



Disability Awareness

Strengthening
America's Workforce

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Disability

Disabilities are a universal part of the human condition.

The worldwide disability community includes people of every color, gender, religion, ethnicity, and age.

At SourceAmerica, we envision a time when every person with a disability in the United States has equal access to career opportunities.

When people with disabilities gain greater access to social and economic independence and professional fulfillment, our communities and our nation grow stronger.

Each individual with a disability functions differently.

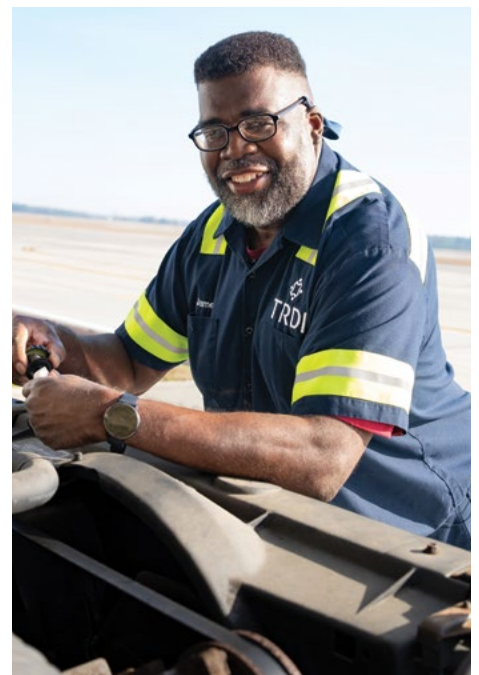
Some disabilities are clearly visible, like when a person uses a wheelchair or a service animal, reads documents with a screen reader, or communicates through sign language.

Other disabilities are less visible. This includes a wide range of intellectual, developmental, and neurological disabilities, and conditions such as autism, epilepsy, orthopedic and sensory conditions, attention deficit, and learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Most people with disabilities share one thing in common: they are willing, eager, and capable of holding and thriving in a job. Yet nearly 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed.

Often employers may not appreciate the full potential of a person with a disability. They may be concerned that people with disabilities require expensive training, workplace accommodations, or may slow workplace productivity. With disability awareness comes understanding.

People with disabilities have abilities.



Communication



How to Interact with People with Disabilities*

1. **When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person.** Don't speak through their companion or sign language interpreter.
2. **When introduced to a person with a disability, offer to shake hands.** People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb will let you know if they prefer a different way.
3. **When meeting a person who is blind or partially sighted, verbally identify yourself and ask those with you to verbally introduce themselves.** When conversing in a group, each person should identify themselves prior to speaking.

**Don't be
afraid
to ask
questions!**

* The etiquette was adapted from many sources, including the United Cerebral Palsy's version of The Ten Commandments, which was updated by Irene M. Ward & Associates (Columbus, Ohio) to provide the most current language for its video, The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities.

4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen and, if necessary, ask for instructions. It is important not to assume what an individual can or cannot do without assistance.

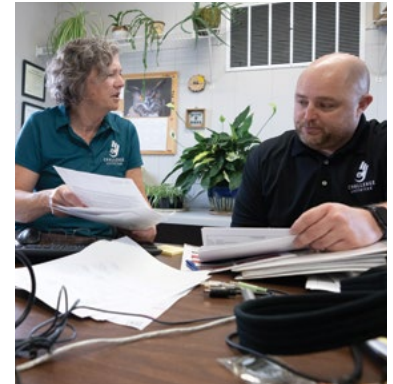
5. Treat adults as adults. When speaking to a person with a disability, use a tone of voice and manner as one adult addressing another. Address a person with a disability by their first name only if you are extending the same familiarity to all others. Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the shoulder or head.

6. Treat a wheelchair as part of the personal space of the person using it. In most professional settings, personal space is generally defined as one to four feet. Ask yourself if your relationship with the individual is such that invading their personal space is appropriate, regardless of whether he or she uses a wheelchair.



7. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches, place yourself at eye level without kneeling. Take a step back or suggest finding a place where you can sit. This will help facilitate a more interactive conversation.

8. Listen attentively to a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or attempting to complete their thoughts. Repeat what you have



understood and wait for a response. Ask questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Do not pretend to understand. Acknowledge that you are having difficulty understanding and ask if there is someone who can interpret or suggest an alternative means of communication.

9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap their shoulder or wave your hand so they can see it without encroaching on personal space. Look directly at the person and speak clearly in a normal, non-exaggerated way. Some people may read lips. However, lip reading is only 30-50% effective. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to lighting within the space. For example, in a dimly lit room, place yourself near a light source that illuminates your face. Also, keep your hands away from your face while speaking. In some cases, an interpreter may be present, or you may need to consider alternative forms of communication, such as demonstrative or written.

10. Relax. While you may make a mistake or forget one of these tips, if you are communicating from a place of respect, understanding will follow. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use an accepted common expression that seems to refer to a person's disability, such as "See you later!" or "Did you hear about that?"

People-First or Identity-First Language: Take Cues from the Conversation

People-first language (ex. a person with a disability) is an appropriate default when writing or speaking about people with disabilities. Group designations such as “the disabled” are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities.

In recent years, many self-advocates have expressed a preference for identity-first language which focuses on their lived experience as a person with a disability (ex. a disabled person). This is prevalent within the Deaf community and gaining increasing acceptance within the Blind and Autistic communities, among others. Individual preferences will vary! If the person you are conversing with uses identity-first language, you can take your cue from them during the interaction.

If in doubt, ask individuals what terminology they prefer.

Negative Phrases	Positive Phrases
Retarded, mentally defective	Person with intellectual/developmental disabilities
The blind	Person who is blind, person who is partially sighted
The disabled, handicapped	Person with a disability
A hearing loss, the deaf	Person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing
Afflicted by multiple sclerosis	Person who has multiple sclerosis
Cerebral palsy victim	Person with cerebral palsy
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy
Confined or restricted to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Stricken by muscular dystrophy	Person who has muscular dystrophy
Crippled, lame, deformed	Person with a physical disability
Autistic	Person with autism
Dumb, mute	Unable to speak, uses synthetic speech
Fit	Seizure
Crazy, nuts	Person with a psychiatric disability/mental illness
The deinstitutionalized	Person who no longer lives in an institution
Has overcome his/her disability; courageous (when it implies the person has courage because of having a disability)	Successful, productive
Normal person	Person without a disability
Suffers from a disability, victim	Person who has a disability

Disabilities: Myths and Facts



Myth 1:

People with disabilities cannot be productive in the workplace.

Fact:

People with disabilities have a variety of skill sets and abilities and can make meaningful contributions in the workplace.

Myth 2:

People with disabilities hinder business.

Fact:

Diverse teams produce better solutions, so there's a clear performance advantage to bringing together people with all kinds of differences. Research has also found organizations employing people with disabilities have higher morale and employee engagement, which we know drives profitability.

Myth 3:

People with disabilities always need help.

Fact:

Many people with disabilities are very independent and prefer to be responsible for themselves. However, they often welcome help when needed. If you offer assistance, wait until your offer has been accepted, then listen or ask for instructions.

Common Sense Accommodations for the Workspace

- **Do not assume a person cannot perform a certain task.** A person with a disability knows best what they need, if anything, in terms of accommodations. With the right support, a person with a disability can be very productive.
- **Keep hallways and office spaces clear from excess clutter.** This can make it difficult for people with physical disabilities to use equipment, such as copiers and printers.
- **Provide accessible restrooms, drinking fountains, and telephones.** If such facilities are not available, offer alternatives, such as a private or employee restroom, a glass or bottle of water, or a desk phone.
- **When planning a meeting or other event, find out what specific accommodations a person with a disability might need and make those arrangements.** Communicate in advance what accommodations will be available (e.g. ASL interpreting and live captioning are being provided). Provide an opportunity to request additional disability-related accommodations during registration. Let registrants know ahead of time if certain accommodations cannot be made.



- **Ensure company information, announcements, and events are made accessible through various methods of communication.**
- **Accommodate transportation needs.** Lack of transportation can prevent people with disabilities from joining the workforce. Flexible work schedules and work-from-home options can accommodate those with transportation challenges.
- **Be prepared.** Encourage fellow employees to learn how to assist individuals with disabilities in cases of emergency, including proper procedures for building evacuations and medical emergencies.
- **Encourage interaction between people with disabilities and their coworkers.** Include people with disabilities in group activities, meetings, and social gatherings. Forming work groups or teams with interdependent tasks is an excellent way to enhance employee relations.



Always remember:

- Exclusion is not an acceptable default in the workplace.
- Educate yourself and others.
- Hire qualified people with disabilities.
- Speak out when you hear others talk negatively about people with disabilities.
- Encourage participation of people with disabilities in social, community, and workplace events by making sure that meeting or event sites are accessible.

Common Courtesies



- Ask first before assisting a person with a disability. Wait for acceptance and instructions before you help.
- Not everyone uses the same words to describe themselves and their disabilities. While it's not an appropriate conversation opener, you can ask people with disabilities what terminology they prefer. It is always most respectful to refer to a person by name rather than their condition.
- Familiarize yourself with appropriate ways of communicating.
- Be considerate of the extra time it may take a person with a disability to walk, talk, write, or perform a task. Don't assume that all people with disabilities need the same considerations.
- Use common sense and apologize if you offend a person with a disability in the same manner you would apologize if you offend a person without a disability.
- Identify yourself verbally to a person who is blind or partially sighted, e.g., "Hi, Mary, this is John Doe." Also, alert them verbally when you enter or leave the room.
- Do not interact with a service dog while it is working. Service animals must focus on their handlers. Do not distract, offer food, pet, or otherwise interrupt a service dog's work. Always communicate with the handler – not the dog.
- Extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake hands will let you know.
- Do not block ramps or park in disability-designated parking spaces.
- When describing a person with a disability, do not emphasize the disability over other characteristics.
- Do not use "normal" to describe someone who does not have a disability, thus implying that someone with a disability is not normal. Use "a person without a disability" instead.
- When speaking to a person with a disability, be friendly but not overly friendly, paternalistic, or condescending. Do not assume you need to speak loudly.

**A person is
not defined by
their disability.
Do not refer to
individuals by
their disability.**

Resources

Disability Information

www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas

This user-friendly website links people with disabilities, their families, employers, service providers, and other community members to relevant information such as benefits, employment, and health.

The Office of Disability Employment Policy

www.dol.gov/agencies/odep

This site provides information regarding disability-related policies and practices affecting the employment of people with disabilities.

SourceAmerica Job Board Employment Resources

www.SourceAmerica.org/get-involved/employment-resources

SourceAmerica provides valuable employment resources and training for people with disabilities through our nonprofit network. Through our employment resources, you can assess and test your professional skills, find job listings tailored for people with disabilities, and build your resume.



Job Accommodation Network

www.askjan.org

This is a free consulting service designed to increase the employability of people with disabilities by:

- Providing individualized worksite accommodation solutions
- Providing technical assistance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability-related legislation
- Educating callers about self-employment options.

About SourceAmerica

SourceAmerica is a national nonprofit that administers the [AbilityOne Program](#) – a program that creates employment opportunities for people with disabilities through federal product and service contracts. We are a bridge between our network contractors and federal customers, providing the resources and support they need to successfully navigate the AbilityOne Program. To learn more, visit SourceAmerica.org and follow @SourceAmerica on [Facebook](#), [X.com](#) (formerly Twitter), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



**To learn more about disability
awareness and the talents of
people with disabilities, visit
SourceAmerica.org or call
1-888-411-8424.**

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