



Wellbeing Insight

Disability Is Part Of Being Human

Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 1.3 billion people or about 16% of the global population currently experience significant disability.

Last week, as **our manifesto** delivered a Workplace Culture workshop to a team of Behavioural Analysts, the CEO shared with us the critical role one's environment plays in determining the experience and extent of one's disability. Whilst we may cognitively know the importance of our environment, Chelsea's explanation and story reached us at an emotional level as well.

The WHO describe disability as 'resulting from the interaction between individuals with a health condition (such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression), with personal and environmental factors (including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support). Such a description implies that with a helpful personal attitude and a supportive and accessible environment, a potential disability may actually not become a disability.

My Mum has lived with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) for all of my life. Mum has a phobia of germs and spends many hours each day washing her hands and cleaning – the installation of sensor taps has been one significant environmental change for Mum that has enabled her disability.

One of our favourite TV shows, *Escape to the Country*, recently introduced a new host, Steve Brown. Steve's accident in his early 20s resulted in him becoming a paraplegic and requiring a wheelchair for transportation. Despite most homes on the show being multi-storey, the producers have created an environment that has enabled Steve to host the show and effectively remove his disability within this role.

Also, our work has recently connected us with Sam Willoughby and his amazing story of courage and resilience. We were fortunate to attend the premiere of Sam's recently released documentary, *Ride* (this documentary is available to watch on ABC iview). Sam, a world champion BMX rider, suffered a tragic training accident that resulted in him becoming a quadriplegic. And whilst he is no longer able to ride a bike, Sam has become Australia's BMX coach and within this enabling environment he is thriving. We highly recommend Sam's documentary.

Can our interaction with our environment, which powerfully influences our sense of disability, also influence our abilities? Whilst it feels a little awkward and unnatural to write, I wanted to share that on various occasions over the past few years people have very kindly spotted the character



strength of humility in me (you can understand my awkwardness as this doesn't feel a very modest act!). In reflecting upon the importance of one's environment in regard to disability, I realised our environment also plays a vital role in shaping our abilities, in this case, our character strengths.

On deeper reflection, I believe my ability to action the strength of modesty and humility was greatly enhanced by my long-term mentor and line manager, Charlie. Several signature strengths of Charlie's included: Social Intelligence, Kindness and Gratitude. On countless occasions, Charlie would write a personal note or card to me, would thank me in public settings, or would acknowledge my efforts in newsletters and publications. There is no doubt in my mind, that these specific actions by Charlie, and others, created environmental conditions for me that 'enabled' my character strength of humility, for which I am very grateful.

With our head and our heart fully aware that our environment can enable our abilities and disabilities, fresh opportunities to act can present. We are part of another person's environment. What can each of us do today to enable someone else's abilities and how can we remove a barrier within an inaccessible environment in order to promote full and effective participation of a person with disabilities?