

Conjunction Junction, What's Your Function?

Dawn Bacon
MN APSE President

High Functioning or Low Functioning? An interesting dichotomy of words many of us use or have used to define persons with disabilities. When using these terms as a matter of permanency, we systematically divide people into two camps. And based on what? In my experience, it has been a rather loosely and randomly ascribed label given to people in casual conversation. So I ask you this: Have you ever heard anyone refer to himself or herself as Low-Functioning? If not, would you want to?

Context is key here. No one is good at everything and we all need supports in certain areas. When we label someone as "low functioning" our expectations for and from the individual take a nosedive. How does this descent of expectation influence perceptions on the part of the described individual, a current or potential employer, and members of our communities?

The advantage of Supported Employment is that it is not an either/or. On the contrary, SE services embrace an approach that centers on individual strengths and builds in supports tailored to the individual.

So I ask you this: Collectively, at what level are we functioning? Of course, this is a loaded question but one worthy of dialogue and discernment. To turn the mirror on ourselves and begin to ask such questions can be difficult. We may find that we have to let go of some of our perceptions that are holding us back; such as the belief that someone is too low functioning to participate in the workforce or that the barriers are just too big to penetrate. It's easy to go there and most of us have. However, if we want to achieve the outcomes that transform lives, we have to take off the lens of scarcity, step outside our comfort zones and walk boldly into 2007. Let us resolve to expect more, think bigger and unlock doors to places that were traditionally unattainable.

Minnesota APSE

The Network on Employment – January 2007