Disability-Related Language and Tips

As an employer, you can help build a stronger, more inclusive team by learning how to interact effectively and respectfully with your diverse colleagues/team. Language related to disabilities is constantly evolving [1] and preferred language can differ by region, country, or individual. Here are some language tips that may help you get started.

1. **Be inclusive in your conversations.** It's better to talk to people with disabilities, rather than to talk about them. People with disabilities want to be treated like anyone else and to be equal participants in the workplace and the community.

2. **Use a person-first approach.** Remain focused on the person, not their disability [2]. This has implications for the language you use and the way you interact. Use the individual's name and make eye contact. Rather than "handicapped" or "disabled person", use "person with a disability" instead.

3. **Generally, frame a disability and most medical conditions as something a person has rather than what they are.** For example, "She has a disability" not "She is disabled", "He has arthritis" not "He is arthritic", "She has epilepsy" not "She is epileptic."

4. **For certain sensory conditions, people may prefer more direct language.** For example, "He is deaf" rather than "He has deafness" or "She is blind" rather than "She has blindness."

5. **Avoid using language that suggests weakness or infirmity.** For example, never use the terms "wheelchair-bound", "crippled" or "handicapped'.

6. **Always ask the person.** To ensure you are using the right language – discretely ask the person you are referring to what they are most comfortable with [3]. Not everyone with a disability will have strong preferences about language. Do not assume the language one person prefers is the language that everyone with their disability prefers.

7. **Do not use disability-related terms as insults or slurs.** These phrases should be avoided whether or not you're interacting with people with disabilities. Language like "That movie was retarded", or "Are you blind?" can be hurtful and should be avoided.

8. **If you make a mistake, apologize and move on.** People with disabilities are generally used to educating others about their needs and preferences and understand that things will not always go perfectly. As long as you are learning from your mistakes and trying your best people will usually understand.

Link References:

[1] Rick Hansen Foundation. (2015) *How does language shape how we think about disability?* Retrieved From http://www.rickhansen.com/Blog/ArtMID/13094/ArticleID/48/How-does-language-shape-how-we-think-about-disability

[2] ALACD. (2018)*. Words with dignity.* Retrieved From https://ala.ca/wp-content/uploads/Words-with-Dignity.pdf

[3] Empower. (2018) *Questions – the best way to learn.* Retrieved From http://www.empowernl.ca/about-disability/disability-awareness/questions