



Disability Etiquette 101

More than 54 million people have one or more disabilities in the U.S. Chances are good, especially as our population ages, that you will meet someone at work who has a disability. Be comfortable in your interactions by knowing the appropriate etiquette. Doing so will help you expand your business, better serve your customers and present a disability-friendly workplace.

Here are a few tips:

1. Relax, be yourself and treat the person as you would like to be treated.
2. Be respectful of the individual's privacy about their disability.
3. When introduced to a person with a disability, offer to shake their hand. Be prepared that the individual with a physical limitation might respond by offering to shake your hand with his/her left hand, an artificial limb or with a head nod.
4. If you want to offer assistance to a person with a disability, ask first. Wait for a reply and suggestion on how to assist and abide by their wishes. If a person who is blind appears to need a sighted guide, offer your arm rather than taking his or hers and ask, "Would you like to take my arm?" and "How may I assist you?"
5. When meeting a person with no/low vision, identify yourself as you approach the person.
6. Speak directly to a person who is Deaf or who is hard of hearing. Stand near a sign language interpreter to permit the individual to see both of you at the same time. Make eye contact with the person who is Deaf. Keep your hands and documents away from your face to facilitate lip reading. Use a normal speaking tone and be expressive in the same way you speak to people who can hear.
7. Consider the space around a person's wheelchair as their personal space. Do not touch, push or lean on their chair. Sit down to be at the same eye level when talking.
8. Do not presume or make decisions for a person with a disability. Simply ask.
9. Use disability-friendly communication. Remember to put the person first, say 'person with a disability' not 'disabled person'. Avoid negative and disempowering words like 'victim' or 'sufferer'. Do not use 'handicapped' or 'differently abled.' Say 'wheelchair user' instead of 'confined to a wheelchair' or 'wheelchair bound'. It is a vehicle for the person to get around, and it is liberating and not confining.

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10. People with a variety of different disabilities may use a service animal or guide dog to assist them with daily living and at work. The Illinois White Cane Law and the ADA take precedence over any health codes or 'no animal policy'. Service animals are well trained and behaved; however, you may ask the person to leave if the animal is not well controlled.

Observing the above tips will help you become a disability-friendly workplace and better serve your customers.

Sources

*Adapted from **disabilityworks**, United Spinal Association and other sources for educational purposes only.*