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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 21 November 2020 – “ Pet hates, Buddy greetings & Double bookings ”

You shouldn't sweat the small stuff. It's an old line, I know, but it's true. Still, sometimes small things can get under your skin, annoying, niggling, irritating. If that small thing reoccurs over time it can easily grow into pet hate. Something you can cultivate and inadvertently encourage, like a small dog who barks too much. You give a treat when it stops barking, but it misinterprets the reward cycle, thinking it should bark more, and get more treats- and inevitably it wears you down, and out comes the treat.

Your pet hate might be drivers not indicating at roundabouts, diners eating too loudly or people who stare like zombies. My latest pet hate is being called "Buddy". I've never liked the term. It always seemed so American when I was younger and I was undoubtedly influenced by my father's disdain for anything that he deemed "Americanised". Now that I'm older it's the patronising, condescending connotation of the phrase that curls my toes with a dire cringing sensation. I get it's appropriateness when an uncle or aunt addresses their infant niece or nephew with a "oh that picture is super cool, buddy". When, however, it is used by a peer that you don't know particularly well or a distant colleague who is younger than you, it feels unpleasant. It feels like the person addressing you considers you as somehow inferior or perhaps even a little dim witted. In these incidences it's hard to know whether the speaker is subconsciously being patronising because you have a disability or whether they're just socially inept. I find it difficult to call people on it. To clap back - "don't call me buddy" I run the risk of sounding brittle and uptight, even pompous.

It's a fine line. What about being called 'mate'? It's not a particular favourite of mine either but at least 'mate' always has an air of equality about it, if somewhat over familiar. I think all in all 'mate' passes muster. Nevertheless, the more I'm called buddy the more I plan to deliver a caustic reply at the next opportunity.

Another of my pet hates is when I find myself double booked -not through the clumsiness of forgetting appointments- but by the sheer coincidence of two big events coinciding at the same time. I recently received a complimentary ticket to attend the 'Attitude Awards'. This is an event where everyone who's anyone in the New Zealand Disability community is in splendid attendance. It is a lavish occasion where disabled people who achieve outstandingly are recognised through a number of hotly contested awards. I get to go to these because I have been a judge for the last few years. It's always a big, long night with lashings of wine and haute cuisine at hand. As fate would have it, this year Tiaho Trust is hosting the International Day of People with Disabilities on the very next day. In Cameron Street Mall, the event is scheduled for 3 December starting at 10am with myself and the Mayor opening the event. The probability of me making it from Auckland to Whangarei by 10am the day after the Attitude Awards in any decent state is, I confess, somewhat slim. I had to choose one or the other. Although I feigned vacillation between the two options I knew in my heart of hearts that I would forgo the Awards for our local celebration of disability. See you there- but when I do-please -don't call me -or any other disabled adults 'buddy'. I've been working on my reply!

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.