



## Dispelling Disability Myths

BY REISA SLADE

Is the following statement true or false?

**The definition of disability is constantly changing and is only influenced by medical professionals.\***

Before you answer, consider how today's workplace is filled with etiquettes, expectations and constructed norms. From shaking hands to staff meetings, there are many long-standing routines in the business world.

Being prepared for a change in these situations puts you ahead of the game, but also raises many new questions.

How do you provide criticism to an employee with a learning disability? Can you assist a person with a physical disability without their consent? How can you be sure all employees are treated equally?

"It begins with understanding attitudinal barriers, then knocking them down," said Norma Ricker, Director of Employment Partnerships at the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work. She delivers Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Training workshops to employers and their staff who want to become inclusive.

"The workshop is an opportunity for employers to gain the tools they need to recruit, hire and retain persons with disabilities," Ricker continued. "It helps them understand the challenges, dispel the myths and to explore best practices in hiring and integrating persons with disabilities."

Ricker emphasized that understanding the challenges of persons with disabilities is the first and foremost step to begin working on a Disability Management Program.

To assist in the development of such a program, she recommends the consultation of the Disability Awareness Series, a five-module interactive training program for employers and employees.

Ricker offered solutions for common misconceptions:

Shake hands with a person who has a visual disability in the same situations that you would shake the hand of a sighted person. Although your hand may not be seen, you will often receive an extended hand for the professional greeting.

Expect an employee with a learning disability to do their job well. Work well done should be acknowledged and complimented. Unsatisfactory work should be acknowledged and corrected. Don't wait until someone's performance is a serious problem before addressing it.

Awareness will dispel myths and eliminate unnecessary challenges in the workplace.

If you believed the statement above to be false, you were right!

Disability categories are influenced and constructed by our changing environment, perceptions, political correctness and our raised awareness about different types of human experiences.

Although professionals attempt to diagnose, examine and treat medical conditions, what constitutes as a disability is socially constructed by many factors. It's up to you to dispel the myths. **DI**

*\*1Module 1 – (UN) STEREOTYPING DISABILITY, Disability Awareness Series*

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