



Accessible Customer Service

Best Practices Tips and Procedures

Inclusive vs. Exclusive/Incorrect Language

INSTEAD OF	USE
<i>the visually impaired/blind</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who is blind• person who has a visual impairment
<i>the aged/elderly</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• seniors
<i>disabled community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• disability community
<i>disabled, handicapped crippled</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person with a disability• people with disabilities
<i>lame</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who has a mobility impairment
<i>physically challenged</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person with a physical disability
<i>deaf, mute, dumb, hearing impaired</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who is deaf...hard of hearing
<i>confined to a wheelchair wheelchair bound</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who uses a wheelchair
<i>insane, crazy, demented, deviant, loony, lunatic, mad, maniac, mental mentally diseased, neurotic, nut case, pyscho, schizophrenic, unsound mind</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person with a mental health disability• person who has schizophrenia• person who has depression
<i>mentally retarded, defective, feeble minded, idiot, imbecile, moron, simple, mongoloid</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person with an intellectual disability• person who is intellectually impaired

INSTEAD OF

*suffers from, afflicted by, stricken with,
victim of*

USE

- **person with a disability or mobility impairment**
- **person who has multiple sclerosis, etc.**

Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors and paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendonitis.

A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or grip a door knob
- Move around independently
- control the speed or coordination of movements
- reach, pull or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance

Best Practices Tips and Procedures for Customer Service

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Provide seating for those who cannot stand in line
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things so ask first before you help.
- Be patient as customers will identify their needs to you.
- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Do not speak to the support person accompanying them unless the situation warrants.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, do not touch, move or lean on them
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, washrooms, etc.)
- Keeps ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a surface is too high or wide, step around it to provide service

Hearing Disabilities

Hearing loss or disabilities may cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone
- Understand speech in a noisy environment
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

Best Practices and Procedures for Customer Service

Like other disabilities, hearing disabilities have a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Always ask how you can help. Do not shout. Speak clearly.
- Any personal matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate – always direct your attention to the Deaf Person – not the interpreter
- If they have a service animal – do not touch it – the service animal is working and has to pay attention at all times

Here are some tips on servicing customers with hearing disabilities:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waiving your hand.
- Be clear and precise when giving instructions and be prepared to repeat or rephrase if necessary.
- Face the person directly and keep all objects away from your face and mouth.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- If required, write notes back and forth to share information

Deaf-Blindness Disabilities

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty assessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof. Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener/Personal Support Person who relays information and facilitates auditory and visual information and act as a sighted guides.

Best Practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, personal support person or professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Do not touch or address the service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Direct your attention to your customer, not the Intervener.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency.
- Understand that communication can take some time – be patient.

Vision Disabilities

Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss may result in:

- difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- A narrow field of vision
- The need for bright light or contrast
- Night blindness

Best Practices and procedures for Customer Service

Vision disabilities may restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a service animal or white cane.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- If the person uses a service animal – do not touch or approach the animal – it is working
- Verbally describe the setting, form, location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull. Direct the person from the elbow.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- Do not leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Do not walk away without saying good-bye

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Down's Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, such as Fetal Alcohol syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders. A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information
- Memory

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Use clean, simple language
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person
- Be patient and verify your understanding (seek confirmation)

Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:

- do not assume what a person can or cannot do
- be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decision
- If you cannot understand what is being said do not pretend. Just ask again.

Speech Disabilities

Speech disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical disabilities include problems with:

- pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathiness
- Stuttering or slurring

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Give the person your full attention. Do not interrupt until they finish their sentence.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary or to write their message.
- Verify your understanding (seek confirmation).

Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:

- If possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate are the best tools

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities include a range of disorders that effect verbal and non-verbal information acquisitions, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability have average or above-average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disabilities can result in:

- Difficulties in reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information

Best Practices and procedures for Customer Services

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Ask how you may assist them.
- Offer an alternative form of communication if required.
- Break up the information (no lengthy conversations).

Here are some tips to remember when dealing with those who have learning disabilities:

- Learning disabilities are generally invisible and the ability to function varies greatly – respond to any request for verbal information, assistance in filing in forms and so on with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks as necessary.
- Be willing to provide the information “to go” so they may review it at home
- Use straightforward language if at all possible

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental Health disabilities include a range of disorders; however, there are three main health disabilities:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioural

Best Practices and procedures for Customer Services

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Ask how you may assist them.
- Offer an alternative form of communication if required.
- Break up the information (no lengthy conversations).
- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations

Here are some tips to remember when dealing with those who have mental health disabilities:

- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behaviour, focus on the service they need and how you can help.

Other Disabilities To Be Aware Of

Smell disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odours and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

Touch disabilities can affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, and vibration to pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite, numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations.

Taste disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

Other disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illness and diseases including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDs, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER – Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

How To Interact with Individuals Who Have A Service Animal or Support Person

Service animals offer independence and security to many people with various disabilities. Some laws generally prohibit animals in certain areas (such as food preparation areas); however, service animals are permitted in most public situations.

Support people assist people with disabilities in a variety of ways, by assisting with communication such as an intervener, sign language interpreter, or a personal support worker providing physical assistance. A support person may also be a friend or relative that will assist and support the customer.

Best Practices and procedures for Customer Services

The following procedures are to be followed in this situation:

- Every employee shall use reasonable efforts to allow persons with disabilities to use their own service animal or support person to access goods and services
- Every employee shall allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal unless the animal is excluded by law. Where an animal is excluded by law from a premise, the reason why the animal is excluded shall be explained to the person with the disability. Other reasonable arrangements to provide goods and services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- When a service animal is unruly or disruptive (jumping on people, biting, or other harmful behaviour) an employee may ask the person with the disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods and services. Other reasonable arrangements to provide goods and services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- Persons with disabilities may be accompanied by their support person while accessing goods and services – speak to the person with the disability directly NOT the support person.
- If a support person is necessary to protect the Health & Safety of the person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premise

the person with a disability may be requested to make arrangements for (and cover the costs) for a support person.

Feedback Process

The ultimate goal of the Township of Essa is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities.

Ways Feedback May Be Received

Feedback regarding the way the Township of Essa provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made by:

- Email *,
- Verbally *, and
- The Customer Feedback Form (the “Form”).

* Feedback to be recorded by the Township Clerk to the ‘Customer Feedback Form’.

What To Do With Feedback Once Received

- a) All feedback will be directed to the Township Clerk.
- b) If contact information is provided, confirmation of receipt of their ‘Request for Feedback’ will be provided within **five business days**.
- c) If the feedback pertains to a particular department the feedback will be reviewed by the Clerk with the respective Department Head.

OR

If the feedback is more general in nature, it will be reviewed by the Clerk with the Chief Administrative Officer.

- d) The date of the review will be recorded on the Form.
- e) If revisions to procedures or customer service result from the feedback then any revisions will be recorded on the Form. These revisions will be implemented within 30 days of the review with the Department Head.

OR

If upon review of the feedback provided significant investment is required (financial/capital, physical) the matter will be brought forward to Department Heads where, if it is feasible to remedy the barrier, a plan will be developed to address the situation. This plan will include timeline, costs, and a reason why the barrier may not be remedied within 30 days.

- f) Feedback and Forms received will be kept on record per the Township's records retention by-law.
- g) If contact information is provided, the requestor will be provided with the results/action taken as a result of their feedback.

Assistive Devices

The term “assistive devices” refers to an auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids.

People with disabilities may bring “assistive devices” with them in order to access services and staff is expected to remove any potential barriers to the use of “assistive devices” where possible.

The following “assistive devices” are available through the Township of Essa:

Electronic Door Openers

Electronic Door Openers are located at the following locations:

Essa Township Administration Centre – both main entrances

Angus Recreation Centre – main entrance

Thornton Arena – back entrance

Accessible Telephone Service

If enquiries for telephone services are received for hearing impaired or vision impaired individuals, they may be referred to the Bell Canada Relay Service or, if they are calling the Municipal Office, the Teletype (TTY) service may be used.

Information regarding the Bell Relay Service is provided in the local Bell Canada telephone book under “Special Needs”.

The Teletype (TTY) system is an electronic device for text communication via a telephone line, used when one or more of the parties have hearing or speech difficulties.

Accessible Parking and Accessible Ramps

The accessible parking places for all municipal buildings should be connected or integrated with barrier-free path of travel, shall be painted blue and marked by an identifying marking consisting of the International Symbol for the Disabled.

Wherever possible, the accessible path of travel shall be designated to avoid entering the vehicular routes and drives and be part of the shortest accessible route to the building or facility entrances.

The accessible parking spaces and ramps shall be cleared of snow as soon as practical.

Accessible Public Washrooms

Accessible Public Washrooms are located at the following locations:

Essa Township Administration Centre

Thornton Arena

Angus Recreation Centre

Angus Community Park Building