Basics for Business:



Finding a Comfort Level with Disability

forHealth™ CONSULTING at UMass Chan Medical School

WorkWithoutLimits™ — PUTTING ABILITIES TO WORK —

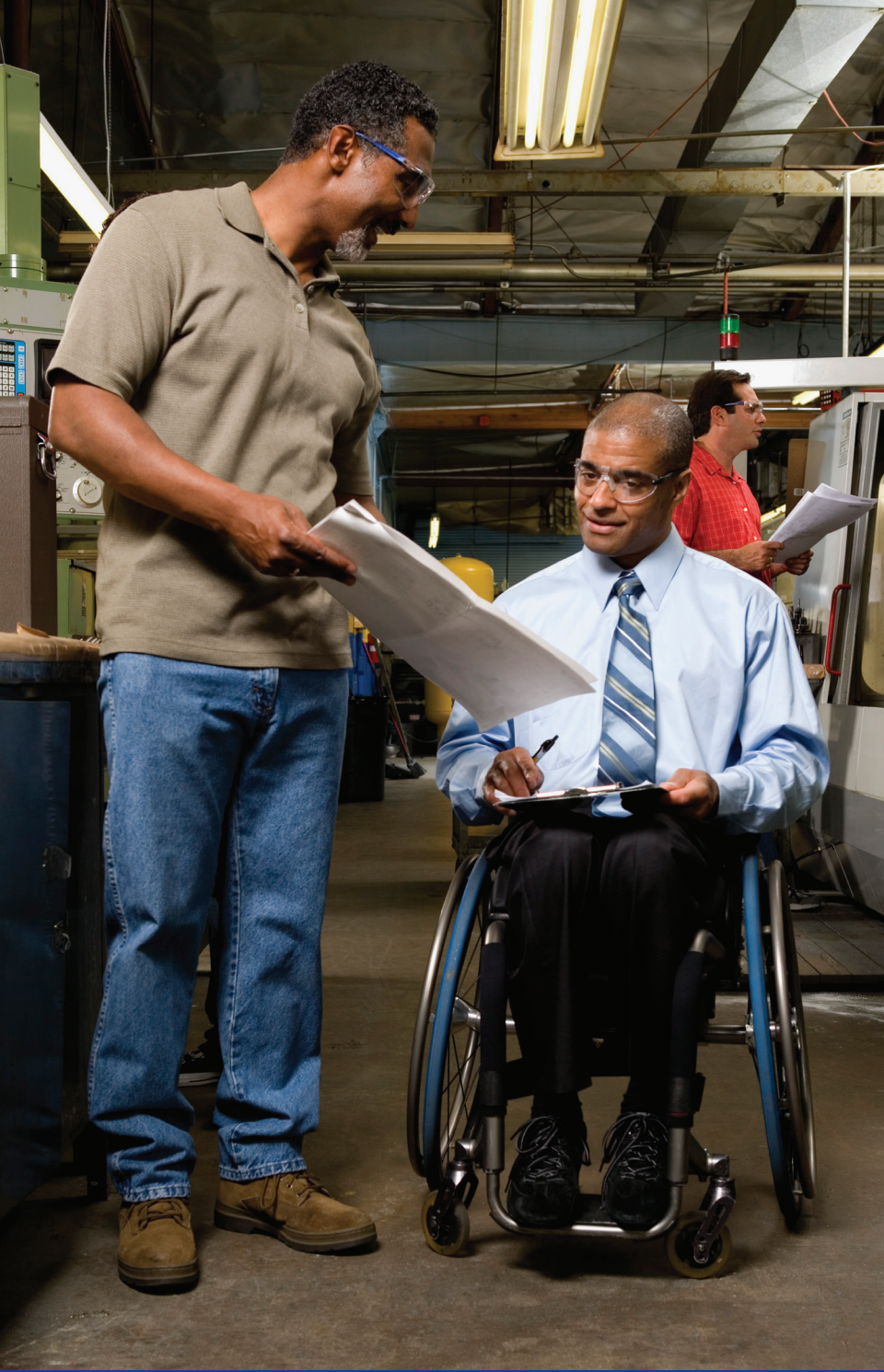
What is a Disability?

You may feel that you can't define disability, but you know it when you see it. There may be visual clues, such as a wheel-chair, guide dog, or cane. But some disabilities are not immediately apparent or observable, such as chronic illnesses, low vision, speech impairment, intellectual disability, and mental illness.

"Disability" is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of conditions that may occur across the life span:

- Physical disabilities like mobility impairments often come to mind first, but other non-apparent physical disabilities include intellectual, low vision or chronic illness.
- Mental health disabilities are less visible, often intermittent and episodic, but no less disabling.
- Intellectual disabilities occur with varying levels of severity.
- Blindness or deafness may be complete or partial.
- Chronic illness can fluctuate and be very debilitating, as with chronic pain.

One in five Americans has some form of disability, and one in three households has a disabled member. People with disabilities are customers, vendors, and employees, representing a large and growing market that the business world should be knowledgeable about and comfortable serving. This handbook is a first step for your company to dispel myths and raise awareness.



Disability in Massachusetts

Data from the U.S. Census' Disability Status Report of the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) suggest that people with disabilities are only half as likely as those without disability to be employed (39.5% compared to 79.5%). In Massachusetts, the prevalence of disability among working age adults (9.3%) and their employment rate (39.9%) are similar to national averages.

The number of Massachusetts residents of working age (21 – 64) with any disability is 726,000, according to the 2008 ACS. In 2009, about 56,000 working-age Massachusetts residents with work limitations were actually working in some capacity (www.disabilitystatistics.org). The remaining pool of 670,900 working-age Massachusetts residents with disabilities constitutes a largely untapped source of labor, and this group will become increasingly important to businesses as the large baby-boomer generation retires, acquires age-related disabilities, and requires greater care from the smaller generation that follows. Moreover, the 726,900 working-age people with disabilities in the state represent a substantial market for goods and services.

Disability and the Law

Since its appearance in English Poor Law (1834,1601), the concept of "disability" has been tied closely to a person's capacity for work and economic self-sufficiency. Today, the U.S. Social Security program bases its definition of disability on one's inability to work, stipulating that the following conditions must be met in order to qualify for benefits:

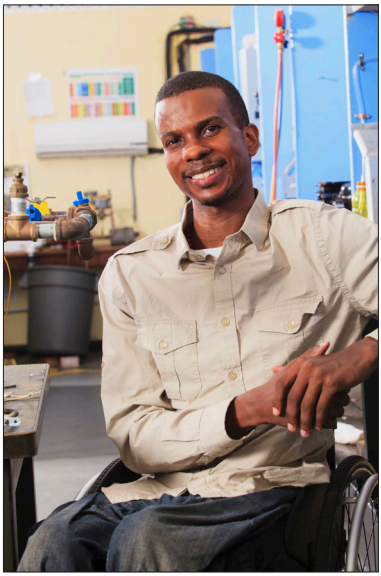
- you cannot do work that you did before;
- you cannot adjust to other work because of your medical condition; and
- your disability has lasted or is expected to last for at least one year or to result in death. (www.ssa.gov/disability).

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the definition of disability is based on a person's having a physical or mental impairment that "substantially limits" one or more major life activities, including the ability to work. Title I, the portion of the legislation that deals with employment, requires that businesses provide "reasonable accommodations", such as job restructuring, equipment modifications, and assistive devices, for employees with disabilities. (www.ada.gov)

Becoming Comfortable with Disability

"Americans with disabilities are active and contributing members of our society, and they must have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to compete and obtain jobs in the 21st-century workforce. By reducing physical barriers and false perceptions, our country meets our commitment to millions of Americans with disabilities, and benefits from their talents, creativity and hard work."

– President George W. Bush, October 2004, National Disability Employment Awareness Month Announcement Proclamation; Washington, D.C.



Disability Etiquette

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- People with disabilities are entitled to the same courtesies you would extend to anyone, including personal privacy. If you find it inappropriate to ask people about their sex lives, or their complexions, or their incomes, extend the courtesy to people with disabilities.
- If you don't make a habit of leaning or hanging on people, don't lean or hang on someone's wheelchair. Wheelchairs are an extension of personal space.
- When you offer to assist someone with a vision impairment, allow the person to take your arm. This will help you to guide, rather than propel or lead, the person.
- Treat adults as adults. Call a person by his or her first name only when you extend this familiarity to everyone present. Don't patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head. Reserve this sign of affection for children.

In conversation...

- When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to him or her, rather than through a companion who may be along.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions, such as "See you later" or "I've got to run", that seem to relate to the person's disability.
- To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not everyone with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who do will rely on facial expressions and other body language to help them understand. Show consideration by facing a light source and keeping your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking. Keep mustaches well-trimmed. Shouting won't help, but written notes will.
- When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, place yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. Say, for example, "On my right is Andy Clark". When conversing in a group, remember to say the name of the person to whom you are speaking, to give a vocal cue. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate when you move from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.

- Give whole, unhurried attention when you're talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting, and be patient rather than speaking for the person. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand. The person's reaction will guide you to understanding.

Common courtesies...

- If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs it before you act, and listen to any instructions the person may want to give.
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.
- When directing a person with a visual impairment, use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards".
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get things done or said. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.
- When planning events involving persons with disabilities, consider their needs ahead of time. If an insurmountable barrier exists, let them know about it prior to the event.

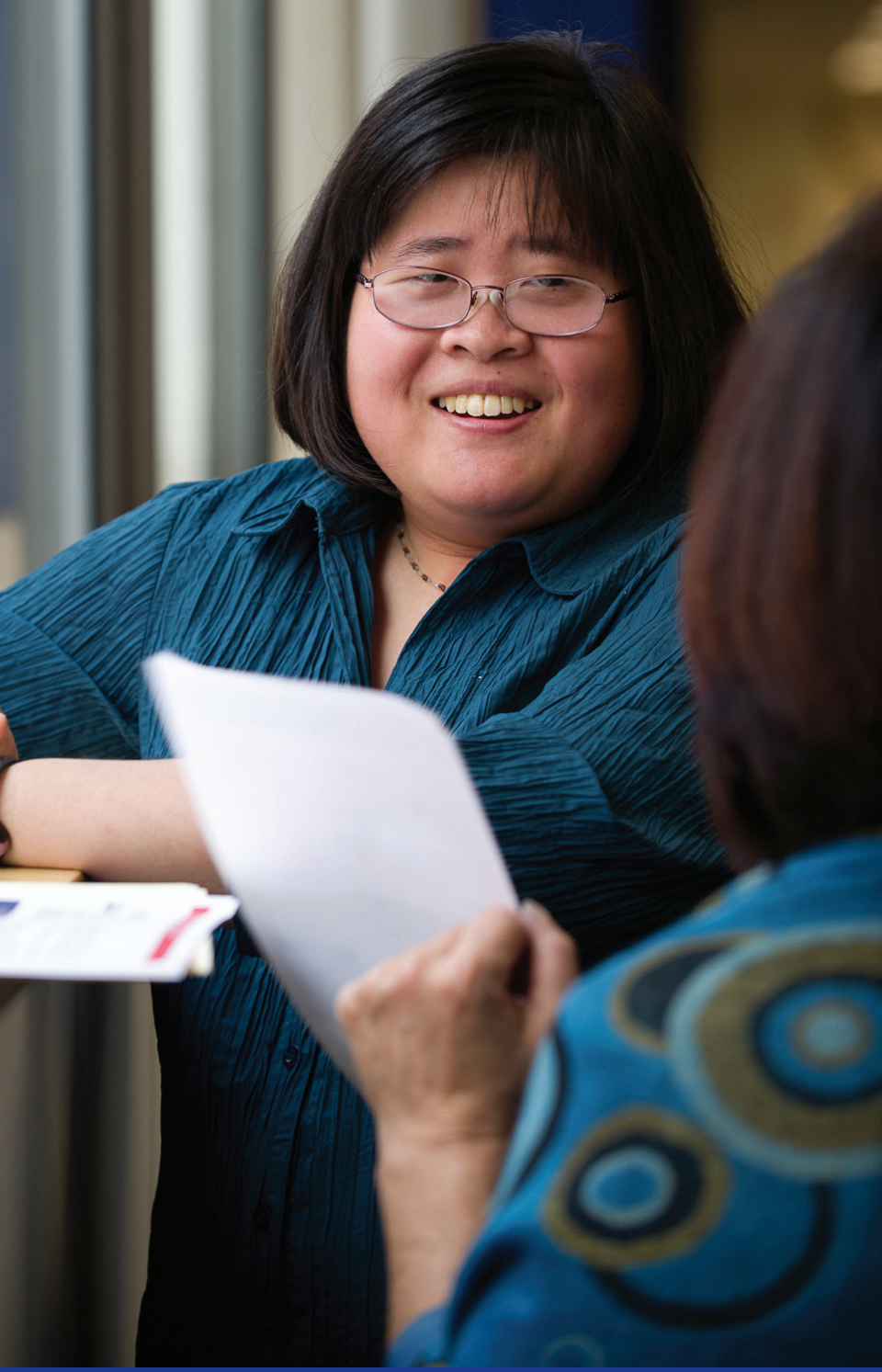
More things you can do:

- Understand the need for accessible parking and leave it for those who need it;
- Encourage participation of people with disabilities in community activities by using accessible meeting and event sites;
- Understand children's curiosity about disabilities and people who have them;
- Advocate for a barrier-free environment;
- Speak up when negative words or phrases are used about disability;
- Write producers and editors a note of support when they portray someone with a disability as a "regular person" in the media;
- Accept people with disabilities as individuals capable of the same needs and feelings as yourself, and hire qualified persons with disabilities whenever possible.

Acknowledgements

This document was developed by Raymond E. Glazier, Ph.D.

For more information about what your company can do to become more disability-friendly, visit the Work Without Limits website: www.workwithoutlimits.org.



Contact **Work Without Limits** to discuss your training needs!

Visit **WorkWithoutLimits.org** to view our full menu of trainings as well as access to more disability resources!

Stay Connected!

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