

# CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING: BALANCING PLANNING AND IMPROV

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# People with disabilities are constantly problem solving:

- Adapting existing tools/devices to serve new/additional purposes;
- Simple is better;
- Cheaper is better;
  - Unless you have unlimited funds, you never know for sure if you'll find a "payer" for new equipment
- Non-specialized equipment is better than equipment that is so specialized that it is only useful to a very discrete demographic.

# Attending a conference in Innsbruck, Austria illustrates a lot of issues

**JULY  
2007**

**International  
Conference on  
Higher  
Education and  
Disability,  
Innsbruck,  
Austria**

**July 23-27,  
2007**





Expanding Access:  
Accommodating Medical and Health Science Students in  
Clinical Settings

International Conference on Higher Education and Disability

Innsbruck, Austria

July 26, 2007

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## For airline travel, taking a manual chair is a smarter option, because it is harder for the airline to break this...

Since my insurance pays for a power wheelchair, I have to buy any additional equipment “out of pocket”.

A “Breezy” manual chair (by Quickie) costs around \$300 online ([Spinlife.com](http://Spinlife.com)).



...than this.

A power wheelchair designed for indoor/outdoor or “heavy” use will cost \$5,000 and up, depending on the bells & whistles...



**Last year, I bought one of these for travel and took it to San Diego,**

**Folding  
lightweight  
wheelchair  
called the  
“At’m”.**

**Only goes  
about 3 mph  
and gets stuck  
on thresholds  
higher than  
½ inch.**

**Cost \$1,395.**



**But it drove like one of these:**

Antique  
tricycle...





**I tried to rent a power wheelchair in Innsbruck, but couldn't find a vendor, so I rented this instead:**

**Meet Mary.**

**For about \$10 euros an hour, I got someone to push me around Innsbruck, and give me a tour at the same time...**



**My room was big and accessible.**



## And so was the bathroom.

One feature of European toilets I found everywhere which happens to be more accessible is the big button on the wall to flush the toilet.



Really well-  
designed  
“roll-in”  
shower with a  
fold-down  
bench.







**As long as I didn't want to look in the mirror.**

Sitting in the manual wheelchair, the bathroom counter-top hit me at chest-height...



## These were the 2 most useful pieces of “assistive technology” that I brought with me to Innsbruck:

For picking stuff I dropped off the floor; much easier for me to handle than the tools designed to be “grabbers” for people with disabilities.



For opening bottles of water and soda



# Key Observations, Lessons and Immutable Truths

- On a practical level the person with a disability must be flexible;
- Must be able to figure out multiple ways to accomplish tasks, with and without assistance, if possible;
- Must be able to explain with a high level of detail exactly what is needed, whether in regard to services or tasks that need to be accomplished;
- Business-like transactions for services is a better system than the charity model – for both parties involved.
  - Particularly true if disabled person is a professional