



INSPIRE TO BE INCLUSIVE

In 1969, I came home to Portland with significant hearing loss and a traumatic brain injury from combat in Vietnam. My plan had been to serve my country and use the GI Bill to study speech communication under Dr. Ben Padrow at Portland State. In 1969, the VA rehabilitation department had a list of the jobs veterans with my disabilities “could” do. Professional public speaker was not on that list. I had been excluded not because of who I was, but because of the disability I had. I was refused my educational plan “for my own good”. There is a name for this decision model. It is called exclusion.

I went to see Dr. Padrow to tell him I wouldn’t be able to study under him. He told me that he saw no evidence that I still couldn’t achieve my dreams. He only saw evidence of my being willing to give up on them. Dr. Padrow rejected the philosophy of exclusion. Instead, he embraced inclusion. Exclusion meant that I would have to achieve my goal alone. Inclusion meant that we would achieve it together. For me, it made all the difference in the world.

Inclusion is the foundation of every aspect of successful organizations. The best practice companies know it by another name “teamwork”.

Historically people with physical and intellectual disabilities have been placed into jobs based using exclusion, not inclusion, considering only the jobs that are assumed to be consistent with their disability. This often means that they are not hired for the jobs that are right for them only the ones that are left. Too often there are few if any left.

By using your organizations commitment to teamwork, inclusion means that you focus on the person with the disability rather than only on the person’s disability. Your company focuses not only on what they can do to be successful, but also what your managers, supervisors and team can do as well.



Inclusion is not just a program to “persuade” you to hire persons with disabilities. It is the first step to bringing training and guidance to make your management team full partners in your employee’s success and making your employees full partners in yours. It will make all the difference in the world not only for your employees but for you as well.

Dr. Richard Pimentel