

TRADING PLACES

Revolutionary Common Sense

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Whether or not you watch a lot of television, you're probably aware of the slew of "reality" TV shows that permeate today's American culture. While I'm not a big TV-viewer, I was intrigued by the concept of people "trading places" on several different TV programs. And it set my mind in motion...

The first step was thinking about people I interact with on a somewhat regular basis. Would I trade places with an airline flight attendant for a day, and would she trade places with me—and become an airline passenger? Yep—I'd have fun being the "boss" on an airplane, and the flight attendant would probably enjoy being able to take a snooze and have a soda and pretzels served to her! Would I trade places with a clerk at Target for a day, and would he trade places with me? Yep! I'd like to have the employee discount for a day, and the Target clerk would probably like being a shopper instead of a stocker! You get the picture, right? These scenarios represent me trading places with people who provide services to me.

Next, I took my thoughts on the road. While presenting to different audiences that included providers of disability-related services, I asked, "Would you be willing to trade places for a day with the people with disabilities you serve?" Sadly, you probably know the answer—a sheepish, but resounding, "no."

The discussions that followed revealed that it wasn't the *presence of a disability* that resulted in a negative response. Many people agreed it wouldn't be such a big deal if they needed to use a wheelchair, or had another type of disability. Instead, the negative response to my proposition was based on people's knowledge of *where and how many individuals with disabilities spend their time!*

Employees who work in the adult service system didn't want to live in a group home, nor did they want to spend their days in sheltered work, a day program, or

other congregate setting. And they most definitely did not like the idea of having little or no control over their lives!

Educators had similar responses. They did not relish the idea of spending the school day in a segregated, special ed environment, with

few opportunities to enjoy the typical experiences of being a school-aged child. Equally important, people added they wouldn't want to be thought of as "incompetent," "unable," "less than," and other characteristics they associate with people who are in "special" (segregated) settings.

As the discussions progressed, I asked if there was any other population that they would not consider trading places with for a day. The consensus reply: people in prisons. And, again, the response was based on *where and how people spend their time.*

What a terrible, terrible state of affairs—people with disabilities and prisoners in the same metaphorical boat!

The good news? For the most part, those I informally surveyed said they *would* be willing to trade places with children or adults with disabilities who are *included* in schools, communities, and workplaces. And what makes the difference for this group of people with disabilities? It's not about the type or "severity" of disability—it's about their having the assistive technology devices, supports, and/or accommodations *that ensure their success in inclusive environments!*

What about you? Would *you*—whether you're a parent, teacher, human services staffer, or have some other role—be willing to trade places for a day with the child and/or adult with a disability in your life? If your answer is "no," I hope you'll sit and ponder this issue. And then I hope you'll think about what will it take for you and others to make changes in the person's life—in *where and how he spends his time*—so you *would* be willing to trade places for one day.