

Tips to Successfully Work with Your Employee with Vision Loss



By the Numbers

- 500,000 Canadians are impacted by sight loss
- Unemployment for those with vision loss is 3x the average of the Canadian rate
- 1/3 of Canadians say they don't know how to interact appropriately with a person who has sight loss in the workplace
- 70% of Canadians say that presented with two fully qualified job candidates, they would hire the sighted person over the person with vision loss

The Basics

- "Vision loss" is an inclusive term
 - Covers blind or partially-sighted individuals
- Blindness or vision loss can occur at any stage in a person's life
- "Legally blind" does not mean total blindness
- Individuals who are blind and who live with vision loss can do most jobs that sighted individuals can do
- Individuals with vision loss may rely on adaptive technology
 - Ex: larger monitors, computers with screen readers or magnification
 - Many systems have accessibility features built into them, at no extra cost to employers

Common Myths about Vision Loss

Myth 1: All blind people require information in Braille

- Many individuals who experience vision loss prefer information in various formats—ask the person what they prefer.
 - Examples: large print, electronic format, etc.
- When giving a presentation, it is important to offer the information in electronic format beforehand so that the individual can read and review it.

Myth 2: It's difficult to communicate with individuals with vision loss

- There are some slight differences in communication, but overall you would communicate similarly with individuals experiencing vision loss as with those who don't:
 - Announce yourself when entering and leaving a room.
 - If you are referencing a photo or image, be sure to describe it for an individual with vision loss.
 - In a large group or video conference, say your name when you speak, so an individual with vision loss is aware of who is speaking.
 - When giving directions, it's important to use descriptive language rather than "it's over there" or "go that way."

Myth 3: Individuals with vision loss always require help

- We all need help sometimes, but not all of the time—this is similar for folks with vision loss.
 - If you are unsure if someone needs help, ask them.
 - If they say no, do not be offended. They most likely are okay and don't need support at that time.
 - When asking if someone needs help, never grab, touch, or try to move the person.
 - Let the person give you instructions on how you can help. They are experts in their vision and needs, and are the best person to teach you how to help.

Myth #4: Individuals with vision loss will have more absenteeism or sick leave than others

- According to the Government of New Brunswick¹, the rates of absenteeism are lower for individuals with sight loss than those without.
- Folks with vision loss tend to stay in their jobs longer than those without, and are described as being loyal, reliable, and hardworking by their employers.

Myth #5: All individuals with vision loss use canes or guide dogs

- Many people do not use any mobility tools, and some individuals do use guide dogs.
 - Remember not to interact with the dog while working—including looking at, touching, or talking to the dog.
- Some individuals use white canes to get around.

- Do not grab the individual's cane while they are using it, even to assist them in guiding.
- If you want to provide guidance, ask first, and the individual will show you how to do so safely.
- Treat individuals with vision loss the same way you would like to be treated.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions. Most individuals with vision loss are happy to educate and share.

Vision Loss Etiquette

- People with vision loss are only different from others with respect to their vision.
- People with vision loss often find other people's beliefs about their abilities to be a much bigger barrier than vision loss itself.
- Say hello and wait for them to offer their hand to be shaken.
 - "Hi, my name is Michael Somers. Great to meet you. Let's shake hands."
- Avoid asking questions about how the person lost their vision.
- Use everyday language.
 - Don't worry about using terms such as "see" and "look."

Etiquette in the Workplace

- Materials should be available for someone with vision loss in their preferred format. Not sure what that is? Feel free to ask them.
 - Different formats are: physical hard copy, electronic copy, braille, etc.
- If any presentations are taking place (videos, PowerPoint's, etc.), the presenter should describe what is on the screen. This helps your employees without vision loss, too.
- Ask first before you read aloud any printed material or offer assistance.

Creating Accessible Meetings

- Describe the layout of the room.
- Always ask first if the individual requires help before offering assistance.
- Introduce each person by name and indicate where he or she is in the room relative to the person with vision loss.
- When facilitating a group, state the name of the person to whom you are speaking, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end
 - "Sarah, could you please outline your ideas..." "Thanks, Sarah. That answers my question."

- Provide materials for the meeting in advance.
 - List of attendees, notes, and/or instructions.
- Caption videos used in the presentation.
 - This includes spoken words or audio cues.
- Avoid relying on non-verbal communication.
 - Participants with vision loss will probably not notice non-verbal communication.

This resource was developed by CNIB Foundation of BC, a service provider within the Community of Accessible Employers.

Have more questions about supporting your employee with vision loss? Looking to learn more about common accommodations and adaptive technologies? They're happy to offer support to employers.