

Fully Accessible: Technology and Techniques for Recruiting and Retaining Employees with Disabilities

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BASIC DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

The following tips are things to keep in mind when interacting with an individual with a disability. Remember, each person is an individual. Never assume you know what a person with a disability wants or needs.

ASK BEFORE Attempting to HELP

Interact with the person as a person first! Don't assume a person with a disability needs help. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it and ask how you may help before you act.

Respect an Individual's Property

Respect all assistive devices (e.g., canes and service animals, wheelchairs and mobility devices, digital notetakers and braille displays, augmentative communication devices) as personal property. Unless given permission, do not move, play with, or use them.

Be Sensitive Regarding Physical Contact

Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them – even if your intention is to assist – could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person with a mobility impairment on the head or touching the wheelchair, scooter or cane. Touching or grabbing someone without prior permission may startle, frighten, intimidate or otherwise create distress or put the individual at risk.

Think Before You Speak

Always speak directly to a person with a disability, not their companion, friend, aide or sign language interpreter.

It is not necessary to speak more loudly and/or slowly to an individual just because he/she has a disability, unless he/she asks you to do so or appears to have difficulty understanding you. If you are unsure simply ask the individual.

Don't apologize if you use an expression such as "I gotta run" or "See you later" that relates to the person's disability. These expressions are part of everyday language and it is likely the apology will be more offensive than the expression.

Don't portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or superhuman. This implies that it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents or skills.

Don't Make Assumptions

People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't make decisions for them about performing a task or participating in an activity. Remember that people with disabilities may be interested in the same topics of conversation as non-disabled individuals.

Terminology Tips

Use “People First” Language – refer to the individual first, then this or her disability, when it is relevant and appropriate. Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person” or use the following formula:

Name or Title	+ Verb +	Assistive Device or Disability
He or she, employee, applicant, client, etc.	Has, uses, utilizes, etc.	Wheelchair, learning disability, sign-language, etc.

Note: “Visually Impaired” or “Hearing Impaired” are not automatically preferable terms to “Blind” or “Deaf,” respectively. Many individuals prefer the terms “Blind” or “Deaf,” either as a sociocultural matter or in order to indicate that they have no functional sight or hearing, as distinguished from those whose sight or hearing is impaired but still functional. The best practice is to follow an individual’s lead on which term he/she prefers or, if not sure, simply ask the individual.

Label/Term to be avoided	People-First Language
The handicapped or the disabled	People with disabilities
Epileptic	A person with epilepsy
Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair	Uses a wheelchair or scooter, or is a wheelchair user
Crippled or lame	Has a physical disability
Dwarf or midget	Has short stature, is a little person
Mute or dumb	Communicates non-verbally or uses an augmentative communications device
Is learning disabled	Has a learning disability
Afflicted with, suffers from or victim of ...	Has a hearing impairment, has a visual impairment, has a learning disability
Emotionally disturbed or crazy	Has a psychiatric disability
Normal or healthy	A person without a disability
Quadriplegic, paraplegic, etc.	Has quadriplegia, paraplegia, etc.
Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.	Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.

Terms to be Avoided

- Invalid
- Wheelchair bound
- Defect
- Handicapped
- Victim
- Suffers from

- Crippled
- A patient

People Who Use Wheelchairs Or Have Mobility Impairments

- ✓ Offer to shake hands when greeting the individual.
- ✓ Don't lean on or touch the individual's wheelchair.
- ✓ Place yourself at eye level with the individual when in conversation.
- ✓ Refrain from touching individuals who use canes, crutches or other assistive devices and avoid moving objects around them unexpectedly.

People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

- ✓ Identify yourself and encourage others with you to do the same.
- ✓ Offer an elbow when providing travel/navigational assistance.
- ✓ Walk to the left and slightly behind a person with a guide dog or white cane.
- ✓ Give specific, non-visual, non-gesture-based directions.
- ✓ Inform a person with a visual impairment if you move or need to end the conversation.
- ✓ Allow a person with a visual impairment to negotiate their surroundings (e.g., finding the door handle, locating a chair, etc.) independently — assistance will be requested when necessary.

People Who Are Deaf Or Hard Of Hearing

- ✓ Tap gently on the shoulder to get attention.
- ✓ If beyond the reach to tap, wave in the air until eye contact is established.
- ✓ Switch lights on and off to get attention.
- ✓ Remember to face a person who is deaf or hard of hearing while speaking.
- ✓ Establish eye contact before beginning communication. This is considered a stare in other cultures but not in deaf culture.
- ✓ Keep your face clear of any obstruction, e.g. hair, scarf, etc.
- ✓ Use a normal tone/volume, speak clearly and distinctly.
- ✓ Determine an individual's preference for sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.
- ✓ Be prepared to write notes to communicate if necessary.
- ✓ Show that you are attentive by nodding slightly. If you are expressionless, it conveys inattentiveness.
- ✓ Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences that the person doesn't understand.
- ✓ When a sign language interpreter is present, speak directly to the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.

People with Speech Disabilities

- ✓ Give the person your full attention and be patient.
- ✓ Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences.
- ✓ When meaning is unclear, ask for clarification or verification.

- ✓ When you are unable to understand the communication, ask the individual to write it down or suggest another means of communicating.

ADVANCING ACCESS FOR EVERYONE

Creating Accessible & Inclusive Meetings or Events

Planning ahead for inclusion can help to create an event that is welcoming to everybody. Here are some guidelines to consider when organizing meetings and events.

EARLY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- When possible, include people with disabilities in all stages of event planning.
- Consider the date and time of your event to minimize barriers related to length of day, number & duration of breaks throughout the event, availability of transportation, and religious observances.
- Designate an **Access Coordinator** on your team for the event or meeting.

Event Access Coordinators

- Receive, confirm and track all access requests from participants.
- Manage and implement accommodations.
- Communicate accommodations arrangements with participants and staff.
- Identify assistants who will be available to help with access-related tasks.
- Coordinate all materials for accessible distribution several days in advance.
- Request interpreters & captioners at least **two weeks in advance** (z.umn.edu/icu).

VENUE

Conduct an early site visit to clarify accessibility and what may require additional planning related to:

- Entrances & elevators
- Restrooms (accessible, all-gender & transfer table availability)
- A refrigerator & microwave for those bringing food
- Sufficient accessible parking & transportation
- Audio technology (microphones, listening devices)
- Temperature control & lighting considerations
- Quiet spaces

Please also:

- Ensure space is large enough.
- Plan for wheelchair accessible seating and paths throughout the space.
- Provide a variety of seating and table options (e.g. table heights, styles, sizes).
- Confirm emergency protocols and request changes needed for disabled people (e.g. elevator use during a fire).
- Identify other events at the same venue that day and plan to reduce access barriers (e.g. managing noise level).
- Avoid decorations in pathways, flash/strobe effects, latex balloons, and fog machines.

MARKETING, WEB DESIGN & FORMS

- Create accessible materials — learn how at accessibility.umn.edu or z.umn.edu/doccon.
- Provide accessible online registration and request preferred names.
- Indicate access being provided (e.g. interpreting, captioning, listening devices, audio description).
- Ask and remind participants to use scent-free products.
- Use this language to invite accommodation requests: "To make disability-related accommodations or dietary requests contact [**Event Access Coordinator**]."

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Other Considerations

For all-day or multi-day events and conferences:

Verify and provide, in advance, a list of:

- Accessible lodging
- Accessible restaurants nearby and hours of operation

Contact information for:

- Pharmacy – nearest & 24 hour
- Urgent Care, E.R. & crisis hotline
- Grocery stores
- Accessible transportation
- Veterinary office, emergency vet & pet stores

MATERIALS

- ❑ Contact Document Conversion at dsdoccon@umn.edu to request alternate formats at least **two weeks in advance**.
- ❑ Distribute all materials digitally in advance to all attendees—include an agenda indicating the amount of walking/physical activity.
- ❑ Provide copies in Braille (as requested), large print and digitally on event day.
- ❑ Check and update all **presenters'** materials for accessibility.
- ❑ Print preferred names on name tags in a large, dark font.
- ❑ Consider the color choices and contrast of all materials.
- ❑ Gather an **Event Kit**.

Presenter Considerations

Instruct presenters to create accessible presentations by:

- Checking the order each slide element will be read by a screen reader.
- Including alt text on all images. (accessibility.umn.edu)
- Considering color/contrast choices and avoiding use of flash or strobe effects.

Remind presenters to:

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Always use a microphone.
- Describe images and explain slide content.

FOOD

- ❑ Plan ahead to provide gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan, kosher and halal options.
- ❑ Clearly label all food and keep specialized options separate.
- ❑ If meals are provided, offer full course options for specialized requests.

Event Kit

- First aid kit with latex-free supplies & ear plugs
- Paper, pens, unscented markers, scissors, tape, duct tape, blank name tags & clipboards
- Unscented bathroom & cleaning products
- Bike tire pump & patch kit for wheelchair tires
- Juice or regular soda & straws
- Clean rug or mat
- Umbrellas & ponchos
- Water bowl & dog waste bags for service dogs
- Garbage bags

Announcements

- Introduce the Event Access Coordinator.
- Give clear directions to accessible & all-gender bathrooms—indicate transfer table availability.
- Ask all participants to say their name before speaking.
- Invite participants to take breaks for self-care.
- Share emergency protocols.
- Explain Event Kit and identify quiet spaces.
- Invite people with dietary requests to get their food first.

EVENT DAY

- ❑ Post directional signs and station greeters at all entry points, elevators, stairs.
- ❑ Use an inclusive check-in process (consider table height, amount of noise, number of staff, flow of check-in process).
- ❑ Avoid background music.
- ❑ Brief all staff about accessibility plans.
- ❑ Set up clear and spacious paths outside and inside.
- ❑ Ask photographers to not use flash and to seek permission before photographing people.

EVENT FOLLOW-UP

- ❑ Distribute promised materials and/or post online in an accessible format.
- ❑ Send accessible thank you notes and evaluations and ask for feedback regarding accessibility and inclusion.

Please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 612-626-1333 or drc@umn.edu if you have questions.

Disability Resource Center
Office for **Equity and Diversity**

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