

## National Disability Employment Awareness Month Series

### Introductory Script

*308 words (3 minutes)*

When we discuss equality in America, the conversation often includes race or gender. But what about people with disabilities? It's not often that the over 50 million individuals with disabilities in our country get mentioned. National Disability Employment Awareness Month gives us the opportunity to see the world through our fellow Americans' eyes. It allows us to appreciate their many achievements, giving us a more complete view of our own history.

The roots of NDEAM go back to World War II. When the war is over, service members return to the States, many with disabilities. This sparks public interest in the way these individuals will be able to contribute in the workplace. In 1945, Congress enacts a law declaring the first week in October "National Employ the Physically Handicapped." The word "physically" is removed in 1962 to better acknowledge the needs and contributions of people with all types of disabilities.

In 1988, what had started as a one-week observance, blossoms into a month-long celebration. And the movement really gains traction! For the next few decades, anti-discrimination laws pass prohibiting discrimination in job applications, advancement and termination. They also provide equal access to workers' compensation, employment training, and other privileges of employment. Public schools are required to have special education courses for children with disabilities, and our country continues to become more and more accessible to individuals with a variety of skills and abilities.

Now every October we have the honor of celebrating the many achievements of workers with disabilities through National Disability Employment Awareness Month. And we learn about the significance of a workforce who embraces their talents and skills. In this series, we will introduce you to determined, hard-working Americans who have overcome incredible obstacles within their various fields. Please join us as we go beyond bias and discover the astonishing individuals who make up our America.

### Erik Weihenmayer

*97 words (1 minute)*

Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to climb Mount Everest? Erik Weihenmayer not only wonders, he experiences it. And he accomplishes this incredible feat completely blind. At thirteen, Erik is blind from retinoschisis. But he doesn't let the disease bring him down. Instead, he tries out rock climbing and discovers he's a natural. In 2001, Erik is the first blind person to reach the summit of Mount Everest. He cofounds the organization "No Barriers USA" to inspire individuals facing challenges to live active, purposeful lives. Their mission? Unleashing the potential of the human spirit!

Hayley D. Lefèvre

**Ralph Braun**

*99 words (1 minute)*

What would it be like to not be able to walk? Could you get around alone? At 15, Ralph Braun asks himself these same questions. Diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, Braun loses the ability to walk in 1955. Determined to stay mobile, he invents the first electric scooter. And he doesn't stop there! Braun also designs the world's first wheelchair lift and steering controls, allowing him to drive unaided! He notices other wheelchair users are eager to have this same independence. So in 1972, he forms The Braun Corporation, now BraunAbility. Their focus? Bringing mobility to people around the globe.

**Dr. Jacob Bolotin**

*93 words (1 minute)*

Imagine diagnosing patients without being able to see them. Dr. Jacob Bolotin does just that, becoming the world's first person born totally blind to become a licensed physician. But his journey is far from easy. When Jacob is born in 1888, resources don't exist yet to aid the blind. He must overcome the many staggering barriers facing him alone. He fights ignorance and prejudice to attend medical school, take the medical examination, and ultimately save people's lives. Dr. Bolotin proves that through belief in oneself, we can overcome any obstacle in our path.

**Laurent Clerc**

*93 words (1 minute)*

Before 1817, no schools are available for deaf people in America. In fact, they have no formal way of communicating and are left "virtually without a language." French-born educator for the deaf, Laurent Clerc wishes to open the first school for the deaf in America. Deaf himself, Clerc petitions the public for funding. In 1817, the school opens, with Clerc as the head teacher. While Clerc's teaching uses French signs, his students and teachers both hearing and deaf blend the signs with English. This gradually develops into the American Sign Language used today!

**Karen Gaffney**

*97 words (1 minute)*

You just found out your child is likely to be born with Down Syndrome. What do you do? Karen Gaffney and her incredible story might be able to help. Born with Down Syndrome in 1977, Karen never lets anyone tell her no. She succeeds in the classroom and becomes an accomplished long-distance swimmer. She advocates for full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities, calling attention to the immense capabilities they possess. Because of her accomplishments in academia, athleticism and advocacy, she receives a doctorate of humane letters, the first living person with Down Syndrome to do so.

**Marlee Matlin**

*94 words (1 minute)*

You're in the spotlight! You've just been presented with an Academy Award! This is Marlee Matlin in 1986. She is the first and only deaf actor to receive an Oscar. Growing up, Marlee is unwilling to let deafness hold her back. She studies criminal justice and carries this passion into her acting career. It's through this role that she advocates for hearing and deaf children around the world. She is also instrumental in getting Congress to pass legislation supporting Closed Captioning. Today, she pushes to see more disabled actors represented in film and TV.

**Chris Burke**

*97 words (1 minute)*

It's 1965. In a New York hospital, Chris Burke is born and is diagnosed with Down Syndrome. While still at the hospital, doctors advise his parents to have Chris institutionalized, rather than bring him home. They refuse. Years later, with his family's support, Chris realizes his dream to become an actor. In 1989, he becomes the first primetime TV star with Down Syndrome. Today, Chris is a Goodwill Ambassador at the National Down Syndrome Society where he works full time. Chris' inspirational message, "it's not about performing disabilities, it's about performing abilities," is celebrated around the world.