

Disability issue familiarization

As we go through this module, we will be hitting the high points.

It is not possible in the short time we must cover all the issues related to disability.

If you have questions, please email me (Doug Towne) at chair-ceo@accessready.org

While people with disabilities face all the same issues everyone else does, they often must face them in different ways.

It is said that disability is a by partisan political issue. True up to a point.

It is difficult to discuss these topics without over generalization.

Social liberals often approach disability from the Perspective of offering a handout.

Social conservatives often approach disability from the perspective of a hand up.

Some avoid the issue all together.

The issue is that neither offer enough resources to do what is really necessary.

If the resources are there, Then the programs are not designed with the input of people with disabilities.

Nothing about us without us!

Is the guiding principle of the Independent living movement.

What it Means to be Disabled

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary:

Dis-able: 1: to deprive of legal right, qualification, or capacity 2: to make incapable or ineffective; especially: to deprive of physical, moral, or intellectual strength.
Synonym see weaken.

Hand-i-cap: 1: a disadvantage that makes achievement unusually difficult 2: a physical disability.

In the book ABC Clio Companion to the Disability Rights Movement, Able-ism is defined as the act of being competent, clever, good and capable of superior abilities.

Considering the above definitions, it is better to be a non-disabled person than disabled, what many non-disabled people have referred to as "a fate worse than death."

How, in the definition of dis-able above, can there be anything positive about being disabled?

Disability is part of who we are, and we are strong and proud!

Let's step back a minute.

History has often portrayed people with disabilities as evil, villainous, inhuman, dumb, sick, or depraved or conversely, angelic, childlike, innocent, pitiable, or objects of charity.

None of these descriptions are accurate or appropriate.

But because of their appearances, behavior and language, they have been put in nursing homes, institutions, and jails.

They have been experimented upon, faced forced sterilization, and been subjected to genocide.

People with disabilities have never been seen as distinct, beautiful, loving, caring, creative, intelligent, funny or strong.

Instead, they have been seen as broken and unfixable. Society has tried to put them away, do away with them, or take care of them.

Disability is NOT a sickness but a political fact of life!

Society needs to change, have you ever looked at someone in a wheelchair or someone who is blind and thought, "How do you do it?" "You are so brave."

"I could never live like that." "If I were you, I'd kill myself."

Do you realize what that means?

You have decided they would be better off dead.

The truth is that people with disabilities are a minority, a minority group that anyone can join at any time in their life.

They are a political minority in that they have shared common discrimination, poverty, and barriers-both physical and attitudinal.

Society says that living with a disability is suffering.

In general society does not see that it is not the disability one "suffers" from but rather the prejudices, assumptions, attitudes and behavior towards the disabled.

These are the real problems.

There are issues on several fronts related to disability. An overarching issue is the conflict between the concept of accommodation verses designed accessibility or universal design.

The term accommodation is a creature of the American's With Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA makes it clear that if something is not accessible than an accommodation must be provided. The issue is that this concept has been perceived as a ceiling for how products, programs, systems, and other aspects of community life must be created.

The concept of accommodation has been taken on as a limiting factor instead of what it was intended to be, which is a floor on which off the shelf accessibility should be created.

By only seeking to provide accommodation, the creators of products, programs, systems, and other aspects of community life have, without intention, made the needs of people with disabilities an afterthought and relegated them to what is essentially second-class citizenship. This has been the unintended consequence of "accommodation".

It is true that the average person with a disability may only see access issues from his or her point of view.

At the same time disability advocacy leaders tend to take a bigger picture view and are often reaching for things that the rank and file has never considered.

Access to voting, for example has been a big issue for leaders, while access to better employment is generally seen as a more important issue for the average person with a disability. Having said all that, for the disability community in general, many of the issues are the same as they have been forever.

The battle grounds may have changed, but the conflicts remain the same.

These issue lines are often drawn around the term accessibility.

It is a subject that covers all aspects of human endeavor and community life.

It is impossible to list all the areas of concern for people with disabilities where barriers to accessibility exist.

It can safely be said though, that attitude is the most daunting barrier to accessibility on all fronts.

The attitudes of the general public, policy makers, developers at all levels, business professionals, government leaders, civil servants, the medical profession, teachers and perhaps more importantly, the parents of children with disabilities along with every other group you can imagine, all play a part in limiting accessibility.

Limiting attitudes where disabilities are concerned for the most part come from what we each think we know about a given group.

They are often what our parents taught us. Most such attitudes are not limiting by intent and are the fruit of good intentions.

Such intentions often fail to take into account the thoughts, dreams and/or goals of people with disabilities as individuals or as a group.

These intentions then do often bear unintended consequences.

Besides all the standard areas of concern like architectural, education, employment, programmatic and recreational issues, there are others that are growing exponentially.

In accessible technology and its application to all aspects of life is a great concern.

Technology is affecting nearly every part of our lives now and inaccessible technology is not only frustrating but limiting and actually punitive.

Smart phone applications, websites, consumer products, communication, transportation services and elections, along with so many more categories where technology is being developed that is inaccessible; it is with little thought to the needs of the 20 to 25% of the public who require accessibility.

Access to Healthcare

All of the above are entwined throughout healthcare from attitudes to technology and everything in between.

Access Ready the provider of these materials has taken a strong position on the subject of what is called an access ready environment.

What is an Access Ready Environment?

An access Ready Environment is where access for people with disabilities at the physical and technological levels is a matter of forethought, design, inclusion and planning instead of a condition of afterthought, delay and discrimination resulting in risk to all concerned.

The Board of Directors of Access Ready has deemed inaccessible information technology to be a clear, growing, and present danger to the civic, economic, and social welfare of people with disabilities.

Do not make decisions for people with disabilities about what they can or cannot do.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, problems and joys.

While the disability is an integral part of who we are, it alone does not define us.

Do not make us into disability heroes or victims. Treat us as individuals, just like you want to be treated.