



## Tips on How to Better Serve Customers with Various Disabilities

### Fredericton - A Community for All Ages

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#### How To Welcome Customers With Disabilities

People with disabilities travel, shop and do business in your community with their friends and families, just like everyone else. By providing service that welcomes people with disabilities, you can offer better service to everyone. Treating all your customers with individual respect and courtesy is at the heart of excellent customer service.

You can broaden your customer base by welcoming everyone to your store, restaurant or services, including customers with disabilities. By learning how to serve people with disabilities, you can attract more customers and improve your service to everyone.

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.

#### Here are some ways you can provide better service to your customers with disabilities:

- Patience, optimism, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Smile, relax, and keep in mind that people with disabilities are just people.
- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know your customers' needs.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?"
- If you can't understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.
- Ask before you offer to help - don't just jump in. Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at your customer, but don't stare. Speak directly to people with disabilities, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

## Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing

Everyone is different in some way. Each of us has a different way of doing things and there are some things we can't do without some help from people, or from machines and products that are easy to use. People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where your customer can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

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## Deaf/Blind Disabilities

A deaf-blind person cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating.

Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
  - Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
  - A deaf-blind customer is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
  - Speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervenor.
  - Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deaf-blind.
  - Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
  - Never touch a deaf-blind person suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency.
  - Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.
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## Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language. Be supportive and patient.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual disability:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to your customers, not to someone who's with them.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

## Learning or Cognitive Disabilities

Learning disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with your customer's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language. Be supportive and patient.

### Here are some tips on serving customers with learning disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
  - When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
  - Speak normally and clearly, and directly to your customer
  - Take some time - people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
  - Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
  - If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
  - Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
  - Be courteous and patient and your customer will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.
  - Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.
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## Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. And usually it will not affect your customer service at all. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who have mental health disabilities:

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring, and listen to your customers with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- Take your customers with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

## Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability. Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them.
  - People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
  - Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
  - Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
  - Don't touch any assistive devices, including wheelchairs, unnecessarily unless it's an emergency.
  - Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).
  - Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.
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## Speech Impediments

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

### Here are some tips on serving customers with speech impediments:

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking; don't assume they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask your customer to repeat the information.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Take some time. Be patient and polite, and give your customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

## Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Visual Disabilities can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

### Here are some tips on serving customers who have visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

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### Tips On Dealing With Customers With Disabilities Over The Phone:

- Speak normally, clearly and directly.
- Don't worry about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what's being said.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish your customer's sentences. Give your customer time to explain him/herself.
- Don't try to guess what your customer is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- If you're not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you've heard.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a TTY line, just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.
- If your customer has great difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back when it's convenient to speak with someone else.

### Tips on Serving Customers With Disabilities at Home:

- Don't arrive unexpectedly, and confirm the details before you arrive.
- Be patient. You may need to wait a few moments for your customer to open the door.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Introduce yourself clearly. Some customers may not be able to read identity cards and may instead have a password. Check before you visit.
- Keep your customer up to date on what you're doing.
- If you need to move some of your client's possessions, make sure that you leave the customer's house exactly as when you arrived. For example, you don't want someone with a visual impairment to trip because you moved the sofa.
- If you can't complete the job, clearly explain what will happen next. Make another appointment, and leave a contact number in case there are problems.

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## Practical Tips for Providing Great Service to Persons Who Have Alzheimer's

### Alzheimer's Disease:

People with Alzheimer's disease are coping with symptoms of forgetfulness, confusion, difficulty expressing thoughts and doing routine tasks. The disease:

- affects everyone differently
- prevents a person from following a process
- causes them to do and say things we don't understand

A big part of providing good customer service is taking an interest in someone. Engaging with someone and helping them cope with a task creates a good feeling. People with Alzheimer's disease need a lot of good feelings in their day to help them cope with the symptoms of the disease listed above. When good feelings are enhanced, bad ones are diminished.

When we accept someone with Alzheimer's, they are more likely to feel relaxed around us and want to engage with us.

**Here are some tips on serving customers who have Alzheimer's disease:**

- Support them only in what they cannot do
- If their thoughts drift during a conversation, follow their thoughts and engage in the new subject.
- If they forget what they just said, use humour, understanding – something to break the tension
- Be patient – it takes longer to process information and find the words to speak
- Avoid confrontation and reduce stress by:
  - Giving them space when they need it (silence, physical) – they are likely feeling overwhelmed
  - Accepting what they say – not correcting them
  - Making a suggestion or asking a question – not giving direction
  - Focus on feelings – because feelings remain intact
  - “I’ve felt that way too”
  - “I’m sorry”
  - “That could happen to anyone”
  - “That’s happened to me before too”

*Sources:*

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