

Chapter One — Why It's Important

In a truly transformed society, we are already interacting more with a range of people who are emerging into our daily lives — especially in the workplace. This chapter establishes how our world has changed with regard to disability, and why it's critical to workplace culture to establish a current and accurate frame of disability and what it truly means.

Chapter Two — What's In Your Head?

This chapter guides the student in a non-judgmental exercise to explore their current beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about disability. A primary objective of the training is to help people relax around those with disabilities of all kinds, so setting a benchmark of one's existing model will facilitate the fresh understanding that the course is designed to achieve.

Chapter Three — The Stereotype Review

What we think and believe about disability is substantially fostered from the outside — in the media and the arts and our language — and reinforced by what we imagine it must be like to live with a disability. This chapter delves into a selection of prevailing disability stereotypes.

Chapter Four — They Are People First

The first principle of understanding these real people and their real potential is to recognize that people with disabilities are just people. Disability tends to overwhelm our ability to see the individual — until you gain this essential understanding that they have more in common with everyone else than they are different.

Chapter Five — People First Etiquette

What follows from understanding the first principle is simply to focus on the person, as you would with anyone else. For instance, don't start with a story about someone you know with a disability. No need to express sympathy.

Chapter Six — They Treasure Independence

People with disabilities are often seen as limited, as living a difficult life. Our natural, generous response is to help them, thinking we are easing their burden. In fact, the impulse to help might have a negative influence on the working relationship you seek to build with that person. You might even get in their way. Understanding what independence means to them helps define the line for you to respect.

Chapter Seven — Independence Etiquette

Your priority with people with disabilities is to preserve — in fact, foster — their independence. That means you don't just jump in to help. This chapter details the simple steps where you can be of service to people who need, while respecting their right to choose to do what they are able for themselves.

Chapter Eight — They Are Experts at Disability

People with disabilities often look remarkable and inspirational to others, but they are just using skills and tools and strategies that are not immediately evident. They are good at it — which is what happens with experience, and when people are provided the support and resources they need for success. Understanding this “mastery” of their disability will help you relax into recognizing the real person — and see their abilities rather than their limitations.

Chapter Nine — Expert Etiquette

Having learned the preciousness of independence, the simple steps of whether and how to offer help, and that they have skills and experience which allow them to function well with disability, what follows is that anyone who needs or accepts your help will let you know how to provide it. If you are going to help, you need to be expert in how to provide it. All of which means everyone can relax and focus on the mission at hand — success at work!