

Disability Etiquette Skit: “Can You Believe It?”



(Five persons with disabilities have a hash-out gripe session about unbelievably poor etiquette and insults they often endure.)

Props and Preparation:

Table and four chairs, menus (7 copies of script inside a folder with “Menu” of the cover, and each character’s lines marked in the copy with their name on it), dark glasses, white cane, wheelchair, notepad and pen, sign on the wall: “Café Benedict,” order pad and pencil (or electronic tablet).

Ask for volunteers as people enter the session. Provide copies of the script ahead of time to allow them to get comfortable with their lines.

Characters:

NARRATOR: reads play’s setting, describes the characters, narrates any visible but unspoken actions if anyone in the audience is blind, and leads ending applause.

PROP PERSON: gives characters their props prior to the skit

JANE: wears dark glasses and uses a white cane.

SAMUEL: uses a wheelchair, carries a note pad.

EMELIO: wears hearing aids, if possible.

ROSE: (sign language interpreter) wears dark shirt to make signs visible.

PRISCILLA: middle-aged woman with no visible disability

WAIT PERSON: person of any sex or age, carries order pad and pencil.

Setting:

A restaurant with a table, with four chairs arranged with all facing the audience, and an open space for seating a person using a wheelchair.

Narrator: Several friends, in town for a United Methodist jurisdictional meeting, get together at Café Benedict after attending worship at a local church.

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(At opening, JANE and SAMUEL are seated at a table. JANE’s white cane is visibly propped against her chair.)

JANE: Can you believe it? I was just in the restroom and a woman came up to me and grabbed my hand and placed it under the water. Like I didn’t know where the spigot was when I somehow managed to find the sink and turn the water on! That happens all the time! I feel like I’ve been assaulted when someone grabs me without saying anything or asking if I need help.

SAMUEL: That sounds like what happened to me the other day. I was sitting outside, enjoying the sun, and thinking about the article I just started writing. All of a sudden a man came up from behind me and started pushing my wheelchair, without saying a word. It wasn’t like I was in the way or anything.

JANE: I jumped and scolded the woman for grabbing my arm, and she got all huffy. “I was just trying to help you,” she said. Another time I had asked for someone to point me to the stall so that I didn’t bump into anyone in the restroom. I was sitting there doing my business and asked myself where the toilet paper might be. I heard a voice that was too close to be outside the stall telling me where the paper was. I told her in no uncertain terms to get out of that stall and close the door!

SAMUEL: Wow- she really invaded your personal space! I think it’s bad enough that people lean on my wheelchair, or put their feet up on the wheels. They don’t realize that the chair is a part of my space.

JANE: That’s like people who think they are helping by moving my cane out of the way. I need my cane right by me so I can get up when I need to. I fold it up out of the way, so nobody can trip on it.

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JANE, cont.: The other day I was searching all over the ground for my cane, and finally I heard a voice asking what I was looking for. The lady had picked the cane up and was holding it for me, trying to be helpful.

SAMUEL: You know, sometimes it is helpful when people jump to push my chair up a steep ramp. I just wish they would tell me that they were going to do it! If they offer to assist me I can explain how to help and where I am going.

JANE: You're lucky if they listen to you! If someone is helping me get someplace I'll try to tell the person to let me hold the back of their elbow and that I will follow closely behind. You wouldn't believe how often people argue with me and would rather drag me by my hand!

SAMUEL: That sounds like the guys who offer to hold the door open for me so I can get into the building, but then stand in the way so I would have to roll over their feet to get in. Sometimes it's easier just to struggle with the door myself.

JANE: The hard part is that I know I need help at times. But I just wish people would let me try to figure things out myself and wait to make sure I need help. I'm trying to learn to read Braille, but every time I'm trying to make out what a sign says, someone comes along and reads it for me. How am I supposed to get more independent if people do things for me that I can do myself?

SAMUEL: This is a nice restaurant. Thanks for not choosing a buffet. I've had enough buffet lines this week to last me all year. People kept coming up and pushing around me when I was slow because I couldn't reach all the food. It takes my appetite away.

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JANE: My husband saw someone he needed to talk with and took off when we got to the cafeteria yesterday. I just stood there waiting, getting hungrier and hungrier, with people walking by me going for their meals. Finally I called out for someone to please help me get some food. Wouldn't you think somebody might have offered to help?

SAMUEL: How did it go after that? People seem to be put out when I ask them for help going through a buffet line, so I prefer to wait until after everyone else is through so I'm not rushed.

(Enter EMELIO with ROSE from stage right - Action note for EMELIO AND ROSE: EMELIO must always look at Rose who is signing all that is said. She does not sign dialogue belonging to EMELIO.)

EMELIO: Hi, Guys. This is ROSE.

JANE and SAMUEL: Hello. Hi.

ROSE: (signs hello and hi for EMELIO.) Hello.

(They glance at the menu.)

SAMUEL: Are we ready to order yet? Do you remember all the choices that I read to you, JANE?

JANE: I've decided. How about the two of you?

(SAMUEL signals for the WAIT PERSON who comes to the table.)

WAIT PERSON: (Looking at ROSE) Are they ready to order yet? What do they want to eat?

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SAMUEL: (Sighs) I can order for myself, thanks. I'd like the Chicken Caesar Salad and a diet cola.

WAIT PERSON: (Pointing to JANE) What about her?

JANE: Are you talking to me? You can say “Hey, lady with the white cane” and I'll answer you. I'd like a Rueben sandwich and iced tea.

WAIT PERSON: (Looking at ROSE) What about the two of you?

EMELIO: (Points to the menu): I'll have fish and chips and a vanilla milk shake.

ROSE: And I'll have a taco salad and iced tea.

SAMUEL: It's nice to be talking with people at eye level. I get such a crick in my neck from looking up at people when I'm visiting with them. And have you ever noticed how some people will look over your head or at your feet when you are sitting in a wheelchair?

(Noise off stage makes SAMUEL notice PRISCILLA. He waves for her to join the group.)

PRISCILLA: I'm so upset with that waitress! After she scolded me, I needed to see a friendly face. Thanks for inviting me to join you.

JANE: Why did she scold you?

PRISCILLA: She said I didn't look disabled! She said I had no business taking up a handicapped parking spot, even though I had my parking permit and everything.

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SAMUEL and ROSE: But you don't look disabled!

PRISCILLA: That's what everyone says. But I just had my eighth knee surgery and I was afraid I would slip on the icy patches in the parking lot. I've been falling a lot lately. I can't use a cane or walker because my hand doesn't work right since my stroke.

(The others exchange humorous glances.)

PRISCILLA: I've had my parking permit since my stroke, but I don't use it unless I need it. It's come in handy after my back surgeries and when I was weak from my chemo two years ago, and I had . . .

EMELIO: (Interrupting) So...did you enjoy the church service today?

JANE: Can you believe the way the usher treated me? I asked him if they had a Braille hymnal, and he said in a very loud voice, like he was talking to a two-year old, "Stand over here out of the way and I'll get somebody to help you." So I stood there for a while and finally gave up and found my way to a pew.

SAMUEL: I didn't think I could see any cut-out areas in the pews, but I asked just in case. I really wanted to see the bishop preaching, so I sat next to the front pew. The ushers acted like I was in the way, but I just ignored them. They don't seem to understand that if I stay in the back I can't see a thing when everyone else is standing.

EMELIO: I asked where to sit so I could see the interpreter. They told me where to sit, but when I watched the interpreter I couldn't see anything else that was going on. She was sitting down on the main floor, clear off to the side. There wasn't much light there so it was a little hard to see her.

ROSE: We met with the interpreter afterwards and asked her why she sat there to interpret. He said that the worship and design team had decided that was the best place because it wouldn't distract the congregation during the service. Can you believe it?

PRISCILLA: The loud music really bothered me. I asked the usher if there was a better place to sit, where it wasn't so loud. He suggested that I go outside. I finally took his advice, because I was also getting a headache from the strong aftershave the kid sitting next to me was wearing. I don't know why kids think they have to bathe in the stuff!

JANE: Then you must have missed communion. I wanted to go to the front for communion, but the usher insisted that I stay put and he would bring the elements to me. He said it was easier that way.

SAMUEL: Since I was already in the front, I went forward for communion. The steward acted like he didn't know what to do. Since my hands were a little shaky maybe he thought I couldn't use them, because all of a sudden I found he was shoving a piece of bread in my mouth. Maybe he thought I would contaminate the grape juice if I dipped the bread myself!

EMELIO: So why are people so afraid of those of us who are Deaf or have disabilities? Do they think we bite? Do they think what we have is contagious? And by the way, Priscilla – I'm sorry that I cut you off a little while ago! All of us with various disabilities, hidden or obvious, need to stick together and listen to each other's stories.

JANE: I don't think people are acting with malice. I had a friend who didn't talk to me for a year after I went blind.

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JANE, cont.: She said she didn't know what to say. Anything would have been better than not talking to me. She's not mean, but that was hurtful!

SAMUEL: Well, I think it is mostly ignorance. Can you believe how some people seem hung up on using the correct language? They ask, "what would you rather be called: disabled, handicapped, physically challenged, or what?" I tell them, "SAMUEL would be just fine."

PRISCILLA: One thing about it, SAMUEL. At least they are trying to understand.

(NARRATOR leads applause)

Discussion points:

Did the skit seem realistic? (Hint: the stories all came from the experiences of people with disabilities.)

Did you see yourself or members of your church in any of the characters or statements?

What are alternatives to these etiquette blunders?

Did you learn anything new?

Why are some people offended when those of us with disabilities want to do things independently and turn down unsolicited help?

Written by Deaconess Lynn Swedberg for Mission u 2014