

Assume the Best

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

Apple's Steve Jobs once said, "Let's make a dent in the universe." How about if we make a dent in Disability World? Let's assume the best—instead of the worst—about children and adults with disabilities. We can *make the choice* to do this, can't we?

Let's assume all children with developmental disabilities have unlimited potential, the same assumption we have about children *without* disabilities. Let's assume they can learn the three Rs and other academics in general ed classrooms. Let's assume they can participate in and contribute to ordinary, age-appropriate, inclusive activities. And let's assume they'll grow up to be successful and productive.

Let's assume adults with disabilities can also be successful—in a job, volunteer work, or other endeavors of their choice. Let's assume they can live more interdependently, do more for themselves, etc.

Let's assume the best: that children and adults with disabilities are competent and should be the drivers of their own destinies. Let's assume they can triumph at home, school, work, or community when they have assistive technology devices (power wheelchairs, communication devices, etc.), supports, and/or accommodations—the same things needed by people without disabilities.

Let's assume all children and adults with disabilities can achieve these great outcomes *when they're given opportunities to do so*. This requires us to also assume the best about ourselves—parents, teachers, service providers, and/or others. First, that we have the chutzpah to fling aside the old, negative attitudes that have clouded our vision. Second, that we are competent to do what it takes so children and adults with disabilities lead wonderfully normal lives, instead of "special," segregated lives.

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

To believe in something not yet proved and to underwrite it with our lives: it is the only way we can leave the future open.

Lillian Smith

We don't have to first know *how* to make any of this happen—we need to first believe it *can happen* (assume the best). Once that belief is firmly entrenched, the "how" will come. And sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back. But positive assumptions and stick-with-it attitudes will see us through.

Let's assume the best in others, too. Throughout our son's life, we've assumed the best regarding Benjamin's inclusion in school, Cub Scouts, T-ball, drama classes, college, and more. We assumed others were not inherently prejudiced toward people with disabilities like our son; we assumed they had good hearts and would welcome our son. We presented positive perceptions of Benjamin and his participation and provided whatever information and/or assistance others needed. Then we all enjoyed the positive outcomes.

If you can't quite find it in yourself to assume the best—if you want to fall back on "being realistic" or some other notion—then *fake it* for an hour, or a day, or a week...Fake it and see how your thinking can change: you'll see things in a new and different way, awesome possibilities will be revealed, and more. It can be an eye-opening experience!

The ultimate barrier facing children and adults with disabilities is not disability, but others' negative attitudes, low expectations, and more—assuming the worst. We have the power to eliminate that barrier; we can make the choice to assume the best.

Paul Harvey once said, "I've never seen a monument erected to a pessimist." *Become a hair-on-fire optimist and change the life of a person with a disability.* Your assume-the-best efforts will also create a monument of yourself that will live on and on and on in the lives of those you touch.