



# Disabilities

How to Serve  
Customers with

by Michael D. Haines

with help from Kelowna Virtual Assistant

# **How to Serve Customers with Disabilities**

by Michael D. Haines

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## The purpose of this e-book:

- To help business managers and employees learn how to serve people who are living with a disability.
- To help the service industry increase its customer base by providing information on making its establishments more accessible.
- To serve as a training manual for staff & business owners.
  - I have done the research to give you the information necessary to serve disabled people.
  - Where the user of this e-book could use more explanation, I have included links to excellent websites.
  - Each chapter concludes with a quiz to help with training.

## Allow me to introduce myself

My name is Michael Haines and I have cerebral palsy. Because of my using a wheelchair for many decades, I have been in many uncomfortable, embarrassing, and unsafe situations for myself and employees and ultimately business owners:

- I couldn't maneuver in a wheelchair-accessible washroom because it was used to store highchairs.
- I've had trouble fitting the front of my electric wheelchair under a table.
- I've had to ask for help out of a washroom cubicle because the door was too heavy.
- Because of my speech, a waitress told me I had had too much to drink. I had not had a thing to drink.
- I couldn't go to a restaurant on the second floor because there was no elevator.

I have been inspiring businesses and students with my insightful talks to restaurants for more than twenty years. I want to share what I've learned. I want to help managers, employees and the general public better understand how to interact with and cater to the needs of people who have unique challenges or disabilities.

In my quest to lead a relatively normal life, I've learned a great deal about the [13.7%](#) of the Canadian adult population who have physical and mental challenges that limit their daily activities.

If you manage a business, you may be missing out on sales by not catering to that 13.7% of the population. In this e-book, I would like to pass on to you the essence of what I've learned about minimizing the discomfort they feel.

I want employers and their staff to be equipped to better understand the needs of seniors and other people with unique disabilities. I believe that a company's bottom line will increase if their establishment is fully accessible and as welcoming as possible.

## **My challenge of cerebral palsy**

Cerebral palsy is a developmental disability caused by a disruption of brain development in the fetus or at birth. The severity of symptoms varies greatly from stiff muscles, abnormal reflexes, poor coordination and posture as well as speech difficulty.

I often get the question, "Wow, what's it like to have cerebral palsy?" Whether it's a small child or an adult, I like to tell the story of my friend, the foreman at a big factory. He gave orders and people carried out his orders.

Now I want you to think about your body as a factory with your brain relaying thoughts down the back of your neck. Those commands are then passed along to the other parts of your body. These commands are something like the foreman's orders. When these orders go to the muscles, the muscles are on a slowdown strike. They sort of do the job. But their work is extremely substandard.

Then I have spastic muscles and poor flexibility in my arms and legs. My body does not move the way I want it to. I can take a few steps but I have used a wheelchair for years. The wheelchair is a mobility tool that gives me freedom. I have poor dexterity in my hands and fingers. So, it is hard to drink a coffee without spilling on my clean shirt.

### ***Disabilities and intelligence***

People with disabilities are not necessarily mentally challenged (like many people tend to think).
--

I have built my life around fighting derogatory words and labels. I'm always trying to prove to people that I'm not stupid.

Because cerebral palsy affects so many parts of my body, people sometimes put me in a box. They tend to think that because my muscles don't work well, my mind must not work well either. That definitely is not true.

One of my biggest challenges is my speech.

Watch this [one-minute video](#) so that you can hear me speak. The longer you listen to me, the easier it is to understand me. (As you work through this e-book, you will see how I began to view my speech challenge as an opportunity.)

One person who has proven to the world that his intellect remained intact despite living with devastating disabilities was [Stephen Hawking](#) (1942 - 2018). He was one of the most brilliant people that has ever lived. He had a rare form of ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease – where nerve cells that control muscles throughout the body gradually lose strength and die. After losing his speech, he was able to activate a speech-generating device by using a single cheek muscle.

Steven Hawking did not have cerebral palsy like me. But my point is this: even though his physical disabilities were enormous, his mind was extraordinary. His theories changed the world as we know it. He was considered to be among the [100 greatest people](#) in Britain's history.

### ***My own schooling challenges***

When I was when I was 16 years of age, my parents were told by the experts that I wouldn't progress any further than grade 5 in a formal educational setting. I should drop out. This actually gave me a sense of relief. I wasn't accomplishing anything; I didn't feel like I was getting anything done. I was just passing time. It was not pleasant. I was in a special class of 7 or 8 students, in a normal school setting.

My father, a former army captain, opened a service station so I could work for him. I ran the night shift. It was quite horrible, especially at 4 am while trying to stay awake. I would run out to the cars. I could handle the cash register easily and one time I even got robbed. Going to the cop shop was quite an experience!

At the age of 21, being much more motivated, I went to an Adult Education Center. Within 10 months I had achieved my grade 12. It was a miracle! I set my own pace. I accomplished things that were incredible. I was determined. I worked like a Trojan while living at home with my parents and older brother in London, Ontario. Dad dropped me off at school every morning and I took the bus home every night.

My Dad was proud of me. I was proud of me; everybody was proud of me. On the last day of school, the Principal called me in front of the whole school of about 400 students. He presented me with two book ends. It was incredible! And I still have the book ends and a book of poems with my classmates' comments inside the hard covers. I tell you this not to brag about myself, but to reinforce the idea that we all have untapped resources within us.

## ***Interesting side notes about people with physical & intellectual challenges***

*“Including workers with disabilities in real jobs with equal pay tends to have a direct and positive impact on a business’s profitability. Workers with disabilities are more productive, work more safely, stay longer, require less supervision, are more innovative and have less absenteeism.”* ([The Globe and Mail](#), 2016). (If you manage a business, click on that Globe & Mail story to learn much more. It is a real eye opener!)

*“A Tim Hortons franchisee has found that hiring disabled Canadians has boosted his bottom line. It’s an approach that’s been coined ‘return on disability.’”* From the description of this YouTube video: [Business owner makes money by hiring disabled workers](#).

## ***Structure of this e-book***

The first two chapters of this e-book are structured to help business personnel better understand how to serve customers with a wide range of physical and mental challenges. The next chapter talks about turning our challenges into opportunities.

[Statistics Canada](#) categorizes disabilities as

- Pain
- Flexibility
- Mobility
- Mental/psychological
- Dexterity
- Hearing
- Seeing
- Memory
- Learning
- Developmental

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## Chapter 1

# How to serve people living with disabilities at your place of business

*Disabled - a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions*

Merriam Webster Dictionary

People often jump to all sorts of assumptions or negative conclusions about the words disability or "disabled":

- not able to do anything
- need to be looked after
- always needing help
- unable to think or make decisions
- unlovable, uninteresting, unmotivated

These negative statements are totally untrue, detrimental, discouraging and demoralizing. Negative attitudes in your workplace can be a barrier to accessible customer service.

I like to use the word "challenge". Thinking of myself as "challenged" rather than "disabled" uplifts me. It gives me a positive outlook and motivates me to overcome life's hurdles. I try to uplift others and help them view their challenge as an opportunity, not something they lack.

Speaking personally, my arms & legs do not allow me to run a race or play soccer. That doesn't mean that I can't go on a date, host a party or travel. I've been to Las Vegas & Cancun recently.

The use of the word "challenge" promotes a more inclusive society. We all have our own challenges that life has dealt us. For example, you might need glasses to read this document. It would be a challenge to try and read this article without glasses.

I look at people all day long – from the vantage point of my electric wheelchair. I spend a lot of time at the mall across from my apartment. I have come to recognize a lot of faces and I smile and talk and laugh with a lot of people. I love to make people laugh. Many strangers have become my friends.



I think all people are miraculous, constantly evolving, changing, growing, learning. I am interested in people, not just people who are disabled or who have a challenge to deal with. I ask lots of questions so that I can learn what makes people tick or what may be tough for them at the moment.

We all have a story to tell, whether we require a wheelchair or a service dog or have an invisible challenge like depression or chronic pain. We are alike in so many ways. We have good days & bad days; sometimes we are up and the next minute we are down in the dumps.

I try to motivate people to raise their outlook, drive their talents and do something out of the ordinary. I have lots of time to listen to their answers since I am sitting down already in my wheelchair. I want people to break through the barriers they have set for themselves, especially if it relates to their disability or challenge.

### ***The use of person-first language***

Person-first language puts means the person is more important than the disability. Say “person with disability” and not “disabled person”; “person who has cerebral palsy” and not “cerebral palsy person”.

Using positive or person-first language reminds us that the person is more important than their disability or the device they are using. Person-first language also gives friends and employees a consistent and respectful way of referring to a person who has a challenge or disability.

Etiquette is based on respect and courtesy, (a must in the service industry). Learn more about [proper etiquette](#) when relating to people with a variety of disabilities. This is an excellent website. Please read it.

## Prevalence of disability by type

[Statistics Canada](#) classifies disability into the categories below. To the right of the disability is a number telling what percentage of Canadians have that particular disability. 11% of Canadians experience at least one of the top 3 disabilities. 40% of these people experience all 3 at the same time. Please keep in mind that the people in this survey indicated to Statistics Canada that their disability limits their daily activities.

Disability Type	%
Pain	9.7
Flexibility	7.6
Mobility	7.2
Mental/psychological	3.9
Dexterity	3.5
Hearing	3.2
Seeing	2.7
Memory	2.3
Learning	2.3
Developmental	0.6

The statistical methods for the classification of disabilities in the United States are different. Read the [2016 Disability Status Reports](#) for the United States.

With such high numbers as the ones given here, catering to this demographic just makes good business sense.

## Helpful links

The internal links below provide helpful information in the corresponding chapter sections.

[Down syndrome](#)

[Falls](#)

[Hearing loss](#)

[Intellectual](#)

[Memory Loss & Dementia](#)

[Mental/Psychological](#)

[Obnoxious customers](#)

[Pain](#)

[Physical Challenges](#)

[Sign Language](#)

[Speech challenges](#)

[Telephone use](#)

[Tips for serving people with challenges in general](#)

[Visual loss](#)

[Wheelchairs](#)

## Physical Challenges

### ***1. Flexibility Mobility and Dexterity***

People use mobility aids for a variety of reasons – frailty, poor balance, paralysis, pain, fractures or to decrease the risk of falling to name a few. When customers enter your establishment using a cane, a walker, a manual or electric wheelchair, power chair or scooter, remember:

- People with physical challenges often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Speak in a normal voice & directly to your customer. Don't address their friend when the message is directed at the person with the challenge.
- Be patient while you are discovering precisely what their needs are.
- Tell customers about your accessibility features such as accessible washrooms & automatic doors.

### Shaking hands

In today's society, a handshake begins a conversation. It acknowledges one's personhood. However, sometimes shaking hands may be physically painful or even impossible.

- ✓ So, always start with a gentle grasp.
- ✓ Offer to shake their hand even if it appears they have limited use of their arms or have a prosthetic limb.
- ✓ Don't be embarrassed if the person is unable to grasp your hand.

### Falls

- Falls are a major cause of injury and [death](#) among the elderly.

- Call 911
  - If the person is in serious pain or has clearly suffered an injury.
  - If the person cannot get up by themselves.
- **NEVER** help a person get up if they cannot do so by themselves. You may cause further injury to them or injure yourself.



### To decrease the risk of falls

- Remove clutter from entryways.
- Clear passageways to bathrooms.
- Securely fasten mats that could be a tripping hazard.
- Use proper signage when floor is wet.
- Ensure floor spills are wiped up immediately.
- Enhance lighting at all entrances and staircases.
- Install grab bars in bathrooms.
- Add banisters next to all steps.
- Add a graduated slope if at all feasible. (See [chapter 2](#).)

### Wheelchairs

Most people using wheelchairs have no choice but to sit. Therefore, make their reception and environment as pleasant as possible.

- Interact with people in wheelchairs the same way you would talk to any able-bodied person.
- If the person is accompanied by someone, focus your conversation on the person in the wheelchair.
- If your conversation becomes lengthy, sit down. It's very tiring for someone in a wheelchair to have to stare up at you.
- Just like a person's glasses are an extension of their body, a wheelchair is an extension of a person's body. Always ask permission before touching the person or their wheelchair.
- If there are multiple obstacles on someone's wheelchair path, ask "What's the easiest way for you to do this?"
  - Listen to and follow their instructions carefully.
- If there is a heavy door to open, open it for them.
- If a person is in a crowded space, it is appropriate to ask them whether they have enough room to get through the crowd. This is common courtesy.



Read about [23 things that people in wheelchairs have to cope with](#).

## Serving people who use mobility devices

- Most people using a mobility device want to be independent.
- Don't be insulted if they refuse your help.
- When people walk slowly or use devices such as crutches, canes or walkers, adjust your pace to theirs.
- When they sit down, make sure their device is within sight and easy reach.
  - Make sure the device is not in the pathway of other patrons.
- Offer to carry packages in a welcoming manner
- Never move a person's mobility device without permission.



## 2. Pain

Pain, whether it is temporary or chronic, has many causes and is often invisible. Note that physical pain can make people cranky or impatient. Don't take it personally. Pain can also interfere with someone's ability to concentrate. Be patient. Sometimes people in pain just need to be heard and acknowledged.

Examples of how to respond to a customer complaining about a sprained ankle:

- **Mirroring back.** "You have a sprained ankle? That must be difficult for you." This helps the customer realize that you heard their complaint. You are empathizing with them.
- **Just listening.** Sometimes the best thing you can do is just listen. It is not your place to offer advice.

## Sensory Challenges

### 1. People with hearing loss

Hearing loss is often one of the challenges that is invisible to the naked eye. If you pay attention to how the customer responds to your initial greeting, you may need to:

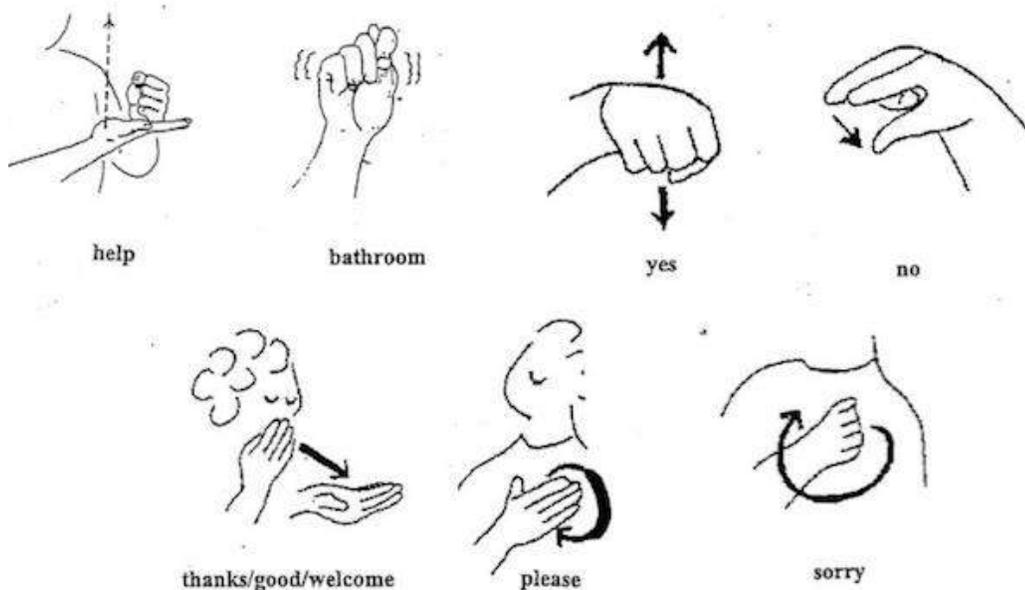
1. Stay in their field of vision with your eyes at their eye level. Stand a little further back than normal so that they can see all of your gestures.
2. Avoid chewing gum or covering your mouth. It could prevent them from reading your lips.
3. Maintain eye contact to help communicate the tone & intention of your speech.
4. Speak in your normal voice & tone so that your lip movements are not distorted. Increase the volume of your voice only if asked to do so. Speak more slowly if the person asks you to.
5. Speak directly to the customer rather than to the friend accompanying them.

6. Use gestures & visual cues. Pointing to, holding up items you're talking about or mimicking actions can help to illustrate your words.

Read the interesting information about [hearing loss, noise level and customer loyalty](#) in chapter 2.

If you regularly have patrons with hearing loss, consider learning these common signs:

- Please – Hand flat against chest & move it clockwise 3 times
- Thank you – Touch fingers to lips with hand flat. Then move it forward in direction of person.
- Hello – Touch hand to forehead with palm facing downward. Then move it away from the forehead.



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### Problems with sign language

1. There is more than one sign language
2. Not all deaf people know sign language

So, start by signing “hello”. If they sign back, you can use more sign language.

### Etiquette for the hard of hearing

- In the deaf community it is NOT considered rude to point.
- Nor is it rude to tap people on the shoulder to get their attention.
- If a deaf person has an interpreter, speak to the deaf person and not the interpreter.
- If you are called away by an interruption, a person might not hear (e.g., knock at door or cell phone call),
  - Make gestures to indicate why you are interrupting the conversation.
  - Otherwise, you may be considered rude.

## Speech challenges due to hearing loss

A person with partial hearing loss may not hear sounds clearly. This may then reflect on how they speak. They may have difficulty expressing themselves and might be slow to answer. So:

- If you do not understand, just be honest.
  - You might say, “Would you repeat that please?” or
  - “Can you say that again in different words?”
- Ask questions that can be answered with a “yes” or a “no” if applicable.
- Be patient & polite, giving the person time to get their point across.

## When serving customers with hearing and speech challenges on the phone

- Speak normally, clearly and directly using short sentences.
- Don't be concerned about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what they are saying. Use patience, optimism and a willingness to communicate.
- Don't interrupt and don't finish the speaker's sentences. Give them time to explain themselves.
- If you don't understand, don't guess at what was said. Just ask again. It's OK to repeat or rephrase what you think you've heard.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a [TTY](#) line, just speak normally to the customer. Do not speak to the interpreter.
- If your customer has great difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back. Then find someone else who may be able to help.

**TTY:** An electronic device for text communication over a telephone line. Typically, it is about the size of a typewriter or laptop computer with a QWERTY keyboard and small screen to display typed text electronically. It goes by various names — TTY (teletypewriter), TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf), textphone and minicom. (Read more about TTY in [chapter 2](#).)

## ***2. People with vision loss***

- Always introduce yourself & anyone with you.
- Describe the layout of the room.
- When helping the person sit down or walk to a destination, offer them your arm.
- Guide them slowly at their pace.
- Offer to hold or carry any packages they may have.
- Never leave the person on their own without an explanation.
- Always let guide dogs enter your business with the owner.
- Do not talk to, touch or feed a guide dog without the owner's permission.
- For very short video demonstrations, I recommend the [CNIB website](#) or call 1-800-563-2642.

## Mental/Psychological

According to [Newsweek](#), 18.2% of the total adult population in the United States suffers from some mental illness, enduring conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. 4% of American adults have such serious mental illness that it impedes their day-to-day activities such as going to work.

We meet, work and play with people every day who may or may not have a psychological or mental challenge. Usually all goes well. However, when someone, for whatever reason, begins to complain, speaks in a loud or disruptive manner or becomes agitated, staff must be prepared. The bottom line in this e-book is that people need to be acknowledged and treated with decency and respect.

How to defuse a difficult situation

- Keep your voice calm as you assess the situation.
- Listen carefully as you decide how to respond.
- Show the customer you are listening: eye contact, nodding, remaining silent.
- Allow the customer time & space to vent. Stay present.
- If the situation escalates, call the nearby staff members at once.
- Keep your voice calm as you assess the situation.
- Call 911 if any customer or staff member safety is in jeopardy.



If a customer starts acting hostile or obnoxious, your staff must be prepared. Perhaps they are just having a bad day. Or perhaps the person does have a serious mental health issue. We cannot make all customers happy. But hearing them out goes a long way to providing good customer service.

To learn more, go to the [Squadle](#) website.

## Intellectual challenges

“Intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability” has replaced “mental retardation” as the appropriate term for any conditions of the mind such as autism, ADD (attention deficit disorder), dementia, [Down syndrome](#) and traumatic brain injuries to name a few. People with these challenges may be hyperactive or have difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions.

### ***Memory loss and dementia***

In June 2016, an estimated 564 thousand Canadians were living with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias. People as young as 40 years old have been diagnosed

with this progressive disease that affects each person differently. Besides difficulty remembering & making decisions, the person may lose the ability to perform simple tasks such as dressing or following a conversation. The person may not recognize loved ones, forget how to use cutlery or be unable to recognize money to pay a restaurant bill. In some cases, the person may become restless, agitated or have physical outbursts.

If you suspect or learn that your customer may have a memory problem, try to make the time in your establishment as pleasant as possible. Quite likely the person will be accompanied by their spouse, a family member or a friend who will appreciate your attentiveness.

- Seat the person and their companions in a quiet area to decrease sensory stimulation.
- Remove excess clutter from the area.
- Speak slowly in short simple sentences.
- Provide just one piece of information at a time.
- Don't interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Provide cues with simple gestures; you could point to objects or pictures.
- Be patient and don't rush the situation.

For more information go to [alzheimers.ca](http://alzheimers.ca).

## ***Down Syndrome***

Down Syndrome is a condition or a syndrome, not a disease. People "have" Down Syndrome; they do not "suffer" from it and are not "afflicted" by it.

All people with Down Syndrome experience cognitive delays, but the effect is usually mild to moderate and is not indicative of the many strengths and talents that each individual possesses. A few of the common physical traits to help you recognize a person with Down Syndrome are: low muscle tone, small stature, an upward slant to the eyes and a single deep crease across the center of the palm.

As mentioned in the [Introduction](#), people with Down Syndrome are often very productive employees.

The National Down Syndrome Society website says:

*In every cell in the human body there is a nucleus, where genetic material is stored in genes. Genes carry the codes responsible for all of our inherited traits and are grouped along rod-like structures called chromosomes. Typically, the nucleus of each cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, half of which are inherited from each parent. Down syndrome occurs when an individual has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21.... Most people with Down Syndrome have cognitive delays that are mild to moderate.... People with Down Syndrome attend school, work, participate in decisions*

that affect them, have meaningful relationships, vote and contribute to society in many wonderful ways. [Read more.](#)

An article entitled [Let's Get Real About Down Syndrome](#) talked about a survey of 3500 families in which a family member had Down Syndrome. It said that

- 99% of people with Down syndrome said they were happy with their lives.
- 97% of people with Down syndrome liked who they are.
- 99% of parents said they love their child with Down syndrome.
- 5% of parents felt embarrassed by their child.
- 97% of brothers/sisters, ages 9-11, said they love their sibling.



Related websites

- [National Down Syndrome Society](#)
- [Canadian Down Syndrome Society](#)
- [Down's Syndrome Association](#)

*"Including workers with disabilities in real jobs with equal pay tends to have a direct and positive impact on a business's profitability. Workers with disabilities are more productive, work more safely, stay longer, require less supervision, are more innovative and have less absenteeism."* ([The Globe and Mail](#) 2016).

## Guidelines for serving people with challenges

- Just because someone has a disability does not mean he or she is disabled.
- Never assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Treat **all** your clientele with consideration and respect.
- Kind words are **worth much** and **cost little**.
- ✓ Remember the law of sowing & reaping. It is obvious you would never reap carrots after planting wheat. That's because you reap what you sow. So, remember:
  - When you sow smiles, you reap smiles.
  - When you sow kindness, you usually will get kindness back.
  - When you sow love, people love you back.
- ✓ All people want to be acknowledged. So, speak directly to your customer and not only to their companion.
- ✓ Never assume what a person can or cannot do.
- ✓ Never ignore someone with a challenge just because you don't know what to say to them.

## Chapter quizzes

To help you remember the main points of each chapter, I have prepared chapter quizzes.

The answer key for each quiz is [right before the index](#) or online. The online version of the Chapter 1 quiz is more effective than this PDF version in helping you to learn the content of this chapter. If possible, go to [Chapter 1 Quiz](#).



### Chapter 1 quiz

1. Of the people who come into your office, school or organization, which ones should be treated with consideration & respect?
  - a. The people with lots of money to spend.
  - b. The people you consider important.
  - c. All people.
  - d. The people in positions of authority.
2. If you have difficulty understanding a customer on the phone, you should:
  - a. Just hang up.
  - b. Speak normally using short sentences.

- c. Ask your supervisor to take over the call.
  - d. Raise your voice so that they can understand you better.
3. Suppose you ask a customer how they are doing and they say they have a sprained ankle. What communication technique does chapter 1 say you should use?
- a. Mirror back. E.g., “You have a sprained ankle. That must be difficult for you.”
  - b. Ignore. E.g., “Let me show you to your table.”
  - c. Competition. E.g., “We all have challenges. I bet my pain is worse than yours.”
  - d. Bright side. E.g., “Well, at least you have something to talk about.”
4. Chapter 1 says that falls are a major cause of injury and \_\_\_\_\_ among the elderly. Fill in the blank:
- a. Stomach acid.
  - b. Broken eye glasses.
  - c. Death.
  - d. Sadness.
5. What if an elderly person has fallen, but says they are okay. What is the wisest course of action?
- a. Leave them alone.
  - b. Lift them up immediately.
  - c. Ask them what they would like for supper. Tell them we will make it while they are trying to get up.
  - d. Phone 911 if they cannot get up by themselves.
6. Chapter 1 says that in order to prevent falls, you should:
- a. Remove clutter from the floor, have enhanced lighting at entrances & staircases and remove all banana peels from the floor.
  - b. Install grab bars in the bathrooms, clear passageways to the bathroom and keep your cat in the kitchen.
  - c. Replace stairs to the front door with a graduated slope, add banisters next to steps that don't have them, install grab bars in bathrooms and

- make sure hyperactive kids release their energy at the front entrance.
- d. Remove clutter from the floor, have enhanced lighting at entrances & staircases and add banisters next to steps that don't have them.
7. Which of the following is not appropriate?
    - a. Talking to people in wheelchairs the same way you would talk to any able-bodied person their age.
    - b. Asking permission before touching the user or their wheelchair.
    - c. Adjusting your posture to eye level. It's very tiring for someone in a wheelchair to have to stare up at you.
    - d. Pushing a person's wheelchair before you have asked them.
  8. When planning an event & wishing to make it wheelchair friendly, you should not:
    - a. Make sure bathrooms are large enough to turn the chair around.
    - b. If the event is outdoors, make sure gravel, sand, soft or very uneven surfaces don't make it too difficult for wheelchairs to move over.
    - c. Request some chair seating so that people using walkers or wheelchairs will have someone to converse with at eye level.
    - d. Install a winch to pull stuck wheelchairs if the event is outdoors.
  9. According to chapter 1, which of the following about mobility aids is false?
    - a. When walking with people who use crutches, braces, canes or who otherwise walk slowly, suggest a race. It will make them forget they have a disability.
    - b. When your customer sits down, make sure their device is within sight or reach.
    - c. Offer assistance with sensitivity and respect. Be careful not to demean them.
    - d. Offer to carry packages in a welcoming manner.
  10. If someone appears to have intellectual challenges, which of the following is a bad idea?
    - a. Speak with plain language in short sentences. Provide just one piece of information at a time.
    - b. If you don't understand what the customer said, pretend you do.

- c. Be supportive and patient.
  - d. All people want to maintain their dignity. So, try to speak directly to your customer and not to their companion or attendant.
11. When serving people with a hearing impairment, which one of the following is incorrect?
- a. Increase the volume of your voice ONLY if asked to.
  - b. Avoid chewing gum as it could prevent them from reading your lips.
  - c. As often as possible, speak to their friend rather than speaking directly to the person who is deaf.
  - d. Use gestures & visual cues. Pointing to, holding up items you are talking about or mimicking actions can help to illustrate your words.
12. Which of the following is “hello” in sign language?
- a. Hand flat against chest & move it clockwise twice.
  - b. Touch fingers to lips with hand flat. Then move it forward in direction of person.
  - c. Hand flat against chest & move it counter-clockwise twice.
  - d. Touch hand to forehead with palm facing downward. Then move it away from the forehead.
13. In the deaf community it is:
- a. Considered rude to point at people or to tap on a deaf person’s shoulder to get their attention.
  - b. Proper etiquette to speak to the interpreter rather than the person who is deaf.
  - c. NOT considered rude to point. Nor is it rude to tap people on the shoulder to get their attention.
  - d. Considered rude to point to other people and to speak to a deaf person when their interpreter is present.
14. When helping a person with vision loss, it is proper etiquette to:
- a. Pet their guide dog to encourage it to guide the person to their destination.

- b. Ask them to take your arm and offer to hold their packages as you guide them to their destination.
  - c. Insist that they leave the guide dog outside because it could poop on your floor.
  - d. Touch blind people suddenly without asking their permission.
15. If a customer is exhibiting disruptive behavior, the first thing to do is:
- a. Call 911.
  - b. Tell them to be careful because you know Karate.
  - c. Acknowledge the customer's feelings, whether you agree with their perspective or not.
  - d. Ask some burly men nearby to help you out.
16. If you think that a customer has a learning challenge, you should:
- a. Ask them how you can best help them.
  - b. Use sign language & other gestures.
  - c. Explain in no uncertain terms that you can't help them.
  - d. Speak in long sentences because everyone likes a challenge.
17. If someone has a speech impediment and you can't understand them, you should:
- a. Call the manager or someone who can interpret for you.
  - b. Ask questions that require long answers.
  - c. Ask them to repeat a tongue twister.
  - d. Simply ask the customer to repeat themselves.

## Chapter 2

# Making your place of business more accessible

More than 8 out of 10 people with disabilities use an aid or assistive device.

Making your business accessible is more than making it easy for people to physically access your business. It means making sure that your services, information and washrooms are also accessible.

When renting or designing a physical space for seniors & people with disabilities, consider this checklist:

- ✓ Does your company policy include wheelchair accessible counters & tables?
- ✓ Is lighting bright enough for people with low vision?
- ✓ Are hallways and doorways wide enough for wheelchairs, electric scooters or walkers?
- ✓ Will people with arthritis have difficulty grasping doorknobs? Are they levered?
- ✓ Are parking spaces wide enough for wheelchair-accessible vehicles?
- ✓ Do you have telecommunication devices for people with hearing loss?
- ✓ Customer feedback is a great opportunity to learn about your customers and their opinions on how accessible your business is. Do you make it obvious to your customers how and where they can give feedback? (For example, on your “how are we doing today” survey.)

### *Detailed notes on accessibility*

#### Public space designated for wheelchair use

- Specific restroom stalls, parking spaces and school desks may be designated wheelchair accessible. Do not use these spaces unless accompanying a wheelchair user.
- Try to prevent patrons from using them.
- When parking, a van with a handicap designation may appear to be away from other vehicles.
  - Avoid parking beside it. The handicap van occupant may need the empty space next to the van to deploy a ramp.



### If you are booking or hosting an event

- Make sure the venue including the washroom is wheelchair accessible.
- Check the venue for barriers to the building's entrance.
- Make sure aisles and corridors are wide enough.
- If the event is outdoors, make sure gravel, sand, soft or very uneven surfaces don't make it too difficult for people using mobility aids to move over.
- If it is a stand-up event, request some chair seating so that people using walkers or wheelchairs will have someone to converse with at eye level.

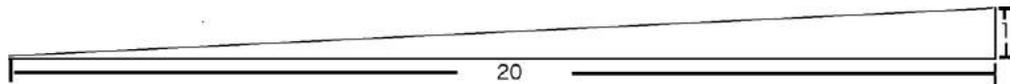
### Outside your building: Make sure

- Parking spaces & drop-off areas are kept clear for people who need them.
- Lighting is sufficient around the building & on entryways.
- At least one door at your main entrance is wheelchair accessible.

The [Canadian Parking Association](#) website says: *Each accessible parking spot should be viewed as an investment in humanity and business. The value of accessible spaces is not only for the person parking, but also to the owner of the parking lot, and neighbouring businesses who benefit from increased patronage. Therefore, investment in accessible parking is not only a contribution to our society, but also a sound business practice.*

### Ramps & steps: Make sure

- Ramps & steps on access slopes steeper than 1:20 are available.



### Steps & elevators

- Whenever possible, avoid putting steps within a floor in a building.
- If steps are necessary, have a ramp beside them.
- Consider providing wheelchair-accessible elevators in all new buildings that have more than one floor.
- Check elevator operation regularly.

### Corridors & doors

#### Make sure that

- Corridors are not obstructed by machinery, deliveries or clutter.
- Doors are kept open whenever reasonable to do so.
- Closed doors can be pushed open easily.
- Doorways are wide enough for any customer using mobility devices.

## Signage

Signage in public buildings should not leave people guessing. Signs should

- Have professional lettering that is large enough & well lit.
- Use appropriate disability symbols.
- Have Braille or raised lettering whenever reasonable.
- Look professional.
- Never obstruct walkways.

## Reception areas, waiting rooms

- It is best to have a mix of types & sizes of seating.
  - E.g., some people use arm-rests for comfort & support; others find arm-rests awkward.
- Provide an [induction loop system](#) when reasonable to do so.

## Information desks, intercoms, queueing systems & ticket offices

Plan these informational systems carefully so that customers can:

- Hear audio information and intercoms easily.
- Read text easily. (Avoid jargon & complicated verbiage.)
- Reach intercoms or ticket dispensers.

Staff should still be prepared to give spoken or written information to customers.

## Public washrooms

Consider:

- Including at least one cubicle that is wheelchair accessible.
- Providing an alarm system in accessible cubicle & test it regularly.
- Not using washrooms to store cleaning equipment or supplies.
- Placing sanitary bins in cubicles in such a way that they do not hinder people using mobility devices.
- Use male/female designations rather than fancy names such as pointers/setters.

## Lighting & visual contrast

- Avoid glossy, shiny and polished surface finishes in order to minimize the reflections, shadows and glare.
- Consider using differences in colour & colour intensity to create visual contrast. That will help customers with visual impairments to:
  - Distinguish between walls and floors.
  - Distinguish between door backgrounds & fittings.

For more information

Go to the [National Disability Authority website](#) to find the acceptable minimum standards for a wide variety of accessibility issues. Enter this into a search engine: *disabled access to buildings*. To find the exact regulations for your geographical area, have the name of your area at the end of your search terms.

See the [Building Code information for British Columbia](#).

For another example of minimum standards see [Americans with Disabilities Act PDF file](#).

To make your business more accessible and pleasant for customers with hearing loss:

“Restaurant noise reduction is as important as the quality of your food or the level of your service.”

The level of noise is very important to people with hearing aids. If it is too high, they will just stay away from your business. The noise interferes with their conversation too much. Hearing aids can't differentiate between near sounds and sounds that are further away. Search online and you will find companies such as [NetWell](#) or [Primacoustic](#) with products that can control the noise levels in your business.

## Relay services

- Make your contact information accessible to people who are hearing impaired by using a relay service and train your staff on how to use it.
- Use your company's website and other marketing material to let people know that you use the relay service.
- Provide staff training and guidance on how to use the relay service.

A telecommunications relay service (TRS) enables standard voice telephone users to talk to people who have difficulty hearing or speaking on the telephone.

You can answer verbally or type a response that a communications assistant reads for you. In order to communicate this way, your organization will need a TTY (a phone used by people with hearing and speech disabilities).

Below are details about how TRS is handled in Canada and in the United States.

### ***Canada***

In Canada use the Bell Relay service. The Bell Relay service [web page](#) includes the following information:

*The Bell Relay service (BRS) supports communication by phone between hearing people and people who are deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, or those with speech disabilities. Professionally trained operators act as intermediaries to facilitate the call. Bell Relay operators are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.*

*Calls placed through the Bell Relay service are also entirely confidential. Bell Relay operators follow a strict code of ethics. No record of conversation content is retained.*

*Tip: "Call me" cards provide simple instructions on how to reach you through the Bell Relay service. Download and print your own cards to hand out to friends, family and those you do business with.*

*There is no charge for using the Bell Relay service to place local calls. Long distance calls are billed to the number you are calling from at a reduced rate. The cost of the call will depend on where you are calling from, the type of phone service you have and how you are billing the call.*

*Registered TTY/teletypewriter users are eligible for an 100% rebate on Canada-to-Canada or Canada-to-U.S. long distance calls that are billed to their Bell Home phone service.*

*To register for the discount or get more information on the available long-distance discounts for TTY/teletypewriter users, please contact the Accessibility services centre.*

*NOTE: Calls to 900 and 976 numbers are not accepted.*

*Collect, person-to-person and Calling Card calls and calls billed to a third number are subject to regular operator-handling charges.*

*Calls from a public phone or hotel must be charged collect, to a third number or using a Calling Card. Calls from a public phone cannot be paid with additional coins or "quick change" cards because the Bell Relay operator cannot collect or return your money. Calls billed to a third number are always checked before a call is connected.*

## **USA**

A [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services web page](#) includes the following information:

### ***What are telecommunication relay services?***

*Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (which took full effect on July 26, 1993) requires all U.S. telephone companies to provide telecommunications relay services.*

*A telecommunications relay service (TRS) provides a communications assistant (CA) that allows people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired to communicate with people who use a standard telephone. A TRS offers two options: voice carry-over (VCO) and hearing carry-over (HCO). VCO allows a person with a hearing impairment to speak directly to the other party and then read the response typed by a CA. HCO allows a person with a speech impairment to hear the other party and relay the typed response back to the telephone user through the CA. This service allows individuals with communication disorders to communicate with all telephone users.*

### ***How can I use a telecommunication relay service?***

*To reach a TRS, dial 711 and the assistant can place the 10-digit call on behalf of the text telephone device (TTY or TDD) user.*

*You can dial 711 to access all telecommunications relay services anywhere in the United States. The relay service is free. In the event of an emergency, TDD or TTY users can call 911 directly and do not need to make a TRS call via 711.*

*Communications assistants are trained to be unobtrusive. An assistant's responsibility is to relay the conversation exactly as it is received. All relay calls are confidential.*

## **Chapter 2 quiz**

The online version of the Chapter 2 quiz is more effective than this PDF version in helping you to learn the content of this chapter. If possible, go to [Chapter 2 Quiz](#).

1. Chapter 2 states that, in order to make your business accessible to people with arthritis, it should have:
  - a. At least one entrance that is wheelchair accessible.
  - b. Levered door handles or doors that push open.
  - c. Corridors free of clutter.
  - d. Signage that is large enough & well lit.

2. The chapter says that both ramps & steps should be available on slopes steeper than:
  - a. 1:15
  - b. 1:20
  - c. 1:25
  - d. 1:30
  
3. Whenever possible, you should:
  - a. Avoid putting steps within a floor in a building.
  - b. Keep all doors closed.
  - c. Have all seats in reception areas the same style & size.
  - d. Use industry-appropriate jargon on all signage.
  
4. In a large building equipped with washrooms for people with physical challenges:
  - a. Have a stack of magazines in each cubicle.
  - b. Have access to an alarm system in each cubicle.
  - c. Have lighting intensity distributed evenly.
  - d. Have portable sanitary bins in each cubicle even if they would obstruct a person using a wheelchair.
  
5. For people with vision loss, it is preferable to have:
  - a. Swinging chandeliers
  - b. Lots of glossy, shiny & polished surfaces.
  - c. Differences in colour & colour intensity to help distinguish between walls & floors.
  - d. Doors and doorknobs of the same colour.
  
6. Parking spaces & drop-off areas for people using a mobility aid should:
  - a. Have ramps nearby.
  - b. Be close to the wheelchair-accessible entry.
  - c. Kept clear for people who need them.
  - d. All of the above
  
7. Signage in public buildings should be:
  - a. Readable from 30 feet (10 metres).
  - b. At eye level.
  - c. Equipped with an induction loop system.
  - d. Written in Braille or raised lettering whenever reasonable to do so.
  
8. Which is not true: information desks, intercoms, queueing systems & ticket offices need to be planned carefully because some people with challenges may not be able to:
  - a. Use an induction loop system.
  - b. Read text.
  - c. Hear audio information & intercoms.
  - d. Reach ticket dispensers.

9. Which of the following points about a telecommunications service is not true?
- a. Professionally-trained telephone operators speak some of the communications between a deaf person and someone who can hear.
  - b. The service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
  - c. There is a nominal fee when using the service for local calls.
  - d. Conversations made are not recorded.

## Chapter 3

# How I've Embraced My Challenges

### *Inspiring people for over 25 years*

In 1981 I moved to Kelowna, British Columbia with my parents. My folks were the only two people I knew in my new city. It did not take long for that to change.

It all started when the Lions Club bought me a 3-wheel bicycle. My mobility challenge was now dramatically reduced. This gave me permission to dream about making money to support myself. After a while I got the bright idea that I should use my bike for a courier service in the downtown core.

Watch the [very short video](#) to get an idea of what my courier service looked like. Click on the picture below to watch it now.



I spent 12 hours a day either picking up & delivering envelopes or else drumming up business. That business became so successful that I had it for 25 years. I began displaying signs on my 3-wheel bicycle, advertising local businesses. I'd charge either by the month or the year.



During those 25 years my bike wore out and was replaced with an electric scooter. This gave me a new opportunity that enabled me to expand my business because my scooter could carry more signs than my bike. I would have 35 to 40 signs making money for me at any one time.

This new venture was hard work, but my bills were paid. I'd work 8 to 10 hours a day, 7 days a week, putting on 20 miles a day. I got to know my scooter technicians very well because my scooter broke down so many times. I'm very thankful that, because of my disability designation, the government paid for the repairs.

If advertising worked on my scooter, why not on restaurant placemats? This was my next big dream. A map of Kelowna was in the centre of the placemat design. Around it

were 20 ads for Kelowna businesses. Each ad was numbered with a corresponding number on the map. Each month I had 20,000 placemats printed. They were distributed by the KFC kiosk in the mall food court in my neighborhood. I created this opportunity. It provided me with a supplemental income for a number of years.

## Rising above my speech impediment

In spite of the way I speak, I really enjoy public speaking. Before moving to Kelowna in 1981, I worked for the Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta. I had a desk job. But, the part I liked most was visiting schools to give motivational talks to students of every age – from kindergarten to first year medical students.

When I talk to any group, I share some of the embarrassing situations I have been in. My presence during these talks gives the audience an opportunity to learn that I'm just like them, someone who has real feelings and ideas, someone who likes jazz and travelling.

When my goal was to start an advertising business, my friends discouraged me because, due to my cerebral palsy, my speech was very difficult to understand. Of course, I knew this. But, I was determined to use this as an opportunity and not let people's negative comments deter me. So, my plan was to always meet potential customers face to face. The more we talked, the easier it became for them to understand my speech pattern. Over time, this allowed me to sell them advertising over the phone. My speech didn't change, but I overcame the obstacle it initially presented.

### From businessman to civic politics

I ran for city council because I wanted to advocate for people with disabilities. I saw some issues in Kelowna that I wanted changed. For instance, while making deliveries, I travelled on the road. I could not get my scooter onto the sidewalk to make a delivery because there were insufficient curb cuts.

If my memory serves me correctly, I was the first person in my province with a major physical disability to run for office. I got around 600 votes the first time. In the next election it was around 1200. The third time I got 1800 votes. I figured that if I increased by 600 each time, by 2035 I would be a city councillor! After five elections, I decided to hang up my political hat.

As people spend time with me, they come to realize that I'm a real person. I get feedback. Many people have told me that they feel more prepared to interact with other people facing physical challenges.

Watch the [online interview](#) between myself & a friend of mine, Pamela Lynch.

## A personal perspective

### ***Embrace your challenge***

Whether or not you are living with a disability, I suspect you have had to embrace many challenges you now take for granted, like:

- How do I make my groceries last until my next check arrives?
- How do I find a laundromat that is accessible and on my bus route?
- How do I go about hiring employees who have a disability?

### ***Explore your obstacles***

- What is the obstacle troubling you or distressing you the most?
- List the specific obstacles that are hampering you from moving forward?
- Give yourself permission to dream big about your hopes and aspirations.
- Keep track of your accomplishments, big and small.

### ***Change your self-talk or thinking patterns from:***

- “I’m always slow to answer” to “Wait ’til they hear my new joke?”
- “This will be hard” to “I am willing to put in the hard work.”
- “This won’t be easy” to “I’m going to give it my best shot.”
- “I don’t like change” to “This will change my life. It will be worth it in the end.”

### ***What are the road blocks? What’s stopping us?***

- As humans, we tend to lose focus or become complacent.
- We get discouraged and procrastinate.
- We may lose our motivation if change is not happening fast enough.
- We may lose faith in our abilities.
- We may feel like no one is on our side.
- The list is endless.....

### ***Mike's advice***

I would like to recommend [this ultimate goal-setting worksheet](#).

It provides a two-page worksheet that is easy to follow and includes 5 steps to goal setting. The fourth step suggests the well-known S.M.A.R.T approach that says goals should be:

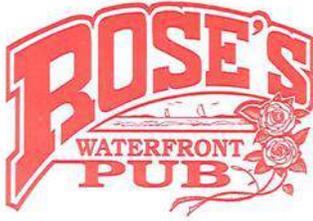
**S**pecific   **M**easurable   **A**chievable   **R**elevant   **T**imely

#### ***Mike-isms***

- **Take one bite at a time.**
- **Everything takes time.**
- **Achieving your big goals will not be won in one hour, one day or one week.**
- **But, if you keep showing up, day after day, week after week, you will not regret it!**

As people spend time with me, they come to realize that I'm a real person. People tell me that they feel more prepared to interact with others facing physical challenges after they have met me or attended one of my seminars. For confirmation of that feedback, read the [testimonial letter](#) at the end of this chapter.

If you would like to know how to provide better service to individuals who are facing challenges, consider talking with me. This is my website: [michaeldhaines.com](http://michaeldhaines.com). I know a great deal about people's physical, emotional and mental challenges. I have been talking to business staffs for over two decades. It is my dream to eventually give motivational talks to audiences around the world.



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To whom it may concern:

Professional reference for Mike Haines

Mike Haines has been a fixture in Kelowna for as long as anyone can remember, Mike has lived his life with many challenges stemming from cerebral palsy; Mike has taken his challenges and refused to let them get the best of him. Mike looks at the world in a different way than most of us he sees and encounters things we couldn't even imagine. He has always been a self starter with an entrepreneurial spirit and a kind heart.

We recently had the pleasure of Mike speaking to our staff about customer service focusing on serving patrons with challenges. Mike talked about the importance of serving with an open mind and respect, Mike has first hand knowledge of how it feels to be treated differently and in a demeaning fashion. Many people in the service industry inadvertently and unintentionally treat people with challenges differently, much of this happens due to being uncomfortable and uninformed about approaching the patron. Mike's message really struck home with my staff, even to a point of people crying, I can assure you my staff that attended have different outlook on patrons with challenges. As coincidence would have it we had a situation the very next day, some patrons were "bullying" a fellow with challenges in order to gain a patio table, and my staff reacted in a way that made me proud. I do accredit that to Mike, his message got through and that people with challenges have feelings and are people to. I would not hesitate to recommend Mike to do a presentation to your staff, it was enlightening, educational and if you are ok with some corny jokes, it was also entertaining. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours Truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Neville".

Andrew Neville  
General Manager  
Rose's Waterfront Pub  
250-860-1141  
[info@rosespub.com](mailto:info@rosespub.com)

## Chapter 3 Quiz

The online version of the Chapter 3 quiz is more effective than this PDF version in helping you to learn the content of this chapter. If possible, go to [Chapter 3 Quiz](#).

1. Chapter 3 helps us overcome our challenges. It says we need to stop viewing these challenges as \_\_\_\_\_ and start viewing them as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Problems, opportunities to experience real growth
  - b. Shortcomings, chances to experience real growth
  - c. Disabilities, ability to experience real growth
  - d. Disabilities, enablement to experience real growth
  
2. Michael Haines' friends discouraged him from getting into the advertising business because his speech was very difficult to understand. He says he would not let their \_\_\_\_\_ deter him and he started a profitable advertising business.
  - a. Outrageous behavior
  - b. Pessimism
  - c. Lack of faith
  - d. Negative comments
  
3. The S.M.A.R.T. approach to goal setting says that goals should be Specific, M\_\_\_\_\_, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.
  - a. Magnificent
  - b. Major
  - c. Makeshift
  - d. Measurable
  
4. Chapter 3 says that a roadblock to success is \_\_\_\_\_ after we get discouraged.
  - a. Procrastinating
  - b. Spinning our wheels
  - c. Laziness
  - d. Hopelessness
  
5. People tell Michael Haines that they feel more prepared to \_\_\_\_\_ after they have met him or attended one of his seminars.
  - a. Conquer the world
  - b. Speak in public
  - c. Interact with others facing physical challenges
  - d. Socialize with strangers

***Michael's Closing Comments***

Thank you for taking time to learn about people with disabilities. It's been my honour to assist you in your quest to provide better customer service.

My bottom line is to always be kind & courteous and above all compassionate. May it be yours too.

*Have an incredible life!*

***Closing Comments from Kelowna Virtual Assistant***

Watch a very short [YouTube video](#) explaining how to train staff how to serve customers with disabilities.

If staff training has been happening for some time, please be so kind as to email a review of the book to [peter@kelownavirtualassistant.com](mailto:peter@kelownavirtualassistant.com). Feel free to include errors, omissions, suggestions & success stories.

May the contents of this book help you to make the life of a person with challenges a little bit better.

Peter Enns

Answer keys to chapter quizzes

**Chapter 1**

- 1 c
- 2 b
- 3 a
- 4 c
- 5 d
- 6 d
- 7 d
- 8 d
- 9 a
- 10 b
- 11 c
- 12 d
- 13 c
- 14 b
- 15 c
- 16 a
- 17 d

**Chapter 2**

- 1 b
- 2 b
- 3 a
- 4 b
- 5 c
- 6 d
- 7 d
- 8 a
- 9 c

**Chapter 3**

- 1 a
- 2 d
- 3 d
- 4 a
- 5 c

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