

National Youth Leadership Network: Advocates for the Next Generation

The TecAccess Story

A few years ago, Debra Ruh had a dream. She was to create a company that primarily hires persons with disabilities. Debra's inspiration - a beautiful daughter named Sara, who has Down's syndrome. When Sara entered middle school, Debra realized that her daughter's employment opportunities were bleak. At 13 years of age, Sara's reading and math skills were still at a kindergarten level.

Some suggested that Sara collect shopping carts at a local grocery store, or work in a sheltered workshop environment. But Debra knew that Sara could do much more.

Drawing upon a long and successful career in information technology, Debra's entrepreneurial instincts kicked into overdrive and she created an IT company that hired mainly persons with disabilities — not only mild disabilities, but also severe disabilities.

Today, Debra's dream has become a reality. TecAccess now has over 60 associates with disabilities ranging from developmental to physical. To say that TecAccess is a diverse company is an understatement: there are associates with cerebral palsy, brain injury, quadriplegia, diabetes, bipolar disorder, macular degeneration, visual impairment, blindness, and hearing loss — just to name a few.

TecAccess (www.tecaccess.net) — an SBA 8(a) Certified, Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB), and Woman-Owned Company - has become the global leader in E&IT accessibility solutions. TecAccess specializes in Web and IT Accessibility, Section 508 compliance, and W3C standards. Services include testing and assessment, training, engineering, policy review, and consulting. TecAccess is uniquely positioned to undertake the challenge of developing creative accessibility solutions for private industries, government, and education.

The majority of the TecAccess associates are people with disabilities. TecAccess is composed of the very individuals for whom Section 508 was designed. As such, we possess the inherent capability of realistically evaluating technology from the perspective of the target audience — people with disabilities.

Though employment opportunities are still limited for people with disabilities, there are many technology positions that can be performed regardless of a disability. In fact, sometimes a person with a disability can perform certain technology positions better than a non-disabled person, as evidenced by the success of TecAccess.

Companies are often reluctant to hire people with disabilities because they fear the unknown, the cost of accommodations for a person with a disability, and absenteeism. However, TecAccess proves that the reality is that people with disabilities have excellent attendance records, a great

work ethic, and strong loyalty to their employers. TecAccess believes in the abilities of its associates and feels the bottom line is that millions of people with disabilities want and need access to today's technology.

At TecAccess, employees with disabilities draw upon their unique perspective on facing accessibility challenges on a daily basis, and in turn use these personal experiences to help others better understand practical and cost effective accessibility solutions. This firsthand knowledge and experience results in a comprehensive suite of services that ultimately helps TecAccess' clients with their accessibility, usability, and Section 508 compliance needs. TecAccess even takes the compliance issue one step further — not only helping companies become Section 508 compliant, but also assisting in making IT software, products, and websites accessible and useable for everyone!

For these efforts TecAccess has received numerous distinctions - including the President's *New Freedom Initiative Award*, the Department of Labor's "Circle of Champions," the Virginia Small Business Administration's "Small Minority Business of the Year," the National Association of Business Owner's "Rising Star" award, the "Career Award" by Lighthouse International, and the "Leadership Award" by Women in Technology (WIT). In addition, Debra Ruh has authored many publications and spoken to leaders from around the world, as evidenced by her widely anticipated address to the European Union in 2006. These honors highlight three primary goals in TecAccess' successful endeavor:

Provide organizations with realistic options from a complete menu of compliance and accessibility solutions: TecAccess offers comprehensive Section 508 Compliance and Accessibility Solutions — including training, testing, assessment, marketing, policy review, and engineering.

Employ people with disabilities: TecAccess helps individuals with disabilities become more productive and independent. The logic behind this strategy is simple: Who better to assess the services and products as accessible than the ultimate users?

Remain strong advocates for people with disabilities: TecAccess is a strong advocate for people with disabilities, with a goal is to help people with disabilities achieve an independent and productive lifestyle.

With TecAccess as a partner you'll be a leader in compliance, accessibility, and usability.