**Kevin McCloskey:** All right, welcome everybody to today's webinar. My name is Kevin McCloskey. I'm the Senior Director of Leadership and Workforce Development here at Disability Belongs™. It's nice to have you all here. I am a white male in my young 40s with black hair with a little bit of gray, a little scruffy beard, and I'm wearing a green and white checkered shirt. Again, nice to have you all here today for our NDEAM webinar. This is our second webinar of the month, and it is Strategies for Employers to Increase Self-Identification of Veterans and People with Disabilities, with our special guest here, Rob Arndt from BufferSprings. Rob, I'll throw it over to you.

**Rob Arndt:** Awesome, thank you so much Kevin. Love the green shirt by the way. My name is Rob Arndt, and I'll be spending the next hour with all of you, so thank you so much for joining me. I am a middle-aged white male, black blazer, or a black zipup on, collared shirt, glasses, dark hair, getting some gray in there like Kevin, and looking forward to talking with everybody today, so thank you so much for joining us. Our session today is entitled "Strategies for Employers to Increase Self-Identification for Veterans and People with Disabilities." And today we're going to have some real conversations around this. This isn't going to be a stuff shirt dry discussion like you're used to in these kind of topics, but want to make this engaging for everyone, and really want to hear feedback from the crowd. So if you have questions, you have anything throughout this, I don't want this to be "Death by PowerPoint." Please engage, please ask -- ask questions, and please engage, so we can get some progress here at the end of the day. Kevin, next slide please.

So, who am I and what am I doing here? So as I said in the beginning, my name is Rob Arndt. I am the CEO and founder of BufferSprings. We are a training consulting firm that specializes in helping smart organizations create effective, scalable, and sustainable military talent initiatives. I am also a 14-year Marine Corps veteran. Half of that time was spent on Marine Corps recruiting and manpower strategy, before moving out to the civilian sector in 2012, where I made this my life's work to help eradicate and wipe out underemployment within the military connected community, so it's great to be with all of you today. And less about me, and more about what we came to talk about today, so next slide please, Kevin.

Before we get rolling on this, really want to discuss who BufferSprings is in this, and why we're talking with you today. So as I said, we're a consulting firm, and we work with smart organizations like PepsiCo, Frito-Lay, Benesch Engineering, Caterpillar, and a lot of great organizations that are joining us in our mission to eradicate underemployment. The way that we do this is by creating an ecosystem of understanding of value and helping organizations understand the vast amount of talent that veterans and people with disabilities bring to the table. There are also a lot of overarching legal requirements and things that are around that, such as VEVRAA and section 503 that we're going to talk about a lot today. But not only do companies have to hire veterans, it's a great idea to hire veterans and people with disabilities, and we're going to discuss some of those and get rid of some of those stigmas today. So really excited about joining all of you today, and without further ado, we'll get rolling on the actual content. So Kevin -- next page. So in the chat, please feel free to put it in here. Does anyone in here own a pair of Crocs? Honestly. If anyone's never heard of Crocs, this little ones in the cartoon character in the bottom. Seriously -- self identification 101 -- be brave. They're the ugliest shoes in the world. I don't understand the functionality of them, my kids have them. So I actually own four pairs of Crocs, but I don't wear them myself. Anyone else? Anyone else got bootleg Crocs? That'll count too -- the ones we pick up at the grocery store. Anyone?

**Kevin McCloskey:** Yeah we got a bunch. Some have multiple pairs. Some significant others do.

**Rob Arndt:** Anyone adverse to Crocs? If you're not picking it up, I have a little bit of adversity towards Crocs. So anyone else who doesn't like Crocs? I hear multiple pairs in the chat. My husband has one, I'm sorry to hear that. All right, let's make it a little more interesting. Kevin, if you can move to the next slide please.

I don't really feel like we're getting the honest feedback from everyone in the crowd so -- and I probably should have said this beforehand. So at the end of the call today, we're actually going to be giving a -- giving away a free BufferSprings hat, and a trip to BufferSprings, wherever that place may be. These are all the other accolades and great things that come along with owning a pair of Crocs that we've put together for all of you. We have prioritized hiring programs for you. We have tailored support specifically for people who wear these weird shoes that have holes in them. On a rainy day they can't be comfortable. We have employee resource groups for people who squeak around in these weird shoes. We're also creating it where we have carpets that go down to make accommodations for these folks so they're not squeaking down the hallway when we're trying to have meetings. So now that we have all these great opportunities and great doors that exist for people with Crocs, are any of you considering buying Crocs? I personally may be jumping into it -- healthcare benefits, partnerships, I got to wear weird shoes to be around great people, I guess I could do that. I wore some weird uniforms in the Marine Corps. So, before we beat this -- beat this on, Kevin, we can move on to the next slide.

What I really want to cover today and talk about is the fact that we are asked to self-identify in a lot of different categories, but we're not necessarily told when or why or what is going to happen with this information. And we're going to dispel and peel some of that back today. So in today's session, we're going to talk about the importance of self-identification for employers and for veterans and people with disabilities alike. We're also going to talk about actionable strategies of how we can encourage self-identification and how we can strengthen this within our organizations, and give ourselves pride in -- that sense of belonging in just owning that as in ourselves. We're also going to talk about how our employers and how we can help in fostering a culture of inclusivity and authenticity, and not just kind of waving flags around these topics. And then also ensuring that we are compliant with the programs that we have in front of us. So next slide please, Kevin.

So, when I first got out of the the military, I saw these different self-ID check boxes and things that were in front of me. And this is the first time that I had ever seen any of those. As I said, I was in the Marines for 14 years, so the government had all my information. Everything was there, and it wasn't really something where it was mandatory for us to submit. Now when I got out, I was faced with all these different questionnaires and answers. And as I was going through the application process, I didn't know if it was either hindering my performance or my ability to obtain that job or whether it was strengthening that. And by the looks of it, and I'll share more of the story as we get into there, it was actually a blockage for me. So really, what we want to talk about is what is self-identification in the first place? Why is it important to us as individuals? And why is it important to our employers? And we're not necessarily doing this for the same reasons, but if we could, we could make some amazing things happen, and that's what we're going to talk about today. Kevin, next slide please.

So from the employer's perspective on here, and we're going to talk about all the different perspectives -- for employers, this isn't just about compliance. Although staying on the right side of VEVRAA and 503 is important, it's about building a workplace that brings different perspectives, unique problem-solving abilities, and a mindset that can transform your company. Veterans and people with disabilities -- or what I like to call people with missed abilities -- are not liabilities, but they are assets. We can't hire all different people, but if we hire the right ones for the right reasons, we can make amazing things happen, but only if we make them feel welcome and they raise their hand and say "this is me and this is who I am, and I want to bring that to the table." And that's where there's usually a missed opportunity. So understanding the different workforce demographics that are in there -- this is one of the reasons why your employer is asking for this information. We're going to talk about the legal perspective in a lot of detail today, but your employers for the most part, especially if they're Federal contractors -- it is mandatory that they're asked to collect this data from their employees. So there are compliance regulations and different things we have to submit there, but it's also -- the smart way to do it is understanding who actually works there. Who do we have on our team? If our company is trying to win a Super Bowl or hit a sales goal or to -- hit a revenue goal, whatever it is that's out there, do we have the right players in the right spots on the field to actually make that happen? So it's not just about checking boxes and submitting to Uncle Sam that we have X amount of black people and X amount of women working here. It's saying, what do we have and what do we -- what does our neighborhood and what does our community look like, and does our organization look like that? And if not, why? Why are the people not coming in and why are they not looking to work here? Talking about VEVRAA and 503 compliance -- so to make a really long story short here, there is the office of federal contractor compliance programs, which is a sub-segment of the Department of Labor here in the United States. I know we may have some international folks on the call. But -- what they're doing is, anyone who does business with the United States government -- it's mandatory that you have to hire veterans and people with disabilities. And there are benchmarks set forth for both of those -- for veterans it's 5.2%, but those continue to go up and down as the population changes. So not only do you -- for federal contractors, you have to hire veterans and people with disabilities. You might as well do it well, and find a place where you can grow us, because we do bring a ton of immense value to the organization. We're going to talk about that in detail. Kevin, next slide please.

So let's talk about timing on this. So when is a good time? When is a bad time? When is the best time? So for discussions on here, looking at the application stage of it -- this is one of the weirdest stages to ask for that information. And I'll tell my story here in a little bit, but you are applying to a job, and you're being asked questions. So -- is this the best time? Do I know what they're doing with this information? When I apply to that job and indicate that I am a Marine Corps veteran, is the person on the other side mad at me because a marine stole their girlfriend when they were in high school? Do they have biases? Do they have stigmas? Do they have stereotypes? So at the application stage, I don't know if that's going to be a thing that's good, that they value military experience, or if they do not, or if they have some negative bias towards it. The other question that usually comes up right after military service or right before it is "do you identify as a person with disabilities?" And I'll talk about that here, but now it seems like it's almost knockout questions where -- is the other person on the other side of that a person with disabilities themselves that can -- understand that or has lived experience there? Or is it someone that sees that disabled word and it throws up a red flag to them that they think they're going to need accommodations and all these other things? So the application stage, there's not really a relationship there. It's kind of a dating profile where you're submitting your stuff, and they're submitting their stuff, and somebody's making a decision on those sides. The other portion of it is during the onboarding stage, but before we go to onboarding I want to hear in the crowd, and feel free to put this in the chat -- does anyone have -- for employers on the call -- at the application stage, does anyone think that they have this locked down and you are getting all that great information up front? Please put yes if you do. Please put no if you do not. If you think the application stage is the best time to do this, put yes. If you think that this is not a great time to do this or that your process isn't great, please put no in the chat. Okay, perfect. So as those are coming in, talking about the onboarding portion of it. Now here, if we look at the recruiting process as almost like the dating game. The application stage is you on some virtual platform -- e-harmony, match.com, whatever it is. And you're being matched and allocated for that. At the onboarding stage, this is kind of first date, first rolling out that's on there. This is a much better opportunity here where you have rapport, you have a relationship, and there's a human to human interaction there. At this stage, a lot of times what we see is during the onboarding process, it's still that check in the box, it's a piece of paper that was thrown at you as you were doing your W4 and any kind of other onboarding documents that are there, learning about sick leave, getting the employee handbook, and by the way, in here, here's a self identification form again for onboarding. A lot of times we see this as being a check in the box, when in reality -- if we structured our onboarding processes a little bit better and thought of these more intently of where we're going to be going with this individual, or what we're trying to accomplish, or getting that first impression, this is a missed opportunity in a lot of cases for the employment process. The other aspect is the ongoing updates, which is great. We have a relationship, the person's worked here for three months, three years, whatever it is in the process. But if no one's asked them if they're a veteran or person with disabilities yet, and they've been able to do their job, the longer they've been there, the longer they feel that, hey, it hasn't stopped me or propelled me anywhere yet, so I'm not going to self-identify. Now during these stages, there is one thing that is common in here and it's not really talked about. And I know that we have job-seekers on here, we have HR practitioners, we have talent acquisition people and everyone else. So during these stages one of the things I want to put out there is that your information is not being aired out publicly. It is going into your HR System, your HRI system, your applicant tracking system, whatever it is in there, and it's only being seen by need to know parties on the employment side, and being submitted to Uncle Sam for OFCCP, VEVRAA regulations, and things like that. It's not like you're wearing a scarlet letter that when you show up that you are automatically branded as someone with disabilities, or that they're going to throw a t-shirt at you that says that you're a person with disabilities or anything else. This is completely up to you to self-identify, but it's only going into the HR portal. It's not going out to your friends and your buddies and co-workers and everything else saying, hey, there's a new veteran or new disabled person coming aboard. So I want to make that clear to everyone that, when you are submitting these things, that your employers are doing what they need to do with them, but there are certain things that we can do to tweak this to make this process better -- in here. So there was a question or something in there that said if you need an accommodation during the interview process -- that could be something during the application stage that's seen during there and you're talking to the right people about that. However, what I would question in that is if you are going through onboarding -- during the interview process, it's good to bring up any accommodations that will come up, especially with your direct hiring manager. Sometimes you may be talking with a recruiter or someone who's not the direct stakeholder, so that may be something that's more in onboarding, where you identify as a person with disability during the application stage, you go through the application, you get the job, and then when you're onboarding, say "I need a standing desk," or I need -- "I can't be under fluorescent lighting for x amount of time." So whatever accommodations that are there, if your employer is a good employer, they're going to make those easy accommodations for you and be a welcoming member of the team. So I saw the question there and -- hopefully that clears some of that up. So your employers do not share this information, it's all internal, and -- you can roll that into the interview process if you choose to self-identify. Kevin, next slide please.

Okay so on this one, I want to get real for a second and kind of like share the -- the story on here where veterans and people with disabilities may hesitate to self-identify because we're worried. We're wondering, "is this going to work against me? Am I opening myself up for discrimination or more red tape?" Or -- what can we do to eliminate that fear. Some of these benefits are theoretical. Self-ID can unlock access to career paths, development opportunities, and the kind of support that allows people to thrive. But the more transparent we are, the more likely it is that folks are going to feel comfortable to tell their story. So when we look at the self-identification process through veterans military spouses and people with "missed abilities," we have hesitation of discrimination coming out of that. And -- it's horrible for us to do that but we never know what is going to happen with this information. So as a veteran myself -- and Kevin, if you can go to the next slide, I'll kind of tell my story in this process. So when I transitioned out of the Marine Corps back in 2012, I applied to a job. I ended up getting a job in a cubicle as a salesperson selling a $40 Hammer back to the government. I was miserable my first week that I was there. It wasn't -- it wasn't the environment for me, it wasn't great for my -- personality type, background, experience, whatever you want to call it -- was not a good fit for me at all. I hated it the first week that I was there, but it took me 15 months to get out of there. And during this process, I applied to hundreds, if not thousands, of positions. I looked at every military and disability friendly company that was out there waving flags and putting things on their website, and didn't hear back from any of them. And I was identifying as a veteran, as a protected class of Veteran, and as a person with disabilities. And I wasn't hearing anything back. So after a while I started to lose faith. And I started not identifying as a veteran, and I started not identifying as a person with disabilities, and then the application still did not come in. So what I found in this process after hundreds of times, trial and error, doing it with and without, what I finally realized and what I came to in the soul searching myself was that I'm going to self-identify. I'm going to say exactly 150% who I authentically am. And if that company doesn't want to hire me because of who I am, I dodged a bullet, and I am not working somewhere where I'm not respected, appreciated, or that my talent is not valued. So what I would recommend to all of you is, I know as job seekers, we go through this tailspin. We need a job, we need to feed our families, we need to do all these things. But what I recommend doing is finding a like-minded company, and looking at more than just an -- an occupation, but look at the values of the organization. Look at their culture. Talk to people who work there. Talk to veterans and other people with disabilities that work there to actually get the scoop with that organization. But for all of you that are going through this and wondering, "should I check that box or not?" My recommendation in my experience of doing this is check that box. If that organization doesn't want you for how beautiful you authentically are, you're not supposed to work there anyway. Next slide on here, Kevin.

So looking at the self-identification process from the veteran set of the eyes. So we talked about the application stage -- identifying where is this information going. Again, it's going into a protected classified system. It's not going out on broadcast that another veteran or another person with disabilities applied. So when we're going through this, I highly recommend to everyone on the call to identify as your 100% self, because that's who you're going to be able to show up to work as, and you don't have a choice to do it any other way. On the onboarding stage -- these -- this is a portion where it gets confusing, because from a Veteran standpoint, when I transitioned out of the Marine corps, the entire time that was in, I was told that I was 10 feet tall and bulletproof and the most feared warrior on the planet -- all the things that they tell Marines to keep us doing what we do. Then when I got out the next day, I came into an identity crisis. I was now called a veteran. I always thought that veterans were just some older people that hung out in VFWs and wore red POW hats and told old "'Nam" stories or whatever. But now I'm labeled as a veteran. I've never been called that before. What do I do with this information? Do I identify as those people in the VFW hall, or do I identify as something different, or just as myself having that experience? The next thing after I was told that I was omnipotent and warrior and all this other stuff was that I was disabled. When we transition out of the military -- this is something that a lot of organizations don't understand, but we -- because -- the longer you've been in the more wear and tear Uncle Sam has done on your body whether -- depending on what branch of service that -- you've been in. So -- because I was in the Marine corps for 14 years, when I came in when I was 18, I was in pinnacle shape, not an issue, not a scratch on me. 14 years of deployments going to Iraq, Kuwait, rolling around in Humvees, running over bombs, whatever we were doing in there takes its toll on your back and a few other things after a while. So when I got out, I was classified as a person with disabilities, and had to go through a VA process to be told at the end that I'm 90% disabled. And on paper, and airing out my own laundry because we're all friends on this call, according to the Department of Veteran Affairs, I am 90% disabled. However, the only accommodation that I need is a standing desk. I don't need any other accommodations. I can work with everything myself. I am a completely -- apt employee of everywhere that I've ever been. So looking at these different things on there, it's -- at the different stages, it's tough to decide which direction that you want to go. Where onboarding gives you a better opportunity here to get to know that individual, to ask those questions, to say what is it like being a veteran with that 90% disability? What does that mean? What do you need for accommodations? And have those discussions during onboarding. But this is a portion where onboarding shouldn't just be a paper drill. It should be your indoctrination, it should be your boot camp, your first impression. You're rolling out the red carpet for this individual. And onboarding should just be that time to make them feel a part of the family. And then your ongoing updates. This is one, as I said in the beginning -- it's tough to get information with somebody when they're already here. You need my cover fee now? But I'm already in the club, and now you're asking me for 20 bucks? I'm already here and I've been dancing for an hour. So that's kind of what we're asking our employees who are already there. It hasn't stopped me from doing my job, it hasn't made my job any better. So what we have to do in the ongoing updates is be authentic, be real, and be true to why we're asking these things and what we're trying to do with that information. Because right now as a veteran, I think you're just trying to submit my information to the government. But the government already has my information -- DNA, everything, I was in for 14 years, they know me. So I don't necessarily need to give my employer that information as far as I'm concerned. But we do. So next slide, Kevin.

So how do we bridge this gap, is the big question here. So -- if -- there's a big difference. If your organization is just military or disability "friendly," that's not enough. We're not looking for friends. We're looking for ways to go out there and conquer our careers and continue doing what everyone else is doing. So we need to be military effective, we need to be disability effective, and that means going beyond lip service, beyond just hanging a flag in the lobby, or showing a stock image of someone in a wheelchair on our website when we know that's a Walmart lobby wheelchair. It's doing the actual work. It's creating pathways and -- mentorship programs, leadership opportunities and attracting veterans and people with disabilities and retaining these individuals and letting them know that they're in the right place, and they didn't end up -- in here on accident. And this is how we build an authentic culture: one where our people actually feel seen, they feel that they can show up as their true selves, and they feel that they do not have judgment or exclusion or any kind of fear in that context. So now we're going to talk about the different perspectives of how we actually do that. So Kevin, if we can roll on to the next slide.

All right. So for those of you who have been in sales or any kind of sales training, we have something called the WIIFM, the WIIFM stands for "what's in it for me?" This is everyone's absolute favorite thing. As you can see on here though, we can see conflicting viewpoints and conflicting WIIFMs on here. So for our employer the reason they're asking us these self-identification questions and giving us these questionnaires, surveys, and everything that's around there is because they are looking for a diverse talent pool. So diversity is not only a check in the box, but diversity is one of the greatest things that a company can have. In my 14 years in the Marine corps it was -- that was the thing that I look back on most fondly. I don't necessarily miss the circus, but I miss the clowns. It was a portion of people coming from different cultures, creeds, walks of life, languages, ability ratings, everything else. We're all painted green, we all come together, and we all are focused on the same mission. And I saw amazing things happen, and that's why we have the strongest military on the planet here in the United States. So employers are trying to tap into that. If they're only trying to do it to check a box, it's never going to actually happen. If you say that we just want to hire all black women, you can't hire all black women. You can't hire all people with disabilities. You can't hire all veterans. So we have to have a diverse talent pool that actually works and is relevant, and not just someone that we chocked up to put on the website and they're gone in a week. Employers are also looking for their reputation and compliance. So when we talk about OFCCP and compliance, those things have pain points to them. So for VEVRAA infractions, there are quite a few big name companies -- not going to call anybody out here -- but over the past six months, there's been banks, financial institutions, really large scale consulting and construction companies that are being looked at for malpractice or -- or discrimination towards veterans and people with disabilities. So there are huge fees of millions of dollars that go around if these companies mess with -- or create obstacles for our people. It's also the reputation that it's not only being shown on the public blotter that company X was seen discriminating against veterans or people with disabilities -- and getting the money for that, it's now that I see that, that news is out there, we have access to information faster than ever before -- your reputation can go down quickly just by one blurb of messing with one of our people. So it's reputation and compliance for your employers that has legal ramifications and everything else behind it. We also have priority hiring. So sometimes organizations have priority hiring for veterans and people with disabilities. For those of us applying into the government sector, there's 10-point preferences for being a veteran or being a protected class of veteran. You also have, with certain disability ratings of 30% or above, to get into some government agencies, you can bypass USA Jobs and that whole cluster of an ATS and have direct hiring authority. So sometimes these organizations are asking for this information because they have conduits and tracks and upward mobility tracks that are just for us, and that are not being utilized, and that we see go unutilized a lot of times. Also, leadership development tracks -- a big issue that we see right now with employers, especially post-pandemic, quiet quitting, the great recession -- or great resignation, all the stuff that we saw -- organizations are trying to get back on track and the biggest -- or the biggest gaps that we see right now are skilled labor gaps. They don't have enough skilled people to continue to move wrenches and continue to keep the gears turning. And they also have leadership gaps, where their whole leadership cadre has retired, or got out early, or they let them go during the pandemic. And now they're trying to figure out who's leading the company in the next five to 10 years. We don't have those issues in the military. Skills? We train all of our people to be skilled individuals. We can't have planes and helicopters falling out of the sky. These individuals know what they're doing. Also leaders we do not have a leadership bench shaped gap in the military. It's literally next woman up, next man up. If somebody goes down in the heat of combat, and we have secession planning put out for years. So leadership and development. If you need leaders, military people are your solution, veterans are your solution, people with disabilities are your solution. Same with skilled. We are skilled individuals that have gone out there and created this. It may be called something different. If you're hiring truck drivers it may be called a motor transport operator in the Army and the Marine corps, but if you know what you're looking for, you can find some really great people. The other thing that they're looking to do is foster a workplace culture and environment that looks like they're neighborhoods. We want to make our organizations look like it does when we walk out of our organizations. It's not just Bob, and doing things the way that we used to do it, and everybody looks like Bob, and does things like Bob. Diversity of thought, diversity of action, diversity of people is what strengthens, and like I said, what makes us the strongest military on the planet. And now corporate America's -- kind of catching up to what we've been doing for hundreds of years. And also, engagement and retention. It is 10 times more cost-effective to keep a current employee than it is to go find a new one. So what do we do to keep these people? You know, there's the old adage, like, what happens if we train them and they go somewhere else? Well, what happens if we don't and they stay here? So this is employee engagement and retention to get people to stay in there, to grow, to look at those next leaders, and to be cultural ambassadors, instead of always having that rotating door that nobody's been there and no one has that legacy or lexicon of data or information on the organization. This is crucial to success and survival. Now looking at it from the military spouse, veteran, and individual with disability side -- so what do we want in this? We want tailored support. If we need accommodations, if we need groups or some sort of accessibility somewhere, we want to have that there, just like you have it for everyone else who has some sort of accommodation or needs a specific chair or something else that's there. But tailored support and access -- and I'm not just talking about an accommodation or a standing desk, I'm talking about what do we do to escalate these people, to move them up in the organization. If we're just hiring veterans into entry-level roles and they keep leaving every 90 days, that is not going to be future success for you. What do we do to take those people in their frontline or entry level roles to groom them to be future leaders and bring in other veterans like them? So we're looking for tailored support that taps into our hidden abilities, or our missed abilities that other employers aren't smart enough to hire us for, and creating support so we're strengthening both the organization and the person together. Tapping right into that is also career advancement. We are not just looking for a dead end, punch in, punch out job. We're looking for career advancement. We want to lead, we want to follow, we want to build things, do things, and be a part of something bigger than ourselves. So what does that look like? Can I see where I'll be 5 years, 10 years in your company? Or -- do I not know if I even want to be there in 90 days? This is up to us and up to our employers to come up with these cultural nuances and connections and try to figure out how we can make that to advance our people for the strength of the company, and for the strength of the individual. Also, flexible work policies and things. So we have a lot of policies and a lot of things around people with disabilities as well as veterans. One thing with veterans is if you're hiring some of us that are still on some sort of active duty contract, or in the reserves, what happens to me if I get deployed and Uncle Sam calls and says, hey, a bad guy wants to mess with America, and I need you to go over to their country and let them know that they can't do that. What happens to my job when that does happen? Or if I have to go to a drill weekend because I'm in the reserves and I'm out for two weeks, is my job gone? Am I able -- do I have to take my personal leave and vacation days to go serve my country, when I don't ever get that time on the beach to relax throughout the year when everyone else does? So looking at our policies -- even looking at military spouse and leave policies, or people with disabilities or transitioning veterans that will have to go through a lot of medical appointments and everything as we transition -- what does that look like for them, and is it evidently rolled out by the employer of -- that these policies exist, or do I have to go as a veteran and feel awkward on my first week in the job saying, hey, the VA is making me come in four times next week? I'm not broken, I promise, I'm going to be at work after that, but this is a necessity. It's hard for an employee to have that conversation when they're trying to prove themselves. It'd be better for an employer to roll that out, and say, hey, if this does happen, we have your back. The other thing that we're looking for is a sense of belonging. Especially with veterans, we belong to something way bigger than ourselves. When I was in the Marine corps -- the Marine corps is not a branch of service, it's a cult. For anybody who didn't know, the Marine corps is a cult. I'm going to say it live on the call today. We have tattoos, we have this Die Hard mentality about our brand and everything else. Then when we get out, I had the identity crisis of being a guy in a cubicle selling a Hammer back to the government. So my sense of belonging, my sense of pride kind of dwindled off where I wasn't a marine, I wasn't telling people that at the Thanksgiving table anymore, it's -- I'm a guy in a cubicle now. So, what is that sense of belonging? And obviously -- with the military, we fight battles, win wars, and keep America great, whatever we want to say there. But what does that mean at your organization? What does your company do that is impressive to give us a mission, to give us something that we can go behind and be proud that we belong to it? You know, we a ton of work with PepsiCo, and they are doing some really incredible things with veterans and with people with disabilities, showing -- showcasing leaders and all these great people throughout up and down the organization, that veterans are the backbone and people with disabilities are the backbone of that company. Does anything like that exist at yours, where there is a group or a mini military mafia, or people with disabilities within different conduits within the company making stuff happen that you can attach to? We're also looking for benefits: wellness programs and things like that that our civilian counter -- or that our regular counterparts may have -- our civilian or non-disabled counterparts. And then impactful roles. And this is -- I wanted to save this one for last, because I see a lot of tokenism. And I hate to say that out there. But a lot of our people are forced into specific corners, where veterans may only be able to go into frontline or entry level roles, and not necessarily looked that for their leadership abilities. Or people that may be in a wheelchair are only looked at for administrative positions, instead of being out on the floor in the -- in the warehouse actually making stuff happen, when they're fully capable of doing that. So biases, stigmas, and things like that can sometimes pigeon hole us into different roles. Even the military spouse hiring programs that I see out there are all focused on remote, fractional -- hourly work for military spouses, when the military spouses who I've worked with were way smarter and way more educated and experienced than most of my marines that serve for me. So we want impactful roles, we don't want to be looked at as tokens, we don't want to be put out there. We want to do the same thing our -- other counterparts do, and show you that in some cases, we can actually do it better than they can. Next slide please, Kevin.

So looking at the career progression tracks on here, and this is that red carpet that I was talking about rolling out in the beginning. What does this look like? From onboarding, to a year in the company, five years in the company -- what does the track look like there? Now putting this into perspective, in the military we have rank structure in a hierarchy. We have enlisted, we have officers, and we have warrant officers, but I won't get into the details of that. So on the enlisted side where I started off, I started as an E1. At that point I was called a maggot, a lower life form, and told that I was never going to do anything. And they had me cleaning toilets, sweeping floors, and menial work. However, I knew the rank structure in the hierarchal path that was in front of me that this was only temporary, and that would -- in 3 months I would move up the next rank. And in about a year I would move up the next one. Two years after that it would be accelerated promotion, I'd make more money, I'd have more responsibility, I wouldn't be sweeping floors anymore. But I knew I had to start somewhere. The majority of us who are employers on here have frontline roles that aren't the sexiest jobs in the world. But we also have people who are in those sexy jobs that used to be in those frontline roles that came up from there, just like everyone who was in the military service. You didn't just come in and become a sergeant major or a captain. You had to stick around, you had to learn, you had to grow. Same thing with organizations. But what does that look like? In the military, I can look on a website and see the entire rank chart, it hasn't changed. I know exactly what everybody to my left and right is making -- money-wise and everything else, because of their rank on their collar. What does that look like at your company? When I come in as a veteran, or even as a person with disabilities that's looking to where I'm going to be or looking to find my new home of where I'm going to grow -- is that laid out? Are -- is there old policies, is it hidden in the depths of some employee manual somewhere, or only Judy knows about this program, and Judy's on vacation? Is this rolled out and is there a road map? So what we're seeing here is kind of the progression and advancement paths that are ideal for an organization. So during your basic training or your onboarding or your orientation -- is that being rolled out of where you can be, how you can grow, what you can do, additional ERG leadership responsibilities or membership -- what does that basic -- that first impression look like? This is your first date -- do I want to stay in this relationship? And this is kind of where both of you are figuring that out, because the interview is done, we're here. Then looking at the technical training: what does this individual come to the table with? A lot of times we're not getting somebody fresh out of the box that can just do the work that we do. I work with -- I do extensive work with PepsiCo, as I said. I've also worked with the guys in the red can in the past, even though they're direct competitors and selling soda water or sugar water, whatever you want to call it, at the end of the day, they are completely different organizations and have completely different learning and hierarchical tracks and leadership tracks and everything else. They couldn't be more different than each other. So from a technical training standpoint, are you getting someone straight out of the box that's a CPA or an accountant and they're just doing that job? Or is it someone that is a mechanic that's leaving the Marine corps that's been working on Humvees and amphibious assault vehicles, and now they're going to take that same mechanical know-how on how to work on the machine that makes flaming hot Cheetos? We've obviously never done that in the military, but it's experience and know--how, but they have to train that individual on how to understand that machine that they're going to be working on. So what does that technical training look like for your team and for that specific role? Is it gearing them for the next level and equipping them for what you need them to do, or is it setting them up for failure? Also looking at certification programs. So if they're going to be going through -- an HR person to get that respect, that clout, is there a learning track for them to go get their PHR or to attend webinars or different sessions? What does that look like to get them certified to keep them to continue growing? We're looking for degrees, we're looking for accolades, and if our companies are providing those to us, that continues to let us grow as an individual, while also serving the company with all this new power and knowledge that we're coming back to. Leadership pathways -- if I want to lead, in the Marine corps, I know exactly how to do that, and how to make that happen. In corporate America, that was a conundrum for me. How do I navigate this, how do I look at a company like PepsiCo that has all these different divisions and everything -- how do I navigate this? How do I find that ladder? What does that look like? Is it starting off of managing one or two people that are on your team? Is it managing a whole group? Is there opportunity to do more? But what does that look like in your team because some people may have -- the ambition to be a leader, and they're coming from here. Military individuals -- we have proven leaders, we've been through formal leadership schools and academies. We have to tap into that skill or find out where we can actually leverage that. Same thing with people with disabilities. We need more people with disabilities in leadership roles and shouting from the mountain tops, that I'm one of you, and I got here, and others can be inspired to do the same. So what does that look like -- are there people like me in these leadership roles, or is this just a pipe dream that you're putting in front of me? Continuous learning and development. I -- I've heard the saying before that -- if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room. Eventually, if you've stayed in the room long enough, you become the smartest person in the room. And that's happened to me, and that's why I've left my previous employers, is because I stopped growing. So what does that look like in your team for me to get this, to understand the work you're doing, and to take my passion and my purpose and to take that and escalate that? It's going to be -- a return on investment for you, as well as a return on investment for the individual company. Mentoring and coaching programs -- I'm going to talk about those in some detail in the next slide, but those are highly important for actually making this happen. People don't just navigate through this themselves. We have to have other people bringing us up along the way. Looking at career progression discussions as well. After onboarding and we had the first date and we all love each other and everything else, when are you going to talk to somebody about the next thing? Are you doing performance evaluations? Are they every six months, every year? Is that enough time? Is that too much time between talking to somebody? But when are you having these goals to talk with your people about what they want to do, what they're doing now, and how we can find the best seat on the bus for the right individual? Also cross-functional opportunities aren't really talked about. Do I have the opportunity -- if I'm a mechanic, do I have the opportunity to do anything with your veteran team? Can I come out to job fairs as a fellow veteran when your team goes out there, and talk to my people to tell them what a great opportunity it is to work at Disability Belongs™ or wherever you're at? Also, advanced education and support. Continuing to progress and work with those individuals. Are you offering tuition assistance? Are you congratulating individuals and boosting them up when they take the time to make themselves better off hours, and not just when they're punching a clock? And are you recognizing them for this? When people go above and beyond, when they accomplish things in the military, we have -- medals and badges and certifications and rank and all this other stuff. What does that look like within your organization? Am I being recognized for these awards and accolades and what I'm doing at work? Or does my boss take the recognition for everything that I do and now I'm looking for another job? So these are all things that we have to think about of the full life cycle of an individual -- not just where they are today or where they were a year ago, but where are they five years from now, and are they an asset or a liability to the company, and is the company an asset or a liability to them are the questions that we need to ask ourselves. Next slide please, Kevin.

So in order to make this happen, we talked about the how of creating these tracks, creating this road map of success for our individual people. But the how doesn't just work. We can lay things on paper it's like if you build it will they come -- we never know. So what we really want to look at is the who in all of this. So veterans know, and more importantly trust, veterans. It's our own people. Same thing people with disabilities. I can connect with other people with disabilities and be able to openly talk about it, because we don't necessarily get to talk about that in open forums, and we have that lived experience and something that we have shared between us. We have that bond, that commonality. Are we tapping into that in our workforce? We hire people with disabilities. We hire veteran. We hire military spouses. But where are they? Every time I look at somebody's website, they're sharing some Adobe stock image of some veteran in pajamas with a backwards weird salute, or person in a wheelchair with huge calf muscles and -- a Walmart waiting room wheelchair. Like, do we not have veterans working at our companies? And if we do, those are the best people to activate, and people with disabilities, and military spouses -- because we're passionate about who we are and we want to escalate and elevate other people who are like us. So looking at the first stage of that, we have an opportunity for battle buddies, and this is the lowest rung but the easiest way to connect these. When you have military individuals at your company, connect your military individuals or your people with disabilities with them. That way, they can share best practices. If I was a veteran and I had to -- I had to overcome this, or I had to submit for my -- military orders for leave and paid leave to not have a dock towards me, if someone else has already been through that, I'd like to hear that from them rather than just thinking about how awkward the conversation is going to be with my boss. I don't know that somebody else has already done that. In the military, battle buddies are a huge asset to us. Anytime that I go to another duty station, or I'm stationed somewhere else, or I have to check in somewhere, I'm assigned a battle buddy. That individual helps me get checked in, shows me where I work, where I live, where I sleep, where I eat, shows me around -- "hey, that's the first sergeant, he's kind of a jerk, stay away from that guy." I get a whole lay of the land from someone who's already been there, kind of like an advanced party to just show me the ropes or, like, my own tour guide to the new location that I'm in. Do we have that in our companies? When they come on -- if I'm coming in as a warehouse associate, am I attached to another veteran who may have been -- been doing what I'm doing three months ago or three years ago that can show me those things that I have common ground with? Or do I have another person with disabilities who's doing that role that may have or need the same accommodation or the same accessibility issues that I may have -- can I talk to them of how they've done their job better to optimize my performance? Our other counterparts civilian and non-disabled have these luxuries of talking with other people that are like them to do that job. Do we have anyone like us that we can talk to to do that job and to do it better, because that may be fewer and further between. So battle buddies -- this is your peer group, your people who are doing about the same level of work you are. Now looking at mentors is the next rung up. So for our employees, and there -- there's a saying that I really truly believe in, and that is that you are the average of the -- you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. So if I spend time with a bunch of veterans commiserating and saying nobody wants to hire a hero or warrior or whatever we call ourselves these days, which by the way, none of us call ourselves any of these things that you see out there on media and whatnot. But when we're doing that, like -- who can we connect with within the organization? So looking at mentors -- how do I escalate -- how do I see where these individuals are? So when we surround ourself with five powerful people, we become the average of those. So how can we do that in our company? If I want Rob, who is a frontline warehouse associate, to one day be the district sales leader, who do I connect them with? Even if they're not a veteran, just someone doing that job to show them this is how it can be done, we believe in you, you can do what I'm doing in a few years. Do I have that light or that beacon that I can follow? And that's where your mentors come in -- to groom your future employees to kind of pass over the torch. They're almost building out their replacement, because when they leave, that next person should be able to fill their seat. So are there mentors within your organization who are willing to step up to take care of that younger generation and to grow and foster their success? Talking about ERGs next. So ERGs, employee resource groups, business resource groups, affinity programs -- they're called a million different things. At the end of the day, what we're trying to do is build a club or a mini military connected community or -- a mini -- people with -- individuals with disabilities mafia within that organization. So with ERGs, they're -- over the past few years, they've really been the cool -- a buzz, and all the cool kids have them, and everyone rolled out these employee resource groups for LGBTQIA and people of color and all these other subgroups, which is an amazing thing. But it's a matter of if you build it, will they come? The majority that we see don't have a lot of substance behind them. So for veterans, it's hey, we have an awesome ERG group. Tell me about that? Well we do free coffee and donuts for veterans in the breakroom on Veterans Day, and then on -- Memorial Day, we do a flag ceremony and have veterans raise a flag out there. So that's not an ERG. What an employee resource group should be is a mini connected community with those individuals where they have representation, they have allies and advocates. It's not just a closed group where veterans or people with disabilities go in there and gripe to each other. It's getting the other stakeholders, your battle buddies, your mentors, all of those other individuals, your executive chairs, and everyone else around and surrounding this, because it's in the best interest of the organization. And what we're trying to do is not have one day or -- gay pride month or anything like that, where we just have these things on the calendar that don't mean anything. This has to be 365. This has to be a living breathing thing that has battle buddies and mentors in your community activated around that. So in that ERG group, ask yourself, or ask your members -- if you have members in your ERG group right now, I challenge each and every one of you to do a survey of how they feel about it, good, bad, and ugly, and look for room for improvement. Your people are going to tell you what they need and what they're lacking. Don't just assume that everything that's there, that you built it, that everything's going great there. It needs to continue -- needs to have continuous progress and love to it. And then finally is the community. And this is one of the most slept on resources that's out there. So we have our internal stakeholders, and a lot of times the answers are within our organization. We don't have to go out there and hire consultants or go to job fairs or any of that stuff. But in the community, we have to be -- we have to be careful with this. This can either be one of our biggest assets or our biggest liabilities. The military veteran community and disability support community is nebulous and huge. There are so many nonprofits, charitable organizations, veteran support, people with disability support companies that are out there. However, some of them are good, some of them are bad, some of them are actually predatory towards our people and charge for their services and get us when we need them the most at the time that we need a bill the least. So looking at your community partners -- they are not all cut the same. If you're just going to a job fair or tokenizing something or a disability employment summit or whatever, it's not enough. We have to look at it and be intentional. Who do we need at our company? You can't hire all people with disabilities, you can't hire all veterans, but if you look at the right ones -- you may only be able to hire Marine corps avionics technicians, but those may be the best people you ever hire. You may only be able to hire -- people that have this disability, on the autism spectrum or something, for this specific role, but you have to know where those individuals go. Veterans don't all just hang out at some virtual VFW somewhere. People with disabilities, we all don't just -- don't hang out at some -- committee somewhere. So you have to be intentional for finding our individualism of where we are in the world, and connecting with those direct community partners that are there -- relevant ones. Next slide, Kevin.

So moving beyond lip service, as we're starting to wrap up here. How do we do this? How do we get there? At the end of the day, it's not rocket science but it takes intention. We need to move past the superficial platitudes and all of that, not just checking a box or hiring a veteran or a person with disabilities and calling it a day. We have to create real programs: mentorship, training, growth opportunities, you name it. This is how we measure our programs and keep them working. And it's actionable. It's things that we can actually see results and outcomes with, and not just waving another flag, because nobody's convinced anymore. Next slide please. So as we wrap up, I want to leave you with one big takeaway. Self-identification isn't just a compliance exercise. It's a strategy that can help make your companies stronger, more diverse, and more competitive. But it only works if -- if we foster our actual culture of authenticity and realness, where people feel safe and supported and valued for who they are, and not just as employees, but as individuals and as human beings. And that's when the magic actually happens here. So I want everyone to commit to going past lip service. Get into action. Ask questions -- what are we doing with this? When we do this event, what are we trying to make happen? What -- what is the anticipated outcome? When we throw money at this, what are we going to do? How does this change the game for our company and our people? Next slide, Kevin.

Really appreciate everyone joining us today. We have a quick download on here. I'm sure Kevin and everybody will share that with you after the -- after the session, but this is something we put together. This is the smart way to hiring veterans so this is chalk full of great real time information. A lot of this the methodologies can be used and there are portions in here with people with disabilities and protected class veterans as well. But feel free to download this free guide here. Hopefully it helps you to create a military or disability effective program within your company. But at the the end of the day it takes a village. We need to activate everyone. It can't just be your veteran or disability program manager or campus hiring people. It has to be everyone: your stakeholders, your leadership, your veterans, your military spouses, your people with disabilities all marching together to make it happen for your company and for your people. Next slide please.

My contact info is up here. Again, my name is Rob Arndt. It has been great working and talking with all of you today. Thank you so much for all you do to hire our people, and thank you all to our people who are on here: veterans, people with disabilities, military spouses -- I love you all and hope nothing but the best for you all. If you need any help along the way on either side of that, my contact info is up. It's simply Rob@BufferSprings.com. You can find me on LinkedIn, porch light is always on here. If I can help you, a veteran, a person with disabilities, your company, whoever, we are here to make progress. Again, our mission is to eradicate and wipe out underemployment for our communities. But we can't do it alone, we need all of you. So I'll open up for Q&A, and I know we have about 5 minutes left, so wrapping up here so thank you all again.

**Kevin McCloskey:** Rob, thank you so much as always. I love having you as a guest because you tell it how it is and you really put together some actionable items for both employers and -- both applicants, candidates, and employees with disabilities, and veterans as well. So really do appreciate that. I know you answered a question that came up earlier about accommodations. I think we got something just pop in right now -- just a couple of wonderful presentation, thanks Rob, great presentation. I don't see any questions coming through right now, just some nice words for you, Rob. But can you talk a little bit about what you've seen -- I know recently you were down in Texas shooting some videos. Can you talk about that impact and how that helps employers -- those videos that you were a part of and talk a little bit about that, and how that helps employers be more inclusive to people with disabilities and veterans as well?

**Rob Arndt:** Absolutely. So we had a really incredible experience, and probably one of the coolest things I've ever got to do in my career. So we're working with a film crew called Cave 76 Productions, who is now partnered with BufferSprings, and something we're going to be doing with other organizations outside of PepsiCo. But what we did is we went down to Plano, Texas and San Antonio, Texas. We went to Frito-Lay's headquarters. We went to manufacturing facilities, shipping facilities, warehouses and across PepsiCo's footprint, and just talked to veterans and people with disabilities that are out there every day making it happen. There was no tokenism of like -- showing a guy -- a veteran with one leg with a flag draped over their shoulder, there was none of that fluff and flag waving crap. What we did is we got into real intimate stories with individuals that are from our backgrounds: people with immense disabilities, or people with -- military experience. But it wasn't all puppies and rainbows. We had a senior executive -- that's the equivalent of a general in Army -- break down and say I went into a dark place when I left the Army. I spent a year in a hotel room doing every drug, every -- drink I could find, until another veteran got me back on my feet. I found my career, and I found my -- I was able to accelerate with Pepsi, you know, as a veteran taking that with me. We were able to catch really raw stories. One woman beat leukemia after she got out of the army, the Army saw her as an unserviceable weapon because she had leukemia, but she got a great health care plan through Pepsi, and was able to actually beat cancer and grow and be there for about 5 years. So we were able to catch some really amazing stories, and at the end of the day, we're showing that this is -- like -- we're thinking about this wrong. These aren't people that you should hire because it's your patriotic duty, or that you pity us, or that we're a hero, or a victim, or a broken toy, or that you saw a commercial. This should be that you want your organization to be as strong as it can, and Pepsi wants to do that, and there are veterans and people with disabilities in some really crucial roles there, and it's so beautiful to see. So that's what we got a chance to film, and we'll be doing more projects like that. But -- it's all about telling these real stories. What I like most about it is some of us are afraid to speak up and say I'm a person with disabilities, or that I'm a veteran, or that how do I identify on there. I think telling these stories and having voices from all sides of the mountain speaking up and saying this is who I am and this is what I am and deal with it, I think is super powerful. And I can't wait for this series to roll out. It -- first video is going to drop in the beginning of November, and then I think we're submitting to Sundance Film Festival as well. Like, this was one of the most powerful things I've ever done in my 25 career -- 25 year career of doing this work.

**Kevin McCloskey:** Excellent. I know that definitely helps self- identification as well. So again Rob, thank you, Rob Arndt, founder and CEO, disabled veteran, Marine corps veteran, Rob from BufferSprings. His contact information is up there. We'll be sharing the slides and the recording as well. So Rob, once again, appreciate your time, appreciate your service, and until next time, thank you.

**Rob Arndt:** Awesome. Thank you again everybody for joining me today. Hire veterans, people with disabilities. Call us if you need help.

**Kevin McCloskey:** Thanks Rob.