Hand Shake

Western Culture-n Western culture the handshake is the customary and respectful method of introduction, yet some professionals are wary about offering the handshake to certain people with disabilities. From <http://www.disabilityetiquettetraining.com/>

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF HANDSHAKE ETIQUETTE

1. Always offer to shake hands.

2. Smile, make eye contact and be at eye level.

3. Be sure you have the full attention of the person you wish to shake hands with.

4. If a person with a disability is with a companion, be sure to shake hands with both people.

5. By necessity a handshake involves touching so if the person seems touch averse be prepared to be extra gentle or to step back. A simple touching of fingers may be enough to convey the customary respect.

6. Take your time and use the opportunity to form a thoughtful connection (thoughtful both in the sense of conscious and in the sense of kind).

7. See the person first, not the disability.

• When shaking hands with a person in a wheelchair, bend or find a way to sit so that you can converse eye-to-eye. A person in a wheelchair may be fragile, for example if she has Cerebral Palsy or Rheumatoid Arthritis, so be extra careful to notice if her hands seem vulnerable. Pay attention to her expression and respond in kind. Don’t be afraid to offer a reassuring alternative: “Shall we touch fingers?”

• A person who is deaf or hard of hearing may not realize that you are about to offer your hand. You may gain her attention by waving or by a light tap. People with hearing disabilities often complain about being handled too roughly – be aware that the merest suggestion of touch will be adequate to gain his attention.

• If you are greeting a person who is blind, just say: “May I shake your hand?” and he will surely extend his. Depending on circumstances you may want to follow this introduction by inviting the person to sit…tapping the seat to “show” him where it is and informing him about his environs: “There’s a table to your left if you’d like to put your briefcase there.”

• Among the most discomfiting situations may be the case where you are greeting a person without hands, either due to birth defect or due to injury. Many Iraq veterans have had amputations of limbs, whether hands or feet or both.

It’s not uncommon to be taken aback for a moment, but let your good manners guide you to extend your hand in the customary greeting and let your customer or prospect guide you. Once again, the merest touch will complete this important gesture of acknowledgement and respect and will allow you to carry on your conversation having set a mutually respectful and accepting tone.

• Other special situations may arise. For example if you are visiting a family with a grown son with Down Syndrome, you may shake hands with the parents and find that the son throws his arms around you in an exuberant hug! Depending on your own comfort level you can return the hug, or draw back and say something like: “It’s quite a surprise to get such a greeting, why don’t we just shake hands!”

Some Do’s and Don’ts when interacting with people with disabilities from <http://www.apdjhb.co.za/>

* Use a normal tone of voice when speaking to people with disabilities.
* Do not raise your voice towards a person with disabilities, unless requested.
* It is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear artificial limbs can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is also acceptable. If the person cannot shake hands, touch his / her shoulder or arm to welcome and acknowledge their presence.
* Treat adults as adults. Call the person by his / her name only when extending that familiarity to all others present.
* Do not patronize people with disabilities by, for instance, patting them on the head or shoulder.
* Do not lean on a person’s wheelchair; this is part of his / her personal space.
* Look at and speak directly to the person with a disability, rather than through a companion who may be with them.
* When offering assistance, do it in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect. Be prepared to have the offer declined. If the offer is accepted, listen to and accept instructions.
* Do not proceed to assist if your off to assist is declined.
* Offer to hold or carry packages in a welcoming manner, do not be offended if the offer is declined.
* Do not offer to hold or hand a cane or crutches to a person – wait for the request.
* Set up a system of able-bodied staff assisting people with disabilities in the event of a building evacuation when an emergency occurs.
* Be prepared for possible resentment from a small minority of people with disabilities when being approached, as they may not have come to terms with their disabilities yet.

HEARING IMPAIRED PEOPLE – General Communication Hints

* Do not shout at a person with a hearing loss, it is humiliating and distorts the articulation (mouth).
* Speak clearly and at a slightly slower pace.
* Do not cover your mouth, chew food or smoke while talking.
* Use short and simple sentences.
* Rephrase if you are not understood.
* Remember, only 6 of the 26 letters of the alphabet can been seen on the speaking lips.
* Use facial expressions that correspond with what you are saying.
* Write if necessary.
* Be patient if the response is slow.
* Remain positive and relaxed.
* Talk to the person, not about him / her.
* Do not be distracted by the person’s flat tone of voice.
* Show that you care – your attitude can build confidence.
* Do not change your language in mid-sentence.

Handy Hints

* Tap gently on the shoulder to get his / her attention.
* If he / she is beyond your reach, wave your hand in the air until eye contact is established.
* Switch lights on and off to get attention.
* Establish a comfortable distance between you and the person involved in the communication.
* Establish eye contact before beginning to communicate.
* Keep the face clear of any obstruction, e.g. hair, scarf, etc.
* Ask a person how he would like to communicate.
* Avoid background noise.
* Show that you are attentive by nodding slightly. If you are expressionless it conveys inattentiveness.
* Ensure that the available light shines on your face when communicating. Do not stand against the light or a window.
* Do not pass between people who are communicating.
* Do not look away during the conversation as that denotes termination of communication.
* Avoid communication with your hands full of objects, e.g. cup, books, etc.
* Do not eat or chew anything during communication.
* If an interpreter is present, speak to the person who has scheduled the appointment, not to the interpreter.
* Pre-plan a system of communication to be used in the event of an emergency evacuation.
* Be prepared for possible resentment from a small minority of people with disabilities when being approached, as they may not as yet come to terms with their disabilities.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

Rather use the term visually impaired than blind as not all visually impaired persons are blind.

Guiding a Blind Person

* Allow a person with a visual impairment to take your arm (at or about the elbow). This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.
* Walk slightly in front of a blind person and offer him / her your arm to enable you to guide him / her.
* Do not push the blind person in any way.
* When passing through narrow spaces, bend your arm behind your back to enable the blind person to walk right behind you.
* If you are helping a blind person into a car, say which way it is facing and place the blind person’s hand on the roof over the open door.
* Always remember to warn the blind person when you are approaching a flight of stairs or a slope and say whether it goes up or down.
* To indicate an empty seat, place his / her hand on the arm or back of the chair.
* Never leave doors half open and never leave things lying around on the floor.
* Always ask whether the blind person needs assistance (and in which way) before helping.

Handy Hints

* Do not offer to hand him / her something unless the individual requests you to do so.
* Be prepared for possible resentment from a small minority of people with disabilities when being approached, as they may not as yet come to terms with their disabilities.
* Talk to a blind person in a normal tone of voice and do not assume that the person is hard of hearing.
* Address a blind person directly and not through a third person.
* Do not be afraid to use the word “see” in phrases like “see you later”. Blind people talk to each other in the same way.
* Do not refer to a blind person’s blindness openly by word or action in a meeting or other gathering.
* When speaking to a blind person, always say who you are.
* Always say goodbye when leaving a room so that the blind is not left speaking to an empty space.
* When greeting a blind person, wait for him / her to extend his / her hand before shaking it. Say something like “take my hand” as this will prevent uncertainty and embarrassment for both parties.
* Do not leave a blind person in a strange environment without orientating him / her to it.
* When in a meeting, read documents to the blind person if a Braille document is not available and allow him / her to comment.
* Do not distract a blind person’s guide-dog from being his / her active eyes.
* Do not hesitate to laugh when a blind person tells a joke about his blindness. This is quite common among blind people.
* Always ask whether the blind person needs assistance, and in which way, before helping.

What is a service animal? from <http://www.examiner.com/article/7-manners-musts-for-interacting-with-service-animals>

Basically, a service animal is a creature trained to offer special assistance to an individual living with a disability or challenge. Seeing-eye dogs were among the first creature companions employed in this manner.

Service animals generally work in Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Animal-Assisted Education (AAE), Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) or personal assistance for individuals.

These etiquette tips can guide us, when we see service animals out and about.

1. Approach service animals with caution.

Despite the advanced training they generally possess, service animals may still react instinctively, if they are startled or surprised. They are also likely to try to protect their humans, if they sense a possible threat. Dogs may bite, or horses may kick. A well wisher should walk up slowly, approaching so that the animal can clearly see her coming.

2. Greet the human before interacting with the animal.

As a courtesy and caution, it’s important to speak first to the person holding the service animal. Never go directly for the creature.

3. Ask permission before touching a service animal.

Although it may be tempting to reach out and stroke a pretty animal, this must not be attempted without asking the human. A service animal is not merely a pet.

4. Avoid distracting a service animal on duty.

Guide or therapy animals are on the job when we encounter them in public. That sweet dog or mini horse may look like a mere companion, but he has work to do. Confusing the animal might prevent him from leading or otherwise assisting the one who needs his help. Consider the possible consequences of distracting a seeing eye dog while he is guiding his vision-impaired owner across a busy street.

5. Never offer a service animal treats or toys.

Animal trainers use rewards to reinforce successful exercises and behavioral achievements. Treats and toys may be offered to service animals under specific circumstances. Well-meaning individuals must not overstep in this department.

6. Be tactful with the human.

Although we may be fascinated by a service animal and his ability to assist his owner, it is not polite or appropriate to pry about the person’s particular disability. This may sound obvious to some, but it’s astonishing how many people jump right in with nosy questions when encountering total strangers with service animals.

7. Respect the human’s privacy.

A brief courteous interaction with a service animal and his human may be acceptable in a public place. Still, it’s important to remember that a human with a creature helper may be out and about with her daily business, rather than seeking interactions with curious folks. It’s best to greet the human and her service animal, if one must, but avoid detaining them longer.

As service animals find additional applications, we will likely see more species appearing with various occupations to assist humans. Perhaps general curiosity will diminish, as these helpful creatures become even more visible.

No Ordinary Pup: How to Interact with On-Duty Service Dogs from <http://blog.theanimalrescuesite.com/cs-service-dogs/>

TALK TO THE HANDLER, NOT THE DOG

The best thing to do when coming into contact with a service dog, according to most handlers, is to pretend that the dog is not there. This does not mean ignoring the practical needs of the canine or the handler, but simply remembering that the dog is there to function as a medical device. Just as most wheelchair users would be a little put off if you addressed their wheelchairs rather than talking to them, service dog owners need to be seen as people first before you address their on-duty dog.

DON’T DISTRACT THE DOG

Additionally, working dogs need to concentrate, and too much attention from strangers could potentially distract them. It’s fine to ask the handler if the dog needs anything if the circumstances call for it, such as offering to provide a bowl of water on a hot day. However, approaching the dog without permission or making a fuss can throw the dog off its game and cause the handler unneeded distress. Never touch a service dog without express permission for the handler — and for good reason.

CURIOSITY MUST BE CONTROLLED

While it’s understandable that the sight of a well-trained and beautifully cared-for animal encourages people to ask questions, a service dog is a part of its handler’s life — not a novelty to be discussed at length. Most handlers are proud of their partners and will happily answer one or two sensible questions, but streams of questions about the animal are likely to get short shrift. If you are the twentieth person that day to ask about the dog, even one question may be too much, so do use discretion, and don’t be offended if the handler refuses to answer. And, as always, it is impolite to ask personal questions about the handler’s disability.

SERVICE DOGS GO ANYWHERE

Under federal law, service dogs are allowed in any public space, even without a certificate or license. This applies whether or not they are officially working or wearing their identification vests. There are exceptions if the animal breaks house-training or loses control but — aside from these unlikely scenarios — wherever the handler goes, the dog is welcome too. Service dogs come in all shapes and sizes, and it’s impossible to tell a service dog by breed or type. However, all service dogs undergo rigorous training, so their well-mannered, attentive behavior is usually the defining characteristic.

OFF-DUTY DOGS

Another important thing to remember about service dogs is that they have distinct on- and off-duty lives. When a service dog is off-duty, it is allowed to play and relax, and it will behave just like any other well-trained pet. Do not assume that a handler does not really need a service dog because the animal is allowed this relaxation time; after all, you wouldn’t like to work all day without a break either!