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By Tony Trott

When I heard the news about the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, my first thoughts were for the people and families whose lives were changed irrevocably that morning. One of my best friends from high school is a doctor with an office about 15 blocks away from the World Trade Center. I found out later that evening that he was OK and that he was on the street when the towers fell. "Surreal" was the only way he was able to even begin to describe it.



Over the course of the next few days, I began to think about my life, my country and the world. It was one of those situations that makes me realize that we, in America, have things pretty good. I wrote out a list of some of the laws and regulations that make my life what it is today and I want to share them with you in hopes that you will realize something good about them that you didn't before.

I know that there are plenty of people who have been very frustrated by some of these same laws and regulations listed here. My purpose is definitely not to say these laws are perfect; in fact in many cases they

Living in America

need our constant vigilance, but they are pretty darn good.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This, for me, is one of the greatest laws on the books in this great country and at the same time it is one of the most frustrating. Because I use a wheelchair, I have a great need for the accessibility requirements mandated by it. Making public services, e.g., transportation and housing, accessible makes a huge difference in my life. I don't know what I would be doing today if it weren't for the ADA. I never forget though, that it is a law of empowerment. It does not simply do everything for me as an individual with a disability; it gives me the right, indeed the obligation, to stand up for myself and make my voice heard. It is frustrating for me when people break it down into the smallest possible bits and try to 'read between the lines' to interpret it. Even through this, it is still a great law to me.

"I don't know what I would be doing today if it weren't for the ADA"

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

My life would be sorely missing many things if it weren't for IDEA. I know that many people will not agree that IDEA is a good law, but look at the big picture. IDEA gives individuals with disabilities the

opportunity to be educated in the public schools in the United States of America. Yes, our schools have problems but they are still pretty good. I have often wondered what my life would be like if I was citizen of a third world country. Would I have learned to read, learned my math, been educated at all? I don't know the answers to these questions and, truthfully, I don't like to think about them. I just know that I am lucky to have the IDEA for myself and, if my kids ever need it, for them.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act)

Without the Rehab Act, we would not have the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). We would also not have any Section 504 regulations. Section 504 is a part of the Rehab Act that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs that receive federal financial assistance. It was a forerunner to the IDEA and the ADA. Make sure that you realize that Section 504 does not only apply to students nor does it only cover educational programs. Section 504 applies to all programs that receive federal funds, including a school or college, whether public or private, including academics, extracurricular activities, and athletics. The law also applies to the activities of a school or college that occur off campus.

Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1998 (Tech Act)

This law makes assistive technologies (AT) available to many people who would not have been able to benefit from them without it. AT is becoming more and more

commonplace in society and I am grateful for that. I use plenty of AT in my personal life and I am learning more about it all the time in my professional life. Almost anything can be considered AT and as more things are, I am always more grateful for this law.

The above laws and regulations affect me and make my life better and, in many cases, easier. I think that we can see the good even in laws that we thought were way off the mark. These laws are ones that I appreciate and/or need every day of my life. I realize that my list will be different from everyone else's, but I think if you take some time to think about it, you'll find a list of your own.



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