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BOOK REVIEW

Able! How one company's extraordinary workforce changed the way we look at disability today. (2nd edition), by Nancy Henderson. Published by Benbella Books, Dallas, TX, 2008. (254 pages)

The inclusion of people with disabilities is no longer a problem for education alone. As the number of work-aged people with disabilities rises in the United States, there is a growing concern and awareness among parents, educators, advocates and employers regarding the need for work and independence among those previously seen as “un-hirable.” As difficult as the road has been in education, business seems to be putting up an even greater struggle. As early as the late 1980s, Habitat International began to forge through the untamed wilderness of employing people with “positive distractions.” Nearly two decades later, Nancy Henderson strives to tell the story that is Habitat—the journey, the people, the attitude—in one word, *Able!*

In the business world—where product and profit are typically the main concerns—taking the time, energy, and money to integrate those with disabilities into the workforce is often seen as “poor business sense.” With this worldview in mind, Henderson shares the incredible story of one small-town Georgia business that not only is successfully competitive in its field—often out-producing larger companies—but whose basic philosophy puts people, and their differences, first. As the author follows their twenty-year journey—the struggles with government agencies, competition and other “giants,” the big picture is occasionally interrupted with some of Habitat’s success stories—people whose lives were turned around for the better by the unselfish, accepting, and inclusive acts of the company and her founders.

Habitat’s co-founders, Saul and David Morris, first began hiring people with mental disabilities through a government sponsored job placement program, never suspecting the positive repercussions such a decision would bring their way. After working with two different agencies and facing nearly constant problems, David and Saul “bucked the system,” ending all ties with the government agencies that were causing them problems and reached out to the parents of the clients they’d been working with in order to hire them full time.

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Although they continue to struggle with problems, the fifteen years since that decision has seen a marked difference in the business and people that are Habitat. Now, people with mental and physical disabilities work alongside people with severe brain injuries and mental illnesses. Nearly every employee at Habitat was once told that they would never succeed in “normal” society, that they were “un-able.” Habitat has proven that anything is possible as these “un-able” people continue to outshine the limitations set for them by other people.

Habitat is a shining light and example to businesses, parents, teachers, advocates, and the disabled. Although Habitat’s tale is the success story of a business, the implications are far reaching and especially beneficial to families and to education. This incredible story brings tears to the eyes, laughter to lips, and joy to the heart as the ups and downs of business are intertwined with the personal success stories of those that society deemed unworthy, subpar, and unable.

*Emily Appel, MA Student
Education Department
Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
Silang, Cavite, Philippines*