



The Awareness Is Power® Seminar: The Sky Is The Limit!

TEAM BUILDING with a DIVERSE GROUP SIGHTED, BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED

*“Beams Of Light
Were Shining Down
On All Of Us!”*

I am extremely excited to share with you something that I found to be a phenomenal undertaking for Bayley & Bender. Our organization has provided ‘guidance and assistance’ to a wide range of clients and participants over the past 21 years, but I can honestly say that this program experience stands alone. The participants in the Awareness Is Power® Team Building and Advanced Team Building seminar for the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Section 508 Testing and Training Center were a diverse group of sighted, blind and visually impaired persons, and thus our company was challenged to adapt our program in a variety of ways. I am proud to say the adjustments were successful, judging from a seminar rating of 4.8 out of a possible 5.0 by the participants.

When we were hired by VETS, (Veterans Enterprise Technology Solutions, Inc.), for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs I was certain we would have no problem tackling the project although I was unaware of the specific details called for. To say ‘Just translate it into Braille’ would be a severe understatement of the process involved, but in a nutshell, that’s essentially what was done. Let’s just say there are a litany of intricacies that combine the human element and sensitivity with fabulous state of the art technology, to put everything needed in place to reach our goal of now being able to service an entirely new group of clientele.

Before attending our Awareness Is Power® Team Building Seminars, each participant must complete an Awareness Is Power® Leadership and Values Assessment. One quarter of



the participants were blind, so our assessments were converted into electronic documents so they could be read and filled out with Assistive Technology enabling the blind participants to complete them. One component of Assistive Technology is the screen reader. As the name implies it reads the information on a screen and displays the information in Braille. Speech is more commonly used because it is less expensive than Braille which must employ a separate Braille display while speech can utilize a computer’s sound chip.

The Awareness Is Power® Reports are the foundation of our seminars. If the participants do not have their reports, they won’t benefit much from the seminar. Once the assessments were completed the reports were printed out in Grade 2 Braille and distributed to the blind participants.

In order to adapt my presentation to accommodate blind participants I consulted with a woman named Lucia, who is blind, and she clarified that it was all right to use the word blind and there was no problem with using phrases that imply sight, such as ‘You may have seen a report on the news last night’. I was also made more aware that I would need to describe things I was doing that I normally wouldn’t have to for sighted participants.

If someone needs to Braille things out, (a new term we learned), it takes advance planning and someone with a thorough understanding of the translation system. In some cases, electronic versions of the documents are downloaded and the participant uses a pda with braille and speech output. The Braille display allows the user to read

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the documents and take notes all from a keyboard-like device. Our new awareness of these special needs gives us the insight to successfully accommodate our blind seminar participants and any clientele with other special considerations to be taken into account.

The most phenomenal experiences of all during the days spent together in our seminars are the stories everyone shares. This one was no exception, although I must say that I felt some of the stories were even more incredible than usual. As people opened up stories were shared that I had never heard before. By the second day everyone had opened up their hearts, souls, minds and levels of trust and shared a story. As these seminars are geared towards overcoming obstacles, accounts of some of the blind participants cross country skiing and even down hill skiing and rock climbing were quite inspirational to all the participants.

As the seminar progressed and participant's level of trust with one another grew, they shared their personal stories as well as reflected on how the seminar helped them to grow. Below are a few of their accounts:

- ▶ Thomas, who is blind said, *"The seminar helped me become more aware of the way I need people to communicate with me."*
- ▶ Joy, who is totally blind, said she learned that she really needs to focus on understanding her strengths and weaknesses and developing her skills and career direction in a way that she has never done before.
- ▶ Mike told us of his being blind until he was 14 years old. His father told him, *"You are not going to be different than anyone else and I don't expect any less from you because you are blind."* Remaining true to his word his father even made him cut the grass. *"My sister hated this because she had to clean up the mess I made."*
- ▶ Ian, a blind gentleman said, *"The seminar gave me a clear understanding of how I see myself in relation to other people."*
- ▶ Vicki, who is sighted shared, *"The seminar helped me see my blind spots. I showed my son my Awareness Is Power® Leadership Report that night and he said, "Mom this is spot on." She continued, "You need another person to give you feedback. This is so wonderful to have a reinforcement tool that lets me know what to work on, how I react to other people and how I like them to communicate with me."*

▶ Lucia was determined from an early age that being blind was not going to stop her from achieving anything she wanted to accomplish. She is the only member of her family to graduate from college and graduate school. She broke the mold that none of her siblings or cousins had been able to. At the end of the seminar she beamed. *"This has changed my life. I now have new goals and direction and I am going to do what I have always wanted to do for years. Nothing is going to stop me now, the sky is the limit!"*

▶ Interviewing Terry, who is sighted, summed up the experience better than I ever could have. *"Taking the seminar's survey identified me. My report was 100% accurate. When I read my report, I said, "That's me!". It made me recognize that my behavioral style is of value to my team. It made me realize that teamwork is important. I discovered a lot about my colleagues and now we understand each other better, respect and appreciate each other more. It was the course doing all of this. It allowed us to be open with each other, not to hold back and to feel comfortable with each other. We trust each other more. I look forward to the next course you are going to provide."*

Each person on a team has a certain behavioral style. When putting teams together you want to have the proper balance. Being aware of your strengths and needs and the strengths and needs of others are the keys to working together as the ultimate team. To optimize your team's performance, call us at **301-439-8317** or email us at:

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Have a great day!

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