

Social Justice: What's disability got to do with it?

Transcript begins.

[Animated text appears on screen throughout the video, in sync with the narration delivered by a diversity of voices. Footage of people who represent the different communities being described is interspersed.]

Welcome! We're sure glad you're here!

All right, get comfortable, take a deep breath, and let's imagine.

What comes to mind when you think of the word "identity"?

Female, Hispanic, Buddhist, transgender ... Things that help us understand who we are and where we come from ... African American, gay, Asian, Muslim, indigenous ... The way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world ... Heterosexual Pacific Islander, white lesbian, cisgender Mexican, Black male ...

Were those some of the things that came to mind?

Did Blind? Or Deaf? Or lupus? Or depression? Or Black male COVID-19 long-hauler? Or white lesbian wheelchair user? Or any kind of disability?

Well, for many of us, disability is an identity. And a community and a culture. Both a socially constructed identity and also an identity that people choose and even celebrate. You see, disability is a natural part of the human experience. Not a problem to fix. Or an issue you can choose not to focus on.

So, why is it important to see it this way?

Well, 15% of the world's population is living with a disability or disabilities. And each of those people have parents or siblings or children ... Disability can and does affect all of us. It cuts across age, race, gender, and ethnicity. It's something you can be born with or acquire at any point in your life.

And because disability itself is hugely diverse, there are infinite ways in which we live and experience the world.

We often talk about the importance of "bringing your whole self to the table," but what happens when part of who we are is less welcome? When we value people without disabilities over people with disabilities, this is called "ableism." Ingrained attitudes continue to degrade and stigmatize people with disabilities. While it's common to use language like "insane" or "lame" or "dumb," these terms label people with disabilities as deficient and inferior and undermine our collective work toward justice.

Now, on top of understanding the effects of ableism, there's something else it's important to know.

Although disability can affect all of us, it does not affect all of us equally. Inequity is exacerbated for disabled people who are members of other minority groups. When you take racism, add a slice of ableism, and then some patriarchy on top ... well, then you are crushed by our systems. So, if you are a person of color, a woman, incarcerated, living in poverty, or in more than one of those groups, you are much more likely to have a disability. And people of color with disabilities are the most likely to live in poverty and be unemployed.

But there is good news ...

Everything that's wrong with our society was a set of choices, and the beautiful thing is that, together, we can make different choices.

So, together, let's take another deep breath ... and imagine.

What choices can we make to truly accelerate full inclusion? What choices can we make to collectively dismantle ableism? What choices can we make to fuel our march toward social justice?

There is so much ...

You can open up the conversation, ask questions, and listen and learn to move past our collective fear toward action. You can create a safe space for disability identity, including your own. You can ensure that people with disabilities are involved in decision making and agenda setting. You can center the priorities of disabled people in your advocacy. And commit both time and budget to making all your organization's activities accessible and inclusive.

You will make mistakes, and it's okay. But don't let fear hold you back. Together, we can celebrate how our differences make us stronger. Unite us, in fact. Together, we can talk about what each of us contributes and honor our interdependence.

In making our systems and structures, our communities, culture, and language accessible and free from discrimination, we won't have to imagine what a just world looks like any longer. Because, together, we will have built it.

There is no justice without disability.

End of transcript.