



Sharpen Our Skills

Creating a Welcoming
Environment for People with
Disabilities



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Presented By WOTA

In 1990, the federal government enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act. One of the most important civil rights act of our lifetime. ADA sought to break down barriers to access for all. Addressing concerns with inclusion, independence and segregation, the ADA is the foundation for providing equality regardless of physical or cognitive ability. Although the ADA is about civil rights, today is about how to respect people with disabilities while fulfilling the spirit of the law.

1. People with disabilities are people first.

Identifying a person by their disability reduces them to their disability; however, as people we are more than our appearance, ability, or beliefs. Treating others with respect recognizes their personhood and not just their disability. Language is important. This is not semantics – this is a form of respect. Words have power and how you address or speak of those with disabilities will inform how you perceive them, and in return how they respond to you.

2. Talking about a disability.

If an employee or customer wants to discuss their disability, then be open to listening and if appropriate ask questions. But for many individuals, talking about their disability is not something they want to do with a stranger or even a co-worker. If you build a relationship, they may choose to confide in you but be mindful that not everyone wants to share.

3. “Just because you cannot see it, doesn’t mean a disability doesn’t exist.”

Disabilities come in all shapes and sizes. There is no “one size fits all.” A disability can be in the form of learning, physical abilities, cognitive abilities and even hidden medical conditions. Don’t make assumptions about people.

4. Reasonable Modifications/Accommodations.

While ADA compliance is the norm, are there any areas of your business that could be an unintended barrier? For example, what is the level of your background music? Is it so loud that it overwhelms someone with sensory issues or an individual with hearing loss? Something as simple as lowering background music can make the retail or restaurant experience much more enjoyable and bring customers back. For employees, are there areas of your office that present obstacles to success for employees with disabilities? Could you offer a larger screen for an employee with visual impairment, use a microphone for large group instruction or provide extra training for an employee who has dyslexia. Modifications or accommodations communicate your commitment to your employee’s success or signal your appreciation for your customer’s patronage.