

Strategies to Promote Accessible Marketplaces and Inclusive Workplaces

Why should organizations include people with disabilities in their business and hiring strategies? Because they cannot afford not to.

The Conference Board of Canada: Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities

By Ruth Wright

Building accessible marketplaces and inclusive workplaces for people who have disabilities will happen through 'opening minds and doors.' The following strategies may be helpful to your efforts as an employer and/or business.

Physical Accessibility for Marketplaces and Workplaces

- ❑ Provide parking spaces marked with the wheelchair logo close to the main entrance. Include at least one oversized space (4 metres wide) for a van equipped with a wheelchair lift. This strategy enables your customers or employees who have a disability to access your building more readily.
- ❑ Add ramps at entrances that have stairs leading to them.
- ❑ Ensure that all pathways, sidewalks, aisles and ramps leading to your business have non-slip surfaces for people who have mobility impairments. At every ramp and stairway, install handrails in a contrasting colour to make them more visible to people who have a visual impairment.
- ❑ Paint doorways and entrances in a colour that contrasts with the surrounding area to make them more visible for individuals who have a visual impairment.
- ❑ Install automatic doors that are at least 81 cm wide to allow access for individuals using a wheelchair. If installing automatic doors is not an option, ensure that existing doors have easy-to-grasp handles. Mark accessible entrances with the international symbol of accessibility (wheelchair logo).
- ❑ Install an elevator or ramp if your place of business operates on more than one floor.

- ❑ Ensure that both the internal and external environments of your workplace or business are free from objects such as garbage cans and low-hanging canopies, all of which can create barriers to accessibility for people who have mobility or vision challenges.
- ❑ Ensure that elevators are accessible, that openings are at least 81 cm wide, and that the top control button is lower than 1.4 m from the ground for easy reach. Include raised symbols and/or numbers on the control panel for people who have visual impairments.
- ❑ Adjust tables, sinks and counters to a height of between 68 cm and 86 cm to enable an individual using a mobility device to reach the top of the surface and a wheelchair user to slide their chair under the surface.
- ❑ Ensure that washroom and/or change-room entrances are at least 81 cm wide. It is helpful if cubicles are 1.5 m by 1.5 m in size to allow a wheelchair to manoeuvre inside.
- ❑ Mount signs in well-lit areas. The use of lighter-coloured fonts, graphics and symbols against a darker background will make signs easier to read.
- ❑ Mark glass surfaces, including counters, tables and doors, for people who have a visual impairment.
- ❑ Evaluate emergency procedures to ensure they take into account the needs of people who have a disability. For example, emergency alarms should activate in both audio and visual formats. Ensure that employees are aware of evacuation procedures established for people who have a disability.
- ❑ For more information regarding accessibility requirements for specific venues, refer to Access Guide Canada at <http://enablelink.org/agc/index.php>.

Marketing to Potential Customers who have a Disability

- ❑ Develop your promotional materials and employee information in alternative formats, including Braille, large print, audio cassette and electronic formats. These alternate formats will allow all individuals to be fully informed about your business.

- ❑ Make sure people featured in your advertising campaigns are representative of the whole community, including people who have a disability.
- ❑ Use positive language to portray people who have a disability. (Refer to *Suggested Guidelines for Language to Promote Positive Images of People with Disabilities* in the resources section of this website.)
- ❑ Include people with disabilities in both your marketing and product development to ensure that the needs of these potential customers will be taken into account.
- ❑ Reach a broader sector of the marketplace by ensuring that any direct mailing materials are easy to read. In your contact information, provide a number for a telecommunications device for people who are deaf.
- ❑ Consult with community organizations that support people with disabilities to explore strategies that will enhance your marketing efforts to include all potential customers.

Communication and Customer Service Tips and Strategies

- ❑ Treat people who have disabilities with respect, just as you would anyone else.
- ❑ Educate staff about diversity and raise their awareness of disability to dispel the myths and stereotypes surrounding people who have a disability. (Refer to the *Common Myths and Misconceptions About Disability* handout in the resources section of this website.)
- ❑ In your employee training, focus on similarities, strengths and values, rather than on differences.
- ❑ Use language that concentrates on people's ability, not their disability, so that you put the person first. Avoid using phrases such as "confined to a wheelchair," "crippled," "afflicted" or "victim of," which only serve to draw attention to the individual's disability. (Refer to *Suggested Guidelines for Language to Promote Positive Images of People with Disabilities* in the resources section of this website for examples of "person-first" language.)

- ❑ Provide assistance by coming around to the other side of the service desk if the counter is too high for a person who uses a wheelchair to see over.
- ❑ Speak directly to the person, not to any companion or interpreter who may be in attendance. Even if the interpreter speaks for the person, maintain eye contact with the individual who has the disability and address all your comments to them.
- ❑ Before providing assistance such as opening a door, inquire if the individual requires it, and then follow any instructions if assistance is required.
- ❑ Respect an individual's personal space. Do not lean on or hang on to their wheelchair or walker.
- ❑ When greeting a person who has a visual impairment, identify yourself and inform them of your proximity – e.g., "Hello my name is Mary Smith. I am standing to your right hand side."
- ❑ To get the attention of a person with a hearing impairment, gently touch the person's arm, look directly at them when speaking, and make sure you do not cover your mouth to facilitate lip reading.
- ❑ Allow adequate time for an individual who has a speech difficulty to convey their message. If you don't understand, ask them to repeat/rephrase what they have said.

Tips for Employers

- ❑ Review your advertising materials, job advertisements and website to make sure they convey inclusiveness and accessibility (e.g., by including the international symbol of accessibility and providing alternative formats for materials).
- ❑ Clearly state that you are an equal opportunity employer and encourage people who have a disability to apply for your positions.
- ❑ Advertise your products and job openings through publications and conferences that target people who have a disability and indicate that job applications are available in a variety of formats.

- ❑ Plan for the interview by asking if there are any accommodations that need to be in place, such as providing directions to accessible entrances and elevators. Ensure that the interview room is accessible and allow extra time for the interview.
- ❑ Focus on an applicant's technical and professional knowledge, skills, experience and interest, not on their disability.
- ❑ Avoid asking a prospective employee how their disability will affect their performance. Instead, present a task that the job requires and ask how they would go about performing the task.
- ❑ Remember that there are different ways to get a job done and that how a job gets done is not as important as it getting done well.

Employee Orientation and Workplace Accommodation

- ❑ Before the first day of work, discuss any physical accommodations that may be needed and encourage the employee to bring forward any concerns.
- ❑ Initiate discussions concerning emergency evacuations, fire alarms, and any specific support or assistance that may be required in an emergency situation.
- ❑ Consider implementing a mentoring program, including pairing a long-term employee with a new employee for a period of time.
- ❑ Keep accessibility and accommodation in mind when planning any group training sessions or group social activities, for example making sure that locations chosen are wheelchair accessible.
- ❑ Recognize that not all workplace accommodations involve expenses.

For example, you can:

- Arrange workstations to face each other for employees who lip-read.
- Acquire supportive devices or modify existing devices, such as enlarging a computer screen for someone who has a visual impairment or installing a telephone amplifier for an individual who uses a hearing aid.

- Raise desks on wood blocks to allow a person who uses a wheelchair to get their knees under their desk
- Alter or reorganize job locations to provide easier access to desk and files for a wheelchair or walker user.
- Provide raised labels on shelves for an employee with a visual impairment.
- Leave audio messages for an employee with a visual impairment.



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Building Accessible and Inclusive Communities