Lumen Newsroom

Blind Paralympian Lex Gillette has a vision of realized potential for all

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What would you miss most if you suddenly went blind? The faces of family and friends? The blue sky or green grass? Imagine you had eight years to take in the world and then it irretrievably vanished. What would you do?

For U.S. Paralympian **Lex Gillette**, the answer was… everything. “I couldn’t see those things anymore and it was really difficult,” he shared with members of Lumen’s **FRIENDS Employee Resource Group** during a virtual **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** celebration. “I had had eight years of being able to see the world.”

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His mother told her son that even though retinal detachments robbed him of sight, he would be successful in life. Mrs. Gillette was right. At 19, Lex won the first of five Paralympic medals. Most recently, he soared to **silver in the long jump** at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games. Next up: the 2024 Paralympics in Paris. The goal is winning his first gold medal.

“My mom said the world would look at you differently because you have a disability. They are going to believe that you can and cannot do certain things, that you should and should not do certain things because you are blind,” Lex shared with 200+ Lumen employees. “But she didn’t want me confined by other people’s expectations and opinions. At the end of the day, she said, I decide what I can do.”

Amidst training for the 2024 Games, Lex shares his journey as a motivational speaker. His motto is “No need for sight when you have a vision.” The key, he says, is ensuring anyone with a disability has the resources to “unleash their potential into the world.”

Lex’s mother sent him to public school, not a school for the blind. She wanted him to have the best experience possible. He fortunately had a teacher who understood what accommodations he needed to succeed – Braille textbooks, speech software, etc.

“There’s something wrong with my eyesight. I can’t see anything. I have total ability in my arms. I can type, read, and write emails. I can surf the web,” Lex said. “I can do all of those things but if I’m not given the resources, I can’t use a computer.”

Lex passionately insists that resources and opportunities should be provided wherever possible based on how, where, when, and why the disabled person requires them. Resources can be as simple as a clap. In competition, a guide stands by the long jump takeoff board and claps to denote the number of stride Lex is taking. When Lex reaches the board, the guide yells “Fly! Fly! Fly! Fly!”

The result is awe-inspiring. “My best jump is 22-feet-1-inch or 6.73 meters.” That’s a world record. Even so, sometimes the outcome is less thrilling. He shared a video of a jump where he strayed to the right side of the lane and landed on the pavement outside the sand pit.

“For each of you to be a guide, you’re going to provide your voice. Meet people where they are and give them the resources and tools needed to have the confidence to maneuver down their own unique runway in life,” he said.

“FRIENDS was thrilled to welcome Lex for our International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebration,” said Deb Andersson, FRIENDS ERG Chair. “We share his philosophy that everyone has something amazing to contribute to the world regardless of disability labels.”

More than 700 Lumen employees are members of FRIENDS, which stands for Friends who Respect and Inspire Everyone in Need of Disability Support. The mission of FRIENDS is to bring awareness to the different forms of disabilities, provide education and resources, and lend a helping hand to others who need a friend.

Lumen’s active support of employees with disabilities has earned numerous industry accolades. **You can learn more about FRIENDS and how Lumen embraces employees with disabilities**.

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