



Tips to Remember when Assisting People with Severe Disabilities in their Advocacy Efforts

Do's and Don'ts when Mentoring to Individuals with Disabilities

DO's:

1. Do consider the person as a person first, as a customer second, and thirdly as a consumer.
2. Do make every effort to understand what the person with a speech impairment has to say.
3. Do take time to listen and do not assume you know what the person wants to say.
4. Do look at the person you are talking to and give him/her/them your full attention; this means do not fiddle with paper, read, or look at your watch.
5. Do be open-minded when he/she is telling what their vocational goal is.
6. Do keep your expectations high and believe the person has the ability to know their own capabilities.
7. Do communicate with the person even if they are accompanied by a parent, or an attendant.
8. Do be courteous to the person.
9. Do be encouraging and supportive. Avoid comments like: "come now, be realistic," "You know you'll fail if you try that."
10. Do be sensitive and willing to offer accommodations appropriate to the person's disability. Examples are: offer to read documents to the person with a visual impairment, have a sign interpreter for the deaf, and provide a solid writing surface for people who have difficulty in using their hands.

DON'TS:

1. Don't be negative when talking to a person with a severe disability. Negativity is stifling to a person not used to expressing themselves.
2. Don't be loud when conversing with a person with a disability who has no hearing impairment.
3. Don't try to be a mind reader when you are listening to a person with a speech impairment. Believe me, this can be irritating because pretending to understand is insulting.

4. Don't underestimate the determination of the person you are talking to.
5. Don't let the appearance of the person influence your judgement of their abilities. A good rule to remember is the old saying, "don't judge a book by its cover."
6. Don't be over-protective and deny the person their right to learn even if that means failing. A mentor can point out obstacles but should never force their opinions of what is and what is not possible.
7. Don't fail to offer appropriate accommodations if you are talking to a person with a disability.
8. Don't position yourself in such a way as to make it difficult to maintain eye contact with the person.
9. Don't talk to a person with a speech impairment in a noisy environment. If possible, talk to them in a quiet environment.
10. Don't ever talk down to a person with a disability, this includes persons with cognitive disabilities.