



# *Accessible Customer Service Practice and Procedures*

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***In reference to:  
HR Policy: HR – 016***

<b>Approved by:</b>	Director – Power Precast Solutions Ltd.
<b>Originated:</b>	December 2017
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<b>Applies to:</b>	All Salaried and Hourly Employees of Power Precast Solutions
<b>Administered by:</b>	Human Resources

## **Policy Statement**

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Power Precast Solutions is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities.

This policy is intended to meet the requirements of Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and applies to the provision of goods and services to the public or other third parties, not to the goods themselves.

All goods and services provided by Power Precast Solutions shall follow the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

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## **Types of Disabilities**

Most people think of disabilities as physical disabilities such as an individual who uses a wheelchair. In fact, there are numerous other disabilities including many that are invisible or episodic and disabilities can vary in degree and seriousness. Regardless of the severity of the disability, some of the many types can be summarized in this list:

- **Vision**
- **Hearing**
- **Deaf-Blind**
- **Physical**

- **Speech or language**
- **Mental Health**
- **Intellectual, Developmental, Learning**

### **Understanding Vision Disabilities**

There are different types of vision disabilities that can reduce a person's ability to see clearly. Some people may experience reduced side vision or a lack of central vision meaning they cannot see straight ahead but very few people are completely blind. Depending on the severity of the vision loss, you may or may not be able to identify a person with limited vision. Some may require the assistance of a service animal or use a white cane, but others may not show any signs of their limitations.

A customer with limited vision may have difficulty reading, navigating around unfamiliar places and troubles with depth perception. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that hazards are removed such as clearing aisle ways and removing snow from entrances.

Customers with vision disabilities may also need assistance finding a product or service, reading labels, and understanding directions. But don't assume a customer needs or wants your help. Keeping with the core principle of independence, treat the customer as you would treat any other customer – ask how you may help them.

#### **Practices & Procedures:**

- Speak normally, be patient and friendly.
- Offer assistance but wait until the person accepts your offer or makes a request.
- When offering to guide someone through unfamiliar surroundings, offer your elbow and walk slowly. You may verbally advise of obstacles or indicate when coming upon a door or walkway.
- Offer to describe goods and services.
- When providing written material offer to read or summarize it.
- If you need to leave the customer to get something, let them know where you are going and when you will return.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

### **Understanding Hearing Disabilities**

Similar to other disabilities, there are varying degrees of hearing loss ranging from problems with distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words to complete hearing loss. A person who is deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing may be unable to use a public telephone, understand speech in noisy environments or pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers. These individuals may use assistive devices to communicate, but it may be difficult to recognize a person with a hearing disability.

Customers with hearing disabilities might face barriers such as not hearing others approaching them, not responding to alarms or other emergency situations, and not understanding speech in a noisy environment.

#### Practices & Procedures:

- Make sure that the customer sees you and knows that you are communicating with them.
- Avoid placing your hands, papers, menus, or other objects in front of your mouth while talking with the customer.
- Avoid talking to the customer while leading them.
- In emergency situations, assist the customer in recognizing and responding to the emergency.
- If you cannot speak in sign language, offer a paper and pen so you can write notes back and forth to share information.
- People using a hearing aid may find it difficult to hear in a noisy environment so you may want to suggest moving to a quieter location.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

#### Understanding Deaf-Blindness

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss that results in a person experiencing difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Some will have some sight or hearing, but others will have neither and rely on their other senses.

Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation, and mobility. Customers who are deaf-blind communicate using any combination of sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, and communication boards and often use the services of an Intervener to relay information, facilitate auditory and visual information and act as sighted guides. The Intervener is trained to use sign language that involves touching the individual's hand in a two-hand, manual alphabet, or finger spelling.

Customers with deaf-blindness disabilities might face barriers such as accessing information, maneuvering around tight spaces or stairwells, and communicating needs or questions.

#### Practices & Procedures:

- Understand that communication can take some time, please be patient. Always direct your questions and responses to the customer.
- Ask what would make your customer the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Avoid sudden movements or touching of the individual that may catch them off guard unless it is an emergency.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Physical Disabilities**

Physical disabilities can also come in many forms and degrees of severity. The most visible would include people using a wheelchair or people with amputations. However, many physical disabilities are not visible or may even be episodic in nature. For example, people who have arthritis, heart disease or lung disease may not show visible signs most of the time but occasionally suffer from their disabilities.

Customers with physical disabilities may face barriers such as being stared at by other customers, not being able to pick up or hold items, not being able to maneuver in tight spaces or reach for products, not being able to stand for extended periods of time or becoming light-headed without notice.

### **Practices & Procedures:**

- If you are providing extended customer service, consider pulling up a chair and talking to the customer at their eye level.
- Ask how you can help.
- If you notice a customer struggling or in distress, offer assistance. . Always ask before touching or moving any assistive device.
- Ensure your environment is clear and free of obstacles that could make it difficult for a customer to pass.
- If shaking hands is a customer service standard, do not back away or not offer to shake hands with a customer who has a prosthetic hand.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Speech or Language Disabilities**

An individual could have speech or language impairments resulting from diseases such as cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or other conditions that make it difficult to clearly pronounce words or make it difficult to communicate with written or spoken language.

Customers with speech or language disabilities may face barriers such as difficulties pronouncing words, sudden slurring or stuttering and complications when they need to express themselves or ask for help.

### **Practices & Procedures:**

- If you don't understand, it is okay to ask a person to repeat the information.
- Ask closed-ended questions inviting a yes or no response.
- Ask the customer how you can help them.
- Be patient, it may take longer for the customer to share information and ask questions.
- Never interrupt or assume you know what the customer wants.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Mental Health Disabilities**

Oftentimes, you will not be aware that you are dealing with a person who has a mental health disability, and it will not affect the way you provide your products or services. However, you may encounter an individual who is in crisis or is struggling and you need to know how to assist.

Customers with mental health disabilities may face barriers such as increased anxiety, sudden mood swings, hearing voices, seeing things, and feeling things that are not there, and poor concentration and memory.

### **Practices & Procedures:**

- Listening skills are important when dealing with such situations as you need to understand the real issue to know how you can offer help.
- Ask how you can help and try to work with the individual to find a solution.
- Be confident, patient and reassuring.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Intellectual, Learning and Developmental Disabilities**

Intellectual, learning, and development disabilities can range from mild to severe. Many people have intellectual, learning, or developmental disabilities that do not affect their everyday life; they use computer programs, recording devices and hand-held devices to record information, calculate prices and store pictures. Intellectual, learning and development disabilities include a range of disorders that affect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing.

Customers with intellectual, learning or development disabilities can have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways.

### **Practices & Procedures:**

- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information.
- Remember that the customer is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make his/her own decisions.
- Be patient and verify your understanding.
- Provide information in smaller sections.
- Respond to any requests for verbal information, assistance in filling in forms and so on with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Use of Assistive Devices**

When it comes to the Customer Service Standard there are a few factors that businesses need to consider: the customer's assistive device and devices that are available by the business for customers to use.

Persons with disabilities are encouraged to use their own devices when accessing goods and services provided by Power Precast Solutions.

Customers might also need assistive devices to help them access service. Assistive devices enable our customers to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading, or lifting by eliminating barriers. Here are a few examples of devices that could be used: wheelchairs, walkers, listening devices, portable oxygen tanks, laptops with screen-reading software and communication programs, canes, handheld devices, and hearing aids.

### **Practices & Procedures:**

- Never refuse to work with the device.
- Don't stare or gawk at the device.
- Never touch or move the device without asking permission from the customer.
- Ensure the customer and assistive device have the appropriate amount of space.
- Don't block, knock, or bump into assistive devices.
- Offer assistance if the customer is having trouble working with their device.
- Keep walkways, entrances, and parking lots clear of ice, snow, and other debris.
- Make eye contact and if required, consider pulling up a chair to meet Customers at their level.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Guide Dogs, Service Dogs and Service Animals**

Customers with a disability who are accompanied by a guide dog, service animal or service dog are allowed access to premises that are open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law regardless of "no pet" policies. "No pet" policies do not apply to guide dogs, service animals and/or service dogs. Businesses are required to allow access to guide dogs, service animals or service dogs unless otherwise excluded by law.

Guide dogs are trained by strict standards and provide independence for customers who are considered legally blind. Service dogs may not receive such standardized training and may be used to warn the customers of an impending seizure, reduce anxiety, assist with carrying goods or provide other needed assistance.

In the majority of cases service animals will be dogs; however, there have been cases of service animals that are monkeys, parrots and other animals that offer critical assistance to our

customers. Service animals offer a variety of assistance including acting as a travel guide, carrying cargo, fetching products, opening doors, ringing doorbells, activating elevator buttons, pulling wheelchairs, providing additional support to avoid falls, warning the customer of an impending seizure or needed medication, protecting the customer in medical situations, calling 911, turning on lights, getting help and reducing panic and fear. Typically guide dogs, service animals or service dogs will be wearing a marked harness or vest. The customer that is accompanied by a guide dog, service dog and/or service animal is responsible for maintaining care and control of the animal at all times.

### Practices & Procedures:

- Never separate the customer and their animal.
- Don't touch, pet, or talk to the animal – when the animal is out with the customer it is working and should not be distracted.
- Do not feed or offer treats to the animal.
- If you are unsure if the animal is in fact providing a service to the customer, ask.
- It is okay to provide water to the animal if the customer requests it.
- If other customers are approaching the animal to pet it, politely stop them and explain that they should ask permission before petting the animal.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

### Understanding Support Persons

Some customers may arrive with a support person to assist them in accessing your goods and services. A support person can be a paid worker, volunteer, family member or friend and does not necessarily require any special training or certification to offer support. Support persons offer a wide range of assistance including interpretation, speaking on behalf of the customer, note taking, reading, guiding, or directing the customer, transportation, personal care, and communication.

If a customer with a disability is accompanied by a support person, the business must ensure that both people are allowed to enter the premises together and that the customer is not prevented from having access to the support person.

### Confidentiality

In situations where confidential information might be discussed, consent should be obtained from the customer, prior to any conversation where confidential information might be discussed. Consent could range from a nod to a signed letter provided from the customer. When obtaining consent, it should be in a manner that considers the customer's disability.

### Practices & Procedures:

- If you are unsure of which person is the customer, politely ask.
- Introduce yourself to both the customer and support person.
- Talk directly to the customer, even if the support person is responding.

- Address the customer appropriately: "How can I help you today?" as opposed to "Can you find out what they need?"
- Don't try to have side conversations with the support person.
- Provide any written materials to both the customer and support person.
- Never separate the customer and their support person.
- Seek support from an onsite Senior Manager or Human Resources, if required.

## **Understanding Service Disruptions**

Customers visiting a Power Precast Solutions location may need certain facilities, services, or systems to access our goods and services. Elevators, automatic doors, accessible washrooms, and ramps are important to customers with disabilities. Service disruptions happen for many reasons and can cause serious upset, hardship, and disappointment to our customers. Responding to and handling service disruptions in a way that supports and informs customers is important for maintaining solid relationships and offering great service.

Service disruptions can include: a broken elevator, cancelled programs, unplanned closures, construction barriers, sick employees, and inaccessible parking. Power Precast Solutions must provide notice of disruptions -- even those that are unplanned or might not be your fault such as construction outside that is blocking the use of a ramp. Once you become aware of a service disruption, notice will need to be provided as soon as possible and it must be posted where customers are likely to find it.

In the event that a notification needs to be posted the following information should be included unless it is not readily available or known:

- goods or services that are disrupted or unavailable.
- reason for the disruption.
- anticipated duration.
- a description of alternative services or options.

For example: Part of the main entrance is blocked due to construction, preventing customers with mobility disabilities from being able to enter the building. Alternatives could be having the customer enter through another door or requesting that customers requiring assistance call ahead, so that an employee is ready to assist them.

### Sample Document 1

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Dear Customers,

The east parking lot will be out of service from April 1 to 15 for routine maintenance. To access the upper level of the building, please use the parking lot and the entrance on the west side of the building. We regret any inconvenience this may cause. If you have questions or concerns, please call 1.519.822.0210.



Thank you.

Management

For example: The accessible washroom is out of service. Alternatives could be indicating where the closest accessible washroom is located either within the building or offered at a nearby location.

## Sample Document 2

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Dear Guests,

Our accessible washroom is out of service due to a broken pipe. A repair person will be on the premises tomorrow to fix it. In the interim, we have made arrangements for our guests to use the accessible washroom at 123 Main Street, which is located next door to our premises. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Thank you.

Management

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## Notice of Disruption Form

The Notice of Disruption form could be used in variety of ways such as:

- Employees could complete part of this form to notify their supervisor or appropriate individuals of a service disruption.
- Power Precast Solutions also uses the form to record who was contacted, alternative options and where the disruption was posted.
- The completed form could be given to the front desk, supervisor and/or any individual that might be handling customers in person or over the phone.
- Once the disruption is over, this form could be used to ensure that all areas where the disruption was posted were updated to remove the notice of disruption.

## Posting Options to Consider

- At the main entrance and the nearest accessible entrance to the service disruption
- At the point of disruption such as on the elevator or washroom door
- On the Power Precast Solutions website or website frequently used by customers
- Contacting customers with reservations
- Verbally notifying customers when they are making a reservation.

## Practices & Procedures:

- Any service disruptions should take top priority.
- Check to ensure no one is trapped or stuck because of the disruption.

- Notify the appropriate individuals to ensure a timely response.
- If required, post notifications in designated locations.
- Apologize to visiting customers for the inconvenience.
- Determine if an accommodation plan can be implemented to enable the customer to access our goods and services.

## **Feedback**

Power Precast Solutions has a feedback process so that anyone can offer comments on the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities that are publically available. The developed process includes how Power Precast Solutions will respond to complaints and indicates what actions were or will be taken. The process permits people to provide their feedback by email, telephone or in person. Power Precast Solutions offers a variety of methods that will ensure that all our customers have an opportunity to provide feedback.

Power Precast Solutions mandates that our businesses must respond to customers who provide formal feedback in the form of complaints. Customers who provide formal feedback will receive an acknowledgement of their feedback from the Sales Manager, along with any resulting actions based on their concerns or on the complaints that were submitted.

## **Process for Feedback**

The process includes the following:

- Time frame: Power Precast Solutions will respond within 72 hours of receiving a formal complaint from a customer.
- Responsibility: The Sales Manager will have the responsibility to respond to all customer complaints.
- Confidentiality: Customers who provide feedback may also be asked to provide Power Precast Solutions with confidential information such as their address and/or phone number. Power Precast Solutions assures us that the process respects the customers' confidentiality.

## Sample Document 1

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### **Customer Feedback Form**

Thank you for visiting Power Precast Solutions. We value all our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs.

Please tell us the date and time of your visit:

Did we respond to your customer service needs today?  YES  NO

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner?

YES  SOMEWHAT  NO (please explain below)

Did you have any problems accessing our goods and services?

YES (please explain below)       SOMEWHAT       NO (please explain below)

Please add any other comments you may have:

Contact information (optional)\*:

Thank you.

Management

**\*Please note:** There may be privacy implications for organizations collecting personal information. Providers should seek their own legal advice regarding the privacy implications of collecting personal information in this manner.

Sample Document 2

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### **Record of Customer Feedback**

Date feedback received:

Name of customer (optional):

Contact information (if appropriate) \*:

Details:

Follow-up:

Action to be taken:

Staff member:

Date:

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**\*Please note:** There may be privacy implications for organizations collecting personal information. Providers should seek their own legal advice regarding the privacy implications of collecting personal information in this manner.

### **Presentation of Information**

Power Precast Solutions posts the information relating to the customer service standard in a conspicuous place and lets customers know it is easy to find and/or request the information and that the documents are available upon request.

#### **Posting Options:**

- On main information bulletin boards

- On the business website or website frequently used by customers
- In customer information booklets
- In waiting areas

### Availability in Multiple Formats

Power Precast Solutions has taken into consideration that documents may be requested in different formats depending on the customer's disability. As such, Power Precast Solutions has alternative options to ensure that documentation is provided in a format that considers the customer's disability.

### Practices & Procedures:

- Printing in a large format
- Email a copy of the documentation to the customer.
- Have a staff member read through the policy with the customer.
- Record the information as an audio file that could be played and reviewed.
- Ask the customer what format they prefer.

### Training

Training needs to be provided to:

- a) all direct employees, volunteers, agents and/or contractors who deal with the public or other third parties that act on behalf of our business; and,
- b) those who are involved in the development and approval of customer service policies, practices, and procedures.

Training covers the following:

- A review of the purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.
- A review of the requirements of the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07*.
- Instructions on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
- Instructions on how to interact with people with disabilities who:
  - use assistive devices.
  - require the assistance of a guide dog, service dog or other service animal; or requires the use of a support person (including the handling of admission fees).
  - Instructions on how to use equipment or devices that are available at our premises or that we provide that may help people with disabilities.
  - Instructions on what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing your services.
  - The businesses policies, procedures and practices pertaining to providing accessible customer service to customers with disabilities.

Power Precast Solutions provides training to all new employees or volunteers, agents and/or contractors who deal with the public or act on Power Precast Solution's behalf. Revised training will be provided in the event of any changes to the legislation or Power Precast Solution's procedures and practices.

**Referenced Documents:**

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005
- Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07
- Blind Person’s Rights Act, 1990
- Dog Owners' Liability Act, Ontario
- Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario Regulation 562
- Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990

<b>Revision History</b>		
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March 8, 2021	Yvette Sturge	Policy/Practice update and review
Sept. 14, 2023	Yvette Sturge	Practice review