

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
Putting Ability to Work www.esbln.org
By Jackie Gast, Director

Have you been to a seminar lately that was a lot of fun and informative? We had one recently at the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce called Workplace Disability Awareness Seminar for Managers. The program was originally designed at the request of Mail Movers in Salisbury who agreed to open it up to the entire Chamber membership. Janet Parke, program specialist at HCI, Inc. in Salisbury put on a great program that was interactive and entertaining. We had participants comment at the end of the seminar that all businesses need to hear this message.

This seminar was targeted towards managers and first line supervisors. If your company is fortunate enough to have a Human Resource manager, typically they know the do's and don'ts of disability workplace etiquette. Although your HR manager may know about it, your first line and non-HR managers may not. If you do not have a Human Resource manager, do you know the do's and don'ts? It could mean the difference between fair or unfair treatment of employees.

In the seminar, we had participants act in role play activities as a blind person, a hearing impaired person, and a person in a wheel chair, among other disabilities. Many times, if a person is blind, people tend to raise their voice as if the person has a hearing issue instead. Also, people forget to identify themselves to the blind individual. Have you ever talked to someone on the phone that is very chummy with you and you have absolutely no idea who they are? Many times a blind person is left standing talking to the air because the person they were just talking to left without letting them know. It is kind of the same feeling you have when you turned your head briefly while talking to someone when that someone had stepped away and a stranger was there instead – “oops, sorry, where did my wife go? I thought you were her!” Many times, a hearing impaired person can hear sounds but they are muffled. Yelling at the person does not help. Also, be sure to look at the person when talking. Lip reading is important to all of us and most of us do not realize it. My sight is poor without corrective lenses. Many times I have said to people, “Excuse me? I can not hear you without my glasses on.” Try closing your eyes at the beginning of an upcoming meeting when people are gathering and talking casually. You will be surprised at what you miss. For people in wheel chairs, the chair should be considered an extension of the individual's body. Do not lean on it, push it without asking or use it as a foot stool.

We would love to take this seminar on the road anywhere on the Delmarva Peninsula. It could easily be done in 45 minutes and would cost the employer nothing if done onsite. Visit www.esbln.org and use our Assistance Request feature or call 410 749-0144.