

**ESBLN** Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network  
By Jackie Gast, Director

Handicapped is no longer an acceptable term when referring to people with disAbilities. The perception of the word handicapped is that one is at a disadvantage or is somehow inferior to a non-disabled person. As we have learned, successful working people with disAbilities are absent no more days, have higher retention rates and have equal productivity rates as non-disabled people. Also, not all disAbilities are obvious. If you could, please avoid using the term handicapped when talking about people, though it is still acceptable with golf and bowling scores.

A friend of mine told me a story about an incident that happened to her. She works for MBNA, a company that is very supportive of hiring people with disabilities. She was having trouble with her computer so she called Information Technology. An IT rep answered the phone prompting my friend to describe her problem. Sensing she was communicating ineffectively, she asked the IT person to come to her desk so she could show him the problem. He quietly hesitated, then asked a few more questions to see if he could solve it over the phone especially since his office was located in a separate building. My friend, getting frustrated, insisted he come over so that he could see what she was talking about. Again, the IT man quietly hesitated but then agreed to her request. He arrived at her desk a short time later, using a cane. You see, he was blind. My friend was quite embarrassed as you can imagine. We laughed about her embarrassment and then I asked, "Did he solve your problem?" to which she answered a very happy "Yes, he did!" I guess we could call my friend communication impaired. Sadly, a lot of us may fit into that category!

I was recently talking to Carol Dunlap from the Office of Disability Employment Policy under the U.S. Department of Labor. Some time ago, she met a group of business associates in downtown Annapolis for a meeting after which they decided to go to lunch. After searching three blocks, they finally found a restaurant Carol could enter without difficulty. Carol uses a wheelchair and finding an entrance without a step was quite a challenge. Although one person had a disability, six lunches were sold. Carol said, "Now, whenever I go to Annapolis, any group I'm with always goes to that restaurant." It seems the many restaurants Carol had to pass over were "handicapped" or at a disadvantage in their ability to serve all customers.

If you would like to learn more about your business and the ADA, consider attending ***Americans with Disabilities Act for Employers and ADA Tax Incentives***, March 15 from 8:00 to 12:00 at Salisbury University or visit the ESBLN web site [www.esbln.org](http://www.esbln.org). Topics include new and proposed ADA regulations, FMLA, accommodations, misconceptions, and HR cost savings. If you are interested in a similar program on the upper shore, e-mail Jackie Gast at [esblnjg@aol.com](mailto:esblnjg@aol.com).