



WorkWithoutLimits

Putting abilities to work in Massachusetts.

Disability Etiquette for Businesses

A MASSACHUSETTS DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

General Disability Etiquette

- It is vitally important always to think of the person with a disability first as a person, and only secondarily as a person with a disability.
- Treat people as people, adults as adults.
- But above all, relax and be yourself.

General Disability Etiquette

- When you offer to assist someone with a disability, make sure to ask if they want help and listen for how best to provide it.
- Speak with the person, not a companion.
- Make eye contact, but don't stare.
- Be considerate and, if appropriate, let the person with a disability set the pace in walking and/or talking.

Disability Etiquette - Language

- Honor the person, not the disability, with person-centered, value-free language:
 - Never “handicap,” “afflicted with,” “suffers from”
 - “Person with a disability,” not “disabled person”
 - “Person with blindness,” not “blind person”
 - “Wheelchair active,” not “confined to a wheelchair”
 - “Consumer” or “survivor,” not “client” or “patient”
 - “Intellectual disability,” not “mental retardation”

Disability Etiquette

Vision Impairments

- Identify yourself each time you speak.
- Offer elbow to guide, don't push or pull.
- Don't pet the guide dog; s/he is working.
- Identify people in a group, describe where they are.
- When directing a person with a visual impairment, use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards" or when identifying placement, "at 3:00," etc.

Disability Etiquette

Wheelchair Users

- Put yourself at eye level \neq sit down, if possible.
- If you don't make a habit of leaning or hanging on people, don't lean or hang on someone's wheelchair.
- Don't push without asking first.
- When giving directions consider distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.

Disability Etiquette

Deaf / Hard of Hearing

- Tap the person's shoulder respectfully/ lightly to get attention.
- Speak clearly, face the light; don't shout.
- No chewing gum or food to obscure your mouth.
- Speak to the person, not to the interpreter.
- Get familiar with the Telephone Relay Service ([MassRelay Service](#)).

Disability Etiquette

Speech Impairment

- Resist the temptation to try to finish the person's sentence.
- Never pretend to understand if you don't.
- Repeat what you thought was said, then ask for confirmation.
- Be encouraging, not correcting.
- Be patient, attentive

A Disability – Friendly Business Offers

- Disability parking
- Level entrance / elevator
- Large-print / Braille signage
- Clear path of travel
- Wide halls and doorways
- Wheelchair restroom
- Communications options
- Staff sensitivity training
- Flexibility above all.

Resources for Business

- Local
 - Work Without Limits
 - www.workwithoutlimits.org
- National
 - Job Accommodations Network
 - <http://askjan.org>
 - United States Business Leadership Network
 - www.usbln.org

Work Without Limits

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