



Many people employed in the front line services of their company are often worried about the possibility to interact with customers with disabilities or specific access requirements.

They feel they may make mistakes, be misunderstood, seem unpolite and rude, in a word be inadequate for a quality communication with their customers.

Training is essential to enable them to deal with the problem: if they have been properly trained on the potential requirements of their disabled guests and know how to handle any request, the contact will be smooth and appreciated and they will be confident to communicate.

It is also very important to know how the tourist service components are linked together in the so-called “chain of tourist services” which highlights the complementary relationships that exist between them. In order to attract tourists is necessary to provide a range of products, distinctly receptive (catering and accommodation) entertainment, recreation, sports, culture, transport and able to satisfy the different demands of the customers.

It's necessary to understand that each element of the chain influences and depends on the others: if one of the elements is weak, from the quality and the fruition point of view, the holiday can be strongly compromised as a whole.

Who are the Customers?

Tourists with specific access needs and older people do not form a homogeneous group. They may have different requirements and needs, in strict relation with the kind of holiday they are planning. Above all, they are and want to be considered as TOURISTS, who are selecting the destination of their vacations as anybody else. They do not represent a closed cluster, their travel motivations and buying habits do not significantly differ from other travellers. However, some special requirements have to be taken into account in order to guarantee the possibility to fully enjoy their vacation and leisure time.

The specific requirements of each individual have to be perfectly clear in order to offer a quality service.

It is necessary to relate and communicate with the guests with an open mind, free from the myths and prejudices about people with disabilities which very frequently create behaviour barriers.

Consider three major statements on **Disability**:

1. Is not a disease
2. Does not mean not being autonomous
3. Does not make people different inside.

and then follow the main principles of a good welcoming:

1. Respect the dignity of the person always
2. Consider the person and not the disability



3. Speak directly to the customer and NOT to any assistant or accompanying person
4. Do not assume you know how to behave: ask the customer and follow his/her instructions
5. Do not help at any cost: ask first and wait until your offer is accepted.

A minimum of flexibility accompanied by clarity and courtesy should be the key to the good management of many complex situations that can occur with a person with specific needs:

- a) Some customers may need extra time to do or say some things. If you can't understand what has been said ask again.
- b) Written information might be provided in different formats, (electronic text, large print, braille or audio).
- c) Verbal description of the layout of an area including any obstacles like stairs or furniture, if the customer has a visual impairment
- d) Consider Assistance animals as a essential support to any customer accompanied by them. They are allowed in all public spaces and on public transport and this right is protected by law. Do not disturb them as they are well trained and working animals
- e) Try and make sure wheelchair users and people of short stature can reach counters. If that's not possible, find a sitting area to talk to the customer so to keep eye contact.
- f) Choose the right position to talk to a customer with a hearing impairment, without shouting or exaggerate gestures. Critical situations are often connected to a poorly flexible attitude, to the absence of aids and facilitators (acoustical and luminous signals, simple and evident graphic signage)
- g) Do not consider Sign Language as usable in any situation as it is a national language; for an efficient communication both the customer and the service provider have to know and use the SAME one.

Disability etiquette

When addressing a customer with disabilities, it is necessary to use an appropriate language and terminology, avoiding expressions and words that could be particularly irritating, if not offensive.

For example, terms like "handicapped" or "invalid", "crippled", "bound to" should be avoided. Use instead terms like "person with disability" or with "specific needs" or with "particular requirements", or "person with reduced mobility".

During the conversation you shouldn't feel uncomfortable to use expressions like "see you later", if the guest is blind, it is most likely that he/she uses the same expression. In conversation it is necessary to focus the attention **on the person and not on his aspect**. The use of simple language is always desirable, for example avoiding acronyms, abbreviations, codes, expressions in dialect.

In general

- Availability and politeness are always appreciated;



M2 LU8 - Communication with people with disabilities and other access requirements; accessible tourism etiquette

- Have a natural attitude, if you feel embarrassed remember that it is normal there is no reason to worry about this. In relations with disabled customers there are no special requirements: just professionalism and quality in response to the various needs;
- When you talk avoid the use of codes at least in direct contact: for example in the case of airline staff do not speak about chair type WCHC (Wheel Chair Cabin) but about a Passenger in a type C wheelchair;
- When it is not possible to satisfy the demands of the customer with specific access requirements explain the reasons without any embarrassment;
- Don't treat adults as children;
- Make it possible for persons with visual impairments to explore the environment and objects by touch.

