

How to Delight a Person With a Disability

As we go through this module, we will be hitting the high points.

It is not possible in the short time we have, to cover all the issues related to disability.

If you have questions, please email me (Doug Towne) at: chair-ceo@accessready.org

Treat us as people not as a disability.

This is a difficult topic to discuss because most people are uncomfortable with the topic of disability. Often people with disabilities are uncomfortable as well especially if they are recently disabled.

Illustrating the point is difficult without sounding whiny, complaining or shocking with incredible tales of discrimination or the unintended consequences of good intentions.

We like to think that we are an evolved society with educated attitudes and open minds especially across the professional class. Tell that to the bank attorney who questioned whether or not it was legal for a "blind person" to sign the lone papers in a closing I was a part of.

At the time I was a Vice President of an international corrugated box manufacturer and responsible for international finances.

I like to think I am a fairly accomplished person who retired from banking as CEO of a mortgage bank in 1994. Yet six years later this attorney representing one of the top 5 banks in the United states questioned if it was proper for me a "blind person" to sign the papers as a duly authorized representative of my corporate employer.

There are many more such stories all that make the point that we should be considered as people first and not as our disability.

Our expertise is not limited to our disability.

This kind of approach takes place not only from the personal level, but from the corporate, government and nonprofit administrative and/or service/product delivery as well.

People have attitudes often ingrained into them from childhood.

Those attitudes often carry forward and become:

Institutional or corporate policy drivers.

What do I mean by that?

The business sector often takes the attitude that people with disabilities are poor and not good perspective customers.

They do not require their websites or phone applications to be accessible as a follow on to that attitude.

In spite of the fact that people with disabilities represent billions in directed and hundreds of millions in discretionary revenue annually.

The business, government and nonprofit sectors often see people with disabilities as:

* unemployable - When they are some of the best educated.

* risky employees because of the cost of accessibility - When Vocational Rehabilitation programs often provide the means at no cost to the employer.

* Risky because of the laws that govern their employment - When acting in good faith to support them is all that is necessary.

The business, government and nonprofit sectors often employ people with disabilities in lower-level positions as a token of their good intentions.

Look at the senior management or Boards of Directors across the fortune one thousand.

How many people with disabilities do you see?

- * How do you delight people with disabilities?
- * Reverse these trends and attitudes.
- * Treat us as equals.
- * Think of people who have a disability as individuals, your friends, your co-workers and your neighbors.