Why practice Disability Etiquette?

• 56 million people living in the United States self-identify as having at least one disability
• 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. No two disabilities look alike – some people’s disabilities are visible disabilities while others are non-apparent disabilities.
   Just because you cannot see someone’s disability does not mean it is not real. Also, people also have multiple disabilities.

3. Be mindful about asking questions about a person’s disability.
   Respect individual’s privacy – Only ask to discuss the person’s disability if it is relevant to the conversation. Do not share someone else’s story without their permission.

4. Always speak directly to the person with a disability...
   ...not their companions, caregivers or interpreters

5. Think before you speak – terminology is important.
   Avoid saying: Handicapped, crippled, physically-challenged, differently-abled, wheelchair bound, victim, sufferer
   Instead use: Language that the person prefers—this may be person first (person with a disability) or identity first (disabled person). Just ask.

6. Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks for people with disabilities...
   The service animal is ‘on the job’ so don’t distract or interact with the animal, unless specifically asked.

7. A wheelchair or mobility device is part of a person’s personal space...
   Don’t touch it without permission or unless you are asked.

8. Provide clear path of travel...
   ...by removing obstacles that prevent movement or passage.

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 parents, business leaders and colleagues, wounded warriors, athletes, kids with big dreams, family, best friends and neighbors. They have families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, 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