

# Being Disabled Is No Joke – or Is It?

A headline like this could only apply to a talk given by Richard Pimentel who has made a career out of attempting to change corporate attitudes to hiring the disabled and who has not hesitated to use humor and fast-paced entertainment to achieve these ends.

At this presentation in the AES Downsviv Auditorium on June 6, he ably demonstrated that humor could spring from many sources, from quoting kids who make embarrassing remarks to their parents about disabled persons they meet in supermarkets, to playing a lively parlor game called Pick a Disability in which the audience is asked, "Who wants to be blind . . . paraplegic . . . mentally retarded or have cerebral palsy?"

(The audience of about 60 AES personnel, was kept on their toes answering such perplexing and rapid fire questions for some 20 minutes).

Mr. Pimentel comes from California, is a Vietnam veteran and has been a "trainer" for almost two decades. He says that humor is necessary to reduce tensions when talking about disabilities and is a proven method of opening the eyes of managers, who might wish to hire disabled people but who don't know what to say at the interview. Mr. Pimental advises: "Don't be afraid to mention the person's disability. If the applicant has one hand missing, don't hesitate to mention it. He probably knew about it before coming into your office, but he will take you much more seriously if you sound genuinely concerned about how you can make adjustments in equipment and working conditions to accommodate the applicant's strengths and weaknesses within your organization."

Mr. Pimentel demonstrated that he could switch from farcical humor to deep seriousness in the flip of a sentence. For example, he cited jokes that disabled people make among themselves about their own disabilities. (They find it helps them develop self-confidence and a sense of proportion in their lives). Turning almost solemn, he then quoted figures to show that over 60 percent of all disabled people are out of work — this despite being the best educated



**Richard Pimentel (right) explains his philosophy on the hiring of the handicapped to Gordon Shimizu, DG, Central Services Directorate, (left) and Dr. Stan Woronko, head of Climate Monitoring.**

minority on the continent and finding themselves in a "buyer's market" as far as overall employment goes in the 1990s. "In fact", added Pimentel, "due to employer ignorance and reluctance to hire, it requires almost one hundred times the effort for a disabled person to get hired for a suitable job as for an 'enabled' person."

Mr. Pimentel who began his current series of seminars in 1978, the Year of the Disabled, as part of a project for the Governor of California, subsequently began assembling a program called the Windmill Package. Its title satyirized Don Quijote, the idealistic Spanish knight in Cervantes' novel who tilted at windmills. In addition to persuading over one half of the Fortune 500 companies to adopt the Windmills program, Mr. Pimentel has addressed the Canadian Bankers' Association, Atomic Energy of Canada, the Manitoba Government, IBM of Canada and a number of other Canadian organizations.

Also participating in the Public Service Commission's Disabled Persons' Program presentation was Sean O'Neill, Employment Equity coordinator. The presentations were introduced by Gordon Shimizu, acting ADMA and Dr. Stan Woronko, organizer of the event at AES Downsviv.