

# **TIPS WHEN CONTACTING BUSINESSES**

There are lots of reasons why you may want to contact a local business – here are just a few:

- To talk with businesses about ADA issues
- To ask businesses for a donation for your group's cause
- To hang a flier or poster in their window
- To ask about employment possibilities
- To compliment them on their service or complain about poor service
- To make a suggestion about products that you think they should carry



(Linn County ADA CELEBRATION Logo not available in Braille. Logo is a circle with the words "United by the ADA" and the Access Symbol, along with 4 other international symbols on the outside of the circle.)

As you can see, the list above could get quite long. We are only going to focus on the first two items listed.

- 1. To talk with businesses about ADA compliance issues**
- 2. To ask businesses for a donation for your group's causes**

## **1. Tips for Approaching Businesses about ADA Compliance Issues**

The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as Amended in 2008) has had a wide-reaching impact on all areas of life for people with disabilities. Title III of the ADA deals with "public accommodation" related to businesses. Title III talks about two things:

1. Buildings and parking must be accessible for people with disabilities
2. Services must be done in a way that works for people with disabilities

Here are some tips to help you approach businesses about ADA issues:

- First, you must decide – will you take an
  - "Educational Mode" with businesses, OR
  - "Compliance Mode" with businesses ("to make a formal complaint")

NOTE: It is always a good idea to start with the Educational Mode, and only switch to the "Compliance Mode" if the first isn't working at all. We will talk mostly about the Educational Mode in this paper.

- **SOME business owners hold false beliefs – for example:**

**MYTH #1 – “No one with a disability ever comes to my store, so why should I make it ADA accessible?”**

**THE FACTS ARE THAT** if you can't get into a building, and don't feel welcomed into the place once you are there, odds are, you won't spend money and you won't come back.

**MYTH #2 – People with disabilities (especially certain types) require a special type of personality to deal them – “You have to be a saint to work with those people!!”**

**THE FACTS ARE THAT** you can't pigeon-hole anyone based on their behavior, their diagnosis, or what you “think is wrong with them.” You don't have to “deal with people with disabilities,” but you do have to provide service to people with disabilities.

**MYTH #3 - ADA job accommodations will cost a lot of money**

**THE FACTS ARE THAT** the majority of workers with disabilities (2/3) do not need any accommodations to perform their jobs. For those who do need accommodations, the cost is usually minimal – cost less than \$500 – according to JAN - the Job Accommodation Network (a service from the U.S. Department of Labor). Also, tax incentives are available to help employers cover the costs of accommodations & modifications required to make their businesses accessible to employees and customers with disabilities.

**MYTH #4 - If a business “GIVES IN” even a little bit on ADA issues, “those people” (people with disabilities) will want more and more....**

**THE FACTS ARE THAT** people with disabilities now know their rights under the ADA. After nearly a quarter of a century of the ADA being in place, people with disabilities are saying that it is time that the promises of the ADA be fulfilled.

**THE TRUTH – People with disabilities want to be treated just like everyone else!**

- **Develop a relationship with the business owner before you start “educating” him/her on the just how they need to change things to come into compliance with the ADA.**
- **Be very polite with the business owner as you educate them on what your group does and why you are approaching him/her. Give them your business card and information about your group.**
- **Offer to be a resource the business owner. If you don't know the answer to a question (for certain), you will find out the answer (for certain).**
- **Expect progress! Don't expect a small business to make changes quickly. Acknowledge and celebrate small accomplishments!**

- At some point, if a business is not in “good compliance with ADA” – the law allows you to do one of these two things:
  - **FILE A COMPLAINT** through a local, state or national governmental agency (like your local or state Civil Rights Commission, or at EEOC or DOJ or many others at the federal level).
  - Or, **FILE A LAWSUIT** in the court system.

## **2. Tips for Asking Business for Donations**

Businesses in your community are likely to support your group or organization if they believe in your cause. A business owner has a much better chance of giving to a cause if he or she has a personal experience in the cause (in our case it is “DISABILITY”), or the business has made an express commitment to improving the community in which it operates.

**REMEMBER** - you can request cash or in-kind donations from businesses. Here are some tips to help you:

- **Start by creating a master list of local businesses (name of owner, business name, street address, city/state/zip+4, phone, email). First on the list should be any providers or vendors that you personally, your group, or its members, either regularly use, work at, or own.**
  - NOTE: A connection within a business can make all the difference.
  - NOTE: Don't overlook businesses that don't have storefronts.
- **If you're working with a team of project members, divide up the names of the businesses on your list.**
- **Each member should maintain responsibility for the businesses on his or her list from start to finish.**
- **Each member should carefully track all contacts and results, AND check back with other team members to make sure that no one is doubling-up on a business.**
  - NOTE: Showing up at a business that got solicited by your fellow group member only yesterday will not look professional!
- **Think creatively about what you'll ask for or accept**
  - Cash or in-kind donations.**
  - Volunteers from the business to help you with your project or fund raising.**
- **Prepare a printed one-page flyer with more information about your group's project and how donations will be used.**
- **Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope, with a form for your prospective donor to fill out.**

- **If you get no response within 10 days, plan to make a personal visit. It is best to schedule an appointment in advance. If you haven't scheduled an appointment, quickly explain your cause, and ask the front-desk person to direct you to the person who handles charitable donations.**

NOTE: When you've got the right person, mention any previous letters you have sent or contacts you have made and review the basic points in your letter. Highlight any past donations made by the business.

NOTE: Your attitude is very important here!! Show excitement about your project or event!! DO NOT beg or attempts to "guilt" the business owner into giving you money – that rarely works.

NOTE: Some businesses respond well to statistics, others respond well to personal stories. Be prepared with both! Almost always, business owners want to know that their money is well spent. Sometimes you need to build a relationship with the business owner before they will donate (show up or shop there, send a thank-you card for their time, etc.).

- **Offering publicity is your part in that win-win situation described earlier. Both in your letter and in person, be completely clear about how your group will publicly recognize the business's donation.**
- **If you get a donation, (cash or in-kind – large or small), you SHOULD send a THANK-YOU NOTE within 10 business days of getting the check or item!!!!!!!!!!**

NOTE: Your letter must have – the date, their business name, address, the letter should remind them that your group is (or is not a 501(c)3 non-profit) and “thank the business owner for their donation of \_\_\_\_\_” (if your group is a 501(c)3 and if the business wants to declare their deduction as a tax write-off, you must put the amount of the check or what the item was into the letter), your SIGNATURE, your group name, address, phone #, email – and all of this should be on your letterhead paper.

- **If you DO NOT get a donation, you should still SEND A NOTE.**

NOTE: Must have – the date, their business name, address, the letter THANKING THE BUSINESS OWNER FOR THEIR TIME, your signature, your group name, address, phone #, email – all of this on your letterhead paper.



(Graphic of an envelope ready to be mailed is not available in Braille.)