Why practice Disability Etiquette?

- 56 million people living in the United States self-identify as having at least one disability
- People with disabilities have $175 billion in discretionary spending power (US DOL)
- When disability etiquette is used, everyone feels more comfortable and interacts more effectively

1. Don’t make assumptions that everyone needs assistance.
   Remember that people with disabilities, like all people, are experts on themselves. They know what they can and cannot do. Don’t make decisions for them.

2. Offer assistance only if someone appears to need it...
   ...and then ask how you should assist before helping.

3. Be mindful about asking questions about a person’s disability.
   Respect individual’s privacy – if you ask about their disability, they may feel like you are just treating them as a disability, not as a human being. However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disabilities after getting to know someone.

4. Always speak directly to the person with a disability...
   ...not companion or interpreter.

5. Think before you speak – terminology is important.
   Avoid saying: Handicapped, Crippled, Physically-challenged, Differently-abled, Wheelchair bound, Victim, Sufferer
   Instead use: Person First Language, Person with a disability, Person who uses a wheelchair

6. Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks for individuals with disabilities...
   ...don’t distract or interact with the animal without asking permission.

7. A wheelchair or mobility device is part of a person’s personal space...
   ...don’t invade it by touching the equipment unless you are asked.

8. Provide clear path of travel...
   ...by removing obstacles that might hinder movement through corridors, shared spaces and restrooms.

9. If an individual who is blind needs to be guided...
   ...offer your arm and give specific directions and warnings of any hazards.

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

People with disabilities are individuals of all ages and backgrounds who are independent and active participants in our society. They are moms, coworkers, wounded warriors, uncles, kids with big dreams, best friends and neighbors. They have families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and problems and joys. While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them.

Visit unitedspinal.org/disability-etiquette/ for more information