

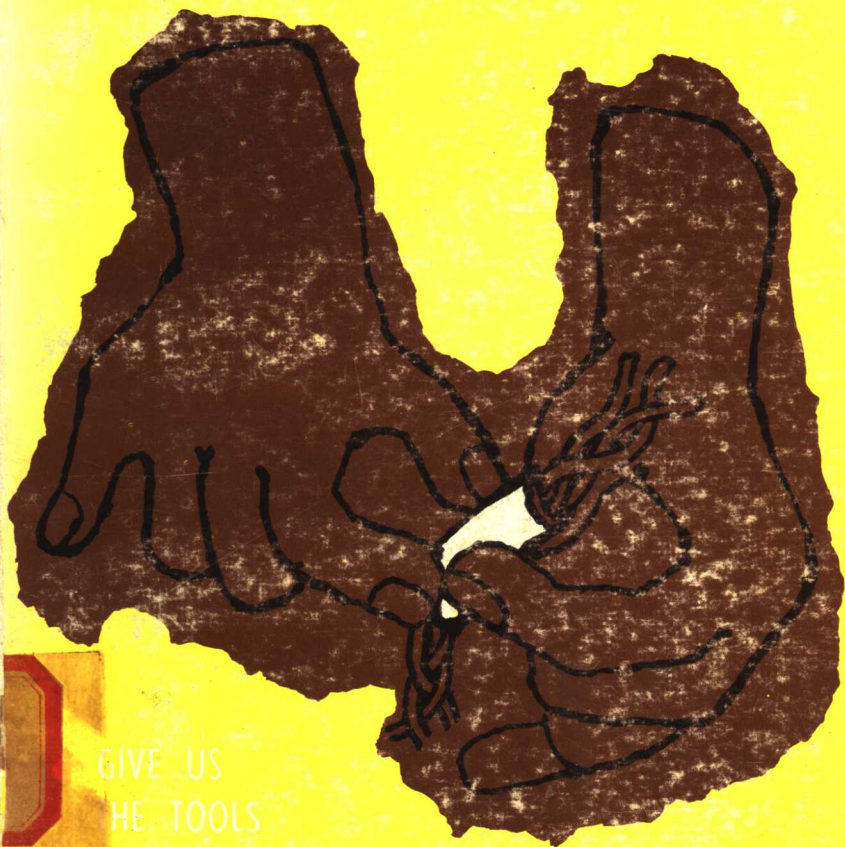
英汉对照

自力更生

韦士嘉地著

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H·韦士嘉地著
朱廉译



GIVE US
THE TOOLS

Henry Viscardi, Jr.,

出版

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Give Us The Tools

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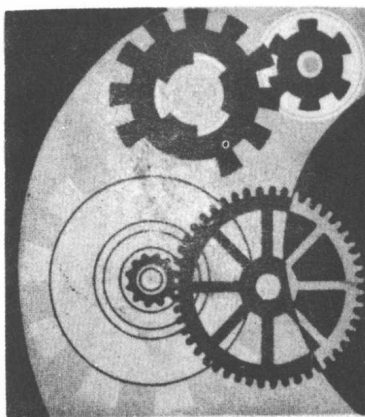
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封百设计：芽浩泉

GIVE US THE TOOLS, by Henry Viscardi, Jr.,
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Give Us The Tools

By Henry Viscardi, Jr.,



GIVE US THE TOOLS

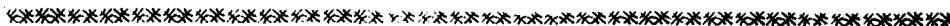
A BLIND MAN could see it. He could stand in the middle of the big shop at Abilities, Inc., and know immediately what it was all about.

He would hear the tap of canes and crutches, the rubber-tire sounds of wheel chairs passing up and down the aisles. The sounds made by afflicted people.

He'd hear other things, too. Machines whirring. Hammers striking metal. Sounds of people working.

Yes, a blind man could see it easily enough. It would not surprise him to find afflicted people hard at work.

Unfortunately, there are those not blind who cannot see it. They heap pity on the disabled, smother them in charity and turn away in embarrassment from the crippled man who wants a job.



That's why Abilities, Inc., exists. It is a factory run by and for the disabled, to prove that they can help themselves if people will only give them a chance. It was started in 1952 with one paralyzed worker in a grimy, unfurnished garage. Within five years it had grown to a million dollar business with some 300 employees. It has enabled each man and woman to rebuild a human life from ruins, and all of them have a fierce pride in their hard-earned skills. As president of Abilities, Inc., I share this pride—violently, I fear.

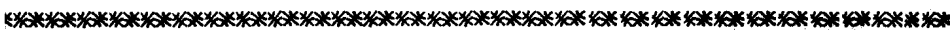
Our employees once decided to set up a credit fund against which they could borrow in emergencies. Since this was considered a banking service, the government agency which regulates such matters sent a man to look into our organization. Things went smoothly enough until he remarked that he doubted that the credit fund's loans could be insured.

When a member of the shop committee asked why, the government man made a discreet throat-clearing sound. "Well, after all, everyone employed here is disabled."

I decided that shock tactics were called for. "Sir," I said, "I'd like to hear you sing high C."

"I can't sing at all," he replied. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about disability," I told him. "You say you can't sing. That makes you totally disabled for an opera career. You're probably not fit to pitch for the Yankees either. But you are able to work at your trade. So are we. We're



entitled to operate under the same rules that apply to everybody else.”

The government man and the insurance company finally agreed that our loans were good enough to rate insurance.

I LEARNED about disability early in life. I was born with twisted, malformed stumps where legs ought to be.

For my first six years a hospital was my home. Afterward I padded around New York on grotesque, cork-stuffed orthopedic boots. My legs were so short that my dangling arms almost touched the ground. Some of the boys in my block called me “ape man,” and so I learned how to fight. I never did learn how to cope with that other insult, the condescending pat on the head.

When I was 25, I was only three feet eight inches tall. Then the miracle happened. A wonderful doctor named Robert Yanover took me to a crusty, brilliant old craftsman named George Dorsch, and between them they stood me up on ingenious aluminium legs. Suddenly I was five feet eight, and everyone recognized what I had known all along: I was a man.

Doc Yanover wouldn't take pay for what he had done. Or, rather, he wouldn't take any money. “Hank,” he said, “maybe someday you'll have a chance to help someone else. That's all I'll ever ask.”

One way or another, I guess I've been making payments on Doc's bills ever since.

There was a small down payment during World War II.

Quitting my job in a tax office, I donned a Red Cross uniform to work with war amputees at Walter Reed Hospital. I tried to show them that life on artificial legs can still be a meaningful, exciting thing.

Many of those young men went out of the hospital willing to give it a try. Unfortunately, a lot of them wrote me later, "Hank, you lied to us. Nobody wants an amputee."

Hometown, U. S. A., welcomed them back with parades and speeches, offered them free cars, money and all the booze they could hold. But no jobs. Business is business. And, well, you know, it makes people kind of uncomfortable to have a cripple around.

When it was over, I was discouraged, disgusted, ready to forget about other people's problems and solve my own. I landed a good job as assistant director of sports and special events at Mutual Broadcasting System. There I met a lovely young woman named Lucile and had the great good fortune to make her my wife. Soon I was stepping into the plush comfort of a skyscraper office as personnel director of a big New York textile firm. I was a Young Man with a Future. The past seemed behind me, the years of hardship and humiliation all neatly tucked out of sight.

I almost got away with it.¹

Then the phone rang one day, and Doc Yanover's bill came due again. This time it was an outfit called Just One Break—a new organization with exciting new ideas about helping the disabled. It had the support of people like

Eleanor Roosevelt and Bernard Baruch. They wanted me to serve as executive director.

It offered one third of the salary I was making and three times as much work. I thought of a dozen good reasons for saying no. My always-understanding Lucile took me off the hook.

"Hank," she said, "you want this thing, don't you? Let's do it."

Just One Break (J.O.B., we called it) was affiliated with Dr. Howard Rusk's world-famous rehabilitation institute at New York University-Bellevue Hospital. It was the job-hunting end of Dr. Rusk's bed-to-job program for restoring disabled people to normal life. I collected a staff of one, requisitioned a cubbyhole office at Bellevue and plunged in.

My days and nights were filled with phone calls, interviews, an endless round of talks on the lunch-and-lecture circuit of civic clubs and business groups. Job applications from disabled workers poured in at a staggering rate. Job offers came more slowly — but they came.

Sometimes we sold the idea of using a particular disability to advantage. Like the young Navy veteran who had lost a hand. He did fine in the kitchen of a big hotel: he could slip his steel hook into scalding water and fish out dishes the other workers couldn't touch. More often, the disability didn't matter. An accountant in a wheel chair can be just as efficient as one in a swivel chair. A blind girl is not a bit disqualified from answering a telephone.

Human vultures who ran sweatshop factories in firetrap tenements were all too willing to take crippled workers. They fattened on people who were too broke and beaten to argue terms. There were outfits, too, that thrived on thinly disguised professional begging. They hired the lame, the halt and the blind to peddle useless, overpriced gimcracks from door to door. But these "angle" boys were only a nuisance, since I checked every job offer.

The biggest problem was sheer numbers. For every disabled person we placed — and we found jobs for more than a thousand — a dozen clamored to be put on our list. For every one we listed, a hundred needed help. We were trying to solve a national problem from a two-by-four office with one telephone and a couple of desks.

I was going round and round, running faster and faster, getting madder and madder at more and more people. When I began bolting my food and thrashing in my bed at night, Lucile tried to calm me.

"You've got to slow down," she said gently. "You're working too hard."

But how could I rest when so many were begging for the right to work?

It seemed so plain to me that there were no disabled people — only people with varying degrees of ability at varying tasks. Why couldn't I make it plain to others? More and more I yearned for a shop where the so-called handicapped could display their abilities for all to see.

And one day a young man hobbled into my office who was plagued by the same idea. His name was Arthur Nierenberg.

HE CAME slowly, on crutches, clutching a big scrapbook. His knuckles showed white with the effort when he eased his powerful torso into the chair.

"I want a job," he said. "Any kind of job. I'll work for nothing, just for the chance to prove myself."

I already knew Nierenberg's case history. He was 24. He'd had polio at two and a half, and had struggled ever since with two paralyzed legs and one partially paralyzed arm. His jacket, I knew, concealed a body brace which supported his spine. He had a highschool diploma and two years of college. He was trying to support a wife and a child on a part-time \$21-a-week job.

The scrapbook pictured Nierenberg at work in the furniture shop he'd set up on money borrowed from his father. I saw snapshots of the wheel chair he'd made for himself and other devices he had developed to compensate for his paralysis.

"This looks interesting," I said. "Why did you give it up?"

"I went broke." He put it bluntly, with no apology for having tried and failed. I liked this guy. The set of his shoulders, the firm line of his chin conveyed a stubborn strength.

"Okay," I conceded. "So you need a job."

"I sure do." He hesitated a moment, then plunged on. "What I really want is to run another shop. I'd know more about it this time. And I'd like to hire other disabled people."

"Maybe we can get together," I said. "I'm going to start a shop like that. I'll need a foreman."

My own words startled me. I didn't know I was going to say them until they came spilling out. Me start such a shop? Well, why not? Maybe it was time for Viscardi to quit cheerleading and grab the ball.

But eager young Art Nierenberg couldn't support his wife and child on my still half-formed dream. So I got him a job on the production line at Servomechanisms, an electronic plant, and told him to stand by. He left my office with crutches flying.

I didn't have the funds to establish a shop. But I thought I knew how to get financial backing. I hit the lunch-and-lecture circuit again: business clubs, professional organizations, chambers of commerce.

I was fired with a bright vision of what this shop could be. We'd throw out the notion that disabled people should be supervised like backward children. We'd dispense with charity drives, run a real plant where men and women could earn a living doing useful work. It would pay for itself, I assured my audiences; it would even show a profit.

The speech went over big. There was a drumfire of applause after almost every luncheon, a big round of hand-

shakes and congratulations. But no backers.

Every few weeks I'd get a phone call from Art Nierenberg. He was doing fine, thanks. Two raises in the first month. But he still had the bug about a workshop for disabled people. Was I still planning to start one?

"Sure. It takes a little time," I'd tell him. "Keep in touch."

Then I'd go out and make another speech.

I'd found an ideal location for the shop, a garage in West Hempstead, N.Y., and every few days I checked to be sure that it was still available. But the weeks went by until finally the owner, Milton Bedell, reported that another prospect wanted it. When he heard that I still had no sponsor, he sympathized and started to hang up.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Will you let me have that place on a short-term lease?"

Bedell hesitated, then agreed. But he'd have to have two months' rent in advance.

"My check," I said, "will be in the mail."

It was a reckless gesture. I didn't have money enough to buy equipment, meet payrolls or do any of the things that must be done to transform an empty building into a shop. By grabbing the lease I had gained a little time—but for what? Then Preston Bassett, president of Sperry Gyroscope Co., whom I'd approached for help, introduced me to Arthur Roth, a banker who was interested in my idea.

After listening to my story, Roth came at once to the heart

of the question. "How much capital would you require?"

"Perhaps \$5000...."

Roth shook his head. "I doubt if you could do it on that. This is a new venture; you'll run into all kinds of unusual expenses. Tell you what I'll do. I'll guarantee up to \$4000, providing you can get other backers to match that amount."

My heart jumped. I had found a man who wanted to buy shares in my dream.

I phoned Nierenberg. "I've got a prospective backer," I said, "and a place to work in and a few people who want to help. But that's about all. I'll have to scramble like crazy for money, for work, for everything. It's going to be a big gamble all the way. Do you still want it?"

"If you're betting on it," Art said, "I'm willing to. When do we start?"

WE GAVE a lot of thought to choosing a name. I was determined that it would not include the term "handicapped" or any such pity-seeking word. "Let's forget our disabilities," I said, "and start thinking about what we *can* do. We should stress our abilities...."

"Abilities, Inc." That was it.

We set it up as a nonprofit corporation (that is, our earnings would be poured back into programs to help the disabled), with Viscardi as president and with an advisory board on which Preston Bassett, Arthur Roth and other business leaders served. For directors we chose men who had

successfully licked some disability problem in their own careers.

Now all we needed was work, and we needed it quickly. Electronic assembly tempted me from the first. It was a tough field, but the pay was excellent, and a man could do it without legs or even eyes if he had good fingers.

The quest soon led to Servomechanisms. That company farmed out electronic jobs, and its production men knew and liked Nierenberg's work. I was told that Servo was swamped with rush orders for the Korean War—perhaps we could help.

Perhaps! I was certain of it. I would guarantee delivery and quality. I bore down hard on the fact that my shop boss was Servotraind, and held my breath for fear I'd be asked how many men I had. Nobody asked me, and I walked out with my first contract.

The order, which totaled \$1870, was for 340 sets of "harnesses"—part of the computer of fire-control system for Sabrejet fighter planes. It was marked ASAP, meaning "as soon as possible." I knew we'd have to beat our brains out to get it done in reasonable time, but after all our other worries, this kind of problem would be pure pleasure. We began hiring men.

We didn't need to place a "Help Wanted" ad. The disabled heard of us and sought us out. Hardly a day passed without adding to the little procession of the lame, the blind and the mangled who found their way to our door. Choosing among them was not easy; we had room at the moment for only three.

One applicant was a half-scared, half-eager kid named Horace Johnson. A polio victim, stricken at three, he had spent more than half his life in hospital wards. Both legs were badly crippled, one arm partially so. He had tried two jobs, and each time he had been fired within a week. With this record he seemed the worst kind of prospect — but Horace had to be game, or he wouldn't still be trying.

"How well do you handle those crutches?" I asked.

"Not too bad, I guess. I can manage a block, maybe two if I take it easy."

"You'd have a problem getting to work. From where you live, you'd have to get on and off two buses, and walk between stops. That's a pretty tough trip."

"I made it this morning, didn't I?"

I couldn't answer this, so I gave him a job.

Another we hired was young Bill Graham, paralyzed from the waist down by a sniper's bullet in World War II. Bill had learned to drive a car with special controls, mastered a trade-school course and become a skilled craftsman. Then for years he tried vainly to find work. When he came to Abilities he had never held a job.

Jim Rizzo, who had lost one arm and one leg in a construction accident, was the only employe who could walk without aid. The boys called him "the leg man" and assigned him such extra duties as sweeping out at night.

Art Nierenberg, in charge as foreman, completed the roster. It made quite a crew — four men with only five good