

Making It Right:

Disability, Empathy, and Equity in the Workplace

At PROVAIL, one employee's lived experience with disability has shaped a meaningful approach to inclusive support grounded in empathy, respect, and a deep belief in making things right for every participant.



**AN EMPOWERMENT
IN ACTION STORY,** by Michael McCollough,
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Facing Misunderstanding and Ableism

Being disabled can be a reality check. One often worries that employers might not understand your situation or how afraid you are of losing your job because you're not as capable as a co-worker. It's common for most employers to need education in order to understand that you are quite capable. There are obvious caveats depending on the person's ability, especially if it is an extremely physically demanding role.

When employers and co-workers are not informed about disability in the workplace, it can create a toxic environment with co-workers who do not understand that we bring other abilities and talents to the table. We know that working gives us more structure and hope. Those diagnosed with a disability also have to contend with ableism within our culture.

Why PROVAIL Feels Different

I have found that being an employee of PROVAIL, in a safe environment where I feel comfortable and accommodated, allows me the opportunity to use my experience without projecting. It increases my understanding and empathy, while ensuring I do not compare or contrast my ailments with the participants we work with.

When working with our participants, I never mention my ailments unless they ask. If they do, I respond as positively as possible, with a sense of hope—because they need to see that I have hope. I refocus back on them, making sure they know my primary goal is to help them and to make things easier by being attentive and seeking ways to help them work smarter, feel more accomplished, and comfortable.

"Make it right" is a popular phrase in Canada and something my grandfather said constantly—whether it was about physical, manual, or demanding work, or about advocating for labor rights and employee well-being. I believe my job is to make it right for our participants—helping them feel comfortable, supported, and capable—and to never diminish their experiences.

Championing Inclusion Through Work

Our roles at PROVAIL are vital because we champion equality and inclusion every day. We strive to normalize supported employment so that it is a standard and best practice, as well as make breakthroughs that can significantly improve our participants' quality of life. That's why I take my job so seriously—because I work hard to get things right so our participants can rely on the quality of my work.

We are undertaking work that changes lives and fulfilling the dream that Martin Luther King Jr. articulated so many years ago: equality, understanding, and changing attitudes that perpetuate ableism and disrespect because of our differences, while recognizing the abilities that have transformed history. Many of us—even those who remain invisible—have strived to make the world better. Please remember—we are changing attitudes every day.

Moving Forward with Pride and Hope

I can say that, despite being disabled and worried about my ailments, I feel supported every day. My managers have been incredible, as have most of the people I have worked with at the company—especially my trainer, who calmed my fears when I worried that my disability would cause issues.

Let's enter Disability Pride Month with pride and hope that one day, people will stop disrespecting those they do not yet understand. The key to change lies in empathy and respect, which grow through education and visibility in our culture—while also fostering familiarity and connection to the disabled community through love and kindness.

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