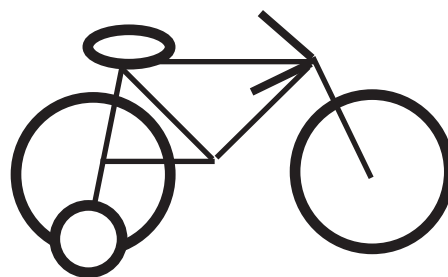


Remember the Bicycle!



Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

While traveling around the country doing presentations, I've been amazed (and dismayed) by how many children and adults with disabilities don't have the tools (assistive technology devices) they need for success. Professionals, parents, therapists, and others who have great power and influence say something like, "Well, Johnny isn't able to use [a power wheelchair, communication device, or whatever]."

In too many cases, however, the person with a disability has never been given the opportunity to try the device! Those around him presume incompetence. Revisiting our bicycle histories, however, can give us a different perspective.

When your parents bought your first bicycle, did *you* know how to ride it? In most cases, the answer is NO! But they bought it for you anyway, with no guarantee you would be successful at mastering the two-wheeler. They presumed competence!

As adults, we buy computers, software, navigation devices, cell phones, video cameras, and many other tools before we know how to use them. We presume competence in ourselves, and we give ourselves plenty of time to learn (and make many mistakes in the process). How would it feel, though, if a salesperson gave you the once-over and said he would not sell you a computer or other device because he didn't think you'd ever learn how to use it?

In many instances, a child or adult with a disability is given only a brief opportunity to try out a new device, and if the person doesn't "get it" immediately, we assume she's incapable of benefiting from it. We don't consider that she might need more time or a different device.

Let's remember the bicycle again. How long did the training wheels stay on *your* bike? Some of us needed them on for a longer time, and some of us needed our moms or dads to hold onto the back of the seat before letting go—again, for a long time. In addition, many of us lost our balance, fell off, and/or

crashed into something many times before we became proficient bike-riders. And some of us may have needed a different type of bike!

How successful would *you* be without your cell phone, computer, garage door opener, microwave oven, and many

other tools that make life better, easier, and/or more productive? Now consider how the appropriate assistive technology devices could radically and positively improve the life of a child or adult with a disability...

Can we continue to put limits on another's success because of our erroneous attitudes? It's time to remember the bicycle and *presume competence!*

**People *without* disabilities
buy things before they know
how to use them.
Why doesn't this happen for
people *with* disabilities?**