

## Persons with Disabilities: From Experience to Principles, Part I

by Peter Noteboom, first published on the GLP blog March 23, 2014

Unbelievably to me, and even at first unnoticed by me in the large ballroom style conference room that was being productive and facilitated through dialogue, the facilitator was blind, unable to see the people and setting in the room with his eyes. Led at the elbow, he deftly travelled from table to table inviting the participants to share their points of view, fielded questions from other members of the audience, and beautifully summarized the outcome of the session.



Intensely attuned to mood, sounds and feelings in that large ballroom hall, he could hear when a comment was about to be made at the other end of the room. His face, wonderfully expressive, let us know when he sensed tension or debate that needed all of our attention. His posture and listening pose affirmed each and every contribution.

“Persons with Disabilities” is the term currently used most frequently to describe persons with various kinds of impairments: physical, visual, hearing, sensory, speech, mental health, emotional, intellectual or developmental.

I celebrate his ability to expertly facilitate a very large group of advocates. He demonstrated respect in all his interactions, and perhaps his disability was a gift that focused our attention even more to being present and alert because we wanted to return that respect we felt. The topic was advocacy for and with persons with disabilities so the engagement level was extraordinarily high since the room included persons with disabilities, their allies, and the broader public. Most importantly, even in that large group of 150 people, we all felt included. We participated at table groups, our voices were heard in the group dialogue, and we found our input reflected in the summary he provided.

At the table groups too, careful seating meant that we were discussing the topic with other persons with disabilities, so our dialogue was well informed with personal experience, not only



good will. Seated with a blind woman and another in a wheel chair, we were leaning in to hear what one another were saying and responding as carefully and thoughtfully as we could.

For more on the results of that session, which contributed to the report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan, please [see the report here](#). It was my pleasure to work alongside the organization supporting that effort, who deserves commendation for their careful, inclusive, and ground-breaking work, the [Civil Society Program in Jordan](#).

*For more information about how GLP can support your work or development, please contact Kate Larose [kate@globallearningpartners.com](mailto:kate@globallearningpartners.com).*