



Customer Service for Business

Ensuring full access to your business and services is a great way to expand your customer base. There are approximately 56.7 million Americans with disabilities (roughly 18% of the population). In addition, persons with disabilities have friends and family members who care about disability and accessibility and are potential customers. Persons with disabilities have significant money to spend (more than \$200 billion in discretionary income) and so do their companions and friends. An accessible business is safer and more user-friendly for everyone, including older customers and aging baby boomers.

Disability Etiquette Tips

- Use common sense and show common courtesy to everyone.
- Treat everyone like a valued customer. Don't patronize.
- Be patient. People with disabilities and seniors might require more time to express themselves or to move about.
- Speak directly to the person and maintain eye contact; don't speak to a companion, aide or interpreter.
- Describe and address people with disabilities appropriately.
 - Use "person first" language that emphasizes the person rather than the disability or condition, as in "person who has epilepsy" rather than "epileptic."
 - Avoid terms such as "handicapped," "victim," "afflicted," and "confined."
- Offer assistance and listen to the response; follow any specific instructions. If the response is "no thank you," this should also be respected.
- Do not pet, feed or distract service animals. They are working animals, not pets.
- Do not make assumptions about anyone's abilities or limitations; every person's disability is different. Ask questions if you are not sure what someone needs.

Practical Tips: Serving Customers with Disabilities

- Train your staff in disability etiquette.
- Have a pad of paper handy in case a customer is deaf or unable to speak.
- Welcome service animals into your establishment. Service animals assist people with all types of disabilities, including individuals who are blind, deaf, have epilepsy, use wheelchairs, and many others.
- Make sure your staff is aware of your business's accessible features, policies, and practices, and is trained to respond accurately to questions about them.
- Before denying a disability-related request, consider alternative solutions, which may include borrowing or renting equipment, providing curb or home delivery, retrieving merchandise from



inaccessible shelves or racks, and relocating activities to accessible locations. Access will increase revenue and does not have to cost a lot of money.

- Include customers with disabilities in your emergency evacuation plan.
- Make sure that your business's website is accessible. For example, provide "alt tags" (descriptive text) with images.
- Use available federal tax incentives to make your business more accessible and to hire employees with disabilities. (See "Resources" below.) Many states also offer tax incentives.
- Remember, people with disabilities are your customers.

You will find that many of these practices also improve your services and products for all customers.

Areas to Assess for Accessibility

- Parking lot
- Entrance
- Lobby
- Public bathrooms
- Service counters
- Outdoor areas, including curb cuts and sidewalks
- Elevators
- Hallways
- Communication and signs (TTY, Braille, etc.)
- Emergency exits

All of these areas have specific accessibility requirements. Your regional ADA Center is available to discuss these requirements, provide training and answer your other ADA-related questions. To contact your regional center, call (800) 949-4232 V/TTY or go to <http://www.adata.org>.

Resources

- **ADA National Network**—provides free technical assistance, training and information. 1-800-949-4232 V/TTY <http://www.adata.org>
- **Reaching Out to Customers with Disabilities**—online training developed by the U.S. Department of Justice. <http://www.ada.gov/reachingout/intro1.htm>
- **Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal**, by the New England ADA Center, Institute for Human Centered Design (2011). <http://www.adachecklist.org/>

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<http://www.adainfo.org/>

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