
Let's Talk Human Rights!



Division of Community Advocacy and Services

- Office of Asian and Pacific Islanders
 - Office of Deaf Services
 - Office of Latino Affairs
 - Office of Persons with Disabilities
 - Office of Native Americans
 - Office on the Status of African Americans
 - Office on the Status of Women
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Is it Free Speech or Hate Speech?

If we Google the terms "Free Speech" and "Hate Speech", we get the following definitions:

Hate speech is speech that offends, threatens, or insults groups based on race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or other traits.

Freedom of speech is the right of people to express their opinions publicly without governmental interference, subject to the laws against libel, incitement to violence or rebellion, etc.

Both of these terms are being used to excuse words that are hurtful to different groups of lowans. For example:

- LGBTQA adults and youth have for a long time been the target or misunderstood, fear based and hurtful remarks and actions that have led to fatalities.
- Latinos from different countries and different immigration status (even US Citizens) continue to live in fear or rejection from peers, neighbors, co-workers, and the community in general due to the negative remarks they live around every day.

On most occasions, whether we call it freedom of speech or hate speech, hurtful speech is led by a lack of knowledge and information. Fear of the unknown and unfamiliarity drives individuals to act in a way that not only harms the group or individual targeted, but also the community and ultimately our great state.

At the end of the day, individuals or groups might not be breaking any laws with negative comments and actions. However, that may not be the most important consideration. Before anyone passes judgement on others, it is important to ask if the words we use create an environment we want to live in and build for our children.

Written by: Sonia Reyes-Snyder, Office of Latino Affairs

Overcoming "Workload Paralysis"

I recently read an online article called, "How to Overcome Workload Paralysis" by Belle Beth Cooper. The author describes four steps to take when the workload is so big that it freezes us from doing anything at all. I often feel small and helpless when I think about the advocacy that needs to be done around the topic of employment for people with disabilities. I want to tackle everything and help everyone. Sometimes my zeal can be motivating, but more often than not it is paralyzing. There is so much to do and so little time and so many road blocks. Why is everything so hard? Woe is me.

I decided to apply the article I found online to my work. First, the author prescribes that we pick just one thing and finish it. I decided that I would select one area of advocacy work focused on Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Section 511 places limitations on the use of subminimum wage. The intent is that it will make it more difficult for youth to enter into subminimum wage employment and will help individuals who have been employed at subminimum wage explore opportunities to work in their communities. The first task I decided to start and finish was identifying data points to collect and monitor.

The next step is to prioritize like mad. This is easy for me because I like lists. I actually find the act of creating lists therapeutic. I decided that individuals with disabilities who have the highest rates of unemployment would be top priority. This includes individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, and individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. Using data to track vocational rehabilitation outcomes will help support any recommendations that I make and monitor the impact on service delivery. Prioritize- check.

The third piece of the author's advice is to take small steps. This is difficult for me because I am a big picture thinker and also because I am extremely impatient, a Millennial trait that I am trying to embrace. I have high expectations of people with disabilities regarding their ability to work. I firmly believe in Employment 1st- the philosophy that anyone who wants to work can work in competitive integrated employment with the right supports. When I become impatient, angry and frustrated, I have to remind myself to slow down. The seemingly small advances are actually what create change. The collective impact that we have as a whole society is what drives opportunity. People with disabilities being courageous enough to explore a new career opportunity in an unfamiliar setting, advocates speaking up and challenging others, businesses becoming more inclusive are all steps leading us to our bigger goal.

Finally, the author says we need to make health a priority. I interpret this to mean regularly scheduled spa days and expensive chocolate. As an advocate I get discouraged at times and it takes a toll on my mental health. I am more of an optimist by nature, but I can get pretty sour after a long week of cutting through bureaucratic red tape. I have to actively reframe my thoughts and remind myself that I am making a difference. Occasional pep talks from colleagues don't hurt either.

I advocate because I believe in the cause and I believe in equal rights for all people, including lowans with disabilities' right to earn a living wage. This work will not be done in a month, a year, or a decade. I know that small successes are all part of the larger movement of empowering individuals with disabilities. I am learning to celebrate small wins with the enthusiasm of a true Millennial, one checklist at a time.

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