

Country Inns & Suites and Econolodge



In 2006, Econolodge was presented with Challenge's Employer of the Year Award. Both managed by Ilana Bobroff, Econolodge and Country Inns & Suites are active participants in Challenge's workforce partnership. At these facilities, participants are able to become integrated in the workforce as staff members of these facilities. This partnership provides a relationship between Challenge program participants and other Country Inns & Suites staff members. "The staff at Challenge is easy to work with, there is a great loyalty in participants that come from Challenge," Ilana said. She focused on one participant in particular who has worked at Econolodge consistently for years, and who is an incredibly diligent and hard-working member of their staff.

Econolodge and Country Inns & Suites invite participants to visit the workplace and surroundings before being hired. This gives them the opportunity to determine whether or not the work environment would

compliment their skills and interests.

In the three years that Challenge has been in partnership with Econolodge, and more recently with Country Inns & Suites, Ilana has recognized a positive change in the other members of staff. "We do sensitivity training for our staff – both for serving disabled guests that stay in our hotels, and for working with other staff members with disabilities... It has become a real eye-opener for the understanding and inclusion of people with all ability levels."

Ilana stressed that integration is a very important part of a healthy community. "There are people all around us with disabilities... Just because we don't see a disability from the outside, doesn't mean there isn't one present." Because of her personal experiences with disability, Ilana has a great understanding of people and what helps them succeed. With this understanding, Ilana is able to combine efficient professionalism with compassionate leadership. These traits are important for all managers, but exceptionally important in a business partner working with Challenge Participants.

The Manager of Placement Services at Challenge, Bruce Flaherty says "Ilana really gets it. She embodies the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. She realizes that as long as someone can do their job, with or without reasonable accommodations, they have the potential to be a good employee. She has fair expectations of her employees, regardless of where they've come from. She expects no more or less of the Challenge clients she employs than she does of anyone else. That's all we ask."

"It's not a sin to be disabled," Ilana stated. There is a great prejudice in our society about disability, much like the prejudices related to race and ethnicity. This discrimination creates sensitivity to the employment of people with disabilities. It is essential for our society to be accepting of the people that make up our communities. Ilana certainly does everything in her power to lessen negative preconceptions of disability.

During our tour of the new building, Ilana pointed out the hardwood floors, central staircase and fireplace that make up the signature entrance to all Country Inns & Suites. She also showed us a few of the fifty-eight suites available at their new facility. Eight of these are Extended Suites, containing a kitchen and living area, and four of the fifty-eight beautiful suites, conference rooms, and a business center. The pride Ilana takes in the new facility is the same pride she demonstrates in her work with her staff, including staff with disabilities hired through the partnership with Challenge.

Ilana's dedication has made her an outstanding hotel manager and leader in our community. At Challenge we are exceptionally grateful for the employment opportunities Ilana has provided for our clients. Her contributions to our mission help create a healthier and more inclusive community.