



Customer Service

ADA National Network

1-800-949-4232 V/TTY
www.adata.org

Customer Service Quick Tips for Front Line Staff Serving Customers with Disabilities

Did you know there are more than 57 million Americans with mobility, sensory, neurological, intellectual, and other types of disabilities? This diverse group represents a growing market for businesses and a valuable source of talent and support for public programs and activities.

The spending power of Americans with disabilities is currently about \$220 billion. Wounded veterans, an aging baby boomer generation, and other factors continue to swell the population of those with disabilities. These individuals, as well as their family members, friends, and associates, are people you want to include in your business or organization as customers, participants, volunteers, and supporters!

Quick tips for providing excellent service to customers with disabilities:

- Treat everyone as a valued customer; don't treat people with disabilities with pity or disrespect.
- Learn about accessibility features at your place of business (e.g., is there a ramped or level entrance?) so you can answer questions and provide accurate information.
- Make sure there is a clear path of travel for customers using mobility devices or service animals.
- Service animals are used by people with a variety of types of disabilities. If you can't tell whether an animal is a service animal, you may ask only two questions: (1) is the animal a service animal needed because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the animal been trained to perform.
- A mobility device is considered part of an individual's personal space; do not lean on it or move it without permission.
- When you offer assistance, wait for the individual to respond; don't make assumptions, listen, ask for instructions, and respect the individual's wishes.

Quick tips for communicating with customers with disabilities:

- Speak directly to persons/individuals with disabilities; don't avoid eye contact or speak only to their companions.

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- Be patient and give your full attention to persons/individuals who may have difficulty communicating; some people need more time to express themselves.
- If you don't understand someone, don't pretend you do; ask questions that will help you understand.
- When speaking with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, speak clearly, face the person, and don't cover your mouth. If speaking through an interpreter, direct your attention to the individual with a disability, not to the interpreter.
- Keep paper and pen handy for exchanging notes with persons/people who are deaf, hard of hearing, have speech disabilities, or other disabilities that affect communication. Know about any other communication aids your business may have on hand (large print materials, assistive listening devices, etc.).
- When speaking with a customer of short stature or a person using a wheelchair or scooter, it may be helpful to sit down at eye level, if possible, to make the conversation easier.
- When speaking with a person who is blind or has low vision, identify yourself and others who are with you, and let the person know if you are leaving. Use specific words to give information or directions (remember the person may not be able to see you pointing, nodding, etc.) and offer to read printed material out loud if necessary.

Online Resources

ADA National Network provides free information, guidance, and training: 800-949-4232; www.ADAta.org

Free 20-minute customer service film at your service: www.adahospitality.org/at-your-service
Revised ADA Requirements: Service Animals: www.ADA.gov/service_animals_2010.htm
Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA: www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html

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