

Interpretype®

Creating A "Deaf Friendly" Workplace

What can you expect when a Deaf person enters your place of business?

You can generally expect a customer who wants the same thing a hearing customer might want when they enter your business – good service at a fair price from a trustworthy business.

You can expect another human being who, despite differences, has a great deal in common with you as well. Seek to find common ground as well as recognize and benefit from the differences. When a Deaf person walks into your business, you and your staff have the opportunity to benefit from the rich experience that diversity can afford. Have a mindset and attitude of learning, acceptance and mutual respect.

Will it be difficult to communicate?

Not with Interpretype™. Smile and use gestures to invite them to communicate with you using Interpretype™. Use of gestures is fine. We use them all the time with other hearing people and they are very effective to use with Deaf people as well. Be willing to do whatever it takes to communicate. The liberal use of gestures, body language and facial expression can add an additional and personal element to communicating using Interpretype™.

While Interpretype™ will allow for easy and fast communication, some people may feel initially awkward just because they are inexperienced in dealing with Deaf people. This is fairly normal, but be patient. After a while, it will become more comfortable, free flowing, and enjoyable.

Is there anything you need to know about communicating with Interpretype™?

Yes. English is the second language of many Deaf people. Imagine trying to learn a language that you have never heard! American Sign Language is a completely different language than English. It actually has a grammatical structure and syntax very different from English. As a result, some of what is typed to you may not be grammatically correct in English. For example, instead of receiving the sentence "Do you have a black car?" it may appear as "Black car have you?" Some words may also be misspelled. It is important to keep in mind that English may be the Deaf person's second language. Understand that the differences do not indicate a lack of intelligence or education on the part of the individual. English is just a language he or she may not yet have mastered.

There is a special key on Interpretype™ that will help facilitate communication. The 'Esc' key means 'Go Ahead'. It lets the other person know that it is okay to respond now.

How can you make your Deaf customers feel comfortable and welcome?

Just be yourself. Be warm, friendly and helpful, just as you would be with any other customer. Be assured that your customers want to communicate with you as much as you want to communicate with them. Don't feel you are deficient because you don't know sign language. They don't expect you to! However, if you decide to learn how to sign, it can be a big plus. Your Deaf customers will be delighted and feel accepted, respected and important. Whether you learn to sign or not, however, make sure you establish eye contact just as you would with any other customer. That personal connection is still vital!

There are several different terms which refer to people who can't hear. What is appropriate?

Avoid the use of labels such as 'deaf and dumb' or 'deaf mute'. These terms are highly offensive. Sometimes the term 'Hearing Impaired' is used, however, some Deaf people do not prefer the use of

that phrase. The most commonly accepted terms are simply 'Deaf' and/or (if a person is not completely Deaf) 'Hard of Hearing'.

What are other ways you can enhance communication with Deaf customers?

Consider buying a TTY. This is a device that allows a hearing and Deaf person to communicate via the telephone. The device looks like a small keyboard with a screen and a 'cradle' for placement of the telephone receiver. The receiver is placed in the cradle of the TTY for either an incoming or an outgoing call. Each person simply types his or her message, and it shows up as typed text on the TTY of the person receiving the message. That person can then respond with his or her own typed message. This device allows a business to directly communicate 'live' with their Deaf and Hard of Hearing customers at will. TTYs can be purchased in stores that sell assistive devices to Deaf consumers all over the country. Look under "Deaf Services" in the yellow pages for listings.

Use Telephone Relay Services. This is a free service that allows a hearing or Deaf person to call a relay 'operator' to assist in telephone communication. The Deaf person types his or her message into a TTY to the Relay Operator, who in turn relays the message using their voice to answer the hearing person. The hearing person speaks to the Relay Operator, who in turn types the spoken message into the TTY for the Deaf person to read. This method of communicating on the phone is effective, but much slower than the use of a TTY. This is a free service and the telephone number for this service is generally printed in the blue pages of the phone directory.

Sign Language Interpreters may be best for some situations, especially if the communication is going to be complex, lengthy or fast paced. Your Deaf customer can guide you as to their needs in any given situation. Sign language interpreting services can be requested through an agency specializing in sign language interpreting. Look under 'Deaf Services' in the yellow pages for the listing, or conduct a search on the internet under 'Sign Language Interpreting Services'.

What if you have Deaf employees?

If you have Deaf employees, you might consider some additional provisions such as a flashing light system for their phone, so they know they have an incoming call on their TTY. A flashing light for the smoke/fire alarms is also important so your Deaf employee can be aware of possible danger (many Deaf people, for example, have been alone in the bathroom when a fire alarm sounded. Everyone vacated the building, but they were left behind – completely unaware of possible danger.).

Depending on the nature of business, a pager that includes a feature similar to 'instant messenger' on the Internet can be helpful. These pagers allow two-way communication along with wireless e-mail capacity. These features provide for free, immediate communication wherever the Deaf employee may be. Captioning for all training and informational company videos can be invaluable. And for meetings or training sessions, Sign language interpreters are vital. Depending on the level and importance of the information, Real-time Captioning and/or a note taker may be helpful. These devices can generally be purchased in stores that sell a variety of paging and communication technologies.