

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Mona Abhari, Lead Organizer at United for Respect.

MONA ABHARI:

As a field organizer at United for Respect, which is a national nonprofit organization that supports retail workers organizing for better pay and working conditions, I've come to realize that there really is no labor movement without disability justice. So for example, on our Amazon campaign, we've worked with warehouse workers like Joan here across the country over the past several years, helping them fight for higher wages and improve safety on the job and better benefits. Time and time again while speaking to these workers, we just kept coming across employees who were struggling to have their disabilities honored in the workplace, accommodations met and respected at work, which is really insulting, because at a place like Amazon, and it's not just Amazon, multiple companies do this, Amazon's PR machine touts the company's inclusion of disability workers, right? They pride themselves in being a workplace that advocates for disability justice and disabled workers, when we know that on the ground, that couldn't be further from the truth, unfortunately.

So many of these impacted workers had to quit in frustration. Some were on indefinite leaves of absence lasting months while the company assessed their request for accommodations, and others were working without accommodations as best as they could, which is not okay. We at United for Respect decided that we needed to organize a campaign around this issue to respond to the repeated concerns we were hearing from current and former employees. Given the astronomical turnover rate at Amazon, we wanted to include former Amazon employees in our campaign as well, since we know their voices, and then since they were pushed out of the workplace because their accommodations were met, are especially important.

Usually labor campaigns are organizing workers within a workplace, but many of our leaders that had been forced out due to their disability or lack of meeting accommodations for their disability wasn't actually a really new approach to organizing, and really hard too. When you can't organize workers that are in the workplace and have been pushed out of a company, it's really hard to get them to connect to other workers as well. So in a traditional worker organizing model, you help workers speak to their coworkers on the job. And again, that was just extremely difficult, navigating that at Amazon. And I know others in other labor secs have also experienced the same thing. So it's a call for a new strategy when it comes to organizing, especially when you really want to make sure you have a disability justice lens to your organizing.

NARRATOR:

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