

News monitored for: Mphasis

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

THESE TECHIES SOUGHT THEIR OWN BEST

I lost my vision, but I run marathons

MAYUR JADHAV | SPECIALIST, IT SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATION, GLOBAL SERVICES, FISERV

Despite grappling with glaucoma, an incurable condition resulting in vision loss, my determination remains unshaken. The completion of my first 10 km marathon ignited a passion for challenges that transcended my professional boundaries, propelling me into marathons, Himalayan treks, and even triathlons. I joined global services at Fiserv in 2018, and today, I work as a specialist in IT systems administration, focusing on application support to ensure the scalability and reliability of our solutions. This was made possible thanks to the unwavering support from my managers, who provided the essential infrastructure for continued effective work. Fiserv initiatives like 'Fuel Your Life' and annual health check-ups were instrumental in tracking my fitness, diet, and sleep, which is very important for me considering my passions. Additionally, one-on-one sessions with an employee assistance programme counsellor provided invaluable mental health guidance, helping me manage both work and sports.



The tech industry is taking significant strides towards inclusivity, but it's clear that there is still a long way to go before we reach a truly inclusive space. On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3), we asked techies with disabilities to talk about how they are confronting the challenges they face, and how their companies are helping to ensure that those with disabilities are not left behind in the workforce of the future.

COS MUST TRAIN STAFF TO BE INCLUSIVE

SHIKSHA GUPTA | SENIOR ANALYST - COMPENSATION & BENEFITS, SAIGERSON

Being visually impaired, I am very glad to say that absolutely every person I have come across, personally and professionally, has been keen on supporting my access needs. It's truly heartening to witness such a positive mindset, but the main issue is that there isn't enough instruction on the "how." It's critical to put in place training programmes that instruct people on how to take the necessary actions to create a truly inclusive atmosphere, whether at work or in the community. These days, accessibility arrangements like wheelchair-accessible washrooms and screen-reading software have become standard, which reflects a positive shift in awareness. Now, it's time to take an additional step by promoting sensitisation and enablement within teams and colleagues, and also fostering a supportive network of buddies/mentors. This approach will encourage every diverse talent to fully embrace and contribute their authentic selves at the workplace.



I HELP MAKE TECH ACCESSIBLE

MEGHNA PATANGI | ACCESSIBILITY SPECIALIST, PEGASYS

I was diagnosed with retinal dystrophy at the age of 13 and had to pass up a lot of professional chances due to my rapid vision loss, including interior design and company secretaryship. To eliminate barriers for the disabled community and make technology accessible to them, I then studied web accessibility. Working at Pega has allowed me to contribute to an inclusive culture and help achieve digital accessibility for all. From the planning stage through the design phase, we are already moving towards accessibility and guaranteeing inclusion at every turn. I would love to see a future where accessibility is an inalienable right and no longer a pursuit. My only advice to all my younger peers and freshers would be to remember that everyone's journey is unique, and you have valuable contributions to make in the workforce. Embrace your strengths, be proactive, and build a career that aligns with your goals and aspirations.



Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India recently supported MTTI Cafe in launching India's first food truck operated by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)

COS MUST PROVIDE PATHS FOR GROWTH

VISHNU RAMCHANDANI | SENIOR ACCESSIBILITY QA ENGINEER, PUBLICIS SAATCHI

Born with blindness in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, I didn't have many resources, help or education designed for me. I studied Arts because STEM seemed out of reach. But the world of technology fascinated me, so I started learning computer courses on the side. Transitioning from Arts to tech wasn't easy. I learnt HTML, CSS, and used every chance to learn more, and honed my skills through online email groups before WhatsApp became popular. My entry into the tech world wasn't direct and a chance meeting with an inspiring engineering leader changed my course. Despite my blindness, she saw my potential. With her backing, I passed an interview designed to fairly assess my skills. That chance paved my way into a tech career. This is what being equitable means. While leadership endorsement is important in making things happen in an organisation, sustaining it depends on the culture. It's not just about showing diversity, it's about providing meaningful careers and paths for growth.



Don't dwell on your limitations

UMADEVI NAVAMANI | SENIOR ASSOCIATE - PROJECTS, AIA DATA INTEGRATION, COGNIZANT

At the age of two, a misdiagnosed polio injection affected both my legs resulting in locomotor disability, which could not be treated. Due to this condition, I was refused admission by several schools. Eventually, with the help of my younger brother's teacher, I was admitted to a school and was able to pursue education. Importantly, it was my family's support and encouragement that inspired me to achieve much more academically and professionally. I joined Cognizant in 2016 as an ETL developer and am currently an AWS data engineer with the company. I am a member of Outreach - Cognizant's employee volunteering programme. Through Unite, the company's affinity group for people with disabilities and caregivers, I mentor associates with disabilities, encouraging them to concentrate on goals attainable through their abilities, rather than dwelling on those hindered by their physical limitations. Today, I am a wheelchair basketball player thanks to Outreach recognising my athletic abilities and helping me transcend my boundaries.



Access challenges still exist everywhere

PRITI ROHRA | CHIEF ACCESSIBILITY OFFICER, BARRIERBREAK

My 20-year career started off as an accessibility tester and I'm now the chief accessibility officer at BarrierBreak, a leading digital accessibility consulting firm. As a person with low vision, I use a screen reader on computers and mobiles. In 2003, applications and websites were not accessible. This only made it difficult for me to find a job since I couldn't fill out an application form on job portals, and companies did not understand my accommodations needs. Using banking facilities or even reading utility bills was just impossible. The experience today is better, but far from perfect. I can book a flight online with the help of screen readers, but I can't select my seat or access the online check-in facility. Today I can use net banking or mobile banking but not all the features are accessible. To people with disabilities, it's time to raise awareness about access challenges and what works!

My team & managers made my journey easy

ZAHAL MOHAMED T P | SOFTWARE ENGINEER SENIOR ANALYST, ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY CENTRES IN INDIA (ATCI), ACCENTURE

I was born deaf. Growing up in a household where my parents were also deaf, education was a priority. I attended a school for those with hearing loss, earned a Bachelor's degree in computer application, and joined Accenture in 2013 as a campus recruit. As my initial self-doubt gave way, I experienced an exhilarating sense of freedom for the very first time as I visualised a future for myself. Over the last decade, Accenture has given me a wonderful environment to learn and build a career. My team members and managers made my journey easy by helping me overcome communication challenges. A senior colleague even re-created a four-hour training session just to help me understand it better. Technology has also been a key enabler. Inclusion works both ways. Just as my team helps me, I take every opportunity to teach them sign language. Most of my peers have taken the time to learn it, which makes me feel respected and included.

Defying odds, I resumed work 4 mths after a car crash

SANDY CARIAPPA | ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, NEXTOPS, MPHISIS

In 2005, my life took an unexpected turn after a car accident left me with a spinal cord injury, confining me to a wheelchair. Returning to the workplace after my accident was a significant challenge. I was unsure of how I would be received. But happily, I experienced overwhelming support from my colleagues. This was a pivotal moment in my professional journey. Against societal expectations and defying the odds, I resumed my duties within four months and even handled customer relationship management. My boss's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion has been instrumental in my career trajectory. Since I found grassroots initiatives to rigorous audits ensuring diverse and inclusive workplaces, the company has created an environment where PwD talent, like myself, receive equal opportunities to fulfil our career aspirations. For younger peers and freshers facing similar hurdles, my advice is to seek support, embrace challenges, and be resilient.

AI promises a brighter future

PAVAN GUPTA | SENIOR ADVANCED EMBEDDED ENGINEER, HONEYWELL AEROSPACE

I've been working for aerospace development at Honeywell for the past 18 years. Along this path, I encountered a unique challenge - a significant loss of 70% of my vision. Navigating this new terrain involved two distinct challenges: pertaining to the professional sphere and societal perceptions of disability. Work-related challenges found their solutions in technology. With tools like JAWS (Job Access With Speech), a screen-reader software provided by my organisation, and other freely available software tools, I managed to surmount professional hurdles. Support from my director, manager, and colleagues, coupled with the use of assistive technologies like the TalkBack feature on Android phones, facilitated a supportive work environment. In contrast, societal attitudes were a different hurdle. While the majority has been supportive, encountering negativity is inevitable. Life, even with a disability, can be lived to the fullest with creative problem-solving. Moreover, the rapid advancements in technology, especially in AI, promise an even brighter future for individuals with disabilities.



Changing your mindset can be empowering

PIYANKA SRIVASTAVA | MANAGER, DIGITAL FOUNDATION, HCL TECH

Facing the reality of being unable to stand or walk and having no sensations in my lower body, I find strength in comparing my challenges to those dealing with more severe conditions, like not having hands or legs or experiencing tetraplegia. It changes my perspective, recognising the resilience of others dealing with more grievous challenges than mine. This change in mindset empowers me to accept my current situation with gratitude. It is a lesson in appreciating the value of what is present rather than focusing on limitations. In a broader context, acknowledging what we possess becomes vital when we realise the struggles many individuals worldwide face to survive. HCLTech has provided me the platform to showcase my unique abilities and stand tall. Here, inclusion and diversity are not just corporate agendas but part of the organisation's DNA.



Social, attitudinal challenges are common

WASIM AHMED | PORTFOLIO MANAGER, FINANCIAL SERVICES (B2 - DATA SCIENCE & ANALYTICS), CAPGEMINI

I've lived with a locomotor disability since I was two and a half years old. Most common challenges I have been facing are physical (lack of accessibility to buildings, transportation, unsafe sidewalks, lack of priority services to PwD), social (exclusion from social activities and opportunities due to inaccessible environments, lack of support, and unintentional discrimination), and attitudinal challenges from people (misconceptions about disability, and lack of awareness and understanding) leading to unintentional discrimination. However, I've never considered this a limitation, but rather a source of my strength, fuelling my ambitions, and shaping my character over the years. After completing my Master's degree in statistics from Bangalore University, I started my career as a trainee in my first organisation, and today I serve as a portfolio manager at Capgemini. Throughout my time here, Capgemini has had my back.

