

I am not sure what we hear more about in the news lately, the 2008 presidential race or the need to be "green". In the whole scheme of life, one is much more long term than the other. So that is why I have been thinking a lot lately about being "greener." Our family has been recycling for years but recently I have gone a little farther by replacing most (not just one or two) of our light bulbs with fluorescent, using reusable bags at the grocery store and by purchasing new "green" major appliances when necessary. All this "green" thinking is about Renewing Resources. Then I had a big thought! Employing people with disabilities is about renewing resources!

People with cognitive disabilities are thought to be very limited in their abilities. Project SEARCH, a program that trains individuals with cognitive disabilities for work in financial and hospital settings, has transformed perceptions about the extent of the abilities of these individuals. The renewal happens within the individual as the result of being challenged and also within the employers and co-workers through positively changed perceptions.

People who have been in accidents are renewed through rehabilitation and retraining programs. How many of us know co-workers whose jobs have been revamped after an accident? Or maybe, they lost their jobs, but are now working somewhere else doing something else. They're the same people, transformed, but still productive. Maybe because of their traumatic experience, the renewing process has changed them for the better giving them a more focused purpose in life and in the workplace.

People with mental disabilities go through a process that involves diagnosis and treatment. There are hundreds of employees, professionals, and entrepreneurs in our area who are leading very productive and successful lives that are also taking medication to control their mental disability. By the way, despite what we see in the news, did you know statistics show overwhelmingly that people with mental disabilities are more likely to be victims than to be the aggressor? By altering or "recycling" the way the chemicals in the brain work via medication and therapy, we have valuable people in our community that make our world a better place.

People who are hearing or sight impaired can do so much more than many people might realize. There are so many technological advances in the workplace and more being developed every day that enable individuals to complete job assignments. Their jobs may be accessed or processed slightly differently but the outcomes are the same.

Renewing existing resources is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. Employing a person with a disability brings a different, and most times, a refreshing perspective to the workplace. I challenge you to think greener in your workplace!