

Person 1: Is it the American Disability Association?

Person 2: Nope.

Person 3: Yeah. American Disabilities Act.

Person 4: American Disability Association?

Person 5: No.

Person 6: No.

Person 7: American With Disabilities Act.

Me: The ADA is an equal rights bill that was passed in 1990 by the George H. W. Bush administration. The ADA stands for the Americans with Disabilities Act, and according to the US Department of labor, the ADA states that, quote, The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to local governments' programs, and services. The ADA covers a lot of different types of discrimination, but it doesn't protect people from experiencing ableism, especially in day to day interactions. So, for example, the ADA can't cover unwanted interactions like someone helping without asking first.

Me: Hi, I'm Mimi, and in this podcast segment of a series of three, we'll be exploring different topics about disability. Today we'll be talking about how ableism affects men with physical disabilities in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I wanted to be able to give definitive answers about the best way to interact with people who have disabilities, but through my interviews, I learned just how naive my goal was. To learn more, I decided to sit down with various people from the Jackson community and have a conversation around the topic of ableism. Now there are three types of ableism that are defined and

according to a peer reviewed article by Medical News today. Quote, Hostile ableism includes openly aggressive behaviors or policies such as bullying, abuse, and violence. Benevolent ableism is a form of ableism which views people as weak, vulnerable, or in need of rescuing. This is patronizing and undermines the person's individuality and autonomy, reinforcing an unequal power dynamic. And ambivalent ableism is a combination of both hostile and benevolent ableism. For example, a person might start an interaction by treating someone in a patronizing way and then switch to being hostile if the person objects to their behavior. There are many great ideas and viewpoints, and I was happy to be able to have such great conversations around the topics that I chose to explore. I drove out to the Teton Adaptive offices to meet with Joe Stone.

Me: How are you today?

Joe Stone: I'm doing really well. How are you? Good. You didn't ask who George was. Who's George? George is my puppy. He's a service dog in training, and he is, for whatever reason, shaking and whining right now, so you might hear him in the background.

Me: Alright. Can you introduce yourself a little bit?

Joe Stone: Yeah. My name is Joe Stone. I am the director of Mission at Teton Adaptive. We are in Jackson, and we are here to build more inclusion in the outdoor recreation and tourism industry around here. So my passion for this work came about eleven years ago when I crashed speed flying in Missoula, Montana, which rendered me an incomplete C seven quadriplegic. So I use a wheelchair full time and I have an

impairment in my hands and can't use my legs at all. So that started me on a journey from being a very adventurous able bodied athlete to trying to figure out how to be an adventurous athlete with a disability. And then once I figured some things out for myself, I started recognizing that there was some potential for me to start helping other people get into the outdoors, which has been a decade long journey of trying to figure out ways to get more people outside.

Me: Referring back to the three types of ableism that we mentioned earlier, I wanted to ask Joe Stone about his experience in dealing with the three types of ableism.

Joe Stone: I mean, I think what is most common that I come across is people just not having any idea that they're even being that way. So they're not necessarily, I don't think trying to be mean, but they just are assuming that myself or someone else with a disability is less capable than what they are. They're assuming that I would need a lot more help than what I do. And without asking, or without trying to get to know me or assuming something is too dangerous for me to do. Those kinds of things is what I encounter the most, which is people feeding off of the stigma that exists within the disability community or within the word disability and...yeah, never really doing any research or never really having any understanding or having any background with it. And so they're just continuing with that stigma, which is what keeps people with disabilities from working or having more opportunities outside or having more opportunities in general, or what makes it harder to go to school or harder to get reasonable accommodations somewhere. So it usually comes from ignorance.

I rarely have it happen where it comes from a source of where maybe there's some anger or hate wrapped around it. But that does happen every now and again on trails. For example, I use a bike that's all electric, and it's a trike. It's on three wheels. But that trike is something that people assume, because other people aren't allowed to have electric motors or anything on those trails, certain trails, that I'm not allowed to have it either. But there's actually an amendment to the Wilderness Act that allows me to be out there. So every now and again, it's very rare, but every now and again I run into somebody who's actually mad that I'm out there with an electric motor.

Me: This is an example of hostile ableism. As Joe was describing, hostile ableism is openly aggressive behaviors, policies, bullying, abuse, or violence. And the example that Joe was giving was someone who was angry with the fact that he had an electric powered bike on a National Park trail. But as Joe said, it is completely legal. So again, that is an example of an openly aggressive behavior from another person towards someone who has a disability.

Joe Stone: Most people might approach it and say, hey, I don't think e-assist is allowed. And I explain the amendment to the Wilderness Act, and they're like oh, I have no idea. That's really great that that exists for people with disabilities. But I've encountered people though, that are like, no, I don't think that's a real thing. And they argue with me about it, which is like, really an interesting situation to find yourself in. But yeah, most of the time it's ignorant. And when it's corrected, people usually are like, oh, I never knew. Thanks for taking the time to explain it. Which is why I usually try to approach everything with kindness and with as much patience as possible and try to educate.

Usually, for the most part, my approach to any of those scenarios where ableism is getting in my way in one way or another.

Me: One of the things that I've come to learn through spending time with people who have disabilities are the interactions that we would assume are simple, such as rushing over to help open a door for someone are more complicated than we would ever think. So I asked Joe Stone and Pierre Bergerman to expand upon why this.

Joe Stone: This is like, this is what ableism is, right? But it's coming out of kindness, but it's also coming out of like, pity, right? So there have been times where I've been 50 feet away from a door to go into a building and someone will wait there and hold the door open and all that. And I'm like pushing up a ramp or whatever. I'm like, I can open that door. I probably had a plan. If I'm getting all the way to that front door, I probably had a plan to get in there. I wasn't thinking I was just going to go outside the door and wait for someone to come by. Somebody is there, awkwardly trying to help, right? So one, they're assuming that I'm not going to be able to open that door, or it's going to be very challenging for me to open that door. So challenging that they should wait two minutes for me to get to the door and continue to hold it open. So it's coming from this kind of negative area, assuming that someone with a disability is just simply less capable of something as simple as opening a door. Some people need help opening the doors. Some people don't need help opening the doors. So it's a nice gesture. So that's what I mean by it's coming from, like a kind place.

Me: This is an example of benevolent ableism, referring back to the definition that I described earlier. A key component of benevolent ableism is an unequal power

dynamic, and Joe states this beautifully by saying that when you automatically go to help someone who has a disability without asking first, then you're automatically assuming that the person who has a disability isn't capable of doing something on their own and that they need someone who is able bodied to help them, which again, reinforces the idea of an unequal power dynamic.

Joe Stone: So people with disabilities are no different than everyone else. In the sense that we all need help from time to time, and it just might look a little bit different or might be a little bit more common for a person with a disability. With somebody like myself with C seven quadriplegic, I probably have to ask for help a little bit more often than somebody without a disability. That's totally fine. But people that are being kind and willing to help, the best thing they can do is say, hey, do you need a hand with that door? And if I say no, I'm all good. Be like, cool, have a great day. But what happens a lot is someone will say, like, for example, I'll be getting in and out of my car, and I'll be getting ready to pull my wheelchair up into the van, and someone will come like, hey, can I help you with that wheelchair? I'm like, no, I'm all good. I do this every day. It's not a big deal. And I got a whole system, so I'm good. And they'll be like, no, I can help you out with that. And I'm like, oh, I get it. It's cool. I don't need your help, though. I was like, I'm good. I've got a whole system that makes it to where it works for me. No, but I'm able bodied, and I can pick that chair up and get in there pretty... I can make your day a lot easier right now.

Me: So the example that Joe just gave to me seems borderline like, ambivalent ableism because the person started off the interaction by being completely nice and by being benevolent and asking, oh, can I help you? And Joe said, no, thank you, though. I'm all

good. And then the person kept pressing it and pressing it and pressing it, which means that they're kind of offended in a way that he didn't want their help. And so, as Joe will say in a minute, that is an indication that the person is not listening.

Joe Stone: And there are times where I've had to stop and say, you're not making my day easier. One, because you're not listening to me. You asked me if I needed help, and I told you I was fine. That's where it should have ended. I said, thanks, I appreciate it, but I'm all good. Conversation should have been over. You kept pressing the issue. So now you've wasted my time. So now I'm here longer than I would have been had I not had to sit and continue to tell you no. But also, you don't know where my wheelchair goes. You don't know how the brakes come off. You don't know how the brakes get engaged again back in it. You don't know where to put it inside my van, where I have access to it when I am ready to get out. You don't know any of those things. So then I have to sit and explain it all to you. And so now it's like more work for me than just for me to pick my wheelchair up and put it in the van and go on with my day. And so when people want to help, whether it's opening the door, helping somebody get in and out of their car, whatever, help with groceries, a number of other things... anything.... Just want to help. In general, it's not a bad thing to ask. What's bad is when you don't listen. And if you could just listen to what the people are saying and respect what they said. If it's a no, then be like, cool, have a good day. And if it's yes, then the next question is, How can I help? So not just assuming, you know, the best way to do it, but if they're like, yeah, I can use your hand, say, cool, how can I help? What's the best practice for me here? What do you need? And then listen to that answer and try to do as closely to what they're asking as possible.

Me: How are you today?

Pierre Bergaman: Good, thanks.

Me: Good.

Pierre: Thanks for having me.

Me: Yeah. Can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

Pierre: Yeah. So my name is Pierre Bergman. I work for a Jackson Hole park n' pipe in the wintertime, and we do bike park in the summer. I do grooming in the winter. So operate a snowcat and we'll figure out summertime. We haven't gotten there yet. It's a lot of figuring out. And I am a T seven paraplegic complete. So that just means I have complete... just means I have no function below my level.

Me: I was wondering what kind of ableism you're most aware about or what do you see on a day to day basis or what do you experience the most?

Pierre: It's probably like, just like everyone always asks me for a hand and stuff like that. It's just like, I got it. I think that's probably like the phrase I repeat the most. They're like, oh, can I get it? I got it. I think it's pretty much all you can say to people who want to help is like, hey, I got it. I can do this. This winter skiing, my sit ski was in the Kids Ranch, and I had to go up the elevator and push it across the yard and stuff. And I had my system and stuff, and most of the people knew and they kind of gave me my space and let me do my thing. Sometimes they would ask and be good. And there's a bit like a few people, and I'd be like, no, I'm good. And they would take my sit ski and I'd be like, all right, well, I didn't really ask for this, but I'm not going to say no. You're going to be somewhat fast... And sometimes it wouldn't be faster. Like they would get stuck in the door and I'd have to go around and I'd be like, all right, I could do this. I do this every

day. You wouldn't believe the amount of doors I open in a day. I don't need you to run across the parking lot to open a door or whatnot.

A lot of people who have a disability will tell you when we need the help. I promise it's very uncomfortable for us to ask for it, so when we need it, we'll ask for it. That's probably, like, the most common one. The looks. Also, people just looking at you all day, it's like eyeballing. It's like, all right, I get it. Just, like, waiting for you to fall or something like that. Just please stop looking at me. We're good. All right. Yes, I know. I'm in a wheelchair. I'm doing something like, when I go to the post office, blows people's minds that I could pick up mail. It's like, oh, my god, he came into the post office, he opened *two doors, got his mail key, picked up a package*. It's incredible. But yes, people got to realize I would have done what I'm doing regardless of if they were there, I would have figured it out.

Like holding the door thing. People want to help me with my wheelchair when I'm putting it away, when I'm parking and stuff, it's like, yeah, you realize I had to do this when I'm at home, when I'm getting home, when I'm getting gas. Like, I do this all the time. We're good. Also, you're going to be way slower than me. You probably don't even know how to take apart a wheelchair. Like, there's just, like, a lot of things like that people don't really think about. They want to be helpful. I know it comes from a good place, but that's where the ableism comes in hand. They just inherently see you with less than so they're like, oh, I got to help this incapable person. Like, he can't do anything. He's in a wheelchair. It's like, you'd be surprised. Probably a better Skier than you. Definitely a better mountain biker than you.

Me: While Pierre is definitely a better mountain biker than I am, at the end of the day, we're all individuals trying to find or live up to our human potential. Lyndsay Rowan shared her observations with me.

Lyndsay Rowan: I am a grow well director at Vertical Harvest here in Jackson. And so that means that I work with all of our team members across the board to support their human potential and their growth at their job. On one hand, I guess what would be some different diagnosis' along both intellectual and physical disabilities. But I've also really learned that a lot of those things aren't barriers for people when they're given the opportunity.

Me: Here is Pierre talking through his own learning.

Pierre: Because I'm still there. I'm still at the wow, we can do this. Okay, cool. Let's keep doing it. Maybe the point is to be like... where it's not a big deal. It's just like, hey, yes, people with disabilities can do things regardless if it's physical or mental, we can ski and we can bike, we can play sled hockey.

Me: Sled hockey in the town of Jackson was introduced in the winter of 2017. For those who don't know what sled hockey is, it's a Paralympic sport. Usually paraplegics or amputees participate in the sport. It is an adaptive way for people with disabilities to participate in hockey. The athlete sits in a sled type contraption that has ice skates on the bottom and in order to maneuver, the person will use short hockey sticks with ice picks on the other end. My little brother Li tried sled hockey and we quickly figured out that he was really good at the sport because of his upper body strength. It's been great

to witness his progression. He's gotten way faster, he can carve the ice and he makes super tight and sharp turns. We started bringing some of his able bodied friends to sled Hockey on Sundays with Teton Adaptive and the playing fields between people with disabilities and able bodied people was evened out in the sleds.

Because the Jackson Hole community is so great and supportive, our lovely semi-pro Moose hockey team was more than happy to volunteer and spend time with people who have disabilities every Sunday. As Teton Adaptive got more sleds, there was enough equipment for some of the Moose hockey players to try out a different way to play hockey. Over time, the players have figured out that sled hockey is actually pretty darn difficult to play. I interviewed three of the players, Drew Akins, Mike Longo and Sean Hannafin about their thoughts on sled hockey.

Drew Akins: It's much harder than I expected... because... I think before I got into sled, I thought it was going to be much easier just from watching and stuff. And as soon as I tried it, I was amazed by how much more difficult it was than I thought. And like your brother, Li is just amazing and it's really fun to watch him because it's just...even some of our Moose guys that were out there today and stuff like they've been doing this week after week and they're still not even close to where Li is. So it's pretty cool to see how much skill is involved and I think it's a great sport.

Mike Longo: Oh, it's so hard. And I may have mentioned this to you before, but a couple of years ago I met the captain of the USA Sled hockey team and he had the largest upper body I think I've ever seen on a human being. It's so different in terms of the muscles that you use, but it's way harder and it's harder probably for me because I'm not as coordinated and I don't have those muscles developed. But I've talked to you

about your brother. Your brother's upper body is insane, so I have the utmost respect for it.

Sean Hannafin: Man, It's impressive. And I mean, you go out there and you see these guys and I've been in the sled a couple of times, and it's a workout, it's difficult, and it's a completely different environment out there, but it's still hockey.

Me: In later episodes, you'll hear from them again on other various topics surrounding disability. Sled hockey is a wonderful example of trying to combat ableism. We have people with disabilities and people without disabilities in the same gear and equipment, and for the most part, everything equals out. This is evident when Li, a 15 year old boy, can outplay a semi-pro hockey player such as Mike.

Mike Longo: The big thing for me is like when we're skating on Sundays, I like to get in a sled with them because then we're in the same boat, we're all the same equipment. Then it's really just within the context of sled hockey the sport, because when we play games, it's skill, it's creativity, and everybody's on the same playing field. So it's nice because the equipment is kind of the great equalizer, I think, at least when we skate on Sundays. But I think that kind of forces you to treat people equally because I'm not on skates and doing things that they can't do.

Me: When people who have disabilities have the gear, space and time, we learn that they are capable. As I've spent time around people with disabilities, I have learned that most of them are better athletes than I'll ever be. Some of the things that I've learned and inferred from the interviews with Joe and Pierre are that the accessible parking

spots should only be used for those who have licensed plates or placards with the disability symbol on it.

Joe Stone: There are two areas of parking that I try to confront whenever possible, with or without a disability. If you're parked over the access aisle, I try to educate, and I rarely get the opportunity to actually chat with the person because it's very rare that you're like going into the store while they're coming out and you actually get to see the person driving the car. But when the opportunity comes up, I'm like, hey, the access aisle, the cross lines in between the two spots that's actually for someone to unload their mobility device and things like that, that's not for parking. And sometimes I've got people lie to park over that so that I have room to get out of my driver's side. I'm like, oh, I totally get it. You've got a disability. Like, I'm not questioning your disability, but the solution there would have been to back into that spot instead of pulling straight in, because if you back in now, you have the access aisle on your left side, and the person that's going to park on the other side has the whole access aisle to get out of. So it's just trying to be kind in that situation to educate. I do for the most part. But if someone's parked in a spot without a pass, it's like this is an accessible parking spot. You're not allowed to park here unless you have a placard or have a disability. And I feel I'm just here for five minutes. Cool. Go wait five minutes over there. You really want me to move now? Yeah. You're learning the lesson right now, which is you actually have to move right now. You're not taking that just to make it easier to get your pizza. That's not what it's for. Because if I rolled up and I had to wait for you for five minutes to be able to get in that parking spot, that would be frustrating for me, and it would be frustrating for anybody else if they had to do something like that.

Pierre: Around here I haven't found it to be too bad. But, like, the resort... And it's funny because they'll be, like, out of town or they'll park there for an hour. I got so mad once. I got to find ways... That's what I was trying to ask people. How do you go about, what do I do? Just carry a carton of eggs and just start egging people's cars? Or do I just...how do I go up to people and be like, hey.... don't do that. I feel like if you park in a disabled spot and you're not disabled and you see me rolling through the parking lot, that should be like the red flag, right? But what else should... I wish I could do something even more passive aggressive, what I really wanted to do... And I got to talk to the parking people and just, like, double park. Just don't let them out until I'm done. And then that way they learn their lesson, something like that where I can... because sometimes I just want... I get so angry. It's just like, I know it's funny because, you know the cars after a while, you know, the cars of the locals that are disabled who parked there, and then there's always that one extra car. I don't know you, you look for a placard and you're like, I don't see anything. I wish I could just park right behind you and you just couldn't leave until I got there. And then you could see the process and you realize, I need this spot because I want to ski as well.

Me: Secondly, people who are able bodied should be more aware of how their language affects people.

Joe Stone: Pity just needs to be like, we need to get rid of that when we're looking at people with disabilities. So if you're an able bodied person and you see a person with a disability, you automatically feel bad. You automatically feel like you're pitying them. You're not showing empathy. You're showing sympathy. Those kinds of things... get rid of that right away. People with disabilities are humans, and they don't want everybody

everywhere they go, everyone just looking down on them, feeling bad for them, feeling like, well, he must have it so hard. I've had people say, I don't know how you do it. If I was in your situation, I'd kill myself. What you're telling me is that my life is so bad. Like it's so terrible that if you had to live in my situation, you would rather be dead. My life is just the *worst*. And the fact that I get out every day and I do something is just amazing.

When in all reality, it's like my life is awesome, it's not that bad. Yeah. Okay, so I got to use a wheelchair, whatever. That's what allows me to go paragliding and mountain biking and meet new people and travel all over the world and do all these things that I do. My life is awesome. Love it. Love being disabled, love being a part of the community. Nothing negative about it to me, and I don't dwell on it. I don't wake up in the morning like, ugh if I just didn't have to use the wheels, that never crosses my mind. So the second story you're saying is where people are literally just pitying people with disabilities and that's like, let's get past that in general. Disability, different race, different religion, different whatever. No need for pity. Nobody wants it.

Me: In the next episode, we'll be exploring more on the language side of disabilities. And lastly, I've learned from Joe that listening and curiosity go a long way.

Joe Stone: I just try to approach everything from kindness And I wish other people would approach things with curiosity. People approaching me... coming out of it with curiosity instead of authority. You're not supposed to be on this trail because you're on an ebike. Well, maybe ask why I use the ebike. Maybe there's a reason and maybe it's totally legal and maybe it's something you don't know. So come out of curiosity first. Come out with authority, people get on defense. And that's why I try my best to not

always come at everything with authority. It's more education, and in my own other ways of life that I don't know things about. Trying to approach it more with curiosity. All those are hard, so we're not ever all going to get it right all the time. I'm not perfect by any means. I make plenty of mistakes, but working on them, trying to be a little bit better than I was yesterday is the goal.

Me: In conclusion, there is a lot to improve, but it sounds like as a society, we're doing well and learning along the way. I want to give a big thank you to Joe Stone, Pierre Bergaman, Lyndsay Rowan, Drew Akins, Mike Longo, and John Hannafin. And thank you so much for listening to this episode. Next time we'll be talking about language.