

I. Diversity Awareness <http://www3.kumc.edu/diversity/april.html>

Disability Awareness Month

II. April's Diversity Activity:

Celebrations Among Us

Posted by [Leslie Elliott](#)

April is a month of religious celebration; some of our most holy days. Is there something for us all to learn at this time, regardless of our beliefs?

For many Hindu, April is the celebration of **Rama Navami**, the Hindu celebration of the birth of Lord Rama. Later in April is **Hanuman Jayanti**, a Hindu celebration of Hanuman -- an embodiment of Lord Rama. Sikhs celebrate **Baisakhi** also in April to celebrate the Sikh brotherhood Khalsa.

The Islamic holiday **Mawlid el-Nabi** was celebrated by many in April, to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam.

The **Theravada Buddhist New Year** is celebrated in April, and the celebration continues for 3 days.

After **Palm Sunday** and **Maundy Thursday**, Christians commemorate the death and rebirth of Christ, first with **Good Friday** celebrations and then with **Easter Sunday** celebrations.

Jewish **Pesach (Passover)** celebrations began at sundown in April. Passover celebrates the deliverance of Jews from slavery in Egypt.

Those are just a few of the important holy days being celebrated, all around us, at this time of year.

III. Diverse Terminology

Racial/Ethnic Terminology: Just when you figured you finally understand the nuisances and variances between the definitions that define race, they are about to change as of 9/1/07. So here is one more opportunity for you to understand the way it will be used. <http://www.equity.psu.edu/cored/resources/term/term.html>

IV. Diversity Resource Material

Inclusive teaching techniques for students with disabilities
<http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/inclusive-teaching/index.php>

Models for defining disabilities:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/understanding-and-awareness/models-of-disability.php>

Diversity Etiquette:

http://www.reslife.cmich.edu/rama/index.php?section=Diversity&category=Disability_Etiquette

V. Monthly Diversity Article: **The Disabled: A part of the Diversity Conversation**

The Disabled—A Part of the Diversity Conversation

by Lorre Leon Mendelson, DTG Diversity Specialist on www.diversitydtg.com

In August 2001 my husband, a gifted songwriter, and I (a disability awareness trainer) decided to move from Northern California to Nashville, TN, the songwriters Mecca! As we dined in local restaurants we noticed accessible parking but in some cases, no accessible entrance for someone who is a wheelchair rider or someone who does not climb steps. As an individual with a disability, a disability advocate and active in many community activities, I am aware of physical and attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities.

Many of us grew up in an era where we were told to ignore people who use wheelchairs and white canes and discussing people who had been in "Mental Institutions" was taboo.

In fact it was not until 1997 that an old law in Chicago was removed that "cripples were not allowed on the streets", seven years after President George Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act. After having grown up with these stereotypes and misinformation about people with disabilities, my work is to help others cross that bridge to the disability community in a safe environment, facilitating discussion, creating understanding, developing models the company can utilize to obtain and distribute this information to their organizations, continuing to incorporate all areas of diversity into their company trainings and orientations. Many employees and employers will also have a disability or may acquire one and it is an asset for any corporation to work with all of its employees, providing a safe, open environment where stress is low, productivity is high. Making disability information part of your policies and available to your employees sends a message of excellent company practices.

This article is based on the following principals:

- Americans with disabilities participate in all arenas including employment, education, communications, the service industry, judicial, media, and medical, and contribute significantly to our country's economy
- The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is not just a good policy: it is a civil rights law designed to protect the rights of all Americans with disabilities. In addition it affects family members, employers, and other community members
- People with disabilities need to be consulted before an accommodation is offered or created on their behalf
- Access to services includes children and adults
- Accessible consists of attitudinal and physical practices

With an estimated 54 million Americans with disabilities, businesses expand their customer base when increasing the scope of customer services. Many gain an opportunity to increase services, customer relations, and revenues. Sometimes access is provided because it is the law and some employers embrace this practice and concept because it just makes good business sense. While some structures are "grand fathered in" and don't have to provide access, I believe taking the

extra step to become accessible literally opens doors of opportunity to businesses and consumers. As we look toward social and business events, it should be easier for employers to locate facilities that can accommodate ***all*** their employees.

Access can include how we talk to someone, how we behave toward them, how we view disability. It may include paved parking with entrances to a building with ramps instead of steps built within ADA architectural standards (not too steep and a level area on which to open doors). Accessible might be menus for people who don't read written print with alternative formats such as audiotape, CD's and Braille. Mail could be sent by email and audiotapes rather than paper postal mail. Sales staff in retail establishments can assist shoppers. Sometimes it might be as obvious as door handles that open automatically or have paddle handles rather than knobs to access. Loud noises, flashing lights, scents and chemicals may prevent people from maintaining a safe worksite. If an accommodation is requested, it is always a good idea to check with the end-user to determine what will work best for that individual. It is equally important to not assume a person needs an accommodation because they have a disability.

Sometimes I have found buildings that had ramps which were almost accessible but too steep for a person using a walker, a parent pushing a stroller, or a person who uses a wheelchair and some were used as break areas for employees, blocked by bicycles, plants, or holding garden equipment. Some businesses unintentionally block the pathway of people with disabilities by putting merchandise or adding outdoor seating on sidewalks by their business. Automatic doors enable total independence to entry. Other options such as a call ahead informing the business you will need a door opened will most likely be greeted with appreciation of your patronage. Awareness is the first step and I would like to collaborate with your organization to discuss good business practices with people with and without disabilities, and courtesy allowing all people the opportunity to enjoy their rights for successful employment.

Sometimes I receive questions about what to do if a public facility or business is not accessible. One option is communicating with each other about ways to access services, merchandise, or information, which will also increase their customer base, and services. Websites and email on the internet, verbal information, holding doors open for customers, installing a doorbell, or bringing merchandise and services to the customer can create access to many customers. Other options include learning more about how your company can participate in learning your rights and employees' rights for successful employment and high retention.

Lorre Leon Mendelson is a diversity trainer, advocate, educator and writer who identifies as an individual with psychiatric diagnoses.