



Pass It On
C E N T E R

... the National AT Reuse Center



PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

*Words with Dignity
for People with disAbilities*

www.passitoncenter.org

Credits



- CEUs – visit www.aacoinstitute.org to register and receive your certification
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Why Are We Here Today?

- **Master Our Skills!**
- **Expand Our Knowledge and**
- **Build Stronger Bridges to
Create Inclusive and United
Communities!**

1 of every 5 Americans has a disAbility*

54 million
Americans
reported
some level of
disability in
2005.*



*U.S. Census Bureau



Who are We Serving

- Over 54,000,000 individuals in the United States have disabilities that affect their ability to:
 - see
 - hear
 - communicate
 - reason
 - walk
 - perform other basic life functions

Public Law 108-364



People with disabilities are the largest minority group in America. This group cuts across racial, ethnic, religious, gender and age boundaries.

Anyone can become a member of this minority group at any time.



Guiding Principle



- disAbility is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to:
 - (A) live independently;
 - (B) enjoy self-determination and make choices;
 - (C) benefit from an education;
 - (D) pursue meaningful careers; and
 - (E) enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of society in the United States.

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE



is the use of words that reflect awareness, dignity and a positive attitude about people with disAbilities.

The Power of Language



- **Language is continually evolving**, and that includes language related to people with disAbilities.
- Staying current is important, not to show that you are "politically correct" but to communicate effectively and with respect.

It's not about political
correctness!



As early as 1993, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, offered guidelines for referring to people with disAbilities that are consistent with what we now call *people first language*.

Language matters. . .



The words used to describe us have the power to make us feel valued or make us feel demeaned.

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.”

Mark Twain

What is Value-Laden Language?



- What you say and write may enhance the dignity of people with disabilities or inadvertently reflect stereotypes and negative attitudes.
- Some words and phrases don't recognize the broad range of capabilities of people with disAbilities.
- People with disabilities don't need or want to be pitied, nor should they be deemed "courageous" or "special" as they accomplish daily activities or work.



Value Laden Language

Says more
about Our
Values

- All staff members should be sensitive to the language they use in referring to customers.
- When we refer to the condition instead of the person, we devalue the person.
- *People first language* is about referring to the person first and the disability (injury, illness or procedures) second.



It may not be visible.
It may be temporary.
Some may have more than
one disability.

It may be the staff
member who has the
disability.

Either way—
*the person is not his or
her disability.*



Value-Laden Language



- Promotes
 - Distance
 - Stereotypes
 - Pigeon-holes

- Reduces sense of:
 - Self-worth
 - Power
 - Self-direction

Value-Laden Language: Promotes Distance



- We vs. They
- Good vs. Bad
- Strong vs. Weak
- High vs. Low (expectation)
- Sick vs. Well
- Superior vs. Inferior

Avoid words that evoke pity or fear

- Abnormal
- Afflicted
- Burdened
- Defect
- Deformity
- Maimed

- Palsied
- Spastic
- Stricken with
- Sufferer
- Victim
- Invalid

Value-Laden Language



What does the word
"Handicapped"
mean?

Value-Laden Language



- "Handicapped" is an archaic term (it's no longer used in any federal legislation) that evokes negative images of pity, fear, and more.
- A legendary origin of the "H-word" refers to a person with a disAbility begging with his "cap in his hand."

Definitions



Disability

Impairment or limitation whether physical, mental or sensory

Handicap

External condition imposed on a perhaps resulting from a disability.
Stairs are a handicap to someone who uses a wheelchair.

Value-Laden Language

disAbility-Negative

- the disabled, the blind, the deaf
- crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid
- impaired, impairment
- normal person, healthy, whole, wheelchair bound

disAbility-Neutral

- people with disabilities, the disability community ("disabled" is an adjective, so must be accompanied by a noun.), the blind community, the Deaf community
- has a disability, is a person with a disability, physically disabled, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
- has a disability
- non-disabled, person without disabilities, uses a wheelchair

Value-Laden Language

disAbility-Negative

- The disabled
- The handicapped
- Disabled parking
- Handicapped entrance
- Confined to a wheelchair
- Wheelchair bound

disAbility-Neutral

- People with disAbilities
- Accessible parking
- Accessible entrance
- Person who uses a wheelchair
- Wheelchair user

Value-Laden Language

disAbility-Negative

- hearing impaired, hearing impairment
- visually impaired, visual impairment
- dumb, mute
- stutterer, tongue-tied
- CP victim, spastic
- epileptic
- fit, attack

disAbility-Neutral

- deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind
- low vision, blind
- person who has a speech or communication disability
- person with cerebral palsy
- person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
- seizure, epileptic episode

Value-Laden Language

disAbility-Negative

- crazy, lunatic, insane, nuts, deranged, psycho
- retard, mentally defective, moron, idiot, imbecile, Down's person, mongoloid
- slow learner, retarded
- dwarf, midget

disAbility-Neutral

- people with mental health issues, mental illness, mental disability, psychiatric disability
- developmentally disabled, developmentally delayed, person with Down syndrome
- has a learning disability, person with a learning disability
- person of small stature, short stature; little person

Value-Laden Language

disAbility-Negative

- paraplegic, quadriplegic
- birth defect
- post-polio, suffered from polio
- homebound

disAbility-Neutral

- man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed, person with spinal cord injury
- congenital disability, person with a disability from birth
- person who had polio
- stay-at-home, hard for the person to get out

Do Not Use Generic Labels for Disability Groups



Avoid referring to groups as:

The paralyzed

The deaf

The blind

People First Language



- Avoids generic labels
- Emphasizes abilities, not limitations
- Avoids euphemisms (that are condescending and avoid real issues)
- Avoids implying illness or suffering (e.g., afflicted, suffers from, victim of)

Refer to the person first, then the disAbility



Robert has Parkinson's.

Mary uses a wheelchair.

Evan is deaf.

Sandra has epilepsy.

John has a multiple sclerosis.

Kelly is paralyzed.

Using People First Language is Crucial!



**People first language
puts the
person before the disAbility,
and it describes who a person is
not what a person has.**

"See Me" by Madeleine Alston

You look
But you don't see me.
You see a crutch.
A bald head.
A scar.
A disease.
An object of pity.
You don't see the person.
The determination.
The fear.
The vitality.

The passion for living.
The capacity for love.
Open your eyes
And look without prejudice.
Look beyond my leg.
Look beyond my illness.
Look into my world.
See the many pieces,
Not just one.
A complete person.
Open your eyes
And see me.

Emphasize Abilities, Not Limitations



- When talking or writing about people with disAbilities, show them as active participants in society.
- Of those people with disAbilities between the ages of 21 and 64 in 2005, 49% were actively employed.

Do not use Euphemisms to describe a disAbility.



- Mental problem
 - Physically challenged
 - “Different”
 - Physically inconvenienced
- Be specific but respectful.
Euphemisms are condescending and they avoid the real issues.



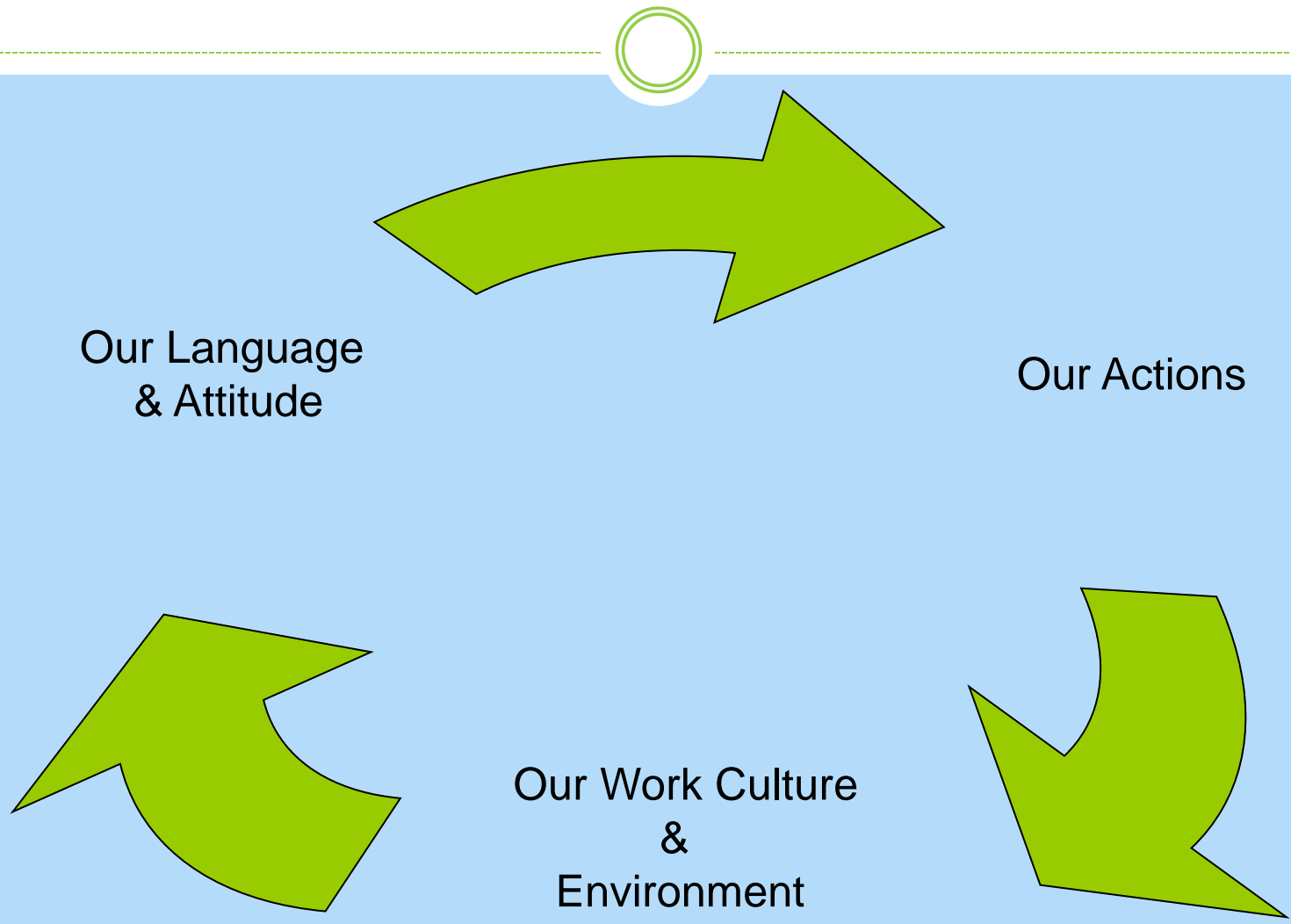
We should appreciate the accomplishments of successful people with disabilities, but avoid portraying them as heroic or superhuman.

Doing so raises the expectation that all people with disabilities should be high achievers.



In this picture, not all of the people with disabilities are in wheelchairs! Some disabilities are not visible.

Making the Connection



A change in Language and Attitude can change everything!



Etiquette and Attitudes

If you are not accustomed to interacting with a person with a disAbility, here are some tips.

- Shaking hands is usually welcome. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.
- Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting. With some, you may want to take the cue from the individual with a disability. (If someone is blind, she won't see your extended hand; wait to see if she extends hers.)



Etiquette and Attitudes

If you are not accustomed to interacting with a person with a disability, here are some tips.

- When talking with a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person rather than to a companion, aide or sign language interpreter.
- Common words and phrases are OK to use. For example, it's fine to say "see you later" to a blind person, or "Do you want to go for a walk?" to someone who uses a wheelchair.



Some Helpful Tips

“Disability is a matter of perception. If you can do just one thing well, you're needed by someone.”

- Martina Navratilova

- Be Patient
- Take Time to Communicate
- Never finish someone's sentences
- Don't assume; Always Ask when in Doubt
- Be Natural in your Language

Making the Connection



- If employers believed adults with disAbilities have (or could learn) valuable job skills, we wouldn't have an estimated 70 percent unemployment rate of people with disAbilities.
- If merchants saw people with disAbilities as customers with money to spend, we wouldn't have so many inaccessible stores, theaters, restrooms, and more.
- If the service system identified people with disAbilities as "customers," instead of "clients/consumers/recipients," perhaps it would begin to meet a person's *real* needs (like inclusion, friendships, etc.) instead of trying to remediate "problems."



Making the Connection

And if individuals with disAbilities and family members saw themselves as first-class citizens who can and should be fully included in all areas of society, we might focus on what's really important: Living a Real Life in the Real World, enjoying ordinary opportunities and experiences and dreaming big dreams (like people without disAbilities), instead of living a Special Life in Disability World, where low expectations, isolation, segregation, poverty, and hopelessness are the norm.



People First Language



. . . is about according dignity to that increasing proportion of the population with disabilities.

People feel better about us and the service we provide when we treat them with dignity and respect.

Making the Connection



“The Greatest Discovery Of My
Generation Is That
Human Beings
Can Alter Their Lives
By Altering Their
Attitudes Of Mind.”

William James



disAbility
is often a
consequence of the
environment

Questions



Help Us Improve



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