

“Imagine the Possibilities”

John and Mark Cronin, John’s Crazy Socks

International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference 2023

November 10

[2023/11/10 09:30] Carolyn Carillon: Hello everyone.

Today’s presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

Some speakers may be using a text teleprompter tool for some or all of their presentation. Transcriptionists will fill in any gaps and support the Question & Answer section at the end. A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are:

Carolyn Carillon

Lorivonne Lustre

The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:

JC: John Cronin

MC: Mark Cronin

[2023/11/10 09:30] Andee Cooper: Good morning everyone and welcome to Virtual Ability’s 2023 International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference.

My name is Andee Cooper and I have been in SL 19 years, off and on, I enjoy working with the VA community, dancing, music, the arts and creativity in SL.

In RL I am a retired school teacher with 30 years experience in Special Education, and guardian to a sister who has cerebral palsy.

But today I am so honored and excited to introduce a young man who with his father has created a social enterprise called "John's Crazy Socks".

John and Mark Cronin have made their business into the world’s largest sock store earning them recognition as EY’s Entrepreneurs of the Year.

He is not only an entrepreneur but he also has spoken at the UN about people with differing abilities,

every day John and Mark show what people with differing abilities can do because he has Downs Syndrome and more than half of their colleagues also have a differing ability.

I could go on forever with the accomplishments and successes but the most important thing is they spread happiness one pair of socks at a time.

I do want to mention with sadness that the Cronin's are at a RL conference and unfortunately it is at the same time as this one, so they will not be able to come inworld, they are really sad they do not get to come in and be Batman and Robin, as we are about not getting to meet them in person. but they sent a film to show for their session today. Also they want to be able to answer your questions so we ARE going to have time at the end to record (in text) your questions and comments.

We will email these questions to them and after their conference they promise to answer them as quickly as they can!

We will then IM the answer to the questioner and also post the answers into the conference archive.

Ladies and Gentleman ,,, the Cronins.

[2023/11/10 09:33] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): In a moment, the video screen will come out onto the stage.

To view the Cronins' video, "Imagine the Possibilities":

When you click on the screen, it will automatically zoom your view to it.

If the video does not start in a couple of seconds, click on the screen again and the video should start.

When the video is done, click on either the ESC key one or two times, or click with your mouse on something outside the screen, then scroll out from the screen.

Be sure to say in local chat that you are done seeing the video.

[2023/11/10 09:34] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): If you prefer to see the video on YouTube with your browser, you can go this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c-9H7XypBU>

<<text transcript and image description of video by the Cronins>>

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

(Full screen shot of Mark and John facing camera, in black shirts with John's Crazy Socks logos. There is office equipment behind them and a John's Crazy Socks poster on the wall)

John: Hiya. I'm John. This is my partner, my dad Mark. We are John's Crazy Socks.

Mark: John's Crazy Socks! What's our mission?

John: Spreading happiness.

Mark: And we are so grateful--

John: Yes!

Mark: --to be able to appear and present at the Disability Rights Affirmation Conference. So we've prepared a presentation. It's really focused on 'look at the possibilities'.

John: Right.

Mark: Look at what each of us can do, and look what the people we meet can do. So we are going to show you some slides, and some videos, and we want to start at the very beginning. You ready?

John: I am ready.

Mark: Okay! Come along for the ride.

John: Come along, guys!

(Slide change. Photograph of John's mother in bed holding John as a newborn. Title: Consider This Baby. Talking-head circle of Mark to the right)

Mark: Consider this baby. This is John, laying on my wife's chest, on his first day of life. We did not know that John would be born with Down syndrome. Here's how we found out. The covering O.B. came into the room, and said, "I'm so sorry, I have bad news for you. It appears that your son may have a slight case of Down syndrome."

Now this is awful. Because what parents should hear is 'Congratulations! You have a son.' But too often, parents hear it in that bad way. We need to change that. Now here's how you get Down syndrome. All of us humans are born with 23 pairs of chromosomes. People with Down syndrome have a little bit extra. They have a third twenty-first chromosome. John says it's a little extra love. And that brings some common traits. Intellectual challenges. Low muscle tone. It takes John more energy to walk across a room, than it might someone else. And some things are inconsequential. If you look at the palm of your hand, you have three creases running across it. People with Down syndrome only have two. Who knows. But it also can bring some significant medical challenges. Like about 10% of people born with Down syndrome, John's intestine was not fully formed, and on day three of his life, he needed intestinal bypass surgery. We did not know if he could survive that operation. We brought a Catholic priest into the hospital, to baptise him. He did survive. And John, like about 50% of people born with Down syndrome, had a significant heart defect. There were two holes in his heart. His heart couldn't keep up. He wasn't growing. We were measuring him in grams. And before he was three months old, our son was in full congestive heart failure. I held him in my arms, and he was literally turning blue. He needed open heart surgery. Again, we did not know if he could survive that operation. But he couldn't live without it. And he did survive. And as John began to grow, he faced challenges. When he was young, he couldn't talk. He learned sign language to communicate, and used an assistive voice device. So I ask you, what chance did this baby have in our world? What could become of this child, with these medical challenges, with the world, right from the beginning, looking on him as being a problem?

(Slide change. Photograph of John before a microphone, reading from documents, in the US Congress. Mark is on his left and a woman is on his right. A name card with John Cronin is in front of John. Title: He could grow up to change the world. Talking-head circle of Mark on the right)

Mark: And the answer is, he could grow up to change the world. This is John, testifying for the second time before the US Congress. And John has spoken twice at the United Nations. He's gone on to start what is now the world's largest sock store, John's Crazy

Socks, that employs 34 people, 22 of whom have a differing ability. He has been named Entrepreneur of the Year by EY. If there's nothing else you take from our talk today, it is this: look at the possibilities. Look at the possibilities in each of us, and look at the possibilities in the people we meet. Yes, John faced many challenges, but look at what he could become. Now, let me bring John back out.

(Back to full screen of Mark and John facing the camera)

Mark: Well, now that you've heard about John at birth, let me reintroduce my partner, John Cronin. And make sure you understand just who John is, right?

John: Right, Dad.

Mark: And you're an entrepreneur?

John: Yeah, I am.

Mark: You own the world's largest sock store, so you're a sock tycoon.

John: Yes, I am. I am a sock tycoon. (both laugh)

Mark: You're a public speaker.

John: Yes, I am. I'm speaking.

Mark: You are speaking. You donate a lot of money. That makes you a philanthropist.

John: Yeah, I've probably found my wings.

Mark: You've been a Special Olympics athlete now for twenty-two years. That makes you an athlete.

John: Yes, I am. I'm a Special Olympics athlete.

Mark: You're a dancer.

John: Yes, I am. (does a dance move)

Mark: You're a good friend.

John: I am a good friend.

Mark: You're a good brother.

John: I am a good brother.

Mark: You don't have a girlfriend right now.

John: No, I don't.

Mark: But you're very smooth.

John: Very smooth.... (slides hand down his cheek) And I am twenty-seven, and I'm single and eligible.

Mark: Twenty-seven, single and eligible. (both laugh) But you notice, you are all of those things, and you have Down syndrome.

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: What do you say about that?

John: I have Down syndrome. Down syndrome... And it never holds me back.

Mark: It does not. And you see, John has Down syndrome, but that's only part of who he is. It doesn't overwhelm and it doesn't define him. He's all these things, and that's true about all of us. He keeps coming back. Look at what's possible. Look at what we can all do. So, I thought we would tell people about John's Crazy Socks, and how and why you got started.

John: Yes, Dad.

Mark: Right. Let's go back to our slides, and we're going to tell you the story, of how John had the idea to start John's Crazy Socks.

(Slide change. Photograph of John and Mark seated before a computer, looking at each other. Title: Our Story Begins. Heading for the 21-year-old Cliff. Bulletpoints: Fall of 2016; Last year of high school; John: What comes next? Talking-heads circle of John and Mark on the right.)

Mark: So, our story begins in the fall of 2016. And let me take you back, to a small log cabin in the woods.

John: No..... (both laugh)

Mark: No. Our story starts on suburban Long Island outside New York City, in a town called Huntington. And where were you?

John: I was at Huntington High School, that was to be my last year at school.

Mark: But we know this, anywhere in the US, you can stay in the public school system till you either graduate, or turn 21. It's often known as the 21-year-old cliff. And John was about to go over that cliff. And you were trying to figure out, what comes next.

John: I did.

Mark: What were you looking at?

John: I was looking at shop, program and school. I don't like it.

Mark: And this is an unfortunate reality for too many people with differing abilities. Only one in five people with disability are employed in this country. It's awful. But John here, John is a natural entrepreneur.

(Slide changes. Photograph of Mark standing behind John with his hands on his son's shoulders. John wears a white sweater with John's Crazy Socks printed on it. Title: Our Story Begins. Heading for the 21-year-old Cliff. Bulletpoints: John says, "I want to go into business with my Dad"; Idea: Food Truck; Idea: Socks.' Talking-heads circle of John and Mark on the right.)

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: If you couldn't find a job, what were you going to do?

John: I want to create one, I want to make one.

Mark: And what did you tell me?

John: I told my Dad, I want to go into business with my Dad. And nice for us to have a business together.

Mark: I'm a lucky man...

John: Yes, you are.

Mark: I have three sons, and this is one I can work with.

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: So, okay, we'll go into business together. But now we had to figure out what were we gonna do. What was one of your ideas?

John: One of them was the food truck. I got the idea from the movie called 'Chef', by John Favreau, a movie about a father and son buying a food truck.

Mark: So, this seemed like a fun idea.

John: Right.

Mark: We got all excited: what would we make, where would we put our food truck...

John: I love hotdogs.

Mark: Right, you're big on the hotdogs, aren't you. But we ran into a problem.

John: We can't cook. (Laughs)

Mark: We can't cook. So... it wasn't going to be a food truck. But then, right before the US Thanksgiving, John had his 'Eureka!' moment.

John: Yes, he did. I wanted to sell crazy socks. Why socks? It's fun, it's colourful, it's creative. It always lets me be me. I want crazy socks in my life.

Mark: We used to drive around looking for these socks. So we figured this: if John loved them that much, surely other people did too. And we could find our tribe.

John: Right.

Mark: So...

(Slide change. Four photographs of John with different people, they all hold a red parcel. Title: Our Story Begins. The Lean Start Up. December 2016. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark on the right.)

Mark: We went about setting up an online socks store. You already had the name.

John: Yeah, I came up with a name, I come up here, I draw a website.

Mark: You're the one who said we should sell online. So we went the lean start up route. We started a website, we had a little bit of inventory, we were boot-strapping. Um, in bootstrapping, we once got asked what does that mean? It means, you have no money. (both laugh) But it means you have to make do with what you have. So the only marketing we did, was to set up a Facebook page. And I would take out my cell phone, and we made videos. And who was in those videos?

John: I am. I talked about socks. Socks, socks and more socks.

Mark: And we saw something. Those videos started spreading, people were sharing them. What day did we open?

John: We opened December 9th. 2016.

Mark: We weren't sure what to expect, but that first day, we got what felt like a flood of orders. We got forty-two orders. And most of them were local, which made sense. We lived in Huntington, you were in Huntington High School. We had temporary office space. So how did we deliver those first orders?

John: Home deliveries, we used red boxes, thank you notes and candy.

Mark: We loaded up the car, and drove around, and you knocked on doors delivering stuff.

John: Yeah, I knock knock knock.

Mark: How did the customers respond?

John: The customers said, I take a picture with me, I take a picture with the socks, put a picture of the example, share it on social media, word again spread.

Mark: We'd get customers ordering again, just to get John to come back to their door.

John: Right!

Mark: And whole families would be waiting, taking pictures with John.

John: Absolutely.

(Slide change. Black and white photograph of John and Mark. Title: Lessons Learned. Bulletpoints: People Want to Buy Socks; People Want to Buy Socks from John; We Learned that We Could Sell Socks. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark on the right.)

Mark: So by the end of that month, really two weeks, we had shifted 152 orders. And we knew we had something. Because, you learn by doing. So we learned, one:

John: One, people want to buy socks. Two, people want to buy socks from me. They related to me...

Mark: They related to John. They like that personal touch of the thank-you note from John and the candy. And even if they weren't getting it themselves, they liked the home deliveries. They liked the fact we'd already pledged five percent of our earnings to the Special Olympics. And, something caught us by surprise. We got a very emotional response from individuals and families, because they saw a young man with Down syndrome, starting his own business.

John: Right!

Mark: And you learn by doing, so you learn that this young man--

John: This old man...

Mark: This old man.. we could sell socks.

John: Right!

Mark: So, we've now grown the business, we're going to celebrate our seventh anniversary shortly, we've shipped 480,000 packages to 88 different countries, we've been able to create 34 jobs. 22 of those are held by people with differing abilities. And we've raised over 650,000 dollars for our charity partners. But we're going to show you a little video which will share some scenes and information about what it is we do here, at John's Crazy Socks.

(Video starts. [video is captioned] John and Mark walk into John's Crazy Socks. John opens the door for his father and Mark says thank you. John and Mark speak to the camera in a large room. Name overlays read: 'John Cronin, Co-Founder, John's Crazy Socks', and 'Mark Cronin, Co-Founder, John's Crazy Socks')

John: My name is John. This is my partner, my dad, Mark. We are John's Crazy Socks.

(Scene changes to a large room with metal shelves holding boxes of socks)

Mark: And what's our mission?

John: Our mission is 'Spreading Happiness!'

(Staff sorting socks of all colours, camera pans over colourful socks)

Mark: How many different socks do we have?

John: We have over 3000 different kinds of socks.

Mark: You know what that means?

(Mark and John walking past many shelves of socks, then back to facing camera)

Mark: John here is the owner of the world's largest sock store!

John: That's right.

(John wrapping socks in colourful paper, staff stapling thank-you notes, and packing and sorting socks)

Mark: And we have built our organisation on five pillars.

John: One, inspiration and hope. Two, giving back. Three, fun products you can love. Four, make it personal.

Mark: And five, make this a great place to work.

(Mark joking with staff member, and communicating with other staff members)

Mark: Are you spreading happiness?

Staff member: Yes!

Mark: A place where people are valued, and respected, and can do their best work. Making it personal, what goes in every package?

John: A thank-you note from me, and candy. (shot of note)

Mark: And every packing slip has a picture and the name of the person who packed that order. (shot of packing slips and collection boxes) Fun products you can love, we have to be a great e-commerce business. What we've created brings the power of business and social mission together.

(scenes of staff working, closeup of note from Ralph Norman, shot of a letter from George Bush. Letter reads: 'March 15, 2018. Dear John, Thank you so much for the generous gift. I am happy to see that you and I have the same taste in fun, colorful socks. Barbara and I are very thankful that you thought of us. In 1990, I was proud to sign into law the Americans with Disabilities Act. We knew that people with disabilities like, Down syndrome, are capable of doing amazing things if they are given the opportunity. You are a wonderful example of what Americans can do despite the challenges that they face. We are proud of all that you have accomplished in the past two years. Keep up the good work! All the best, G. Bush.)

Mark: Pretty good.

John: That's pretty awesome.

(various scenes of John at the Special Olympics, wearing medals, Mark and John holding up giant charity cheques for donation, John donating socks to different organisations)

Mark: Giving back is baked into everything we do. We started by pledging 5% of our earnings to the Special Olympics. John here has now donated over \$450,000 to our charity partners, and over \$100,000 to the Special Olympics.

John: I'm just getting started!

Mark: Just getting started, huh? Are you being a wise guy?

John: Yes, I am.

(Scenes of John, Mark and staff working at John's Crazy Socks)

Mark: The most important pillar to our business is inspiration and hope.

John: Inspiration and hope!

Mark: We want to show the world, what people with differing abilities can do. More than half our colleagues have a differing ability. 'Cause we focus on what people can do, not what they can't do. We are not blinded by somebody's limitations. We are awed by their possibilities.

(closeups of individual staff speaking)

John Bleecker (Sock Wrangler): Every day I am always excited to work here.

John Schneider (Sock Wrangler): Why I like working here is just being able to help others and being a team player.

Masoom Syed (Sock Wrangler): I feel understood here. Like, I can relate to these people 'cause they all have a disability and so do I.

(scenes of staff working)

Mark: It's not altruism, it's good business. They are ready, willing, and able to work.

John: And they work so hard, it's incredible.

Mark: We've been so fortunate in what we've been able to do with this business.

(Mark and John being interviewed on Fox News, Good Morning America, and speaking at the US Congress)

Mark: And it's given us a platform. That creates an obligation for us, that we have to go and speak for others who may not be able to speak for themselves.

John: (reading at the US Congress) I want you to know, what people like me can do, given a chance. Mark: Because at the end of the day, we're a couple of knuckleheads selling socks, right?

John: Yeah, we are.

Mark: But all we want to do is change the world.

John: Absolutely!

(black screen with music and text: When you support John's Crazy Socks, you help employ people with differing abilities. When you support John's Crazy Socks, you help us Give Back. Most of all, you help Spread Happiness. www.johnscrazysocks.com)

(Slide change. Photograph of John holding some socks. Title: A Simple Mission. Spreading Happiness. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark in right corner)

Mark: So we hope you like that video. It kind of tells the story of what we do, huh?

John: I love it.

Mark: So as we spoke about that video, we have a slightly different type of business model, it's a social enterprise. So we have both a social and a business purpose, and they feed off of each other. You know, this business world took a change going back to the 1960s, best summed up with Milton Freedman, the economist and fed reserve chairperson, he came out and announced that corporations only had one responsibility, and that was to their shareholders. We beg to differ. We think any organisation has an obligation to all of its

stakeholders, to whitt employers and customers, and community, and environment, in addition to stakeholders. You want to have a purpose, something that's bigger than ourselves. (turns to John) And for us, it's spreading happiness, right?

John: Yes, spreading happiness.

Mark: And these are not idle words. This drives our decision making. It drives our budget allocations. It's everything we're about. And in that film you heard us talk about our five pillars, that we've built the business on, inspiration and hope--

John: Inspiration and hope, giving back, products you can love, make it personal, and make this a great place to work.

Mark: And we're going to dive in a little bit on two of those.

(Slide change. Photograph of John and a woman holding cheques. Title: A Social Enterprise: Giving Back. Bulletpoints: Donate 5 percent of profits to the Special Olympics; Awareness Socks Raise Money for Charity Partners: NDSS; Autism Society of America, Gigi's Playhouse...; Gift Boxes and Auction Items; Autism Can Do Scholarship. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark in right corner)

Mark: So giving back is baked into everything we do. You've already heard John say that gratitude is doing for others. Well, those are the essential ingredients of happiness.

John: Yes, absolutely.

Mark: And we don't think that it's enough to just sell stuff. You gotta give back. So we start by pledging 5% of our earnings to the Special Olympics. And why the Special Olympics?

John: I am a Special Olympics athlete.

Mark: Yes, you are. What sports do you play?

John: Basketball, track and field, soccer, and snowshoe.

Mark: And how long have you been doing it?

John: Twenty-two years.

Mark: Twenty-two years. Well, I'll tell you, if there was no Special Olympics, there'll be no John's Crazy Socks. But we've gone on to do more. We've created these Awareness Socks, that celebrate causes in people, raise awareness, and raise money for charity partners. So what were the first awareness socks we created?

John: The very first one was Down syndrome awareness socks.

Mark: Down syndrome awareness socks. And who designed those?

John: I did. It was my design and my idea.

Mark: You did, right? John designed the world's first Down syndrome themed socks. And those raised money for the National Down Syndrome Society, NDSS. And...

John: And, ACDS.

Mark: That's where John went to pre-school.

John: Yes, I will come back soon.

Mark: Ah, that arrow only goes forward, son.

John: Forward, Dad (both laugh)

Mark: So we have a line of autism themed products. They raise money for the Autism Society of America. And cerebral palsy awareness socks.

John: And new socks already....

Mark: And we have the rescue socks. And we have the tribute socks, the police tribute socks which we've just introduced. We donate gift boxes and auction items. And this may

be of interest to people in the audience, we're sponsoring Autism Can Do Scholarship. It's an annual scholarship, the top prize is \$5000, there're three of them. To use in any way to advance your education and development. So, giving back is an essential part of what John's Crazy Socks does. And it's part of the experience we share with our customers, because they're part of that giving back. But the most important pillar for us...

(Slide change. Photograph of some of John's Crazy Socks' staff, including John. Title: A Social Enterprise: Inspiration and Hope. Bulletpoints: Showing What People with Differing Abilities Can Do; Hiring; Content; Engagement; Speaking Engagements; Advocacy. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark in right corner)

John: Inspiration and hope!

Mark: We want to show the world what people with differing abilities can do. We've shown with John, you have Down syndrome.

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: And we don't hide you in the back...

John: No, I am in the front.

Mark: You're the face of the business, right?

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: We do it with our hiring. So more than half of our colleagues have a differing ability. And there are little things we get to do. When we hire somebody, we have a ceremony, we all get together and present them with their business cards and their email address. It's a sign of their professionalism. And this year, is when Thomas is getting his first paycheck.

John: I think that's amazing.

Mark: We always celebrate when people get their first paychecks, because for many people, it's the first time they've ever had a job. But we have to do more than just hire people. We have to show the world. So we create content all the time. We're fortunate to have a large social media following, we've got 240,000 followers on Facebook; you've got what, 60-, 65,000 followers on TikTok--

John: Yes

Mark: --and something similar on Instagram, we have a YouTube channel. We want to show people as they are, what they can do. So no broccoli, nothing that your mother says, "Sit down and eat this, this is good for you", it's got to be entertaining, it's got to be fun. We host tours: we've had more than 2000 students come through our facility. We host work groups for social service agencies and high schools. We give people just a little taste of work. We've had more than a thousand people come through that programme. And now we can offer them virtually, so we've had classes from around the world, take tours of John's Crazy Socks.

John: Right.

Mark: We take on speaking engagements. And that's why we've been so grateful that we've been invited to speak here, at the fun and feisty Caregivers Summit. Because we want to spread the word, we want to show the world, we want to reach out. So, we've toured Canada, and the US, and Mexico, for personal events, and spoken round the world, in virtual events. (gesturing) You like that with the hands?

John: (imitates gestures) I love that.

Mark: And our business has put us in a position where people will listen to us. And that creates an obligation on our part, to speak up for others. So we do a lot of advocacy work. We've mentioned that we've testified twice before the US Congress, spoken twice at United Nations, we often meet with legislators to advocate for the rights of people with differing abilities. And here's an example. (looks at John) You know the story I'm gonna tell, right?

John: Yes.

Mark: We were down at Capitol Hill one day, and we got a phone call in the office, from a customer in Houston, saying 'My Mom works on Capitol Hill, and she's a big fan of John's, and would like to meet John. Do you think that's possible? And our colleague said 'Sure', and gave her my cell phone number, and said, 'Have your mother text Mark, we'll contact you.' Well, who was Mom?

John: Nancy Pelosi.

Mark: Nancy Pelosi. So you ask, we're in a bad way. Too often if we disagree with people, we villify them, and we forget their humanity. So forget where you are in the political spectrum. Among other things, Nancy Pelosi, she's an 80-year old Italian grandmother. We get to go in and meet with her, and she was so warm and nice to you...

John: Very nice.

Mark: And she took out pictures of socks that she had given former president Bush, George H.W. Bush, because John here, had somewhat famously, become sock-buddies, with the former president.

John: I did.

Mark: And this is all warm and wonderful and nice. But then, we have to take advantage of that opportunity.

John: Yes.

Mark: So we said, 'Ms Pelosi, we have to speak to you, about repealling, Section 14C of the Fair Labor Section Act, of 1938, which allows employers to pay people with a disability as little as 25 cents an hour. There're about 140,000 people being paid that way in the US, right now. It's outrageous. So we are working, with many others, to repeal that legislation and create new laws that give equal access to fair pay for everybody, including people with differing abilities. So that's what drives us here at John's Crazy Socks.

(Slide change. Photograph of John's Crazy Socks' staff, with a 'Spreading Happiness' sign behind them. Title: A Unified Work Place. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: And in creating this business, we have created a unified work place. Where people with differing abilities work side by side with neurotypicals, if you will. We focus on what people can do, not what they can't do. And you know, we're like any other business, we want to hire the best possible people for the salaries we can afford. To do that you have to include everybody. If you artificially exclude a population, well then, you can't hire the best possible people. And I want to be clear--

John: Yes

Mark: We're a business, it's not charity. We don't give jobs to anybody. If you got to know us, if you got to know John, you would know that he's a very nice guy.

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: I am not. If you're going to work for us, you have to produce. And that's part of the dignity. Everybody knows they belong. Everybody knows their job matters, and they're contributing. To spreading happiness. And I'll give you a concrete example.

(Slide change. Photograph of John Schneider. Title: Hiring Sock Wranglers. Bulletpoints: Requirements: Be able to work on your own, have basic life skills: arrive ready to work; Hiring Process: Meet with John and Mark, A current Sock Wrangler provides training, Pass the Sock Wrangler test. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: So much of what we do, is called fulfilment. And we are an e-commerce business, we sell online. People go to johnscrazysocks.com, they buy socks, they place an order, when it comes in you gotta pick it, pack it, send it out. So we run our own pick and pack warehouse. Anybody that sells online, you have to be able to fulfil orders. We run our own, because we're looking to create jobs, and because we try to personalise the service we provide. So what do we call our pickers?

John: Sock Wranglers!

Mark: Sock Wranglers! And there's John Schneider on the screen, he's a great Sock Wrangler. To get the job, you have to be able to work on your own. You have to be able to show up, and have basic life skills. Your job-coach, or staff person, or your parents can bring you, but they can't stay with you. We literally would not have enough room in our warehouse. Here's the hiring process. First you meet with John and me--

John: Yeah, me and my Dad

Mark: Because we want you to understand about our mission, and our values, and how we operate. We also want to make sure, that you want to be there. That you're not there because Mom and Dad want you to be there, or the job-coach wants you to be there. Then we'll train you. And one of our current Sock Wranglers will train you. (looks at John) You've trained people--

John: I've trained.

Mark: You like doing it?

John: I love it, Dad.

Mark: Our Sock Wranglers love that. And when it's time, you have to pass the Sock Wrangler's test. You have to pick six orders in 20 minutes or less. You have to show us you can do the job. Nothing extraneous, we're not asking you to do anything not related to the job. Just show us you can do the job. If you pass the test, you get the job. And this again is part of the dignity. Everybody who works with us knows they earned that job. They deserve to be there. There's no make-work job, there's no cog in the machinery-- (claps his hands)-- everybody is working towards that mission. If you ask John Schneider-- in fact, yesterday somebody interviewed him and said, 'What's your job about?'--his answer: I'm spreading happiness.

John: I love that!

Mark: You love that, don't you. And so what are the results of hiring people with differing abilities?

(Slide change. Photograph of John's Crazy Socks staff. Title: A Unified Work Place. Bulletpoints: Better Morale; Better Retention; Better Productivity; Helps with Recruiting. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: Well, better morale. It's a happy place.

John: Yes!

Mark: Better retention. In a day and age when people are quitting jobs, nobody leaves!

John: Except one.

Mark: Ohh, right, one. And it's all John's fault (points to John).

John: It's my fault.

Mark: Oh, you take responsibility now...

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: Christy, who'd worked with us for five years or more, managing our social media and email. She left, and said that it was John, who inspired her to leave. Well, Christy left to become a Special Education Teacher. So we think that's pretty cool, right.

John: Yes, I didn't mean it.

Mark: She's at the school now, she's got her first full-time job, we're really happy for Christy. A unified work place produces better productivity, and it helps us recruit. So, the lesson from that...

(Slide change. Photograph of a man and woman inside the John's Crazy Socks warehouse. Title: Changing the World of Work. Bulletpoints: Employers Need Good Workers; The Disabled Population is a Great Untapped Pool of Labor; Minimal Adaptations Needed; Competitive Advantage. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: We want to speak to other businesses. This is changing the world of work out there. Employers... we hear it all the time, they tell us they can't find enough good workers. There's a growing labour shortage in much of the West, in the US and in other countries. At the same time, we have this vast untapped pool of labour with people with differing abilities. It's easy: let's match them up. And we hear things like "Oh, but it will be expensive, what about adaptations, and all that can be scary. I listened to another warehouse operator, that we were encouraging to hire people, we heard, this guy tells me, "Well, it's different Mark, we have heavy machinery. Well, John here crosses our parking lot everyday. And you haven't been hit by a car in weeks, have you?

John: No, I haven't been hit in weeks.

Mark: We've considered this. One of the things we know, if we were to change a process, we don't just do it willy-nilly, we have to be very clear, we have to be very thoughtful about it, we have to communicate, we have to make sure everybody knows what's going on. Because if we just change without advanced warning, many of our colleagues-- that would be very difficult for them. Particularly on the autism spectrum. You can't upset them like that. Now, I ask you: being thoughtful, and documenting, and clearly communicating changes in process, is that an adaptation? Or is that just good business? Did that make us a better business? And what we have found, and other businesses have found, is hiring people with differing abilities gives you a competitive advantage. Where others cannot find enough workers, we have a surplus. Companies like Microsoft have found when they changed their hiring process, it gave them the ability to hire more programmers, that gave them a competitive advantage. IBM will tell you the story, about how they've hired one person with autism who changed some of their software offerings, won new patents and earned the

award of Employee of the Year. So we see this world changing. And it's to the advantage of people with differing abilities. But we've gone on about the big picture thing...

(Slide change. Photograph of Thomas. Title: Real Power of the Unified Workplace. Thomas's Story. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: It all comes down to the personal. So we want to tell you the story about Thomas. This is Thomas here, he's one of our Sock Wranglers. (looks at John) You like talking about Thomas, don't you.

John: I do.

Mark: So Thomas's mother first called us up in October 2017. She said, 'I hear you hire people like my son, I want you to hire my son.' And our colleague said, 'well, we don't have any openings and we'll post it on our website, our social media when we do. Well, she called everyday. Because she's a mom. And I spoke to her, and I said, tell me about Thomas. She said, 'well, he's in his early twenties, he's on the autism spectrum, he's fairly non-verbal but not completely so, and he's in a bad way. He's very depressed, and we can't get him to join any programs, we have trouble just getting him to come out of his room. He doesn't want to shower or shave, and he hasn't spoken to his father in over six months. Well, that sounds like a wonderful employee. When we had an opening, we said, bring Thomas out. And Thomas passed that Sock Wrangler test as if he was put on this Earth to be a Sock Wrangler. He does such a great job. And today, that young man in that picture there, when he's working, he's up at six-thirty in the morning, showered and shaved, and waiting for his father, to drive him an hour to work. And when he comes in the building, he goes around to everybody, and wishes them a good morning. And I want to be really clear. We did nothing. We have no special training, no special programs, no government support. All we did was give Thomas the opportunity to earn a job. And what a job he does, huh.

John: He did.

(Slide change. Photograph of six male staff of John's Crazy Socks in dark suits. Title: The Future? Bulletpoints: A Better World Awaits; Move from Awareness to Acceptance; Make Achievements of People with Differing Abilities Less Remarkable. Talking-heads circle of John and Mark to the right)

Mark: So. What we want to leave you with, is the idea that a better world awaits. We're moving from awareness to acceptance. John, you're twenty-seven?

John: Yes, I am.

Mark: The world is so much better now, than it was even twenty-seven years ago. And we're working to make the achievements of people with differing abilities less remarkable. If after watching this, you go out and stop at a Starbucks, and you see a person working there with Down syndrome. You're going to say something to somebody, you're going to remark on it. That makes it remarkable. Well, we want it to be so typical that you don't say anything, that we no longer remark on it, that it's no longer remarkable. So, thanks to people like you, a better world does await. Pretty good, right?

John: Pretty good.

(Scene changes to full screen of John and Mark speaking to the camera)

Mark: Well, John, we've covered a lot, huh?
John: Yeah, yeah we did!
Mark: We've spoken about the possibilities in everybody. We've told you the story of John's Crazy Socks. And the social enterprise we've created, with the unified work place, where people with differing abilities work side by side with neurotypicals. We've spoken about the power and dignity of work, and the changing work place. Let's send people out on a high note, John. What's your advice?
John: My advice: follow your heart, follow your dream. Work hard. Show you can do it!
Mark: Show you can do it! Alright, folks, well, we are John--
John: I'm John.
Mark: And Mark.
John: And Mark, my father!
Mark: From John's Crazy Socks. Where can people get great socks?
John: You can find us at johnscrazysocks.com
Mark: Alright, thank you folks! Bye!
John: Thank you very much! Bye! Have a wonderful day!

(Last slide. Text: Spreading Happiness. JohnsCrazySocks.com Logo and QR code)

<<video transcript ends, return to live audience in auditorium>>>

[2023/11/10 09:39] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): The transcript has been shared with everyone I am so buying socks for everyone for the holidays!
[2023/11/10 09:48] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): oh nice!
[2023/11/10 09:48] Carla Heartsong: (the video keeps interrupting here and it's not the internet.... might be very popular lol)
[2023/11/10 09:48] ♡ Andee ♡ (Andee Cooper): I bought socks for Xmas gifts
[2023/11/10 09:49] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): I can't help smiling while watching this
[2023/11/10 09:49] Vulcan Viper: Are you watching it on YouTube or here?
[2023/11/10 09:49] Carla Heartsong: ((YouTube so...))
[2023/11/10 09:49] ♡ Andee ♡ (Andee Cooper): I know right so wonderful
[2023/11/10 09:49] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): I am watching here - esp. with the subtitles right there
[2023/11/10 09:50] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): I am grinning ear to ear
[2023/11/10 09:50] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): It is a great video! We'll need to get the Cronins here for a return visit
[2023/11/10 09:50] Minka Angel (Saraminka Nova): wow that is a lot of socks =)
[2023/11/10 09:51] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): The website is a feast for the eyes and toes
[2023/11/10 09:51] Dianna Muircastle: I am here, listening. I am so glad I was able to make it!

[2023/11/10 09:51] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): Love the job title of Sock Wrangler

[2023/11/10 09:51] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): changing the world one foot at a time :)

[2023/11/10 09:51] ♡ Andee ♡ (Andee Cooper): YAY!!

CLAPS

[2023/11/10 09:52] Buffy Beale: Cheering, what a story!

[2023/11/10 09:52] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): So glad we could see this here - I'm looking forward to when they can actually come into SL and talk with us!!

[2023/11/10 09:52] Mook Wheeler: iSkye yes!

[2023/11/10 09:52] Lizard of ARS (Marylou Goldrosen): Fantastic Ideas/Examples!

[2023/11/10 09:52] ♡ Andee ♡ (Andee Cooper): I was so sad when I heard they could not be here

[2023/11/10 09:52] Elli Pinion: **** Cheering! **** So inspirational!

[2023/11/10 09:53] Buffy Beale: So right about corporate responsibility to all stakeholders!!

[2023/11/10 09:53] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): I like their fix the world approach

[2023/11/10 09:53] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): so true organisations have a duty and not to just shareholders.

The enthusiasm is amazing - I think being a social enterprise is such a great thing

[2023/11/10 09:58] Rhiannon Chatnoir: ooo they do virtual tours of their workplace.. maybe a future zoom/stream possibility here some day

[2023/11/10 09:58] Gentle Heron: Good idea!

[2023/11/10 09:59] Sarvana Haalan: Indeed!!

[2023/11/10 10:01] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): ooh that would be awesome Rhi! Maybe for their 'return' visit

[2023/11/10 09:59] Rhiannon Chatnoir: lol... 'so who is your mom.. Nancy Pelosi" ..

Love their story and the video and mission/drive/humor of it all

[2023/11/10 10:06] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): How are we doing everyone? Anyone finished the video yet?

[2023/11/10 10:06] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): it's still running

[2023/11/10 10:06] Marcus Llewellyn: I have about 7 minutes to go for the livestream side of this event.

[2023/11/10 10:06] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): :-)

[2023/11/10 10:06] ♡ Andee ♡ (Andee Cooper): still running here

[2023/11/10 10:06] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): that's about right for me too

[2023/11/10 10:07] Elli Pinion: Yes, still running.

[2023/11/10 10:08] Sarvana Haalan: Indeed the disabled population is an untapped pool of labor

Love Thomas' story.

[2023/11/10 10:10] Marcus Llewellyn: 2 minutes left for me on the livestream.

I want socks.

[2023/11/10 10:11] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): while achievements of people with differing abilities may become less remarkable - we need to also not forget that each person's contribution is appreciated and has value.

[2023/11/10 10:11] Delia Lake: What a WONDERFUL story! Thank you for featuring this.

[2023/11/10 10:11] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu): me too!

[2023/11/10 10:11] Marcus Llewellyn: 1 minute on livestream

[2023/11/10 10:12] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): Disabled people with real jobs and not just greeters at Walmart

[2023/11/10 10:12] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): yeah! absolutely

[2023/11/10 10:12] Vulcan Viper: Not only that, but some disabilities make a person particularly suited for a certain kind of work.

[2023/11/10 10:12] Sarvana Haalan: Awesome!!!

[2023/11/10 10:12] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): Give people the opportunity and the tools

[2023/11/10 10:12] Marcus Llewellyn: Livestream is back to here in SL.

[2023/11/10 10:12] Gentle Heron: Can someone please say this? "For more information on Down Syndrome, check out the poster set on Healthinfo Island.

<http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Healthinfo%20Island/21/63/32>"

[2023/11/10 10:13] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): there is a giver box next to the podium, on the floor for more information too

[2023/11/10 10:13] Buffy Beale: Wow that was amazing!!!! What a story!

[2023/11/10 10:13] Elli Pinion: Thank you, that was really inspirational!

[2023/11/10 10:14] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): That was a pair of REAL cheerleaders!!

[2023/11/10 10:14] ♡Andee♡ (Andee Cooper): amazing story, I hope soon we can get them here

[2023/11/10 10:14] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): That was a winner, good job organizers

[2023/11/10 10:14] Buffy Beale: I can't wait until they start selling SL socks!

[2023/11/10 10:14] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): Fun Buffy!

[2023/11/10 10:14] Gentle Heron: OH hmmm an SL sock store

[2023/11/10 10:14] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): now that would be soooo cool, Buffy

[2023/11/10 10:14] Lizard of ARS (Marylou Goldrosen): Remarkable -Love the Enthusiasm!!! Thanks!

[2023/11/10 10:14] Carolyn Carillon: Please post your questions here. We'll share them with John & Mark.

[2023/11/10 10:13] Gentle Heron: QUESTION for John and Mark- You work with people on the autism spectrum, and you work with people with Down syndrome. How do you support their unique needs, and how can they support each other?

--Remember, your questions WILL be answered!

<<answer provided by Mark Cronin>>

We start at a baseline: everyone who works here must be able to work on their own. And, as we described in our presentation, to get a job as a Sock Wrangler a person needs to pass our Sock Wrangler test to show us they can perform the work. We have created a supportive environment that starts when current stock wranglers train new sock wranglers. It creates an environment where people look to help each other. That they would you're very clear in our instructions and directions that teach the processes to our colleagues we have made things very simple so for

example, we have an addressed based warehouse so people can easily find the items they need to pick for an order.

We communicate in different ways with our colleagues because they learn in different ways so we will convey messages orally, in writing, and visually.

It helps that we have many people with differing ability working here so no one is alone or isolated. That critical mass matters. And we have created a unified workplace, so no one is isolated. By promoting teamwork, we encourage an approach where we help each other.

<<end of answer, return to audience in auditorium>>

[2023/11/10 10:17] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): any more questions? I'm curious how many of us would come here if John and Mark were to log in to SL for us to have a nice conversation with them? Learn more?

[2023/11/10 10:17] Rhiannon Chatnoir: but yes, that would be interesting getting their socks in world.. that could even be tied to buy one on the marketplace and for the right cost maybe even get the virtual and a RL pair.

that would be great

[2023/11/10 10:17] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): every one wear their socks when they talk LOL

[2023/11/10 10:18] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): oh that'd be so fun, Faith!

[2023/11/10 10:18] Mook Wheeler: wow, make some CrazySocks textures for SL socks

[2023/11/10 10:18] Buffy Beale: my vote is the first SL socks are tie-dyed!

[2023/11/10 10:18] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): VAI socks

[2023/11/10 10:19] Delia Lake: FYI, here's the John's Crazy Socks website.

<https://johnscrazysocks.com/>

[2023/11/10 10:19] Dianna Muircastle: If I had socks they designed in here, I mean for SL, I'd wear them.

[2023/11/10 10:19] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): I was searching the CrazySocks site and now my algorithms show me so many socks!

[2023/11/10 10:19] Mook Wheeler: that's it, LV, always

[2023/11/10 10:20] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): So many socks!

[2023/11/10 10:20] Rhiannon Chatnoir: ha! there are worse ads to get than socks

[2023/11/10 10:20] Carolyn Carillon: ANDEE: there are over 4k socks on that website! so cool

[2023/11/10 10:20] Dianna Muircastle: I missed the link. What is it, please?

[2023/11/10 10:20] Marcus Llewellyn: <https://johnscrazysocks.com/>

[2023/11/10 10:20] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): And in SL they could sell socks that no one else needs!

[2023/11/10 10:20] Gentle Heron: They even have compression socks

[2023/11/10 10:21] Rhiannon Chatnoir: Gentle, oh that is good! help circulation issues and good for traveling

[2023/11/10 10:21] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): Single socks for Mer
Merfolks

[2023/11/10 10:21] Dianna Muircastle: Socks for our mertails!

[2023/11/10 10:21] Marcus Llewellyn: Hmm... my hubby needs some snazzy compression socks.

[2023/11/10 10:21] Elektra Panthar: love the variety!

[2023/11/10 10:21] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): sock wrangler, I keep picturing a guy on a horse lassoing socks :)

[2023/11/10 10:22] Keif Denimore: It has to be up there amongst best job titles ever

[2023/11/10 10:22] Marcus Llewellyn: Well, they do tend to wander off if you don't watch them when you do laundry. ;)

[2023/11/10 10:22] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): LOL Pecos

[2023/11/10 10:22] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): I wonder they can keep the sock gnomes away

[2023/11/10 10:23] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): how true, Marcus

[2023/11/10 10:23] Delia Lake: only one of a pair wanders off

[2023/11/10 10:23] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): I find an occasional lone sock weeks after I was looking for them. Seems they pop up when you've given up finding them

[2023/11/10 10:23] Marcus Llewellyn: lol

[2023/11/10 10:23] Shyla the Super Gecko (KriJon Resident): like a game of hide-and-peek

[2023/11/10 10:23] Pecos Kidd: Whoopie ti-yi-yo, get along little compressions....

[2023/11/10 10:24] Linn Darkwatch: Dryers eat socks. Well-known fact. nod nod

[2023/11/10 10:24] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): now there's an idea for John and Mark: sock locator...

[2023/11/10 10:24] Faith Frances (Roxie Marten): It's the spinning action that opens a door to another dimension and your socks fall out :)

[2023/11/10 10:23] Mook Wheeler: 7 minutes to the next session

[2023/11/10 10:24] Sarvana Haalan: Tea time before the next session.

[2023/11/10 10:25] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): last chance to hit that info giver for the Cronins before it's taken up!