



Disability-friendly Businesses

DOING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE A DISABILITY

About 50 million Americans report having a disability. Meeting the needs of customers with disabilities is an important aspect of being a business owner or customer service representative. When your business meets the needs of customers with disabilities, you greatly increase your potential customer base. Many people with and without disabilities appreciate ease and convenience when doing business in their community. Here are suggestions to make your business friendly to people with disabilities.

Accessibility

- Do good research to ensure that your business is accessible for individuals with disabilities. Building codes contain minimum requirements; they may not achieve accessibility for everyone.
- Ask people with disabilities to help plan new spaces or retrofit existing ones.
- Contact your local disability organization for information on universal design and barrier-free environments.

Welcoming Policies

Welcoming policies help make expectations clear and your organization fair for everyone. Here are some examples:

- Welcome people with disabilities.
Example: Our community values diversity. We are continually working to make our facilities, programs, and services accessible for everyone.
- Communicate to others what adaptations you have available and under what circumstances.
Example: We welcome service animals. We post information in a visible place which explains to staff and our customers the benefits and guidelines for their use.
- Outline the training you provide.
Example: To improve our services, all new employees receive training in diversity and communicating with individuals who have a disability.
- Require accessible communications.
Example: We produce all written documents in plain language. We offer information in large print or audio format when people need or ask for it.
- Designate someone to coordinate inclusion efforts.
Example: The Director of Human Resources is responsible to review and develop policies and procedures that relate to how we employ and serve people with disabilities.

Manners

- People with disabilities want to be treated with dignity and courtesy – just like people without disabilities.
- Treat people as adults. Adults with disabilities make their own choices and decisions. Respect wheelchairs and other assistive devices such as a cane, service dog, or hearing aid. Get permission before you touch or move an assistive device. People with disabilities consider these devices an extension of their personal space.





- Where possible and appropriate, sit down and talk at eye level with a person in a wheelchair.
- Shake hands. Greet people with disabilities as you would anyone else. If people can't shake hands they'll tell you.
- Mention a person's disability only if it is relevant.
- When referring to a person with a disability, talk about the person first and the disability second. A disability is only one characteristic. Say 'person with a disability' instead of 'disabled person'.

Communication

- Listen carefully. Pay attention to what people say - verbally and non-verbally.
- Make sure you understand. Ask questions to clarify and gather the information you need. Do not assume.
- Speak directly to people – not through a friend or other person who may be there.
- Apply plain language principles in print and online materials. Be aware of your audience and meet their needs.
- Use eye contact, the person's name, or touch (if appropriate) to get their attention.
- Speak clearly in a respectful tone and volume.
- Pause often in stressful situations to give people the chance to process what you're saying.
- Ask one question at a time and give people additional time to reply, if it is needed. Be patient. Do not finish their sentences.
- Ask people what communication style and techniques you can use to make things easier for them.
- Listen and watch carefully for signs that the person understands. It's not enough to ask 'do you understand?'
- Take responsibility for breakdowns in communication. Say you're sorry, you don't understand. You do not need to pretend to understand.

Customer Service

- Make people with disabilities feel welcome - from the moment they enter the door. Treat them with respect, dignity, courtesy, and professionalism.
- Create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable asking for help. Ask customers if you can help or clarify anything. Respond to requests for help in respectful ways; make people feel glad they asked.
- Offer people with disabilities the same products and services you offer people without disabilities. Avoid excluding or segregating people. Minimize the need for special accommodations or 'disability only' services. If you have concerns that people with disabilities may have problems with a product or service, find ways to support them to use the service as it exists.
- Ask people with disabilities for their feedback – formal and informal.

For additional resources, go to:

[United Spinal Association Disability Etiquette Guide](#)

[Yellowknife Association for Community Living: Community Inclusion 101: A How to Guide](#)

[Southwest Center for Independent Living: Understanding Disabilities 101](#)

Or, contact your [local Regional Office Community Living Coordinator](#) if you have any questions.

