



**ORHMA**

ONTARIO RESTAURANT  
HOTEL & MOTEL ASSOCIATION

# Hospitality Best Practices



Hospitality's Service Culture  
Embraces Accessibility



## Assess Your Accessibility

**It's always difficult to know what path to take unless you know where your destination is. Assess your current accessibility status, determine where the gaps are, develop an action plan to meet your objectives, and seek out the necessary information to complete your plan.**

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*“When I came to Toronto to open my restaurant I discovered there were many different organizations and departments I needed to deal with before I opened. Make sure you know what you want to achieve, including your accessibility needs, that way you will know what information you need to meet your objectives. If we can put a man on the moon, we can do this.”*

**Moe Almaneddine: Owner Manager, O.NOIR Restaurant (Toronto)**

*“We are developing a written policy in each department so new and existing staff know what to do when we have guests that have special needs such as using a wheelchair, or specific dietary needs. It is important to assess where our strengths and gaps are, and what we need to change to make things better and more accessible. Self assessment is key.”*

**Heinz Lipp: General Manager, Cambridge Hotel & Conference Centre**

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## 2 Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Often there are many organizations that can assist you to achieve your accessibility goals, or who have already embarked on a successful accessibility plan. Seek out colleagues' opinions and resources; listen to your customers, and use associations and networks to gather ideas on developing and improving your accessible customer service plan.

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*"It was great to have guidance and assistance from the Government of Ontario with respect to accessibility guidelines. We used the resources the government provided to initiate accessible customer service training with staff, we used it to cover topics, and we did not try to reinvent the wheel."*

**Sharon Dayal: Director of Event Coordination, Metro Toronto Convention Centre**

*"When we reprinted the menus we doubled the size of the font. We noticed customers were bringing out a magnifying glass, so we increased the size of the font. We listen to our patrons and respond to their needs. Most of our customers are older and we have gotten very positive feedback as result."*

**Hans Sturzenbecher Owner/Operator: Macy's Diner, Oakville**

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## **Buddy Up – Partner With A Disability Organization**

Many disability organizations across Ontario want to align with business to provide education and awareness about people living with disabilities. Often times this information is of no cost and the benefits to enhancing customer service and increasing business development are priceless.

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*“We have several disability organizations in our neighborhood. Sometimes we will have a customer with low vision, or a person who is deaf and may request special assistance. We have a contact list of disability organizations at the front desk. Employees know they can call these agencies with questions, or to get advice on how to provide extra support to customers with special needs if it is required.”*

**Hazel Tan: Director of Human Resources, Westin Prince Hotel Toronto**

*“We continually revise policies using feedback from our guests, including individuals with disabilities. For example, we have worked with Autism Ontario to revise policies to respond to the needs of guests with Autism and as a result have received repeat visitors and very positive feedback from our patrons.”*

**Dineen Beaven: Manager of Public Relations and Special Events, Canada’s Wonderland**

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## Let Your Staff Work for YOU

One in five Canadians is living with a disability. This statistic is expected to rise with an aging population. Chances are, one of your staff already has a family member or friend living with a disability, or is living with a disability themselves. Take advantage of this knowledge by asking staff to mentor you and others by sharing their ideas and recommendations to help improve accessible customer service in your establishment.

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*“We have a bunch of staff that have disabilities themselves; we listen to their feedback. When we serve individuals or larger groups with special needs we teach our servers that they have to be patient; we have a lot of customers with mental health issues so servers need to be understanding. We also encourage staff to look to their peers for assistance.”*

**Tobin King: General Manager/Operating Owner, Boston Pizza, Hamilton West**

*“To better serve guests with hearing loss we teamed up with the Canadian Hearing Society. We now have a device and it shakes the bed to wake people up. We also have a staff member that learned ASL (American Sign Language), and we keep a list of languages staff speak so they can help a guest.”*

**Sylvia Biffis: Director of Convention Sales, Nottawasaga Inn Resort, Alliston**

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## **Staff Training At All Levels and With All Departments Is Key**

**Customer Service training in the hospitality industry is always essential; including accessible customer service training. Having staff discuss and role play potential interactions with customers with disabilities can decrease anxiety levels and increase confidence. Involving management and staff at all levels can enhance these benefits.**

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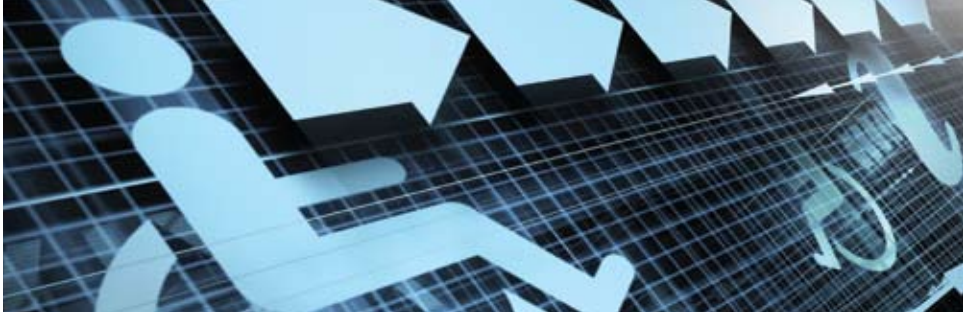
*“Using role playing during staff training has become a priority for us and a great education tool. Going through what a situation might look like with staff; not just classroom based. Working in small groups, staff takes turns as a guest and an associate. They complete several scenarios about a variety of situations; some having to do with guests with special needs. We work through these scenarios, not telling staff the answers, getting them to work together to develop solutions and provide support for the team. This really empowers the staff.”*

**Terry Falk: Director of Human Resources, The Sheraton Centre Toronto**

*“We found that we were limiting our customer service training to guest services and bell staff. We have now branched out to maintenance, housekeeping, laundry etc to broaden the reach. We now offer more extensive training at all levels. We discuss how to approach people, how to deal with situations. We have monthly department meetings and each department takes a turn providing a training topic. Staff will bring up an example of a situation, how it was beneficial, how did the guest react, how to deal with difficult situations and what works well. This includes accessibility and guests with special needs.”*

**Peter Wilson: General Manager Holiday Inn & Suites, Ottawa Downtown**

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## When it Comes to Accessibility Take Baby Steps

Accessibility planning may seem overwhelming at first. Breaking the preparation down into small, manageable tasks makes implementation less complicated.

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*“Some people look at the AODA changes like it is a mountain to climb. It does not have to be confusing; it can be put in terms where employees can understand it. We have 10 hotels in Ontario and we are tackling this project as a region. With this collaborative approach we included Directors, Department Managers and Employees from across the region to help design a training program which we are going to be rolling out during the next few months. We are using examples, to not make it overwhelming for the employee.”*

**Allison Hedges: Director, People Resources Delta Kitchener-Waterloo and Delta Guelph Hotel & Conference Centre**

*“A committee has been developed at the CN Tower to review and implement the new AODA accessibility standards. As a public facility, we work proactively to make sure we are sensitive to the special needs of all our visitors and employees through training, policies and procedures and facility upgrades. All new employees receive training including accessibility training. We work proactively to keep improving policies and it has always been that way. We recognize that mothers with strollers have similar challenges, the same as someone might in a wheelchair. By being sensitive to all our customers’ special needs, we can make the customer experience more comfortable for everyone.”*

**Neil Jones: Manager of Operations, CN Tower, Toronto**

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## Use Your Vendors

**Vendors who supply accessibility products for your establishment can be an excellent resource to keep up to date on what is new and useful when it comes to upgrading accessible resources for guests.**

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*“We have found our vendors are great resources in keeping up to date on the most technological advances for accessibility. We have a good relationship with our suppliers. They often give us options and advice when we are trying to make a decision regarding accessible upgrades. For example, many people who have low vision are not blind; they can see contrasting colours and images. We are working with our suppliers to contrast our towels at the hotel to make things easier for people to see.”*

**Rene Gurtner: General Manager, Valhalla Inn, Thunder Bay**

*“Use your vendors, they are there to sell but also have up to date information and advice on accessible resources that you might want to use to upgrade your property.”*

**Peter Wilson: General Manager, Holiday Inn & Suites, Ottawa Downtown**

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## Empathize with Your Customers

Putting yourself in the position of a customer is always helpful; particularly in the case of a customer who has a disability. For example, restricted mobility or trying to go about daily living while your vision or hearing is limited can be a life changing experience. Placing yourself in the customer's shoes can alter your perspective tremendously.

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*"We teach staff to view a situation from the perspective of the customer, including patrons with visible and non visible disabilities. For example, speak directly to the person in the wheelchair, not the support person or companion and lower yourself to the level of the wheelchair, whenever possible. We have training sessions involving many levels of staff, where we use real life examples and debrief about situations. We have some older patrons, some who have had strokes or have difficulty with their sight or hearing, so we discuss alternative forms of communication for them. Our staff is also taught not to be afraid to ask "How may I best help you?"*

**Pamela Berger: Director of Guest Services, Woodbine Entertainment Group**

*"A lot of it comes down to common sense. You want to do whatever it takes to make the customer comfortable in your establishment, just like you would anyone with or without a disability."*

**Mike Ziola: Partner, Biagios Italian Kitchen, Ottawa**

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## Treat Others As You Would Want To be Treated

When in doubt realize that everyone, regardless of their abilities, wants to be treated well.

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*“Trying to create a pleasant memory is what we should all strive for. Sometimes it is supplying a clean room, and a warm meal. We teach staff to pay attention to customer needs; if they have a pet, if they are travelling with kids, cultural considerations. The same thing applies for people with disabilities. If you pay attention to this everything should work out.”*

**Reynaud Payette: General Manager, Intercontinental Hotel Toronto Centre**

*“My idea is that I treat my guests the way I would like to be treated; customer service is one of the key elements of any successful business. Making everyone feel important, valued, and special is paramount.”*

**Hellen Leon: Owner/Operator, Celestin Restaurant, Toronto**

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## 10 Market Your Accessibility

Accessible customer service has many benefits; including attracting a broader more diverse customer base. Marketing your organization's accessibility can help bring new and repeat customers to your establishment.

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*"We are a family owned business and accessibility is a priority. Paying attention to accessibility has increased our business. Anytime we have corporate groups they often require user -friendliness, including accessible customer service. They are very impressed with our attention to detail and return often. This is good for business."*

**Sylvia Biffis: Director of Convention Sales, Nottawasaga Inn & Resort, Alliston**

*"Approximately 16% of the population in Canada is living with a disability, that means 1.85 million Ontarians alone. Furthermore, in 2005 the Bank of Canada published a study that indicated Canadians living with a disability had a combined disposable income of \$30 billion. As a business owner I want to be able to take advantage of that potential sales revenue by ensuring disabled people can access my restaurants, be served with dignity, and most importantly enjoy the experience enough to return."*

**Mark Wafer: Tim Horton's Franchise Owner, Scarborough**

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The Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association (ORHMA) is the largest provincial hospitality Association in Canada representing more than 11,000 establishments across the province. ORHMA represents the hospitality interests at both the Provincial and Municipal levels of government. Through specialized in-house government relations, our provincial Board of Directors and our local Regional Boards, the Association provides pertinent timely information and education on industry-specific issues to government and membership across the province. The Association's dedicated and professional Membership Team also provides ORHMA members with meaningful cost-saving programs and industry pertinent educational services.

**Visit us at [www.ohma.com](http://www.ohma.com) and visit often!**

**In Partnership with:**



**We would like to thank each of the following ORHMA members who took the time to share their best practice stories and for being ambassadors for the hospitality industry.**

