



Disability Etiquette for Businesses

1. **Don't assume they see their disability as a tragedy.** People with disabilities are as happy and content with their lives as anyone else. A seemingly harmless statement like, "I'm so sorry that happened to you," can make a person feel pitied and diminished.
2. **Don't ask strangers about their disability.** It's none of your concern and not necessary to your business transaction. People with disabilities don't owe you an explanation and often feel uncomfortable being asked about very personal aspects of their lives.
3. **Adjust posture to be eye-level.** The height difference between people in wheelchairs and able-bodieds can create an unspoken feeling of superiority and inferiority. Sit at eye-level with the person who has a disability when it is possible. Use a clip board to bring paperwork to an individual who can't reach a desktop or countertop.
4. **Make eye contact; never avoid someone with a disability.** People who fear they could do or say something unintentionally disrespectful toward a person with a disability will sometimes default to ignoring that person altogether. Never do this.
5. **Ask if he or she needs assistance before providing it and WAIT FOR THEM TO RESPOND.** Don't try to accommodate every last need of someone with a disability in attempts to be respectful. The better choice is to ask, "Is there anything I can help you with?" Helping before asking implies they are incapable and can offend the person.
6. **Do not underestimate the abilities or accomplishments of someone with a disability.** Many people with disabilities are capable of caring for themselves without any assistance. They can work, drive, go on vacations, go to college, and get married. They can have careers, homes, credit cards, and families.
7. **Speak directly to the person, not through their assistant or companion.** People who have difficulty speaking or who have an intellectual disability are often ignored because it is assumed they won't understand. By speaking to the assistant first, the person with the disability assumes you see them as incapable; it damages the relationship immediately. **Do not raise the pitch or volume of your voice, don't speak to an adult as if they are a child.**
8. When listening to a person who has difficulty speaking, **try to "slow down" your listening to match their rate of speech.** Do not interrupt or try to finish sentences for them. You will frequently be wrong and then the person has to repeat themselves. If you understand only part of their statement, repeat that part back to them and ask them to fill in the rest to save them time and effort.
9. **Don't use outdated, offensive terms.** Words "wheelchair bound" or "retarded" are not acceptable terms to use today. Wheelchairs allow freedom and mobility. "Wheelchair accessible" is the more appropriate term to use. "Retarded" has become a word used to insult and belittle. It is never OK to use this word, no matter who you are talking about. Say "intellectual disability" instead.
10. **Seek to understand the person and their disability before expecting to be understood.** There may be times when you try your best to be respectful of a person with a disability and it backfires. You may be perceived incorrectly or perhaps offend someone unintentionally. Before getting angry and thinking, "They should understand I wasn't trying to be rude," step back from the situation and understand there could be many contributing factors to why that person got upset. Don't be afraid to make a mistake, no one is perfect!

