

RESPECTABILITY

*Empowering people with disabilities to
achieve the American dream*

How to Write an Op-ed

Tips and guidelines
for writing your own op-ed
(and getting it published)

By Jennifer Packer
Communications Consultant
jenniferpacker@gmail.com

What is an Op-ed?

Definition (not what you think!)

Op-ed = “Opposite the editorial page”

An op-ed is also:

- An opportunity for you to get your voice heard
- An opportunity to educate the public through facts, your opinions and your own experience
- An opportunity to change public opinion and improve legislation about people with disabilities

You don't have to be a Professional Writer to Get an Op-ed Published!

What you do need is to:

- Care about your topic
- Have a desire to educate the public about your topic
- Have the facts about your topic

Your Goal for Writing an Op-ed

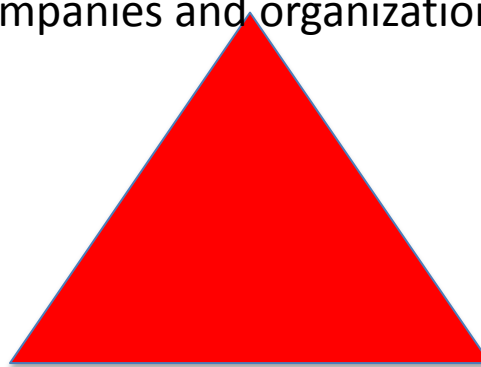
Make people aware of the many benefits of
employing people with disabilities

Aim to make these points:

- Most people with disabilities WANT to work
- Most people with disabilities want to give a 'hand-up,' not get a hand-out
- There are many advantages to employing people with disabilities
- October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Once Again: Your 3 Messages (a.k.a your “message triangle”)

1. **The majority of Americans with disabilities who are working age want to work.** They represent a talent pool of 10 million Americans who can make companies and organizations stronger and better.



2. **Hiring people with disabilities can make companies more profitable.** Nationally Walgreens has found this to be true as employees with disabilities, when aligned with their talents and interests, are more productive, loyal and have fewer work place accidents than employees without disabilities.

3. **Hiring Americans with disabilities can save money for taxpayers.** The U.S. spends \$450 billion a year on benefits to people who, in most cases, would rather have a hand up than a hand out. They need to be included in employment because of the talents they bring to the table. Their work and commitments to success can be a part of how the U.S. can compete against countries like China in this tough global economy.

Some Facts and Examples You Can Use

- 50 million Americans live with disabilities
- 70 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities are unemployed, leading to high levels of poverty, isolation and financial dependency
- The U.S. spends \$450 billion a year on benefits to people who, in most cases, would rather have a hand up than a hand out.
- Walgreens and AMC are two of many companies that have successfully implemented disability inclusion programs.

Tips for Writing Your Op-ed

Number One rule: use the “KISS” method
(KISS = Keep it Simple and Straightforward)

- Avoid using jargon and technical terms
- Use your personal experience
- Use facts - but also try to be conversational
- Use “people-first” language – terms that respect people with disabilities. You are in a unique position to shape the public image for people with disabilities.
- Use a “news hook” – and you already have one!

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Basic Structure of an Op-ed

- Your first paragraph (or “lede”) in which you introduce what you will be writing about
- State your argument
- Give facts that support your argument
- Don’t be afraid to use your personal experience
- Each paragraph supports your argument
- Repeat, repeat, repeat!
- Conclusion

Limit your op-ed to 500-700 words

(Check your target newspaper for length)

And Finally...Pitching Your Op-ed

- Decide which newspaper you want to publish your op-ed (and remember that it doesn't have to be *The New York Times!*)
- Try to develop a relationship with members of the editorial board
- Do an online search to find out the e-mail address where you should send your op-ed
- Write a short note to introduce your topic
- Be sure to include your full name, telephone number and e-mail
- Paste – don't attach - your op-ed below your introductory note

Examples of Good Op-eds

- **A Better Bottom Line: Employing Individuals With Disabilities**
By Jack Markell, Gov. of Delaware
Aug. 13, 2013
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gov-jack-markell/a-better-bottom-line-empl_b_3749414.html?view=print&comm_ref=false
- **Finding jobs for Cole and his peers**
By Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.)
July 1, 2013
<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/308499-finding-jobs-for-cole-and-his-peers>
- **Disability advocates laud governors' jobs focus**
By Cindy Bentley, Daniel Bier, Joan Karan, Lisa Pugh And Beth Swedeen
Aug. 1, 2013
<http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/disability-advocates-laud-governors-jobs-focus-b9966299z1-217983671.html>

TAX DEDUCTABLE DONATIONS VIA THE AUTISM-SOCIETY OF AMERICA

While RespectAbilityUSA is awaiting a final separate IRS approval we are operating as a project of the Autism Society of America. Make checks to RespectAbilityUSA at:

RespectAbilityUSA, a Project of the Autism Society

4340 East-West Hwy, Suite 350

Bethesda, MD 20814

www.RespectAbilityUSA.org

Phone: (240) 744 – 0546

Cell: (202) 365 – 0787

JenniferM@RespectAbilityUSA.org