

The Best Job I Never Expected!

From Suit to Wings: A Metamorphosis of Purpose

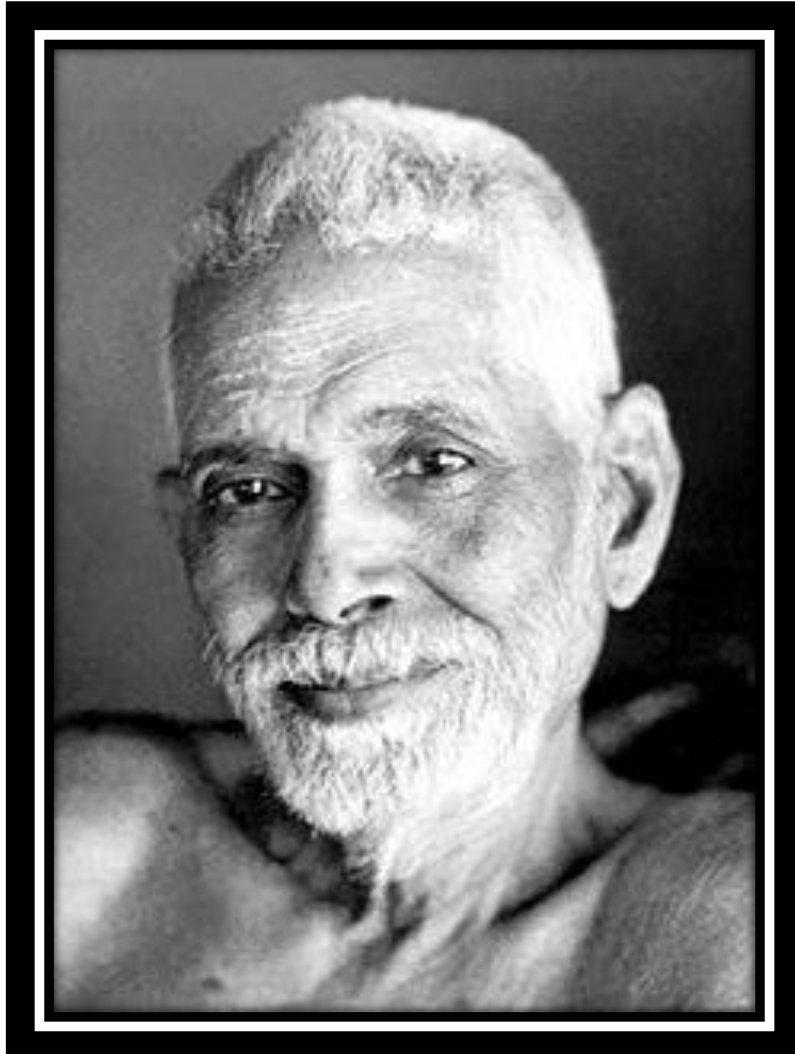


Sivasankar (Shiva) Jayagopal

June 2024

My humble Namaskarams to my beloved Guru –

Shri Ramana Maharshi



A higher power is leading you!
Be led by the same!
The higher power knows what to do and
How to do it!
Trust it!

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Who is this book for?

I wrote this book for all those who believe in kindness and paying it forward.

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The Unexpected Path to Purpose

Almost five decades ago, I was born in Bangalore (now called Bengaluru). Despite facing financial challenges growing up, I was able to secure a solid education through hard work and a little bit of luck. I attended excellent schools like Kalaimagal Kalvi Nilayam and Bharathi Vidya Bhavan in Erode, Tamil Nadu, and later completed my Engineering in Computer Science from REC, now known as NIT, Trichy. I was incredibly honored to receive the Distinguished Alumni award from my college.

My career started as a Software Engineer at Wipro, where I gained valuable experience for five years before moving to the USA to work at a company called IT Solutions, which later became Caritor and then Keane, now known as NTT Data. After spending five years in the USA, I returned to India and continued working at the same firm for over a decade. Following that, I had the opportunity to work at Adobe for a few years, and later at Microsoft for a little over a year.

While these experiences were valuable, the most transformative chapter unfolded later. As Founder Director of WinVinaya Infosystems and Founder Trustee and Chairperson of WinVinaya Foundation, I focused on training people with disabilities for employment in inclusive workplaces. Witnessing their success transformed me in ways I never imagined.

This book delves into that story – the challenges, triumphs, and profound impact of empowering others.

And get this – some parts of the book were even written with the help of a super-powered assistant Google Gemini/ ChatGPT, some paintings were created by Microsoft Designer (talk about the future!).

I also threw in some thoughts on what's coming next, and a few links to articles and best practices that I hope will be useful to you.

I wanted this e-Book to feel like we are chatting, so I used a casual, conversational tone as much as possible.

So, grab a seat, and let's dive into this journey together!



The Day My Mustache Got Schooled

My Wife, the Superhero

My wife Akila has always been a champion for people with disabilities. For almost 20 years, she's been working her magic in the field. Teaching visually impaired children, reading books they can record and replay, and helping them ace their exams! Then she went a step further, becoming a special educator for kids with autism, intellectual disabilities, the whole spectrum. Drama therapy, dance therapy – you name it, she learned it and used it to make a difference.

Me? Mmm..I loved training, mentoring, coaching my teammates, juniors when I was plugged into the corporate world, working for multinational companies. Volunteering happened occasionally, but it wasn't a regular thing. About 11 years back, I moved out of the corporate world and took a leap of faith – starting my own company, WinVinaya InfoSystems. No one in my family had ever done anything like that, and it was a whole new adventure. The pay wasn't as good as the corporates, but hey, at least I had more time on my hands.

Fast forward two years. I decided to volunteer again, this time training people with disabilities for software testing at an NGO - Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled. They assigned me a group of hearing and speech-impaired candidates. Now, get this: all of them were graduates, and they could lip-read!

The Moustache Mishap

The first day of training camp, and I launched into my software testing basics. I told them to try out a website and report back on what worked well and what issues they found...the usual drill. Everyone was quiet and seemed to follow my instructions. Feeling good about myself, I finished the class and headed out. But then, the coordinator pulled me aside.

"Shiva sir," he said, "all these candidates lip-read."

"Yes, sir," I replied, feeling a little confused.

"Well," he continued, "your moustache is quite thick, covering most of your lips. How do you expect them to lip-read?"

That hit me like a ton of bricks. I never even considered that.

"And sir," he added, "you were talking pretty fast during the training. Maybe slow it down a bit?"

Unlearn to Relearn

The next day, I showed up with a neatly trimmed moustache. On the front desk, I placed a big, bold note: "**TALK SLOW.**" The training went much smoother that time.

That day, I learned a valuable lesson: sometimes, the best way to understand someone is to see things from their perspective.



Nothing impressive ever started impressive...

Amy Jo Martin

From Doubt to Dreams: Our First Success Story

Akila and I often talked about giving back, a way to express gratitude for the opportunities we had received. For me, it was clear: empower people with skills that grant them dignity and independence. IT, with its vast potential, seemed the perfect path. Akila, ever the champion of underdogs, pushed for including those from underserved communities.

February 2016 marked the birth of WinVinaya Foundation, a humble trust nurtured within our own home. A few tables, some donated chairs, and used desktops – that was our initial setup. Our first batch? Three determined graduates with disabilities, eager to learn software testing and automation.

Coming from the corporate world, I designed training focused on practical application, not just theory. I pushed them to learn by doing, challenging them to reach their full potential. This wasn't always easy. One student, discouraged by the prospect of low-paying data entry jobs being the norm for graduates with disability, questioned the intensity. I didn't have a magic answer, so I simply encouraged him to focus on learning – the results would speak for themselves.

And speak they did! Luck struck with an interview opportunity at a major consulting firm. Incredibly, all three graduates landed software testing jobs! News travels fast, and soon, our next batch of students arrived with a newfound confidence. They weren't just coming for training; they were demanding it – demanding entry into the world of software testing, not the confines of data entry.

This shift in mindset – from acceptance to aspiration – marked a turning point for WinVinaya.



We have to dream...
How else will we make a future
that does not yet exist?
- Simon Sinek

From Bengaluru to Tiruppur: How a Friend's Kindness Launched a Movement

Remember that first year in Bengaluru, feeling the energy of starting something new? Well, a year later, things got even crazier (in a good way!). A friend of a friend, Suresh Manoharan, heard about WinVinaya's mission and was totally inspired. He offered to set up a whole training centre in his hometown, Tiruppur! We couldn't believe it!

Just a few months later, we headed down to Tiruppur. Suresh had set us up with an amazing training facility, complete with accessible ramps – and the best part? He generously donated the space rent-free. Talk about a lucky break!

Together with "The Manoharan Charitable Trust," we created the Centre for Career Advancement (C2A) – a place where magic happens. We started by training two employees in accounting software. While we were mobilizing candidates for the training, something incredible happened.

A whole bunch of women approached us, eager to learn. Now, these weren't your typical tech-savvy candidates. Many of them were married, some with kids, and none of them had ever touched a computer. They didn't have the resources for typing or accounting classes, but their determination was unreal.

We were so moved by their spirit; we decided to take a chance and train them anyway. We covered everything from computer basics to typing to mastering Microsoft Office and accounting software. And guess what? It paid off! These women, many of whom were homemakers, landed full-time or part-time jobs. They gained valuable skills that not only helped their families financially but also empowered them to teach their kids some cool tech stuff.

Ripple Effect

One day, a woman from a local community walked through our doors. She wasn't necessarily looking for a job, but for a chance to learn and grow personally which she missed because of early marriage and family responsibilities. Our training usually focused on getting people hired, but her desire to learn was so genuine, we had to make an exception. And let me tell you, she was a rockstar! She picked things up super-fast and mastered everything we threw at her.

This experience made us realize something important: there's a whole world of needs out there beyond just job training. Soon after, a group of amazing girls who just finished high school came to us with a dream. In their community, college wasn't always an option, and many girls got married after 12th grade. But these girls were different. They wanted to use part-time jobs to pay their college fees, take some of the financial burden off their families, and keep on learning.

We were blown away by their ambition! Of course, we got them the training they needed. Many landed part-time jobs and successfully enrolled in college.

This story is a perfect example of how our work creates a ripple effect. One opportunity can blossom into so many amazing things, empowering women and young people to build their own path to a brighter future. It's pretty darn inspiring, right?



We are all leaves of one tree.
We are all waves of one sea.

Creating Role Models – Breaking the Sound Barrier

Two years into WinVinaya Foundation (2018), and we were rocking and rolling, training grads with disabilities in all sorts of tech skills – from coding in Java and SQL database to software testing and automation. Then, one day, a group of 14 graduates with hearing and speech impairment joined us. They all knew sign language, but there was a hitch: we didn't! Thankfully, with a little divine intervention (or maybe just good luck!), we found a fantastic NGO - Enable India that sent sign language interpreters our way. Boom! We were back in business, teaching these talented students all about software development.

The crazy part? There were tons of technical terms that didn't even have signs in Indian Sign Language (ISL)! Can you imagine who helped to create some new ones? Our awesome deaf students with some guidance from us! We were basically inventing our own tech-speak sign language.

A month later, some bigwigs from a Fortune 500 company showed up, curious about our training programs. They were on the hunt for a whole bunch of talented grads with disabilities for their software development team. Now, this was their first-time hiring people with disabilities, so they were specifically looking for grads with locomotor disability who also knew Java and SQL.

After chatting for a while, I threw them a curveball. I told them, "Hey, why don't you try communicating with the students in the deaf batch directly?" They were a little confused, but up for the challenge. They started asking questions like, "Can you write a program to reverse a string?"

Here's where things got interesting. One of the deaf students could lip-read, and she quickly turned around to translate the question into sign language for everyone. Surprise... Surprise... Half the deaf students nailed the answer! The company folks were so impressed, they decided to interview not just the deaf students, but a whole bunch of other talented grads with disabilities too.

We were ecstatic! A month later, we sent about 30 students for interviews, and 13 of them landed jobs – 9 of them were deaf, that's almost 70%! The best part? This

company didn't care about their 10th or 12th grade marks, or even their college grades. They just saw raw talent and potential.

The next batch of students who came for training had one request: train us so we can get jobs at that awesome Fortune 500 company! It became clear that people with disabilities were looking for role models, folks they could see themselves becoming. And in our own small way, with the help of so many incredible people, we were helping to create those role models.



It Always Seems Impossible

Until It Is Done

- Nelson Mandela

Grit Over Grades: A Disability Hiring Game Changer

Rethinking Recruitment

When I was in the corporate world, I recruited thousands of college grads. I selected them based on their grades, performance in aptitude tests, coding tests and interviews. I never really stopped to think about the amazing journeys they took to even get to that point. The time had come for me to learn something new in life.

Overcoming Challenges, Landing dreams

In late 2018, Jayashree, a graduate with a locomotor disability, walked into WinVinaya with her mom, beaming with pride. She had landed the job at the Fortune 500 company!

We were curious about her journey, so we sat down with her mom. Her mom's voice trembled slightly as she recounted Jayashree's early struggles. When Jayashree was born, they were understandably worried. Finding schools that would accept her was a nightmare – most slammed the door shut. But they persevered, and finally, one school gave her a chance. Jayashree thrived, excelling in her studies. Even when they had to switch schools, Jayashree's intelligence shone through during an admission test meant for older students. College wasn't easy either, but she completed her MCA degree.

Jayashree then picked up the thread of the story. "Even though getting into schools was tough," she said, "I never gave up hope. I studied hard and gave it my all. The problem was, after graduating with my MCA, no company would give me a chance. That's when I found WinVinaya. Here, I learned Java, SQL, and even improved my English communication. I landed a job at a big IT consulting firm, but it fell through because of a single bad grade from when I had dengue fever during my school boards. My overall scores were great, but that one grade held me back. I was crushed."

But then, the tide turned. The Fortune 500 company saw her potential, not just marks. They hired her based on her skills, and she's been thriving there for over five

years now! She's even gotten a promotion and become the sole breadwinner of her family. It's a beautiful reversal – the person with a disability is now supporting three people without disabilities.

Jayashree's story deeply impacted me. Her starting point and the obstacles she faced were vastly different from mine. But her intelligence was undeniable. Marks on a paper couldn't capture her true potential. What mattered most was her incredible grit and dedication – qualities that are essential for success in today's ever-changing world.

This experience made me realize that true opportunity isn't about treating everyone exactly the same. It's about providing a level playing field, with some flexibility.

Companies need to be open to providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.

[Watch Jayashree's inspiring story here.](#)



Equal Opportunity

Equitable Opportunity

As you can see in the picture above, just by providing reasonable accommodation like a wooden table for a short girl, ramp for a wheelchair user – everyone can enjoy the game.

When corporates offer reasonable accommodations (like Wheelchair Access, Sign Language Interpreters, Screen Readers etc...), they are providing equitable opportunities.

This is very essential to integrate PWDs in the workplace.



Do not Judge me by my successes...
Judge me by how many times
I fell down and
Got back up again

-Nelson Mandela

Training for Neurodiversity: A Different Ball Game

Unfolding a New Chapter

One day, a few parents came knocking on our door. Their kids, all young adults between 20 and 30, were on the neurodiversity spectrum, and they were hoping we could teach them some digital skills.

Now, up until then, we were basically running our training program out of our living room – even the garden got pressed into service sometimes! It wasn't exactly ideal for training people with neurodiversity. So, we started hunting for a rental space, and luckily, we found a great little independent house right in our neighbourhood. We kitted it out with tables, chairs, and even managed to snag some used laptops from some generous corporate donors. We were ready to go!

Play to their strength

Training our first group on the neurodiversity spectrum was an eye-opening experience. Traditional interview methods fell short – contextual questions proved difficult. We figured that if we could train them on something they could showcase with a finished product, interviewers would see their skills and give them a chance. We embraced a project based approach using Microsoft Power BI for creating data visualizations.

Finding the right pace was the next hurdle. We started slow, with limited hours, gradually increasing the training duration. Although initial concepts like dashboard design proved challenging, a hidden strength emerged. Given a blueprint, even a simple sketch, these students transformed them into stunning Power BI creations, complete with charts, visuals, and vibrant colour schemes – the dashboards were truly remarkable!

However, despite their amazing work, securing placements for this first batch proved difficult. Discouraged but not defeated, the pandemic forced a shift to online learning. In 2022, we restarted training for candidates in the neuro divergent spectrum, focusing on Microsoft Excel fundamentals and data entry using the user-friendly Zoho Books.

This simplified system allowed them to identify invoices and bills, bypassing the complexities of accounting.

This time, it was a resounding success! We placed 5 students in back-end jobs at a Fortune 500 company!

The joy was truly contagious! When one parent shared their journey – from struggling to find "me-time" to celebrating their child's first pay check – it felt like a dream come true. There wasn't a dry eye in the house that day. It was a powerful moment, not just about jobs, but about seeing the whole family benefit, with neurodiversity celebrated as a strength.

We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity and batching people.

We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture.

**We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process;
it's an organic process.**

And you cannot predict the outcome of human development.

All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish

From Offline to Impact: WinVinaya's Innovation

Did you know there are over 3 million NGOs in India? Back then, WinVinaya was one of the few teaching IT skills to people with disabilities. We were getting requests left and right to open new WinVinaya centres all over the country.

But here's the thing: quality matters. We weren't interested in just expanding if it meant compromising on how well we trained people. So, we came up with a solution: create top-notch learning materials and assessments, all accessible in the cloud.

This online approach became even more crucial as the number of deaf students we trained skyrocketed – almost 70% within just two years! We offered a range of courses – full-stack Java development and software testing for those with STEM backgrounds, and financial accounting, core banking, and MS Office for students from arts and commerce backgrounds. There were not enough qualified trainers who could teach the deaf effectively and there weren't self-learning materials available in ISL, which they can learn beyond their classrooms.

We knew regular textbooks wouldn't cut it for everyone. So, we wanted to offer our learning materials in both English and Indian Sign Language (ISL). Luckily, we found some incredible partners who were on the same page (pun intended!). Amphisoft generously let us use their online learning platform for free, Chippersage shared their English courses, and Yunikey created fantastic courses entirely in ISL. Talk about teamwork!

We believe learning by doing is the best way to go. That's why we swap out the traditional tests (you know, the ones with a million fill-in-the-blanks) for assessments that are fun and engaging. We even use pictures to help people develop their English comprehension and writing skills. It keeps things interesting and makes sure everyone's actually understanding the material. In fact, forget lectures – a whopping 90% of our courses are hands-on! We are talking practice exercises, assessments, and projects – the good stuff that really helps you learn.

Let me tell you, building online modules on top of our regular training was no easy feat. Long hours became our new normal. But then, COVID hit, and our office had to

shut down. Thankfully, all that groundwork we laid with online platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, and the online modules we were already creating, came to the rescue! Within a month, we launched WinVinaya Academy on the cloud – talk about perfect timing!

We were one of the few NGOs in India that kept the training going smoothly during that crazy time. But it gets even better! We opened up WinVinaya Academy to inclusive colleges that were struggling to find ways to effectively train students with disabilities. WinVinaya Academy became a lifesaver for them, helping them meet their skilling needs.

And the cherry on top? WinVinaya Academy even went on to win several innovation awards, including ones from NASSCOM Foundation and ATF Labs. Sometimes, it really is true – adversity can spark the best innovations!

PETER DRUCKER



**The best way to predict the future
is to create it...**

Beyond Labels - Learning from People with Disabilities

Early on at WinVinaya, we used the phrase "differently abled" in our tagline. We didn't want to use the word "disability" because we worried it might be offensive. But after a couple of years, one of our trainees challenged that thinking. He told me straight up that disability is part of his identity, and he's proud of it!

That conversation opened my eyes. We talked to more trainees, and most of them felt comfortable using the term "disability." We also learned that the United Nations encourages using "person-first" language. So, it's "person with a disability," not "differently abled" or "specially abled." It's about respecting their identity.

Here's another thing: we don't get to define what's "normal" for someone else. It's all about listening and using the right terms which they are comfortable with. **“Nothing about them, without them”**

For example, instead of "wheelchair bound," which sounds restrictive, "wheelchair user" is a more accurate phrase.

We have also noticed subtle biases in everyday language. Visualize this - you are at a traffic light and a beggar asks for help. Saying, "You're not disabled, why are you begging?" implies that disability equals being incapable. That's simply not true!

Another example: someone bumps into you, and you blurt out, "Are you blind? Don't you see I am here?" Many people with visual impairments navigate just fine. A better phrase? "Please be careful when walking."

The truth is: people with disabilities are just like everyone else. They have passions, talents, and dreams. Take our visually impaired colleague who loves earrings! She shops for them herself, proving disability doesn't mean giving up on things you enjoy.

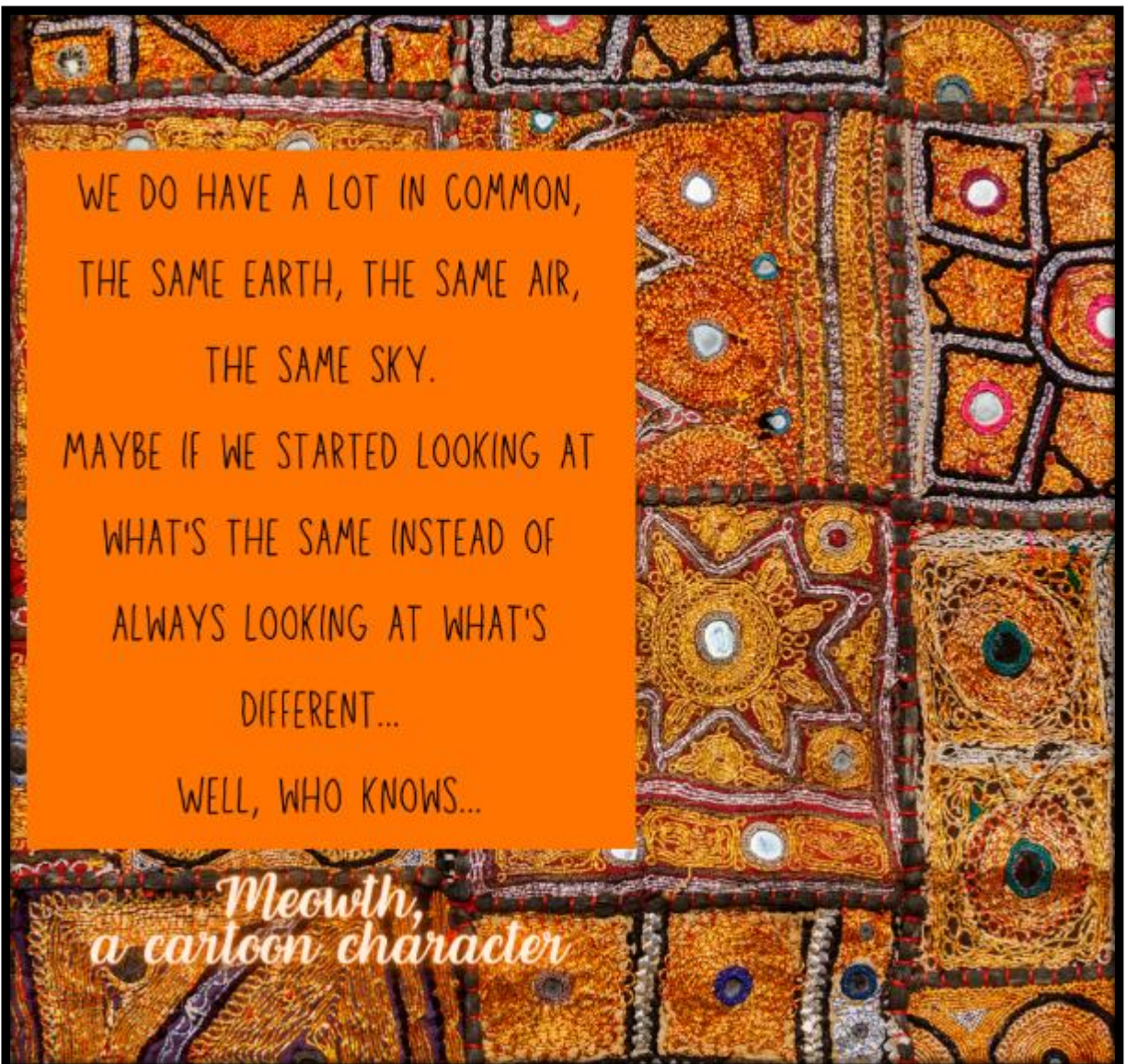
We have deaf colleagues who love to dance! They feel the music through their bodies, even without sound. How many of us can say that?

One of our trainees with Cerebral Palsy walks with a wobble, but that didn't stop her from wanting to dance in one of our events! She even choreographed a group number and got the best out of other dancers!

This extends to learning too. We once trained a company's employees with hearing impairment on Microsoft Power BI, a data visualization tool. Then, an employee with visual impairment insisted on learning it too! We weren't sure it would work, but our trainer found accessible features in Microsoft Power BI and successfully trained our employees with Visual Impairment who then trained the company's employees with visual impairment.

This taught us a valuable lesson: never assume what someone with a disability can or can't do. Give them options, let them choose.

We even trained our employees across disabilities in roller skating! If you ever visit WinVinaya, we would be happy to show you how our employees with visual impairment glide on wheels!



WE DO HAVE A LOT IN COMMON,
THE SAME EARTH, THE SAME AIR,
THE SAME SKY.

MAYBE IF WE STARTED LOOKING AT
WHAT'S THE SAME INSTEAD OF
ALWAYS LOOKING AT WHAT'S
DIFFERENT...

WELL, WHO KNOWS...

*Meowth,
a cartoon character*

Letters in the dark: A friendship forged in ink.

In the early 1800s, Countess Carolina Fantoni da Fivizzano was turning blind, and she could no longer write with her quill pen. Writing private letters, a source of solace and connection suddenly became impossible. Her dear friend Pellegrino Turri, a skilled mechanic, watched her struggle. Inspired by her plight, Pellegrino built a special machine with keys and metal arms. Pressing the keys made letters appear on paper! But regular ink wouldn't work. Pellegrino wasn't done yet! He invented a special kind of paper, like magic, it copied the typed letters!

Carolina's hand hovered over the keys, a touch of trepidation giving way to wonder. With a hesitant press, the first letter appeared – a perfect "C." Tears welled up in her eyes as she typed out a message, the rhythmic click-clack a victory anthem. The letters she wrote, some of the oldest surviving typewritten pieces in existence, were testaments to the power of friendship and innovation.

The typewriter, born from compassion and human ingenuity, had a far greater impact than anyone could have foreseen. It wasn't just Carolina who regained her voice; millions found theirs. This invention, sparked by a need to overcome disability, irrevocably changed the world, shaping the course of history, one typed letter at a time.

The typewriter, a testament to the power of human ingenuity born from compassion, had irrevocably changed the world. It had not only given Carolina her voice back but had given a voice to millions, shaping the course of history, one typed letter at a time.

**Many assistive technologies, designed to support
people with disabilities,
end up improving experiences for everyone.**



Innovation is not born from the dream...

Innovation is born from the struggle

- Simon Sinek

A Solution for People with Disability benefits all...

Please look at the pictures below and answer - How many will benefit from a ramp on a sidewalk?



Through a Clear Lens: A tale of 2 India

Rani squinted at the bustling marketplace in 18th century Delhi. Spices overflowed from baskets, their vibrant colours a confusing mess. The intricate designs on the silk sarees shimmered like mirages, their details lost in a haze. Rani longed to be a weaver like her grandmother, to tell stories through the threads, but her blurry vision made even threading a needle an impossible feat. The cruel whispers of "Andha Rani" (blind Rani) followed her everywhere, a constant reminder of her limitations.

Centuries later, in the heart of modern Bengaluru, Ishaan confidently navigated the crowded train station. His stylish, round spectacles framed his intelligent eyes. Without them, the world would be a chaotic dance of shapes and colours, but with them, details came into sharp focus. Ishaan wasn't "Andha" – he was a gifted astrophysicist, his mind filled with constellations and nebulae. His glasses, far from a mark of disability, were a key that unlocked the universe's secrets.

One evening, while presenting his latest research on a cosmic phenomenon, Ishaan noticed an elderly man in the audience who seemed strangely familiar. The man squinted back, a flicker of Rani's frustration in his furrowed brow. It was a historian, sharing his research on the challenges faced by people with limited vision in ancient India.

As Ishaan listened, a wave of empathy washed over him. Rani, with her curiosity about the stars and unfulfilled dreams, could have been his ancestor. Yet, here he was, living proof of how a simple invention like eyeglasses could change a life.

Later, Ishaan approached the historian. "What if Rani had a pair of spectacles, even basic ones. Maybe she would have become a renowned weaver, her designs as intricate as the constellations themselves." The historian's eyes widened. "Indeed," he breathed, "perhaps a weaver, a scholar... the possibilities are endless."

Ishaan smiled. Eyeglasses, once a tool for correction, were now a symbol of limitless potential. They didn't erase limitations, but they empowered people to see the world

in all its vibrant detail, to chase their dreams, and to weave their own stories, thread by clear thread.

Centuries ago, poor eyesight could have significantly limited a person's ability to function.

The invention of eyeglasses, a revolutionary assistive device, transformed the lives of millions by enabling them to work, learn, and participate fully in society.



It doesn't hurt to keep looking for sunshine...

-Eeyore (Disney Cartoon Character)

The Untapped Power: A Story of Inclusion and Opportunity

In a world where 1.3 billion people, a staggering 15% of humanity, face challenges simply navigating their daily lives. These are the Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), a vibrant and diverse community often overlooked by businesses. But what if I told you this wasn't just a challenge, but a hidden opportunity?

Meet Aisha, a young entrepreneur brimming with ideas. Her dream? To launch a revolutionary fitness app. But as Aisha delves deeper into market research, she stumbles upon a surprising statistic: according to the World Bank, PWDs and their families represent a potential market of 3.4 billion, with a combined disposable income of a whopping \$2 trillion! This untapped market potential sparks a new fire in Aisha's heart.

However, Aisha knows success in this market requires a shift in perspective. She dives into research, user testing sessions with PWDs, and collaborates with disability advocacy groups. Aisha's team revamps their app, ensuring it's accessible for users with visual or hearing impairments. They design user-friendly interfaces, integrate voice commands, and offer diverse workout options catering to various abilities.

Aisha doesn't stop there. She understands the power of inclusion. She recruits talented individuals from the PWD community, enriching her team with diverse lived experiences. Her innovation team thrives with fresh perspectives, leading to the development of features that benefit everyone, not just PWDs.

Aisha's commitment to accessibility extends beyond the app. Their office becomes a beacon of inclusivity, with ramps, wider doorways, and accessible restrooms. The customer service team undergoes rigorous training to understand and cater to specific needs with empathy and respect.

The results? Aisha's app becomes a runaway success, not just within the PWD community, but with everyone seeking a more accessible and inclusive fitness experience. Word-of-mouth spreads like wildfire, fuelled by the exceptional customer service and the positive impact on users' lives.

Aisha's story is a testament to the power of inclusion. By understanding the needs of PWDs, businesses can unlock a vast market potential while creating a more equitable and accessible world for everyone. It's a win-win, a chance to not just sell a product, but to make a real difference.

Take a moment and ponder...

- ❖ Before reading Aisha's story, did you consider the market potential of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)? Why or why not?
- ❖ What are some concrete steps you can take in your own life to be more inclusive and understanding of people with different disabilities?
- ❖ What are some ways we can actively seek out and learn from diverse perspectives, especially those from the disability community?

VALA AFSHAR



**IF YOU ONLY SEE ONE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM,
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM...**

My Aha Moment: Hiring Beyond the Resume

Let me tell you, I used to think I had the golden ticket to hiring success. Great schools, top companies, leading teams – I'd seen it all. My system was flawless, or so I thought: high marks, perfect English, aptitude tests, coding challenges, interviews – the usual suspects. It felt foolproof, right? Wrong!

Then, reality hit me like a ton of bricks. Remember Srinivasan Ramanujan, the math genius from my hometown (Erode, by the way)? He famously failed in one of his English exams. My old system would have shut him out! That's when I realized I was missing out on a massive pool of incredible talent.

The truth hit me again while leading the software testing practice at a major IT consulting firm. We decided to shake things up and try a new approach – finding hidden gems who might not have the perfect resumes but had the drive and work ethic to succeed. And you know what? It was a game-changer!

From Classrooms to Code: Seeing Potential, Not Pedigrees

Fast forward a few years, and I co-founded WinVinaya Foundation, training people with disabilities for tech jobs. Working with these amazing individuals shattered my hiring assumptions even further.

Here were people who might have had a rough academic journey, but their coding skills surpassed some straight-A students out of the water. It became crystal clear – grades simply don't paint the whole picture.

Many of these students had faced constant rejection – schools, jobs, everywhere they turned. But they never gave up. They were determined, dedicated, and hungry to learn. The question was: how would they translate that into real-world work?

So, we took a leap of faith and started hiring people with disabilities at both the foundation and our private company. Here's what we discovered: if you set realistic expectations for the first year (say 40-50% productivity compared to others), and gradually ramp them up over the next two years, it works wonders!

The New Hiring Blueprint: Ditch the Cookie-Cutter

So, what does a good hiring process look like to me now? Forget the one-size-fits-all approach! We're looking for people who are enthusiastic learners, determined problem-solvers, and aren't afraid to learn from their mistakes.

Here's the breakdown:

- **Education Background? Not a Dealbreaker:** Fresh out of college? Awesome! Gaps in your education? No worries! We care about potential, not just past experiences.
- **Grades Don't Define You:** We would rather see how you think with puzzles and exercises, not how well you memorized facts.
- **Let's Talk!:** We want to get to know the real you – your interests, your journey, what makes you tick.
- **Need Extra Time? We Got You:** Feeling a little nervous? No problem! We offer extra prep time to ensure you feel confident.
- **"Learn and Earn" Program:** At WinVinaya, we have a unique program where potential hires can become paid interns. This lets us see their work ethic, learning agility, and how they collaborate with others. If they're a fantastic fit, we offer them full-time roles. If not, we extend their internship to help them develop further.

Everyone's story is unique. Why force everyone through the same boring process? Our differences, like fingerprints, are what make us stronger!

Building Dream Teams: It's All About the People

Let's face it, the old hiring routine was getting stale. It felt like companies were searching for robots, not real people! But trust me, the best teams are built with diverse individuals who bring unique talents and perspectives to the table.

That's why I'm excited about these new hiring methods companies are using. Take "Train & Hire" for example. Here's the beauty. You can find someone with raw potential and then equip them with the training they need to thrive? It's like discovering a hidden gem and polishing it into something amazing.

Or what about "Intern/Apprentice/Contractor to Hire"? It's like a test drive for both the company and the candidate. You get to see how they work in your environment, and they get to see if the role is a good fit.

And of course, there's always the classic "Full-Time Hire" approach. But even there, focusing on diversity is key. Look beyond the usual suspects and consider people from different backgrounds and experiences. You might be surprised by the talent you uncover!

The point is there's no one-size-fits-all approach to hiring. When we embrace different methods and focus on finding the right people, not just the ones with the fanciest resumes, we create magic. We build teams that are innovative, adaptable, and truly unstoppable. And that's a win for everyone – the company, the employees, and the customers we serve. So, let us toss the cookie-cutter approach and start building dream teams, one talented individual at a time!

Tip: Instead of trying to match disabilities to specific jobs, let's open all roles and only exclude those demonstrably unsuitable.

For example, someone who is deaf wouldn't be a good fit for a voice processing role. However, they could likely excel in most other positions.



It is not about what it is...
It is about what it can become...

- DR SEUSS -

Unleashing the Superpowers: Training PWDs for Tech Domination!

Ever wondered how to turn awesome people with disabilities (PWDs) into digital rockstars? At WinVinaya Foundation, we've been on this mission for years, and let me tell you, it's been incredible! We've learned a ton about building training programs that don't just teach, they empower. Here's the inside scoop on crafting a program that unlocks everyone's potential.

Building the Superhero Suit: Crafting Your Training Course

What if, we had a training program that fits each person with a disability, like a perfectly tailored suit. This "suit" equips them with the skills and knowledge to conquer the digital world. Here's what goes into building it:

- **Real-World Ready:** We go beyond just teaching tech jargon. We focus on communication skills and understanding the industry. This is especially important for PWDs, since many come from backgrounds with limited access to formal communication training.
- **Tailored Training:** Not all disabilities are the same. Someone who is deaf might need sign language tutorials or clear closed captions. Someone with visual impairments might benefit from audiobooks and video descriptions. We adapt the training based on each individual's needs.
- **Constant Improvement:** We don't just throw things at the wall and hope they stick. We constantly review and improve the program with the help of professionals and, most importantly, the amazing PWDs themselves.

Prepping for Launch: Gearing Up for Success

Before we blast off with training, we make sure everyone has the tools and support they need to succeed. Consider of this as a pre-rocket check:

- **Skills Check & Career Compass:** We assess everyone's current skills and interests to find the best career fit. We also talk openly about options, salary expectations, and even relocation if necessary.
- **Gearing Up:** Does everyone have a stable internet connection and the assistive devices they need? Especially for online training, having the right tools is crucial.

Liftoff! The Training Experience: Where the Magic Happens

This is where the real fun begins! Here's what makes our training program soar:

- **Small Teams, Big Impact:** We keep our training groups small (about 5 to max 20 people) and extend the training time compared to other programs. This allows everyone to learn at their own pace and get personalized support.
- **Learning Together, Working Together:** We create a supportive environment where everyone can learn from each other. We use buddy systems, games, and even storytelling to make learning an adventure.
- **Real-World Ready:** We bring in companies to conduct workshops and offer internships. This gives trainees a taste of the real world and helps them build connections. We also train our trainers to be extra-effective and make sure all assessments are accessible.
- **Trainer's Toolkit:** Our trainers are the real rockstars! They use lots of practice questions, regular check-ins, and assessments specifically designed for PWDs. Breaking down tasks and using clear language are key ingredients for success.

Finding the Perfect Training Team: A Blend of Experience

We've discovered that the best training teams are a powerful mix of trainers from within the disability community and those from outside. Here's why:

- **Community Connections:** Trainers with disabilities can share relatable experiences and explain concepts in a way that resonates with the trainees. It fosters a sense of understanding and shared journey.

- **Broadened Perspective:** Trainers from outside the disability community bring a different perspective and expertise to the table. This ensures a well-rounded training program.
- **For example:** When training deaf candidates, we include both deaf and hearing trainers. Deaf trainers provide relevant examples and concepts in sign language, while hearing trainers offer additional insights and communication techniques.

By combining these strengths, we create a training environment that's not only accessible but also fosters a deep understanding of the subject matter.

Mission Control: Feedback and Improvement

We don't just launch the rocket and hope for the best. We constantly gather feedback from everyone – trainees, trainers, and companies – to see what's working and what needs tweaking. This feedback loop helps us keep improving and make sure our training program stays mission-critical!

The Final Word: It's All About Potential

Training PWDs requires a flexible and thoughtful approach. By understanding their unique needs and creating an inclusive environment, we can unlock their potential and help them achieve incredible things. This WinVinaya training framework is just a launchpad – feel free to adapt it and make it your own! Together, we can create a world where everyone has the chance to shine in the digital world!



***THE BEST WAY TO
FIND OUT IF IT WILL
WORK IS TO DO IT***

SIMON SINEK

From Application to Awesome: Your Guide to an Inclusive Hiring Process

Picture this! A dream team where everyone feels valued, respected, and like they can totally crush it! That's what building a truly inclusive team is all about. By focusing on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), you can make this dream a reality.

At WinVinaya Foundation, we've been working hard to help organizations like yours attract, hire, and empower incredible people with disabilities (PWDs). Because let's be honest, a team that only thinks one way can get stale, right? PWDs bring fresh perspectives, unique skills, and a whole lot of talent to the table.

The secret weapon for building a strong DEI program? Leaders who are cheerleaders for this initiative. It is like this: having a diverse workforce isn't just about doing good (although that's pretty awesome!), it's also smart business. A wider talent pool means more innovation and a stronger brand. Plus, PWDs themselves are a massive customer base – so by including them in your team, you're better positioned to understand their needs and develop products and services they love.

Now, let's talk about how to actually make this happen. First things first, we gotta streamline that recruitment process. No one wants to jump through hoops to get a job, especially PWDs. Here's how to open the door for opportunity:

- **Prep Your Team:** Get your recruitment crew on board and plan things out well in advance.
- **Open House Events:** Hold info sessions to explain the hiring process, expectations and timelines. This way, candidates feel prepared and confident going in.
- **Be Agile:** Speed it up! Aim for a 3-4 week turnaround to stay competitive. No one wants their dream job to slip away because of a slow hiring process.

Next, let's rethink those eligibility criteria. Sometimes, traditional hiring practices can miss out on amazing talent. Here's how to adjust your approach:

- **Focus on Potential:** Don't get hung up on graduation years or specific degrees. Look for the skills, attitude, and that drive to succeed!
- **Second Chances:** Life happens. Consider a "cooling-off" period so candidates can reapply if needed.
- **Move Beyond Minimums:** Some companies are scrapping minimum mark requirements for PWDs. It's all about the bigger picture!

Speaking of the bigger picture, let's make sure the application process itself is accessible to everyone. We want everyone to feel welcome, right? Here's how to make it a breeze:

- **Minimal Docs:** Only ask for the essentials – a disability certificate and one government ID should do it.
- **Sample Tests:** Provide practice tests that take different disabilities into account. No visual elements for candidates with visually impairment, for example.

Now, even the most amazing team needs some support to get acclimated. Here's how to empower success through training and support:

- **Holistic Training:** Offer comprehensive programs that cover everything from professional communication to technical skills. Don't forget those soft skills, either!
- **Accessibility Matters:** Make sure all training materials are accessible for all learning styles.
- **Communication is Key:** Provide sign language interpreters when needed to ensure clear communication for deaf candidates.

Building an inclusive culture is an ongoing journey, not a one-time thing. Here's how to create a welcoming environment where everyone feels like they belong:

- **Sensitization Training:** Educate everyone on disability awareness and how to best integrate PWDs into the team. Let's break down those barriers!
- **Partner Up:** Collaborate with NGOs to get ongoing support and address any employee concerns that might pop up.

Remember, inclusion is a continuous process. Regularly review your framework to recruit PWDs and make adjustments based on experience and feedback.

Here's the cool part: we've put this whole framework into action steps to make things even easier. It could act as your personal PWD recruitment roadmap to building a dream team!

We're talking workshops, job role mapping, accessibility audits – the whole kit and caboodle. Plus, targeted recruitment drives and customized training programs (with some potential help from us at WinVinaya, of course!).

By implementing these strategies and best practices, you can unlock the vast potential of PWDs and build a truly thriving, inclusive workplace. It's a win-win for everyone!

WinVinaya: A Decade of Progress and a Vision for the Future

Wow, it's been a whirlwind! WinVinaya Infosystems has been around for eleven years now, and the WinVinaya Foundation has been making waves for eight. It's like watching a river carve its path – we've faced challenges, celebrated wins, and learned a ton along the way.

We are definitely moving in the right direction with disability inclusion, but don't get me wrong, there's a lot more work to do. Big companies are starting to get on board, but many still only focus on physical disabilities. There's also a huge gap between the skills employers need and the skills people with disabilities are learning in school/college. Technology is changing so fast; schools and colleges can barely keep up!

Here at WinVinaya, we've empowered over 1250 amazing graduates with disabilities in the past eight years. But that's just a drop in the bucket compared to the millions in India alone. To make a real difference, we need a fresh approach.

The good news is, we've built some incredible relationships – with our candidates, inclusive colleges, awesome companies, NGOs, and even schools. But there's so much more we can do by working with the government, parents, and different industries.

Right now, we mostly focus on helping people get jobs. But that leaves us a little exposed when the economy takes a downturn and hiring freezes. So, for the next ten years, we're proposing a two-pronged attack:

1. Supercharging WinVinaya InfoSystems:

We've got ten years of experience training and hiring people with all kinds of disabilities (over 18 different ones, to be exact!). We want to use that knowledge to grow WinVinaya Infosystems by ten times in the next decade. How? By expanding the products and services we offer. This will allow us to hire even more amazing people with disabilities across all sorts of roles.

Our awesome, inclusive team can currently help you with:

- Power BI Consulting & Training (data analysis magic!)
- Upskilling Corporate Employees with Disabilities (so they can be even more productive)
- Smart Document Digitization (even handwritten stuff!)
- Making Documents Accessible (especially for people with visual impairments)
- Accessibility Testing (to make sure your website or app works for everyone)
- Diversity Equity & Inclusion Services (from disability awareness training to online learning modules and sign language interpretation)

If you're interested in outsourcing projects or connecting us with potential clients, shoot us an email at info@winvinaya.com!

2. Reimagining the WinVinaya Foundation:

We are proud of what we've accomplished so far, like training people in super specialized skills and winning innovation awards. But let's be real, those are just the tip of the iceberg. Moving forward, the WinVinaya Foundation is going to take a more holistic approach. We want to focus on the whole ecosystem and create solutions that work from start to finish. Here's what that looks like:

- **Personalized Learning Paths:** We are building flexible learning models that can adapt to individual needs. With multiple starting points, customized plans, and all the latest assistive technologies.
- **Everyone at the Table:** We are bringing everyone to the table – people with disabilities, parents, teachers, companies, community leaders, and even the government. Together, we can design and implement inclusive learning experiences that truly work.
- **Empowering Learners:** We want our students to take charge of their own learning. This means giving them choices, teaching them how to advocate for themselves, and fostering collaboration and student-led discussions. We will also help them build awesome portfolios to showcase their skills.

- **Thinking Big Picture:** We are crafting a learning ecosystem which will focus on building leaders, entrepreneurs and change makers who are PWDs. We want to focus on creating a future of leaders and enablers. This is not just about education but creating a future where PWDs lead the way. This is an ambitious agenda, but at WinVinaya, we're up for the challenge. We believe that inclusion isn't just a dream, it's the future. Are you in?

*Dare to be free,
dare to go as far
as your thought
leads, and
dare to carry that
out in your life.*

Swami Vivekananda



Resources that could be useful to you

Guidelines on how to hire, train Persons with Disabilities

Best practices for hiring PWDs & Sample Recruitment Framework

- Click here - Recommendation-Hiring-PWDs

Best practices in recruiting Deaf candidates

- Click here - Recommendation-Recruiting-Deaf

Best practices for training PWDs

- Click here to learn how to train PWDs

To learn more about Training & Placement done by WinVinaya

Covers Digital Training Courses, Online Academy, Success Stories

- Click here for the intro deck to WinVinaya Foundation

Learn Basics of Sign Language in 12 days (Free Self-learning materials)

- Click here-Learn-Sign-Language

WinVinaya Foundation website

-Click here-WVF-Website

To Outsource Project, learn DEI offerings from WinVinaya Infosystems

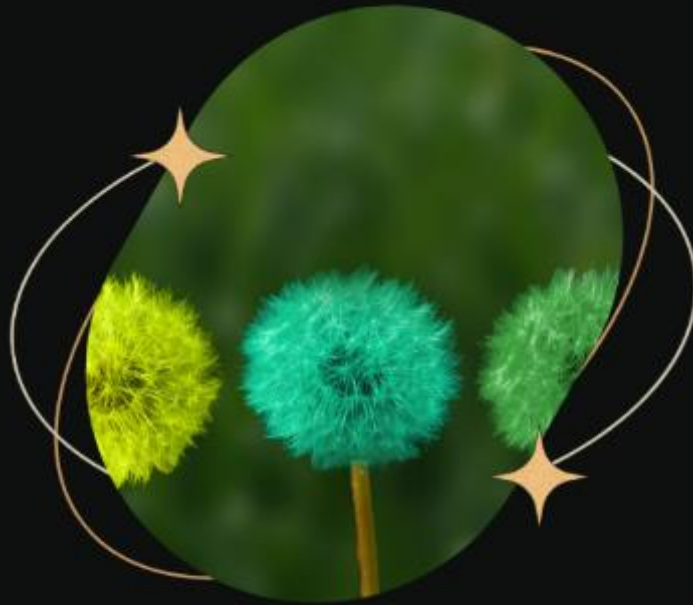
WVIS Intro deck

-Click here-WVIS-Intro-deck

WinVinaya Infosystems website

-Click here-WVI-Website

Professor Richard Feynman



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you were a year ago, a month ago, or even a day ago.

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