Workers' Comp

Beyond Boundaries: How an Injured Worker Became an Inspiration for All

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As a case manager, a big part of my job is to motivate and advocate for injured workers. However, I often find that my inspiration to meet these goals stems from the workers themselves. Such is the case with Todd Eckley, a land surveyor who sustained an incomplete C6-7 fracture, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down and with limited use of his hands.

Despite his diagnosis, Todd was motivated to return to work and reach his highest functional potential. Todd's determination had a significant impact on me, so much so that I nominated him for Outstanding Client of the Year for the Virginia chapter of the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP), which he won last month!

As a testament to Todd and all the injured workers we work with on a daily basis, I'm sharing his story with you. Hopefully, it will serve as a reminder of the important role we serve as workers' comp professionals — to help restore lives for exceptional people like Todd.

I first met Todd at the trauma unit of a local hospital, when I was assigned to be his nurse case manager. Despite his injuries, I soon learned Todd wasn't a person who would be limited by boundaries. I have accompanied Todd on multiple medical appointments and have had the opportunity to witness Todd's struggles and achievements throughout his rehabilitation process.

He steadily progressed from inpatient hospital care to rehabilitation and finally discharged to his newly modified, wheelchair-accessible home. Todd is very active and is regularly seen in the neighborhood propelling himself around for two miles most days, building his upper body strength, stamina and conditioning. This is in addition to his regular outpatient therapy and gym workouts.

He has received generous support from his church and friends, who collected money to purchase a van which Todd has converted to a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. This allowed him to complete his adaptive driving training and significantly increase his independence; so much so that he drove to his daughter's college

graduation.

Todd participated in Genex's Vocational Rehab Program and through his own desire to return to work, obtained an office position as a surveyor. Todd's return to gainful employment has reinforced his purpose in life, as he can share his knowledge after many years as a field surveyor.

Todd lives alone and has overcome many challenges as he manages his daily medical needs to sustain a healthy body and mind. He performs most of his care with minimal assistance from home health aides. In fact, he has sought out opportunities to help others, including serving as a weekly volunteer at his local hospital.

One of the most satisfying statements Todd shared with me recently is that he does not see himself as a handicap person in a wheelchair. Although there are challenges every day, he has learned to manage whatever comes his way with dignity, resiliency and a positive attitude. His commitment to his rehabilitation has made him an inspiration to those who live with life-altering injuries.



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