



ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer Service Tips for Persons with Disabilities

Prepared by Beyond Rewards for:



Persons with Physical Disabilities

- Ask before you help. Not everyone who has a physical disability requires assistance.
- Speak naturally and directly to the person. Having a disability does not mean the person has another disability, such as hearing loss.
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space. Don't touch, move or lean on them (unless it is required in an emergency).
- Keep ramps, wheelchair-accessible doors and corridors free of clutter.
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line.
- When speaking to a person who uses a wheelchair or scooter, where possible, sit at his/her level. If that's not possible, stand at a slight distance away, so that the individual isn't straining their neck to make eye contact with you.
- Speak directly to the person who has the disability, not his or her support person or companion.

Persons with Hearing Loss

- Avoid startling a person with hearing loss by approaching them unexpectedly from behind.
- Get the person's attention before you start speaking. Generally, the best way to do this is by a gentle touch on the shoulder.
- Always face the person as you speak and maintain eye contact. Do not block your face and lips when speaking.
- Be aware of background noise and try to find a place to talk that minimizes it.
- Even if someone is using a Sign Language Interpreter to communicate, always direct your attention to the person with hearing loss.
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information.
- Speak clearly and don't shout at the person.

Persons with Vision Loss

- Attract the person's attention before speaking by introducing yourself. Always verbally identify yourself before making physical contact.
- Speak directly to the person, not through their companion or guide.
- Address the person by name when possible. This is especially useful in crowded areas.
- Do not raise your voice when speaking to a person with vision loss.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions. For example, say "two steps to the left" versus "over there".
- Don't leave a person in the middle of a room; guide him/her to a chair or a comfortable location.
- If the person uses a services animal, do not touch or approach the animal.
- Offer your arm to guide the person if needed.
- Ensure floor space and passageways are clear of obstacles.
- When providing printed materials, use clear fronts with appropriate spacing and font sizes. Ensure there is high contrast between the paper and the text colour.
- When providing printed information, offer to read or summarize it, or provide the information in an alternative format, such as in large print.

Persons with Deaf-Blindness

- A person with deaf-blindness will likely give you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate with him/her.
- If the person is using an intervener, identify yourself to the intervener, but speak directly to the person with deaf-blindness as you normally would.
- If the person has a service animal, do not touch or approach the animal.
- Always ask permission before touching a person with deaf-blindness.
- Understand that communication can take some time.

Persons with Deaf-Blindness

- Whenever possible, communicate in a quiet environment.
- Give the person your full attention. Make eye contact.
- Be patient and don't interrupt or finish sentences for people with speech impairments.
- If the person is accompanied by a support person, ensure you obtain permission before discussing confidential matters in front of the support person.
- Speak in your regular tone of voice. Most people with impaired speech can hear and understand without difficulty.
- Ask the person to repeat what they are saying or to write out their message if you are having trouble understanding. It may be helpful to repeat the part of the message that you understood so that the speaker doesn't have to repeat his/her entire message.
- Sometimes using yes/no questions can facilitate communication. Be sure to phrase such questions clearly and appropriately.

Persons with Learning Disabilities

- Respond to any requests for assistance with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to communicate or complete tasks if necessary.
- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to the person.
- Use everyday language and short sentences.
- When giving instructions, break large tasks into small and clear steps.
- Don't assume that a person with a learning disability has understood or failed to understand you. Politely ask whether or not you have provided sufficient information.

Persons with Mental Health Disabilities

- Be aware of the person's personal space. If someone looks uncomfortable, give them more space than normal.
- Mental illness has nothing to do with a person's intelligence. Do not lie to an individual with a mental disability as this will break rapport.
- If the person seems anxious or distracted, move to a quieter location with less people, if possible.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him/her to tell you the best way to help. When possible, offer the person some choices as this helps them regain some control over the situation.
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the person exhibits unusual behaviour.
- Listen carefully and ask the person to repeat information if you don't understand.
- Speak in a non-confrontational manner. Don't argue with the person. Agree with the individual when appropriate.

Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make his/her own decisions.
- Direct your attention to the person with the intellectual disability even if they are with a support person.
- Use clear, simple language. Try to adjust the pace, complexity and vocabulary of your speech to match theirs.
- Communicate in a quiet, informal, distraction-free environment.
- Allow time for the person to process information and respond to questions or a statement.
- When giving instructions, break large tasks into small and clear steps.

Service Animals

- Do not pet or talk to a service animal without permission. The animal is working and needs to pay attention at all times.
- Do not make noises at, or startle a service animal. It may distract the animal from doing its job, placing the dog and person at risk.
- Do not feed the service animal. It may disrupt his/her schedule. If a person with a service animal is going to be present for a significant period of time, you may ask if it is okay to put out some water for the animal. This is a courtesy but is not required.

Support Persons

- A person with a disability may not always introduce his/her support person. If you are not sure, it is okay to ask: “Is this your interpreter or support person?”
- Speak to and look directly at the person with a disability even though the message may be coming from the support person.
- Address the person with the disability appropriately: “Can you please sign this form?” as opposed to “Can you ask him to sign this form?”
- Support persons, especially interpreters, tend to communicate everything to the person with the disability. Avoid engaging in “side” conversations with the interpreter, thinking these won’t be conveyed to the person with the disability.
- Plan for the presence of a support person – Ex. Ensure seating arrangements for the support person are available

Assistive Devices

- Don’t touch or handle an assistive device without permission.
- Don’t move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer’s reach.

Moving a Person in a Wheelchair

- Wait for and follow the person's instructions.
- Confirm that your customer is ready to move.
- Describe what you are going to do before you do it.
- Try to avoid uneven ground and objects.
- Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

Disability-Related Language

WHEN IN DOUBT, START WITH THE “PERSON” FIRST!

- Use language that focuses on the person rather than their disability.
- Use the word “accessible” rather than “disabled” or “handicapped” when talking about places where accommodations have been made; for example, an accessible washroom vs. a handicapped washroom.
- Be cautious of implying that people with disabilities deserve to be pitied, babied, feared or ignored.
- Avoid using terms that define a person’s disability as a limitation; for example, “someone who uses a wheelchair” vs “someone confined to a wheelchair”
- Terms such as “victim” or “sufferer” should not be used to refer to people who have a disability or diseases.
- Never use the word “normal” to refer to people who do not have a disability; for example, do not say “Jane was able to do that activity just like a normal person”.
- When in doubt, call a person with a disability by his/her name or ask the individual the terminology that they would like you to use.

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Blind person	Person who is blind Person with vision loss
Brain damaged person	Person with a brain injury
Crazy person Insane person Mental person Psychotic person Schizophrenic person	Person with a mental disability
Crippled person Handicapped person Disabled person	Person with a physical disability
Deaf person	Person who is deaf Person with a hearing impairment
Epileptic person	Person who has epilepsy
Slow person	Person with a learning disability
Dumb person Retarded person	Person with an intellectual disability Person with a developmental disability
Midget Dwarf	Little person Person of short stature
Normal person	Person who is not disabled
Stutterer	Person who stutters
Old person	Senior citizen