



The CommUUnicator

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7 Things Disabled People Have To Think About Every Day

This is a summary by Heather Banks of an [article by Andrew Pulrang](#), a freelance writer with lifelong disabilities and 22 years' experience as a service provider and executive in nonprofit disability services and advocacy. It was published in the July 24, 2023 issue of Forbes Magazine.

Having a disability is tiring. Every day you must plan for things that others do not. Yet most “disability awareness” emphasizes disabled peoples’ capabilities and resilience, avoiding any suggestion of hardship. This article reviews seven things disabled people have to think about everyday—but most nondisabled people don’t.

1. How far will I have to wheel, walk, or navigate? To go shopping or on errands, you must be able to get from your car (or subway, bus, taxi, or a friend’s car) into the grocery store or office or business and back, perhaps with things to carry. You may arrive, then be directed to another location, so you have to plan for that too. Wheelchair users worry about whether terrain is level and smooth. Are stairs in the way? Are ramps available and safe? Many people with mobility disabilities do walk but have concerns about pathways and distance. People who are blind or visually impaired think about navigating unfamiliar, complex environments.

Most people get around almost without thinking. For people with disabilities, concerns

about every day plans can be cognitively challenging and emotionally stressful as well as physically taxing.

2. Is transportation accessible, timely, and reliable? Many disabled people drive and have accessible vehicles. Others depend on public transportation, taxis, services like Uber, or rides from family or friends. Failures by other people and transportation systems can throw your plans into chaos. The smallest errand can become as complicated and exhausting as air travel.

3. Is there a place to sit down? It’s not bad getting somewhere if you can sit and rest when you arrive. But disabled people are never sure of a chair, a bench, or even a wall to lean against, especially at outdoor events or markets and amusement parks, as well as large buildings like hospitals, government buildings, schools, and shopping malls. Plans may be curbed or cut short because of not knowing of ways to rest.

4. Will I be able to use the restroom? This is a big one, especially for wheelchair users or anyone who needs extra space and [accessibility](#) to use the toilet in a safe, dignified way. It’s a concern that is the most “accessible” to nondisabled people! Most wheelchair users weigh the pain and risk of “holding it” versus simply not attending an activity—whether eating out, attending a meeting or family event, or voting in person. A “bait and switch” all too familiar to people with disabilities is being told an accessible restroom is available. Later, they find it’s improperly designed or not accessible enough for someone with their disabilities.

5. Will the place be crowded, noisy, and chaotic? Anyone with difficulty walking, wheeling or balancing has to be concerned about the size and type of anticipated crowds, including careless, inattentive (or drunken) moving about by people who assume others' physical capabilities. Deaf and hard of hearing people worry about noise and clear sight lines to see printed instructions or Sign Language interpreting (if it's even provided). Blind and visually impaired people also think about navigating crowded spaces safely. And people with sensory issues, including many with autism, have varying tolerances for noisy crowds.

6. Will I earn or save a little too much money this month? Some of the worst problems of disabled people are bureaucratic. They can ruin not just one day but upend a whole life and a person's independence. People who depend on government benefits and healthcare, but want to work and save, worry about accidentally losing eligibility for support. It's a classic conundrum — not working, or working less, can be more financially stable than trying to work and develop financial independence. A few extra work hours, a few more dollars earned or saved can mean losing Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, Food Stamps, or heating assistance — even when earnings don't nearly make up for the loss. Overpayments may create staggering debts.

7. Will I encounter someone who stares, makes ableist comments, or refuses to deal with me at all? As many disabled people admit, the world is mostly friendlier than 50 years ago. Insensitive comments, rude staring, or outright discrimination are less common. But most also know they can run into ableism at any time or place, whether merely annoying or devastating and emotionally traumatizing. Any fully

accessible appointment, errand, or event can be ruined by an awkward or insulting encounter.

To help people with disabilities, do whatever is in your power to whittle away at this list of worries. The first step is knowing about them. Remember that, whatever level of success a disabled person may show on the surface, a ton of extra planning and strategizing lies behind it.

Our Giving has Meaning

By Ann Majure, Social Justice Team Leader

Years ago, I had a dear friend and mentor who said "Love is giving without asking anything in return." I think most of us are hard-wired to expect some sort of acknowledgment or thank you for our efforts. It can be hard to keep giving when you get nothing back.

About a year ago, the Social Justice Team decided to build a pantry box at the Fellowship to do our small part to address food insecurity in our area. It has been very difficult to keep the box filled. The food seems to go as fast as we can put it in. In most instances we never know who takes the food and how and for whom it is used.

Recently, we had a lovely surprise. Someone left us a note of appreciation in the box. It was a handmade card with a tree and rainbow colors on the cover. Inside they printed a message, "After every storm there is a rainbow. Even in pain and devastation there is beauty. Take each day one step at a time." It was signed "Love from a queer teen."

When we set up the pantry box, we accepted that we were giving without asking anything in return. But sometimes you get something back that is more valuable than you ever imagined. Somehow our effort touched another person, and that person was able to give us back a little of their love. While we didn't expect it, it certainly feels good.

