



NH Governor's Commission on Disability

ADA30 Transcript

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GCD Research & Information Specialist Louise McBride Reflects on ADA and Disability Etiquette

On the day of its passage, the Americans with Disabilities Act was described as powerful in its simplicity. Everything changed that day when disability rights became civil rights. The part of the ADA that I would like to comment on is not its legal impact, rather, I would like to focus on the attitudinal change and understanding that the ADA has birthed.

I would like to share a story to show what I mean. As a staff member of the Governor's Commission on Disability, one of the many things I am involved with is public messaging. Sometime ago, I was tasked with the responsibility of creating a PowerPoint presentation on Disability Etiquette. After much research and many conversations, I realized that the underlying message of the entire presentation could be summarized with one question and one answer: What do you call a person with a disability? The answer, of course, is Bill or Keisha or whatever the person's name is.

Disability etiquette is not a set of rules. That is not to say there are not useful guidelines, such as respect an individual's personal space, don't pet a service dog without permission, or assume an individual does not have a disability just because it is not visible. And there are definitely some vocabulary preferences. However, the true disability etiquette comes from the education and understanding that those with disabilities are individuals. From there, common sense and truthful communication will usually see you through.

The importance of disability etiquette has become an important topic of late. To me, that means the ADA is alive and well. Individuals with disabilities are more represented as consumers in the retail scene, the employment arena, and even in our popular culture in ads and media. You don't have to be able to recite the Americans with Disabilities Act to celebrate its anniversary. Just keep on seeing your neighbor, client, passenger or coworker as a person first. Yes, the ongoing legacy of the ADA is powerful in its influence...and simplicity.

End of transcript. July 2020. *Louise R. McBride is a Research & Information Specialist at the GCD.*