Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs, Equity Programs Division

Basic Disability Etiquette

General Tips for Interviewing People with Disabilities

1. Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.

2. Conduct the interview as you would with anyone. Be considerate without being patronizing.

3. If it appears that a person's disability inhibits performance of a job, focus on HOW the person can perform the job.

Example:
Inappropriate: "I notice that you are in a wheelchair and I wonder how you will be able to do this job."
Appropriate: "As you can see from the job description, this position requires some lifting and moving. Do you foresee any difficulty in performing the required tasks? If so, do you have any suggestions how these tasks can be performed?"

General Tips for Communicating with People with Disabilities

1. Always focus on the individual, not the disability. Use "people first" language – meaning, refer to the individual first, then to his or her disability. (It is better to say "the person with a disability" rather than "the disabled.")

2. When communicating with an individual with a disability, speak directly to the person with the disability rather than their companion or interpreter.

3. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. If the person has limited hand use or has an artificial limb, it is ok to shake what is offered to you. It is equally acceptable to politely touch them on the shoulder/arm or offer a smile or nod to reciprocate a warm greeting.

4. Any and all assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, canes, communication boards, service animals, etc. should always be respected as personal property or extensions of that person. Do not use, lean on, play with or move unless given permission.

5. If you would like to offer assistance to a person with a disability, always ask first, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen patiently and follow their instructions. If the person declines your help, respect their decision and do not proceed to assist.

6. Relax. It is ok to use expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about this?" as these are common phrases that everyone uses, including people with disabilities.

7. As with all other etiquette issues, when mistakes are made, apologize, correct the problem, learn from the mistake, and move on.

Source: Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services