**Disability Etiquette in the Workplace:  
Interviewing and Onboarding**

The U.S. Department of Transportation is committed to increasing our employment of individuals with disabilities while ensuring that our work environment is inclusive and accessible to all employees. While specific needs and preferences vary from person to person, this guide provides basic information on appropriate terminology and tips for improving communication in our workplace.

**Background**

Studies indicate that more than one out of every ten working age Americans (21-64) has a disability. The average DOT employee age is 47. As our workforce ages and continues to work, the prevalence of disability increases. Improved understanding of any culture, including etiquette and terminology, allows all employees to be more comfortable and productive, and fosters inclusion.

**Language is a Powerful Tool**

We know that terminology changes over time. This holds true for the language used to describe people who have different types of disabilities. As a general guide, it’s best to use “people first” language (though recent shifts in language usage also include “identity first” terms\*). This helps ensure that we’re referring to the individual, and the disability is simply a characteristic of the person.

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| **Preferred Language** | **Labels Not to Use** |
| People with disabilities/Disabled People\* | The handicapped or the disabled |
| People with intellectual disabilities | The mentally retarded |
| He has a learning disability | He’s learning disabled |
| She has a physical disability | She’s crippled |
| He uses a wheelchair | He’s wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair |
| Deaf or hard of hearing person\*\* | Deaf-mute, the hearing impaired |
| Accessible parking, accessible bathroom | Handicapped parking, handicapped bathroom |
| She has a disability | She is a victim of/suffers from a disability |

\*Recently, some people with disabilities have adopted “identity first” language as a means of acknowledging the disability, while still recognizing the person.

\*\*It’s acceptable to use “Deaf or hard of hearing person” in lieu of person first language.

**Interview Etiquette**

**Scheduling the Online Interview**

* Inform all applicants that reasonable accommodations are provided upon request and include the HR Specialist’s contact information for easy follow up.
* Request DRC assistance (e.g. interpreters and/or captioning) for online interviews in advance.
* Provide applicants with the names of all interview participants.

**In Person Interviews**

* Schedule interviews at accessible locations and ensure there’s space in the meeting room for a scooter or wheelchair. If the meeting room is inaccessible, be prepared to conduct the interview at an alternate, accessible location.
* Be familiar with directions to the interview location, including the accessible path of travel into the building. Be sure the closest entrance is wheelchair accessible.
* Be aware that an applicant with a disability may need to arrange for transportation following the interview. Provide the applicant with an estimated timeframe, if requested.

**Greeting and Interviewing Tips**

* Always ask similar questions of all applicants, regardless of disability.
* Conduct the interview emphasizing abilities, achievements, and applicant qualities.
* During an interview panel, always state your name before speaking.
* Avoid speaking too fast when working with an interpreter.

**Job Offer Letter and Onboarding**

* Include a reasonable accommodation statement and DRC’s contact information in the job offer letter.
* Be sure reasonable accommodations are in place prior to setting the employee’s start date.
* Supervisors should discuss the office COOP and emergency procedures with all new hires.

**If you need more information on Disability Etiquette in the Workplace, DRC can help! Email us at** [**drc@dot.gov**](mailto:drc@dot.gov) **for more information.**