

PHYSICALLY DISABLED does not mean work-disabled

by Chipo Moyo

It is human nature to look at disabled people with compassion, but it is not right to think that compassion and pity are the same thing. Compassion means caring whereas pity suggests a negative evaluation of the person in question. If we show pity we are reinforcing in them feelings of inferiority and that because they are disabled, they are unable to do anything.

One thing I have learnt in life is not to look at a person with any form of disability with a pitiful eye. It is soul-destroying for them.

Who are we to judge? Are we perfect?

We all have imperfections. We all have shortcomings, and we wish we didn't... but which human being or living thing is absolutely free of imperfections? Being emotionally stable and mature means that we learn to live with those imperfections we can do nothing about, and we want to be loved and respected. Exactly the same applies to our fellow human beings who endure some form of disablement.

We need to make them feel and know that there is life beyond disability.

Does disablement mean incompetence?

Surely this is a gross misjudgment of many people with disabilities who can be hugely competent at tasks within their grasp.



I had a colleague, who had no arms. Mike (not his real name) has an amazing signature. He signs with his toes. His writing is better than mine; he does it with his toes. He eats with a knife and fork, he can drink from a glass, he can drive. When I first saw him I was amazed at his independence. At first I would meet him by the door and rush to open the door for him. He said "Chipo, I am a gentleman, I can open the door for a lady" and did it with his leg and pushed open with his body. He is simply an amazing person. He is employed as an accountant and is one of those people who can really inspire you to think beyond your misconceptions.

Disabled people tend to be shunned and mostly are employed as receptionists, especially the blind, male or female, and many of these could do other jobs as well but are not viewed that way.

I saw a blind runner at the Comrades marathon who fared better than many people who could see. People just need to be encouraged to mix with disabled people in order to appreciate their talents and skills.

Are there people with disabilities at your company?

Government policy does encourage companies to employ at least 2% of people with disabilities. This improves their reputation as non discriminatory. But how many companies are heeding this call?

To this day disabled people are still facing discrimination in terms of transport access, reading materials for the blind and deaf facilities. The NGOs that try to assist them do not have enough resources.

Here are 5 steps that can help dealing with disability issues:

- Disability sensitisation, dealing with peoples' attitudes, addressing biases and stereotypes through

workshops that could foster spiritual, emotional and social change of attitudes

- In the workplace, profiling must be done to know clearly the number of disabled persons on staff and the kind of disabilities.
- Policies and strategies should formulate for the reasonable accommodation of disabled people.
- It is noted with concern, that a lot of organisations still lack the most basic access facilities, such as wheelchair ramps and rails, and that had to be attended to.

The current recruitment strategies are still quite ineffective and a combination of recruitment techniques should be used, including directly working with organisations such as DPSA.

Source: DPSA briefing document -5 March 2013

If you were in a position of influence, would employ a disabled person? Embrace the challenge.



Chipo Moyo, PA and CSI Coordinator, FirstRand Limited.

Chipo has been an OPSA Finalist in the National Professional of the Year 2013, and was invited to be PAFSA Judge for PA of the year 2014-15.

She is a member of PAFSA's AoE.

**She believes that:
A positive attitude makes a difference in how you look at life.**