



Dispelling Myths About People with Disabilities

In our society, the major barriers to achievement by people with disabilities continue to be attitudinal: stereotypical thinking and assumptions about what people can and can't do. The truth is that the range of abilities of persons within any disability group is enormous. We need to view each individual as just that: an individual. Listed below are the kinds of assumptions that can be barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

ASSUMPTION: A person with mental retardation can't be trained to do a job as well as someone without a disability.

FACT: *Over two-thirds of the 4,000 participants in Pizza Hut's "Jobs Plus Program" are persons with mental retardation. The current turnover rate among these individuals is a modest 20% compared to the 150% turnover rate of employees without disabilities. This means a drop in recruitment and training costs.*

ASSUMPTION: An individual with a psychiatric disability can't work in a stressful environment with tight deadlines.

FACT: *All individuals perceive stress differently and their responses vary. Some individuals with psychiatric disabilities perform effectively in jobs that require specific timelines and structure.*

ASSUMPTION: There is no way that a wheelchair racer can compete with the world's best marathon runners.

FACT: *It takes a good runner over two hours to run a marathon. A competitive wheelchair racer can complete a marathon in less than one-and-a-half hours.*

ASSUMPTION: A person with a developmental disability and difficulty with fine motor control is unlikely to be able to handle complex operations on the production line of a manufacturing plant.

FACT: *A person with this combination of functional limitations was hired for a production-line job. The job involved labeling, filling, capping, and packing a liquid product. The only accommodation supplied for the worker was a plywood jig. The jig enabled the worker to hold the bottle steady for correct labeling.*

ASSUMPTION: It is unbelievable that a person with a double amputation can compete with the world's fastest 100 meter dash runners.

FACT: *The world record is 9.9 seconds. A runner who is a double amputee ran the dash in 11.76 seconds, just 1.8 seconds off the world mark.*

ASSUMPTION: People with severe disabilities can't compete in heavy weightlifting activities.

FACT: *A person with cerebral palsy has bench pressed weights in excess of 500 pounds.*

ASSUMPTION: A person who is blind and has a missing right hand cannot perform a job as a machinist.

FACT: *The applicant lost his vision and right hand in Vietnam. He persuaded a community college to train him as a machinist and was finally given a job on a trial basis. From the very first day, he broke production records and caused others to do the same. His only modification: a lever was moved from the right of the machine to the left.*

ASSUMPTION: Downhill skiers with one leg cannot really compete against racers with two legs.

FACT: *Top racers without disabilities have been clocked at 80-85 miles per hour. Downhill skiers with one leg have been clocked at over 74 miles per hour.*

ASSUMPTION: It is unlikely that a man whose right leg is amputated six inches above the knee can perform the duties of a warehouseman that require loading and unloading trucks, standing, lifting, bending, and delivering supplies to various sections as needed.

FACT: *A person with this type of amputation was hired to work in a paper warehouse. He performed the job without any modification. He worked out so well that the company moved him to operating heavy equipment, a log stacker. The company did not have to make any accommodations. He was able to climb ladders and the heavy equipment without any problems. ♦*

This information was made available by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.