

Inclusive Hiring

An Interview with Brandon Ammons, Program Manager, Delivering Jobs

EDITORS' NOTE *Brandon Ammons serves as the Program Manager for Delivering Jobs, a campaign of the Entertainment Industry Foundation. Delivering Jobs is an unprecedented collaboration between Autism Speaks, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics that builds pathways for employment for neurodiverse people across the country. In his role as Program Manager, Ammons provides resources to job seekers, employers, caregivers, and communities and amplifies stories and lived experiences that are changing the narrative around hiring inclusively. In 2017, Ammons joined the Entertainment Industry Foundation, where he worked closely with a colleague with Down syndrome. The experience inspired him to deepen his commitment to supporting people with neurodifferences and led to his promotion to Program Manager for Delivering Jobs. Ammons graduated from Morgan State University before relocating to Los Angeles, where he received his master's degree in Communication Management at the University of Southern California.*



Brandon Ammons

CAMPAIGN BRIEF *Delivering Jobs is an inclusion campaign designed to create pathways to one million employment and leadership opportunities for people with intellectual and/or developmental differences by 2025. The campaign aims to build inclusive workplaces through consumer awareness, community activation, skills development, job preparedness and workforce readiness. Neurodiversity is increasingly a key demographic for inclusion in the workforce, and the website deliveringjobs.org provides resources for employees and employers, including toolkits, an accessibility checklist, case studies, and more. Formed by a coalition of nonprofits and the Entertainment Industry Foundation, Delivering Jobs aims to change the narrative on inclusive hiring.*

What was the vision for creating Delivering Jobs and how do you define its mission?

Autism Speaks, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics – three powerhouse organizations that have advocated for and advanced the

mission of inclusion for people with intellectual and/or developmental differences – joined together with the Entertainment Industry Foundation to form a groundbreaking collaboration to create opportunities for employment for the neurodiverse community. More than 80 percent of people with developmental differences do not have a paying job. Though the spotlight on diversity and inclusion in the workforce is brighter than ever, 6.5 million capable candidates are without work.

The goal of Delivering Jobs is to motivate employers to hire this qualified labor force, engage the public to cultivate communities supportive of inclusion, and ultimately create pathways to one million employment and leadership opportunities for people with autism, intellectual and/or developmental differences by 2025.

Will you discuss how Delivering Jobs works and provide an overview of its initiatives?

Delivering Jobs' approach to increasing employment opportunities involves neurodiverse people, employers and their HR professionals, and the public all working together toward resolution. Delivering Jobs equips people with autism, intellectual and/or developmental differences with the resources they need to strengthen leadership skills and prepare for jobs and leadership positions. Simultaneously, we motivate employers to hire this qualified labor force by offering workplace development resources and highlighting their progress. Additionally, we engage the public to increase awareness about the low rate of employment for people with intellectual and/or developmental differences and challenge them to advocate for inclusion and equality.

Storytelling is a critical element of our work and garners a tremendous response from its reach. The PSAs created by EIF have received more than two billion media impressions and have earned a Telly Award and two Anthem Awards. Most importantly, 90 percent of the cast and crew of those award-winning PSAs were neurodiverse, highlighting a determined, productive, and stellar workforce and underscoring the mission of Delivering Jobs.

How did the partnership between Autism Speaks, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics come together with the Entertainment Industry Foundation to develop this campaign?

These four organizations working individually have successfully impacted millions of people with their efforts toward inclusion. Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families through advocacy and support, increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism, and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. Best Buddies is dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Special Olympics transforms lives through the power of sports, helping people with intellectual and/or developmental differences discover new strengths and abilities, skills and success, and ultimately delivering joy, confidence, and fulfillment on the playing field and in life. These three organizations each spotlight employment in their efforts toward inclusion, but their collective strength and reach toward a single message amplifies awareness and creates a cohesive movement to change the narrative around inclusive hiring.

EIF occupies a unique place in the world of philanthropy. By mobilizing and leveraging the powerful voice and creative talents of the entertainment industry, EIF helps to amplify the message of Delivering Jobs across media platforms to reach people across the country and around the world.

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of Delivering Jobs' work?

Measuring the impact of our work is vital to the campaign's success. Data and metrics allow us to determine how much, and how quickly, the tide is changing towards inclusive hiring of the neurodiverse community.

How valuable has it been to build a network of ambassadors for the work of Delivering Jobs?

The passion, commitment, leadership, and positivity that our ambassadors bring to the



John Tucker and Caley Versfelt on the set of the award-winning Delivering Jobs PSA

work of Delivering Jobs brings us ever closer to our goal. Holly Robinson Peete has been a crusader for people with autism for decades and offered her talent to the campaign by starring in our award-winning PSA. Joey Travolta, who founded Inclusion Films to train neurodiverse people for employment in entertainment, secured our cast and crew for both of our PSAs. From Paralympian swimmer McKenzie Coan and NBA player Ricky Rubio to actress (and EIF employee) Caley Versfelt to Robert Varnedoe, CEO of Lee Container, who is driving change in the manufacturing sector, each of our ambassadors is instrumental in sharing the powerful success stories of hiring inclusively.

Do you feel that there has been effective progress made in the effort to create employment and leadership opportunities for people with autism, intellectual and/or developmental differences, and what more can be done to drive sustainable change in this cause?

We are making substantive progress. Launching an employment initiative in January 2020 as a global pandemic unfurled proved challenging, but it allowed us to share the message of Delivering Jobs during a time when companies were reevaluating their workforce and organizational plans for the future.

Companies are responding to the message of inclusive hiring. Human Resource professionals

are striving to improve hiring practices by tailoring the interview process to allow neurodiverse candidates to best demonstrate their qualifications. Companies are more diligent in educating employees to facilitate a positive and empathetic work environment which is essential to success. More job training programs are being created for people with neurodifferences to prepare them for the workforce, and society is embracing the idea of inclusion like never before.

The Harvard Business Review reported that companies that employ people with intellectual differences see positive business impacts, such as improved morale, enhanced products and services, and increased bottom lines. Delivering Jobs aims to capture those individual stories and amplify them. When companies see the effects of inclusive hiring, it inspires them to create change within their own organizations.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Delivering Jobs and how do you focus your efforts as program manager?

Prior to leading this campaign, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to manage a young woman who has Down syndrome. It was my first managerial experience, and honestly, I was nervous. I didn't feel qualified to manage a person with neurodifferences, but the experience of working with Caley changed my life. She is our front desk administrator, and she's exceptional in her role. She brings warmth and joy to our visitors and colleagues, and we're lucky to have her on our team. Caley is qualified, loyal, reliable, and an asset to the company. The experience of working with someone who is neurodiverse revealed to me how significantly someone who thinks differently can impact and improve a company and its culture.

As program manager of Delivering Jobs, I work closely with Autism Speaks, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics to compile the entirety of their resources for employment that we share with job seekers, employers, caregivers and communities, primarily through our website at deliveringjobs.org. We have developed toolkits and provided a comprehensive database of information dedicated specifically to the employment of neurodiverse people. In addition, I seek out new ways to share stories that effect change. Delivering Jobs has benefited tremendously from our PSAs across radio and television.

What are your priorities for Delivering Jobs as you look to the future?

In the past two years, we've seen a sea change in hiring practices. Perhaps for the first time, companies and individuals truly understand the importance and the benefits of hiring inclusively, but to be truly inclusive, they must consider and prioritize neurodiverse talent. Delivering Jobs will continue to center and amplify the stories of people with intellectual and/or developmental differences who are seeking the economic opportunities available to other American citizens. ●