

Introducing Kathie Snow — 17th Annual Conference Keynote

Reach for the Rainbow Conference delegates who are ready for provocative questions, positive solutions, and innovative thinking, mixed with humor and real life experiences are going to love listening to Kathie Snow. Kathie is the author of *Disability is Natural: Revolutionary Common Sense for Raising Successful Children with Disabilities*. This is just a taste of the perspective Kathie will bring.

from **People First Language** – Kathy Snow

My son, Benjamin, is 18 years old. More important than his diagnosis are his interests, strengths, and dreams. He loves history, burned fish sticks, classic rock, and writing movie reviews---and he's great at mimicking actors and politicians! He's earned two karate belts, taken drama classes, and performed in five children's theater productions. Benj is attending college and wants to be a film critic. He has blonde hair, blue eyes, and cerebral palsy. His diagnosis is only one of many characteristics of his whole persona. *He is not his disability*. His potential cannot be predicted by his diagnosis.

When I meet new people, I don't disclose that I'll never be a prima ballerina. I focus on my strengths, not on what I cannot do. Don't you do the same? So when speaking about my son, I don't say, "Benj can't write with a pencil." I say, "Benj writes on a computer." I don't say, "He can't walk." I say, "He uses a power chair." It's a simple, *but vitally important*, matter of perspective.

People First Language is about good manners and respect. We have the power to create a new paradigm of disability. In doing so, we'll change the lives of children and adults who have disability diagnoses—and we'll also change ourselves and our world.

from **When Less is More, Revolutionary Common Sense** – Kathy Snow

We often tend to believe the “worst” about a person (what he can't do), and then try to do *our* “best” by providing large amounts of help, services, interventions, and so forth. In the process, many children and adults with disabilities *learn helplessness*. But this is a time when less really can be more!

When I make the gravy that accompanies a pot roast, I know what ingredients I'll use: butter, flour, pan drippings, salt, pepper, and some herbs and spices. As I'm making it, I don't dump all these in the skillet-I could ruin my creation! Instead, I add a bit of this and that, stir and taste. This process

is repeated until the gravy is just right. I don't want to put too much of anything in the gravy-adding a little at a time works best. The same is true when an artist paints, a hairdresser cuts hair, and in other creative endeavors. This "a-little-at-a-time" strategy might be worth trying when thinking about providing assistance to another.

Instead of automatically putting most physical support in place (a one-on-one, job coach, etc.), what if we started with little or no support, and paused to give the "ingredients" (a person's abilities, people around him, and the environment) time to blend? Then we could add a little here and a little there, in the right amounts, so we don't interfere with (and possibly ruin) the creation that's developing.

This strategy could be applied to children and adults with disabilities in the home, on the job, during community or recreational activities, and everywhere else. *Less* assistance can have a greater, more positive impact on a person's life than *more*.

What if, when a person tries to do something new and she struggles, we wait for her to ask for help instead of jumping in unasked? And what if we asked her what she wanted to learn or do instead of making those decisions for her? Gadzooks-consider the possibilities! Less really can be more!

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