

Starkloff
Disability Institute

Guidebook on Workplace Disability Etiquette



Etiquette on Interacting with People with Disabilities in the Workplace

Hiring people with disabilities is beneficial to businesses and corporations. People with disabilities offer new insights and life experiences that help create a more diverse workforce as well as a different perspective when problem solving. There are many common misconceptions and presumptions when working with a person with a disability; this worksheet is intended to be a guide to both overcoming these misconceptions and presumptions and to provide practical information on how to interact with a person with a disability in the workplace.

The Golden Rule

The most important thing when conversing with a person with a disability is respect – remember they are a person too! Treat them with the same respect you would treat anyone else; for example, if you shake the hand of everyone you meet, offer to shake the hand of a person with a disability – if they are unable to do so they will tell you. In order to ensure respect of the person, there are some general common courtesies as well as specific phrases to use that convey you acknowledge that the person with the disability is of equal importance as you or anyone else.

Common Courtesies

There is a vast array of disabilities that you and your business may come into contact with; however, there are a few basic common courtesies that you can rely on no matter what the situation:

- Do not assume the role of a caregiver when interacting with people with disabilities. You can offer your help, but do not assume it is needed.
- Be sensitive to physical contact. Avoiding grabbing, touching or pushing a person's wheelchair or cane. This equipment is considered part of a person with a disabilities personal space.
- Speak directly to the person you are talking to. When talking to a person with a disability who uses an interpreter or companion, talk directly to the person with a disability – not their interpreter.
- Do not assume a person's ability. The person with a disability is in the best position to determine whether or not they can do something. Do not make decisions about participation in an activity. When in doubt, respect the person's ability to choose and ask!

People First Language

People with disabilities should be identified as a person first, and their disability second. This is a matter of respect and indicates you see more of the person than just their disability. Avoid the use of the term “handicap” as it derives from the image of a person begging for money using their cap.

Use: Do Not Use:

Person with a disability, disabled	Cripple, handicapped, handicap, invalid (literally means "not valid")
Person who has, person with (e.g., person who has cerebral palsy)	Victim, afflicted with (e.g., victim of cerebral palsy)
Uses a wheelchair	Restricted or confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
Nondisabled or able-bodied	Normal (referring to nondisabled persons as "normal" insinuates that people with disabilities are abnormal)
Deaf, Hard of Hearing	Deaf-mute, Deaf and dumb
Disabled since birth, born with	Birth defect
Emotional disorder, mental illness, psychiatric history, psychiatric disability, consumer of mental health services	Crazy, insane, mental patient, wacko, a lunatic, a psychotic, a schizophrenic
Epilepsy, seizures	Fits
Learning disability, intellectual disability, developmental disability, cognitive disability, ADD/ADHD	Mental retardation, slow, retarded, lazy, stupid, underachiever

Etiquette for Specific Disabilities

For the Blind or Visually Impaired:

Do:

- Identify yourself and what your job role is – provide verbal information to what is visually obvious.
- Avoid using words like “over there” as they have little meaning to a person who is blind or visually impaired. A detailed description like “four doors after turning right from the elevator” is much more helpful.
- Only lead a person who is blind after you have offered, and they have accepted. Do not hold on to them rather let them hold on to you.

Avoid:

- Moving object or furniture after their position has been learned by the person.
- Using visual references
- Interacting with a guide dog while working

For the Deaf and/or Hearing Impaired

Do:

- Introduce yourself by tapping a person who is deaf on the shoulder.

- If the person uses an interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- If the person reads lips, speak normally - not in an exaggerated way.

Avoid:

- Physical barriers between you and the person while conversing
- Becoming impatient if it takes longer to communicate

For Someone Who Uses A Wheel Chair

Do:

- Adjust your viewing angle during conversation – it is very uncomfortable to consistently have to look up for a person in a wheel chair
- When asked to fold, carry or store a wheel chair, treat it with the same respect you would when holding a pair of eyeglasses

Avoid:

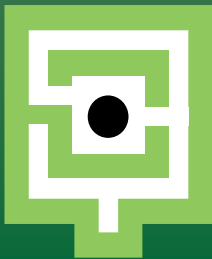
- Assuming the person needs assistance by pushing their wheelchair
- Standing too close to a person’s wheel chair
- Hanging or leaning on a person’s wheelchair – it is considered part of their personal space

Is your company in compliance?

Recent changes in Federal law have instituted new standards for employers, requiring the hiring of workers with disabilities.

The Starkloff Disability Institute works with employers to create accessible and disability positive workplaces for employers who wish to hire people with disabilities.

Contact The Starkloff Disability Institute to find out how we can help your corporation meet these new Federal guidelines.



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