



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH ATTENDEES WHO HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

by Caryn Birch, [Epic Opportunities](#)

Some of the attendees coming to the Ability Axis Employment Expo will be job seekers who have intellectual disabilities. Some of them will be able to communicate directly with you with no problem. Others may have some difficulty expressing themselves clearly. Still others may be accompanied by a support person or job coach who will help to ensure that your interaction goes smoothly. Here are some tips that may come in handy:



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If you are in conversation with an attendee with an intellectual disability who is without a support person or/ job coach:

1. Communicate with the attendee as you would communicate with any attendee.
2. Be aware of communication tools that the attendee may use (e.g. Pictures, communication books, Sign Language, or gestures). Often times attendees who use communication tools will have tools specific to an event (like a career fair). Ask the attendee if they can teach you how to use their communication tool to better facilitate the conversation.
3. Don't be afraid to ask the attendee for clarification, or to repeat what they said. People are





coming to ask questions and to be engaged with exhibitors. They want to communicate effectively.

4. If you are considering attendees for employment with your company, remember to focus on a person's abilities instead of their disabilities. For example: If a person does not communicate verbally, consider what opportunities could be available for that person in your workplace where they could empower and teach your team, and where they could be successful at your office.
5. If a person comes in with a resume, or portfolio, give it a quick read and engage in a conversation about their experience or interests.

If you are in conversation with an attendee with an intellectual disability who is with a support person or/ job coach:

1. Address the attendee before you address the support person.
2. If the support person is assisting with communication, continue to ask questions to the attendee, even if responses are coming from the support person.
3. If you need to ask the support person for clarification on something (i.e. a response or word clarification), first ask the attendee if you can request help from their support person – just in case the attendee has another communication tool or method that can help them to communicate directly with you.