

Beyond medals: the toughest discipline is overcoming daily disability barriers

Paris/Duderstadt, 26 August 2024

Ottobock launches Paralympic Games initiative: “The Unofficial Discipline”

As the world gathers in Paris for the Paralympic Games and athletes compete against each other across 23 disciplines, Ottobock is launching a symbolic new discipline with the support of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). In this "Unofficial Discipline," people with disabilities face involuntary challenges every day. It's about "competitions" in everyday life: broken elevators, missing ramps, stairs, cobblestones, narrow doors ... as well as prejudices they have to overcome. Such challenges go unnoticed by most people, even though more than one billion people, which makes 16 percent of the global population, live with some form of disability.ⁱ

“The Unofficial Discipline refers to the hurdles that people with disabilities must overcome daily. While the Paralympians compete in the stadium for medals, delivering top performances and breaking world records, they are also battling invisible obstacles and prejudices,” says Martin Böhm, Chief Experience Officer at Ottobock. “We want to raise awareness of these challenges, start a conversation and bring about change. We can all help break down barriers – no matter how big or small. After all, the only way we can win is if everyone can cross the finish line.”

Raising awareness of these barriers

The Unofficial Discipline will be visible during the Paralympics Games in Paris with a range of slogans on billboards, posters and video projections, led by creative studio PRESENCE. Headlines like these are designed to attract public attention: *Can we break the record for breaking barriers? / You can't rise to the top in a broken elevator. / Inaccessibility won't make it to the finish line.* The subline and QR code invite to learn more about the mission to make everyday accessible. These campaign messages are

strategically displayed around inaccessible places such as staircases, on Metro billboards as well as popular tourist attractions around the city.

In addition, more than 20 top Paralympic athletes and 50 brand ambassadors of Ottobock are bringing “The Unofficial Discipline” to life and into the digital world. Using the hashtag #UnofficialDiscipline, people from around the world are sharing their day-to-day challenges via Instagram and TikTok. They are encouraging their followers to share similar moments, thereby creating a social media movement.

“Our goal is to make everyone aware of the barriers that people with disabilities face in their everyday lives,” says Martin Böhm. “Paris is just the beginning. The campaign will soon be extended to other cities in Europe and the United States. We recognise that our mission to break down barriers is marathon, not a sprint.”

#UnofficialDiscipline

Nothing will stop Para athletes competing for medals in Paris in the stadium. However, like all people with disabilities, they face obstacles in their daily lives in their respective countries. The following athletes, among others, will share their own personal hurdles that they face daily:

- **Davide Morana** is an Italian Para athlete, best known for his sprinting achievements. Due to a rare form of meningitis, both his legs and arms had to be amputated. “In my daily routine, I have to consider and plan everything. Touch screens, for example, are time-consuming and tedious for me, and sometimes I use my nose for them.”
- **Samantha Kinghorn** from Great Britain won gold medals as a wheelchair racer and competed in the 2016 and 2020 Paralympic Games. Her greatest challenge, however, is travelling in a wheelchair. “Trains are always the most difficult thing. I can't get on and off without help. I have to rely on someone to set up the ramp. I don't think I'll ever be able to rely on public transport in any country.”
- For USA's **Ezra Frech**, a world record holder in the Para high jump, the Unofficial Discipline begins in the bathroom. His left leg was amputated due to a congenital malformation as a child. “Jumping on one leg in the bathroom or shower can be dangerous. It's easy for me to slip and fall, especially when the floor is wet.”
- Germany's **Léon Schäfer** has won multiple world and European titles in the Para long jump and sprint. After being diagnosed with cancer and having his leg amputated in 2010, Léon was inspired by a Paralympian to take up athletics during his rehabilitation. “One of my hurdles in

everyday life is getting a driving license as an amputee. The bureaucracy is incredibly exhausting and difficult.”

- Spanish Paralympic athlete **Desirée Vila Bargiela** is ranked among the top five long jumpers in the world. When she’s travelling, she can’t focus on the competition; instead, she has to spend a lot of time planning and feels uncertain about whether everything will work out. “Do the lifts actually work? Is there a shower at the hotel that I can comfortably use without my prosthesis? Everything requires more energy.”
- **Alessandro Ossola** is a remarkable Italian Para athlete who specialises in sprints, particularly the 100 metres. His journey from traumatic accident to successful athlete is an inspiring story of overcoming adversity and excelling against the odds. Nevertheless, Alessandro worries about the future and the obstacles it may bring: “Today I can do everything with my prosthesis. But I wonder how the healthcare system will support me in the future.”

A competition that shouldn't be held

The new discipline isn't official, but it's real. It's not about medals or records, it's about real life. The competition takes place on the streets, in subways, offices and cafes around the world.

“The Unofficial Discipline is more than just a symbolic gesture. It is an appeal for change, a wake-up call for a more inclusive world so that people with disabilities can live their lives as they choose,” says Martin Böhm. “We can only win in this discipline if we work together to put an end to it.”

More information and insights can be found on the [campaign website](#) and in the [campaign film](#).

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Overview of “The Unofficial Discipline”

- **Idea:** The “Unofficial Discipline” is a symbolic discipline that Ottobock, with the support of IPC, has announced to mark the start of the Paralympic Games in Paris. People with disabilities have to compete in these “competitions” on a daily basis. They have to overcome many barriers in everyday life, such as broken lifts, stairs, narrow doors... as well as prejudices.

- **Objectives** of the initiative: to raise awareness of the challenges faced by people with disabilities, and to start a conversation about accessibility and change.
- **Campaign:** Out-of-home activation during the Paralympic Games in Paris includes messages on billboards, posters and video projections. Additionally, more than 20 top Paralympic athletes and 50 brand ambassadors are sharing their day-to-day challenges via social media using the hashtag #UnofficialDiscipline.
- **Participants** (among others): [Alessandro Ossola](#), [Davide Morana](#), [Desirée Vila Bargiela](#), [Zainab Al Eqabi](#), [Léon Schäfer](#), [Ezra Frech](#), [Martina Caironi](#), [Richard Bionic](#), [Marcus Laudan](#), [Samantha Kinghorn](#), [Bebe Vio](#)
- **Time frame:** Media placements in Paris from 25 August to 8 September 2024, launch of the digital campaign on 26 August, lasting approx. two months
- **Country focus:** Europe and USA
- **Channels:** Social media, YouTube, website, OoH advertising
- **Campaign website:** [Link](#)
- **Campaign video:** [Link](#)
- **Development:** In-house with the support of the following agency partners:
 - Concept and creation: PRESENCE
 - Media: Hungriger Hirsch
 - Website rollout: ctrlQS
 - Social media: In-house

The Unofficial Discipline Manifesto

1 billion people compete in an Unofficial Discipline.

They fight staircases,
broken elevators, prejudice.

Barriers, everyone sees
and no one notices.

But only because no one calls the foul,
doesn't mean it's fair game.

We make it our mission,
to do what we can,
so others can achieve anything.

Day in, day out,
we strive for the best,
because they do, too.

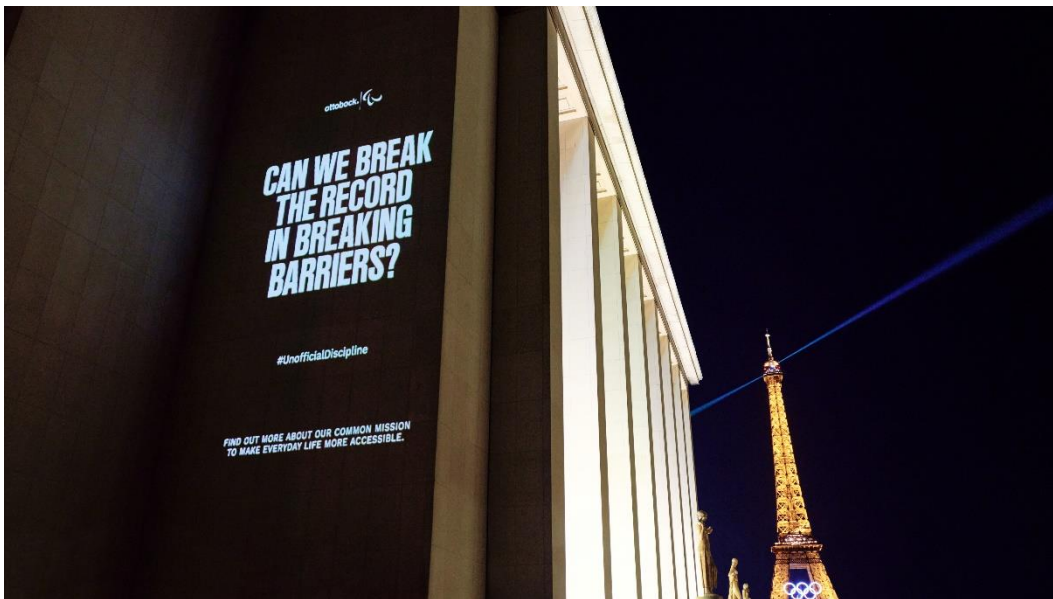
This discipline may not be official.
But it's real.
And only together,
we can make it history.

Photo Selection

(You can download these and other photos via this [link](#)).



Key visual (©Ottobock)



Projection in Paris (@Ottobock)



Billboard in Paris (@Ottobock)



Billboard in Paris (@Ottobock)



Exemplary campaign messages



Pictogram Unofficial Discipline



Davide Morana / Desirée Vila Bargiela (©Julien Barbès for Ottobock)



Alessandro Ossola (©Julien Barbès for Ottobock)



Ezra Frech (©Getty Images for Ottobock)



Léon Schäfer (@Getty Images for Ottobock)



Samantha Kinghorn (@Getty Images for Ottobock)

About Ottobock

For more than 100 years, Ottobock has been developing innovative fitting solutions for people with reduced mobility. As a Human Empowerment Company, Ottobock promotes freedom of movement, quality for life and independence. This is supported by more than 9,000 employees. With innovative power, outstanding technical solutions and services in the fields of Prosthetics, Orthotics, NeuroMobility and Patient Care, they enable people

in 135 countries to live their lives the way they want them to. As the world market leader in wearable human bionics, the company founded in 1919 is constantly setting new standards and pushing ahead with the digitalisation of the industry – together with its partners, the medical supply companies and international research institutions. Since 2018, Ottobock has been transferring its expertise in biomechanics to exoskeletons for ergonomic workplaces. The international activities of the company are coordinated from the head office in Duderstadt (state of Lower Saxony). Ottobock has been supporting the Paralympic Games with its technical expertise since 1988.

ⁱ [Disability \(who.int\)](http://who.int)