

Joni Mullen

Senior

When asked about her philosophy in life, Joni Mullen, a senior business major specializing in personnel and industrial relations, quickly replies, "I don't have a philosophy, I just do it." This no-nonsense approach has enabled Mullen to overcome some obvious obstacles.

Although she has been confined to a wheelchair for the past 10 years, Mullen insists that it doesn't set her apart. "I don't think about it," she says, "and I don't feel any different because I can't walk. I'm nervous about the same things that my friends worry about. For example, when I think about going to a job interview, I don't think about how the employer will react to my wheelchair. Instead, I am thinking about whether I am qualified for the position ... whether I have enough experience."

Mullen and her husband, Tom, who is also confined to a wheelchair, live very independent lives. Their calendar stays filled with social activities, trips, and participation in sports like tennis and basketball. Mullen admits that before she dated Tom, she had avoided dating someone in a wheelchair, thinking, "I need someone to help me, someone who can walk and do the things that walkers can do that I can't do." Oddly enough, he had the same attitude about dating a girl confined to a wheelchair. But Mullen says things "worked out okay There was never a point where I had to explain to him what it means to be handicapped. It does give us one more thing in common . . . and we just save replacing the lightbulbs for a time when Mom comes over!"

Mullen is currently a personnel intern for Motion Designs, a local company that manufactures wheelchairs. In that internship Mullen is putting her classroom instruction to practical use. "I think internships are very important," says Mullen, "because you may imagine

business to be a certain [idealistic] way. But then when you are actually working for a company, you may discover that idealism sometimes takes a back seat to production and fiscal responsibilities."

How did you become interested in personnel and industrial relations?

I had often heard people grumble about their jobs, claiming that company policies were unfair or that the management never appreciated their efforts. Considering the fact that most of us spend a major portion of our lives in the work force, I became interested in learning how to create positive work environments. It makes sense that a company's production, as well as the employees' efficiency, is often directly related to how those employees feel about their jobs. Working in a personnel department gives you an opportunity to initiate new policies or update existing policies in order to foster cooperation between the employer and employee.

This semester you are involved in an internship.

Yes, I work for Motion Designs here in Fresno. They are a relatively new company — about five years old — and they manufacture the lightweight "Quickie" wheelchairs that are easy to maneuver. (My husband, Tom, and I both use this type of wheelchair.) Because the demand for these innovative wheelchairs has been so great, the company is growing very rapidly. In fact, the owners have been so busy producing and distributing wheelchairs that they haven't had the time to establish a personnel office. Each new "company policy" was determined only when it became necessary to have one. For example, when the first woman employee got pregnant, the company had to investigate what the state law said and quickly decide what the company's pregnancy policy would be. It seemed to be a perfect opportunity for a business student to come in and assist them in defining a work environment that would benefit the company.

