

Persons with Disabilities Should Be Treated With Respect

- **Christiane Tourtet B.A.**



Christiane Tourtet graduated with an Associate in Science and an Associate in Arts degrees, both with high honors, from Florida Junior College, and with a Bachelor in Arts, from Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, Florida. She is a well-known, writer, photo-journalist, photographer, poetess, former teacher and college instructor, radio producer/air personality, publicity model and television voice over talent and artist. Her biography has been included in numerous world wide publications, notably in Who's Who in America and Who's Who in the World, and as a role model for Society her biography has been published in the Millennium 54th Edition of Who's Who in America which was chosen to be included in the White House Millennium Time Capsule.

It is hard enough for many persons with disabilities to get the accommodations they are legally entitled to under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and even harder in many instances to get respect. As for persons suffering from painful chronic illnesses/disabilities, which cannot be seen (invisible disabilities), it can be quite a challenge.

There are many illnesses / disabilities which fall under the category of invisible disabilities. Chronic fatigue syndrome, multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), Lyme disease, progressive multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, arthritis, lupus, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, heart diseases, asthma, chronic infections, and brain injury, are just a few of the many diseases and disabilities that are not apparent to onlookers.

It is rather amazing that people in general have the wrong notion that persons with disabilities have to be either on crutches or in wheelchairs, or using some sort of assisting devices. Even though, this may be the case for many persons with disabilities, it certainly is not true for persons suffering from illnesses and disabilities which cannot readily be seen.

The fact that a person looks good

and healthy does not mean in any way that this person cannot possibly have an illness or disability. On the contrary, persons with invisible illnesses and disabilities are legally disabled and entitled to the same rights as persons with visible disabilities under the law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and other laws and regulations.

An excellent source of information on chronic illnesses and invisible disabilities can be found at "The Invisible Disabilities Advocate": <http://www.MyIDA.org>

It is wrong to stereotype persons with disabilities. Many persons with disabilities can be counted among some of the greatest achievers of this nation. From what I have heard and observed over the years, I am quite appalled by the lack of respect, and even cruelty, of many people in general toward persons with visible and invisible disabilities.

Many people with disabilities, especially persons with invisible disabilities, are routinely subjected to insensitive inquiries about their disabilities, including discrimination, derogatory comments, harassment, and mistreatment by many employees in places of business, and by people in general.

“Do not purposely interrupt a person with a disability.”

I have compiled a list of do's and don'ts that can be quite helpful for dealing with persons with disabilities in general:

BUSINESSES:

When a person with a visible or non-visible disability takes the trouble to bring to you information about his/her disability, possibly with sections of applicable law and is making a legal request for Accommodations under the Law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

DO NOT:

1- Do not, become defensive and refuse to accept the information that this person is providing to you. Persons with disabilities are usually very well informed about their disabilities and their legal rights under the Law ADA.

2- Do not be rude, verbally or otherwise, such as throwing on the counter the information provided to you by a person with a disability.

3-Do not make insensitive requests or comments about a person with a disability, such as, “What’s wrong with you?” You surely look fine to me!” Well, you surely could make it to my store!”

4-Do not refuse to accommodate or threaten a person with a disability asking for

accommodations under ADA as it is unlawful to do so and legal consequences may follow.

5- Do not give the brush off to a person explaining to you his/her disability and requesting accommodations under the Law ADA.

6-Do not discriminate by first serving non-disabled customers and then the person with a disability.

7-Do not become impatient, irate, and ask a person with a disability to leave your premises, thus refusing to provide services while this person is trying to obtain the reasonable accommodations/modifications he/she needs under the law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as legal action can be taken.

8-Do not purposely interrupt a person with a disability who is trying to explain to you the accommodations and modifications, he /she needs under the Law ADA.

9-Do not make sarcastic remarks, jokes, about a person with a disability.

10- Do not purposely spray chemicals in the presence of a person disabled by Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), as it could result in very serious reactions for the person with this illness/disability and potentially very serious legal consequences.

Information about Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) can be read at, MCS HOMEPAGE:

<http://www.nettally.com/prusty/mcs.htm>



“Listen attentively to what a person with a disability is trying to convey to you.”



DO:

1-Greet all persons with visible / invisible disabilities with a friendly smile and attitude.

2-Listen attentively to what a person with a disability is trying to convey to you.

3-Be courteous, and take gracefully the information provided to you by a person with a disability.

4-Thank the person with a disability for bringing information about his/her disability, and information about the ADA.

5-Serve persons with disabilities as efficiently and promptly as possible, especially persons suffering from painful chronic illnesses or disabilities such as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Do not use or spray any chemicals in the presence of persons disabled by MCS, as it could result in very severe reactions that could be life-threatening.

6-Be kind and compassionate toward persons with disabilities.

7-Be patient and understanding of the limitations of persons with disabilities.

8-Educate yourself about the ADA and disabilities in general, and diligently train your employees, especially in regard to invisible disabilities.

9-Go out of your way to help persons with disabilities.

10-Make persons with disabilities feel at ease and welcomed, such as saying,

“nice to see you, thank your very much for your business, please come back to see us”.

This way, professional relations with your customers with disabilities will be very good, which will benefit both your business and persons with disabilities.

Information about the law “The Americans with Disabilities Act” (ADA) can be found at the U.S. Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA Homepage: <http://www.ada.gov>

It is recommended to the general public to refrain from sending dirty looks or making unfounded, hurtful, and derogatory comments to persons who happen to look good and healthy and yet may suffer tremendously from invisible chronic illnesses or disabilities.

The next time you get impatient and angry, give dirty looks, discriminate, harass, or make hurtful, sarcastic remarks, think twice. The young, healthy looking, pretty woman who seems to take so much time at a store check-out, the healthy looking lady who insists on having each of her water bottles put in double paper bags, and the young, well dressed, healthy looking man pulling into the handicapped parking space may be people who have painful chronic illnesses and are legally disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA). They most likely have the legal right to park in that disabled parking space!

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