!

With but a 1-2% increase in the labor force participation rate of people with disabilities since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, many new and different approaches must be taken to alter this flat-lined rate. This is not progress; this is maintenance of the status quo at best.

As a person with a disability from birth and who has played an active leadership role in the domestic and international disability movement from the employer perspective, I believe I am as qualified to offer new thoughts and ideas, new processes, and programs, as anyone; not more than, just equal to the most progressive new problem solvers with disabilities.

My life has been an example of an American family facing extraordinary obstacles: a middle child of three siblings born missing most of my arms and legs; our Mother passing away 15 months later from ovarian cancer, and only 3 months after giving birth to my younger sister; our extraordinary father who, at age 32, picked himself up and rebuilt a life of professionalism, faith, profoundly skilled single parenting, and great sacrifices, to afford for each of his three children to flourish in their lives, and for them to “achieve.” It was my father's promise to Mother as she was dying that “Johnny” must be given every opportunity to succeed, whether through the acquisition of knowledge, experience, and vision, or his developed personality, and/or pure persistence. My father devoted his life to bettering the lives of others, and we three children benefited from that as well.

Twenty years ago, I married the finest person I've ever met, my wife, Sameta. She was serving as an executive with United Cerebral Palsy's affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama, when we met. We share our deep belief that people with disabilities must be included in all aspects of life, and especially in employment, and if they do so people with disabilities can enjoy the economic freedoms that have eluded too many of us for far too long. Sam is the number one reason I am able to pursue and maintain so many leadership positions, and she has fulfilled my life by providing me with her—and our—wonderful families and five extraordinary grandsons. This aspect of my life, and

the lives of so many of us living with disabilities, cannot be understated.

In *Disability Friendly*, I praise publicly several great, effective employer programs, and call out those that should be modified, suspended, or ceased altogether, whether they stem from the federal, state, local, for-profit, or nonprofit levels. We have seen significant societal disruptions to our many traditions in recent years. Some stem from the COVID pandemic; others have been shifting in the years before. What does work mean to so many people with disabilities, some of whom currently work at subminimum-wage positions? What policy and program changes must occur if subminimum wages are no longer allowed? These are important and necessary questions to ask as the movement for Disability Inclusion continues its progress. This book is my attempt to address those questions and put forth some solutions to keep our ribbon of progress moving forward.

Disability can be acquired at any age—from birth on, through any point in life—and people with disabilities can acquire secondary and tertiary disabilities as well; disability can be episodic and even be quieted for periods of time. Disability oftentimes is not visible, which can lead to accusations of “faker” and encourage, unjustifiably at times, “doubters.” And it can rise with age, and the ability to perform functions can be more complicated throughout life, and after acquiring a disability. Technology, while beloved by many of us, has yet to be adequately pushed further and higher to assist people living with and emerging into disability to assist in work performance.

People with disabilities are citizens, entitled to all the opportunities that nondisabled people may take for granted—such as using public transportation to get to work, or using productivity enhancements or success enablers to

accommodate or overcome any limitations we may have. And we must recognize that the nondisabled can age into disability as they climb the corporate ramp. Why is this important? Every smart employer or public corporation should want to retain and embrace the abilities of older employees to contribute positively to the company's bottom line; their own financial bottom line, their families' social, emotional, and economic well-being; and their communities' economies and strengths. To do otherwise has oppressed extraordinary human beings and their potential to be extremely productive, costing needless dollars to be spent on dependency and caretaking programs for far too many people with disabilities.

The time has come to design work and its processes to embrace contributing citizens of our nation and the world and redeploy those dependency payments to more productive, dignified societal uses.

I also explore in this book how the nature of work is changing dramatically, taking its cues from the COVID pandemic and remote work, as well as personal branding and “entrepreneurship,” selling our “goods and services” to consumers and as suppliers of our work product into a final good or service. Some people with disabilities do not work in competitive employment due to transportation and personal assistance limitations. Thus, working as entrepreneurs—as a choice and not as a consequence of workplace discrimination, and delivering work product based on time, cost, quality and quantity standard—helps to overcome these barriers and becomes a great opportunity for people with disabilities. Let's support them!

With the post-pandemic “new normal” now upon us, there are more and easier ways to accommodate all employees and especially applicants and employees with disabilities. What works well for us, like remote working, flexible

scheduling, using assistive technologies to perform work, will enable a company's entire workforce to reach higher levels of outputs, throughputs, goal attainment and employee engagement than ever before. There is no better time to take advantage of the disruptions we have all faced in recent years to improve upon and create opportunities for everyone, making Disability Inclusion a core focus of how we envision what it means to be inclusive, what it means to work, and what it means to provide employees with the tools to succeed.

Disability Friendly offers you a blueprint to move forward by engaging all corporate and community groups in your enterprise with cross-enterprise guidance. Including people with disabilities in your workforce is a multitiered, complex process that requires the engagement of numerous departments and divisions, and must be led and championed by the chief executive officer and strongly supported by C-suite executives to be fully successful. Our employees expect corporations and all employers to live up to the call for a responsive, compassionate, high-performing organization that is sustainable and allows all employees to thrive. The disability-friendly blueprint should make this effort easier to accomplish.

I just know you will be great and inclusive in the years ahead!

I What the World Is Missing When It Overlooks People with Disabilities

In [Part I](#) of *Disability Friendly*, I explore the concept of Disability Inclusion and the consequences society faces for not more fully including those of us with disabilities.

Besides the unspeakable human toll it takes on a person's self-esteem, self-respect, and ability to contribute to “our more perfect Union,” people without disabilities miss enjoying and benefiting from our talents in the workplace, our love and guidance within our families, and our engagement in our communities to the fullest extent possible. What a loss, and it need not be that way!

This part of the book moves through how Disability Inclusion benefits everyone, especially in the workplace. The purpose of these inclusive principles is to serve as a guide as to how everyone, including people with disabilities, must be afforded equal opportunities.

From there, I will lean mightily into the power of disability entrepreneurship and its importance in our world today and the opportunities it affords people with disabilities. As business owners, people with disabilities can enjoy greater control and choices in their lives, earn a good living, and encourage other people with disabilities to pursue entrepreneurship as well. Employers who buy from disability-diverse suppliers add immensely to the economic viability of entrepreneurship of people with disabilities.