



Robert Jackson Podcast Transcript

LeDerick Horne 0:00

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities provides information to help New Jersey residents with developmental disabilities and their family members. You can learn more about the council's work by visiting their website, www.njcdd.org

Hello, everybody. This is Lederick Horne. I'd like to welcome you to today's episode. Today I have the distinct pleasure of talking to Mr. Robert Jackson. Robert and I have known each other for about a year. We really started connecting with each other through the New Jersey black IDD Consortium, which is a group that me and brother Bill Davis started as part of a grant through the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities. And Robert has been a real active member in that in that group, he's constantly sharing resources with folks. You know, almost every time I open my inbox, he's got a new link to a webinar or some service. And so he's a man who's connected. And I think his story and his experience and his perspective as a another black man with a disability, I think would be really valuable for us to hear from. So brother, Robert, how are you today?

Robert Jackson 1:13

I'm good. How are you?

LeDerick Horne 1:15

Doing well. Doing well. So I gave you a little bit of an introduction, but Robert just, how do you describe yourself? Like, who is? Who is Robert Jackson?

Robert Jackson 1:25

Well, Robert Jackson is a person with a disability. He's African American in his late 40s who's been through a lot, experienced periods of homelessness, being ridiculed mob teas at home and at school. And of course, I had several different jobs. I had at least 30 or 40 jobs throughout my lifetime before I found out what job, what type of job that I wanted, because some jobs didn't work out. In some jobs, they just weren't a good match. Because I wasn't unaware of my disabilities, and I've had any disabilities that suffer from autism, special disorder, audio processing, traumatic brain injury, hypoxic brain injury, post-treatment, my disease, syndrome, multiple disabilities, and, of course, developmental delay.

LeDerick Horne 2:12

Wow, wow. You said 30 or 40 jobs over the course of your life?

Robert Jackson 2:15

Somewhere, somewhere around there is, I know it's about, I don't know the exact number, but it's about a job for somebody my age, put it that way. Now, that's it. Okay, yeah, can

LeDerick Horne 2:26

Can I ask the what were some of these jobs like before you really understood what was going on with your disability? What were some of these jobs that you were that you were doing

Robert Jackson 2:35

Meager minimum wage benefit, hourly jobs with no benefits, nothing, no health care, no vision, no pension, none of that stuff. And they can let you go at any time. So most of them were at will jobs and grocery stores, fashion, restaurants, and retail where they do not stay with jobs anyway. See the difference between a job and a career? The shop is something that's done for pay, and a career is something that you get the extra pay. You get to pay, plus the extra added benefits like retirement plan, pension benefit, medical debt and net all that good stuff. And the job is something anybody can get nowadays, as with a career, you have to plan for it, but not all careers. You don't need a college education for it, but you just have to map it out to see where you fit. Yeah, I tell people all the time, don't let that college degree stop you from looking for the job that you want, even if you don't, even if you have, if you even if you don't have one, don't let it stop because I don't have. I'm letting you know that even though I tended to go to college, I did two semesters, and that was it.

LeDerick Horne 3:36

And what do you do now?

Robert Jackson 3:38

For employment, I work for the Division of Developmental Disabilities. I work for the State New Jersey Department. Of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities as an assistant coordinator, slash transition information specialist. And my job is is to provide resources to families, students, teachers, school personnel about the different resources available to people with disabilities and educate in the course, educate people about the NJDD system.

LeDerick Horne 4:06

And how long have you been doing that work?

Robert Jackson 4:08

Going on, five years now. This year, every five years, got started in 2019.

LeDerick Horne 4:15

And we're doing a and we're sharing this as an audio recording so they can't, they can't see us, but I can. I can see you smiling when you talk about your job. So is this work that you and you enjoy doing?

Robert Jackson 4:26

Yes, good. I can be myself instead of pretend, pretending to be something that I'm not, because now I'm fully aware of myself and what I'm capable of.

LeDerick Horne 4:37

And I've also had a chance to meet with some of your co-workers, and I know you've got a really great team of folks, who you, who you work with, can I? Can I ask where you are? Where are you from originally? We're both, we're both, you know, Jersey Boys.

Robert Jackson 4:50

Yes, I told you. I'm from Mercer County. I was born and raised in Mercer County most of the time, and I did live in Burlington County for a brief period, and then we moved back. The Mercer County that's more like the Trenton area. That's where I grew up. At

LeDerick Horne 5:03

Robert, I know that you do presentations, and I'm a public speaker as well. I talk to folks about my experience as being a person with a disability, and a lot of presentations to schools and young people. But I know you're a speaker. You're a presenter. Can you maybe just talk a little bit about the the talks the presentations that you do?

Robert Jackson 5:24

Well, sure, the first presentation that we do through DDD is called Preparing for a greater future, first hand experiences of a person with a disability. It talks about my life, growing up as a person with a disability, going through the educational system, having a different jobs that I had already up until, where I'm at now, and what this presentation does; it prepares parents, students, and school personnel that don't let their disability stop them to keep going. And yes, life throws this good and bad punches, but you don't. What if you fall off the horse, you get back on and keep riding. You don't stop, you don't get off the horse and just say, Bobby, you just keep going, and that's the hard day of the presentation. And just, and we just want people to be educated on, yes, you can have a meaningful life with or without a disability, especially, that's what this presentation is all about.

LeDerick Horne 6:13

Okay? And then, Robert, do you have any advice to family members who have a maybe a young person or you know, or an adult with a disability, who they love, and they look after any advice for them on how to like, improve that person's life and make sure that they're living up to their fullest potential.

Robert Jackson 6:35

Well, you have to, well, you have to be patient with them. You have to and plus, you have to advocate for them until they can advocate for themselves, teach them how to advocate for themselves, and don't be too overprotective, because I had a parent who's overprotective and it doesn't help me. Overprotective, you have to let them learn, to make their own mistakes and let them grow. That's the only way they're going to learn, because you can't keep paying for number being too overprotective. That's one way of hurting them and another way, but you should, you should also support them in whatever decision they make, if it's a good, especially if it's a good decision, and if they're if it's beneficial to them, as long as they're not doing that and bad, that's all well and good, but if they know what they want to do, and of course, being a black person, you also have to fight for accommodations in The workplace and in education, because it doesn't, it's not geared toward helping us out. And I, you know, one of the, one of the ideas that I really hold true is this idea that we have to give people the dignity of making their own mistakes, you know, like, I think for a lot of people with disabilities, both our whether it be our education system, our families or the larger society, oftentimes, when it wants to kind of put a hedge around you, or like, you know, constantly protect you and of course, we all need protection. But there's also mistakes are part of being human. Most of us learn from our mistakes. And so if we, if we don't allow a person to, you know, to get a few scrapes and bruises, or, you know, get their heart broken, or, you know, stumble a little at the job, they're they're not, they're not gonna, they're not gonna learn the things that they learned to be. Sometimes you get your feelings hurt, but it helps. That's right. That's right. This way, if nobody doesn't struggle, if they don't know this night, they wouldn't know what it's like to work for anything, or if they ever have to deal with the struggle, they'll fall flat on their face. Yeah, yeah. That's why I'm thankful for the struggles that I went through for the most part, even though at first I wasn't; I was embarrassed about it, but now it's all behind me. I can look forward now.

LeDerick Horne 8:43

Right? Robert, you mentioned that. You know, folks may need accommodations at the job. I'm just curious: Are there any accommodations that you use on a regular basis at your job?

Robert Jackson 8:56

Well, not at the moment, but not at the moment, but if I do need accommodations, I won't be afraid to speak up and ask for them.

LeDerick Horne 9:04

Okay, alright. And how about in the past? Has there ever been any accommodation?

Robert Jackson 9:08

Yes, yes, I have. I've used accommodations in college, and I've used accommodations in the workplace, because one time, there was a situation on the job. I asked for a transfer and did my medical reasons, and he told me the reason why they gave me transfers because my medical conditions, which didn't help me either. Eventually, I had to leave the department, so I did that on my own. But okay, but either way I did it. I found a way to do it. It's even though sometimes people, they say, No, we can't do this. And no, we can't do that, just like with the state, for instance, you have to find you have to provide a job to transfer to. If you want to go to another department, they're not going to do it for you. You have to do it. And that's where, that's where that self determination, self advocacy, comes in, that right, because right, it all boils down to this. For the most part, you have to do most of everything. Just like I had somebody email me this morning about looking for a job for a daughter, I emailed her back. I said, Look, my job is just to provide resources. My job is not to help you and your daughter. Get it, get people jobs. Here's some the resources. I wish you and your daughter best luck in the future in your job search. But here, this is something you have to do. I can't get a job for anybody,

LeDerick Horne 10:23

Right, right? And then, Robert, when you have an opportunity to meet other black folks with disabilities, I'm just curious about maybe one or two pieces of advice you would give, particularly if this was a black person with a disability who was seeking employment, is there? Are there any like one or two sorts of resources that you think everyone needs to be aware of that can help them with employers

Robert Jackson 10:55

or not, and I can email your list of put together list of all the employment opportunities that are available for people with disabilities. In the state, the websites that they can go to, but the two that I mentioned for here New Jersey are the New Jersey, same program, which I talked to you about earlier, which is the state as a model for people with disabilities. And there's also the federal schedule, a federal hiring program. Now the state has a program, and so does the federal program. So they can try the program, and they're guaranteed an interview, and they don't have to go through the same process as everybody else, and it's quicker for them to get a job than anybody else. They don't have to wait on this. Yet. They don't have to.

LeDerick Horne 11:35

Okay, alright. And then maybe just as we, as we close out here. You know, as you think about your life, is there maybe one or two lessons that you think were like, really valuable that have helped you to get to where you are now, things that I don't know maybe, maybe happen and again, maybe something challenging, and you and you learn from it, and you know it's helped you to be where you are now,

Robert Jackson 11:59

Well, actually, I wish I learned how to advocate for myself when I was younger because at the time, I was afraid to advocate. But it's sometimes, in some instances, when I did advocate, I was shut down, so I didn't say anything because I was afraid of getting told no, which, for the most part, I thought I was told no. But sometimes, you can't always accept no for an answer, especially if you feel that they're wrong; that's what matters. Sometimes, no doesn't mean it's always right, and yes doesn't mean it's always good for you. Sometimes you have to say no. Sometimes, when that two-letter word has to it's more powerful in more ways than one. That's what I've learned. When you say no, it eliminates stress. It eliminates a lot of it. It makes your health better and other things, too.

LeDerick Horne 12:47

But you said it's like you can't take no for an answer, right?

Robert Jackson 12:51

Sometimes, you cannot, especially if you and I sometimes have to tell families to do their own research. They can't just listen to everybody else and expect them to have the right answer. You have to do your own research.

LeDerick Horne 13:05

So Robert, you and I know each other, and we've we've had conversations over the over the year that we've known each other. One of the things that I know to be true is that your faith and your belief are very strong, and I think of it as being one of the things that has really helped you to get through some of the more challenging times in your life. So and I also through the advocacy work that I've done, particularly in the black community, one of the things that is like constant, like I see it all the time, is how people really rely on their faith to get through challenges. Yes, you just want to talk, maybe you know, briefly, about just your connection to faith and how it's helped you as a person with a disability,

Robert Jackson 13:49

Well, actually, how it has helped me as a person with a disability because sometimes you have to be healed spiritually instead of physically or mentally. That's where that spiritual connection comes out and that's why I'm so joyful and happy. It's a spiritual connection. And I tell family, and I learned too, that a lot of stuff that spiritual. We can't tell everybody,

because we get a bunch of different answers. That's when you start getting confused, and that's why I don't tell people, a lot of people, about the gospel. And I just, for the most part, when he speak, when God is speaking to me, I shut up, because some things you're not supposed to say out in public anyway, just like when you pray, you're not supposed to pray out in public so men can see it. You're supposed to pray in secret so he will reward you openly.

LeDerick Horne 14:31

Thank you so much, Robert, for taking the time to talk with us today. This has really been a valuable conversation. I appreciate all the advice you've shared and have a great rest of your day.