

Elevating the Experience of People with Disabilities

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

Elevating the experience of people with disabilities is an essential and ongoing endeavor to ensure equal opportunities, inclusivity and accessibility for all individuals.

When a person with a disability encounters a business that is not accessible, that person feels as if they don't belong and are unwelcome. As a result, they may never return, will tell others about their negative experience and give your business a negative review.

There are many ways to elevate the experiences of a person with a disability, thus earning a positive review.

Here are questions to help evaluate how welcoming your business is.

Can people access van accessible parking near the entrance of your business?

How accessible is the level path of travel from the parking area to your business?

Is the entrance to your business accessible? Is your door clearance at least 32 inches wide? Is your door threshold less than one-half inch high? Is your door powered to open?

Once inside, can people using wheelchairs maneuver with wide aisles and open areas?

For retail businesses, how easily can people reach the merchandise and pay for it?

Are the restrooms accessible?

If there are multiple floors, is there an elevator?

If there is dining, are there accessible tables?

To elevate the dining experience for people who use wheelchairs or scooters, use tables 28-34 inches above the floor with at least 27 inches of knee clearance between the floor and the underside of the table. A clear floor area of 30 inches by 48 inches is needed at each seating area. In addition, the path of travel to these tables should be easy to navigate.

Businesses must promote social inclusion by fostering a culture of acceptance, understanding, respect and support for people with disabilities. Make employees aware of how to greet and serve all customers.

Here are disability etiquette tips on interacting with people with disabilities.

1. Ask before you help. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it or asks for help.
2. Respond graciously to the request made. Do what you can to accommodate that person.

3. Be sensitive about physical contact. For example, some people depend on their arms for balance, so touching them can knock them off balance. It is also advisable not to touch a person's mobility device.
4. Talk directly to the person with the disability, not to their companion.

How customers are treated determines how they feel when interacting with your staff and leaving your business. The design of your business and hospitality of your staff can truly elevate the experience for anyone who visits your establishment.

Bio: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility consultant, speaker, author, and president of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. www.RosemarieSpeaks.com

She speaks to and consults with meeting professionals and destination marketing organizations to help them create welcoming, inclusive environments. This ensures they exceed the requirements mandated by the venue and the meeting organizer for inclusion and diversity.

Having been paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, sharing her dramatic personal story. She presents to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond as a recognized expert on inclusive design.

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