

# Hello. Is Anybody Here?

A Facilitator's Guide



*This guide is for use with Training and Discussion Videos  
developed by the Iowa Department for the Blind  
with the Support of the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Preparation .....	3
Requirements.....	3
Facilitator .....	4
Process Opening .....	4
Wrap-up .....	4
Leading the Discussion.....	5
Welcome and Opening .....	5
Example Script.....	5
The Invisible Man .....	6
The Red Carpet.....	7
The Disabled Computer .....	8
The Cold Call Job Application .....	9
Wrapping Up .....	10
Final Credits .....	10
The Actors .....	11

*Cover picture: Mike Harvey, Iowa Department for the Blind, from "The Invisible Man."*



## Introduction

“Hello. Is Anybody Here?” is a collection of four vignettes developed by the staff from the Iowa Department for the Blind to engage service professionals in discussions that will support them in improving customer service to individuals who are blind.

The objectives of the discussion and videos are as follows:

1. **Recognize the customer service experiences** in American Job Centers for blind customers;
2. **Promote service design** that achieves full inclusion;
3. **Increase understanding** of what “program access” really means;
4. **Build the comfort level** of American Job Center staff in working with blind consumers; and
5. **Increase staff understanding** of some of the particular challenges faced by blind job seekers.

With the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB), as one of Iowa’s Core Partner agencies, developed this approach to increase the comfort and ability of their colleagues in fully including individuals who are blind in the career services and career pathway models of American Job Centers. In practice, each of the four vignettes have been presented “live” in staff training sessions with a Department for the Blind staff member facilitator.

With the use of this Facilitator’s Guide, and the videos found at [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRSw4FK3pwcD-tt4v7zr1Xrnns2\\_PxzQ1](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRSw4FK3pwcD-tt4v7zr1Xrnns2_PxzQ1) (with descriptive narration) or <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRSw4FK3pwcDHw4o-wY4OZEHsYOKE6Qoq> (without descriptive narration), other disability subject matter experts can host the same discussions at their offices.

## Preparation

This presentation is designed to be a part of staff training/orientation and can be included in a customer service series that includes other specific topics or can stand on its own. The facilitator's role is best performed by an individual with a strong background in disability and, in particular, has a clear understanding of the blind experience in just about all phases of life. On its own, reserve about 90 minutes for this particular session. The video vignettes are fairly short; however, they are designed to bring out discussion among participants, encouraging them to share their own experiences and efforts with their teams to improve the experiences for individuals who are blind who come into their offices.

## Requirements

**Video projector, screen, the ability to project a web-based video.**



**Classroom seating** is suggested; however, presenters are encouraged to adjust, based upon the nature of the audience and whether this session is included as a part of a longer agenda.

**A fun and creative environment:** These videos are intended to be lighthearted and humorous. First and foremost, the ability to relax and to recognize how we all stumble over our own human nature is required to be effective in joining with our colleagues to improve the customer service experience for everyone.

### Facilitator

**The facilitator's role is crucial for the inclusion of the participants in the discussion** so they will better understand the experiences of individuals featured in the videos and the lessons to be learned in providing useful customer service to individuals who are blind. Because this focus is human-centered, the facilitator must not only have a strong background in the customer service-related experiences of individuals who are blind, but he/she must also have a sense of humor and common sense to establish the solutions that will work in every office.

**The facilitator should become familiar with the vignettes.** View the vignettes and practice playing and pausing for questions and discussion in order to prepare for the actual presentation.

### Process

#### Opening

The facilitator is the key to making this a fun and useful session for the participants.

For each vignette, the facilitator should do the following:

- a) Show the video, and then stop it when the video ends.
- b) Ask a few basic questions (included in this guide). These questions are designed to generate discussion specific to the video.
- c) Turn on the video again to get the actors' reactions and thoughts about the vignette.

#### Wrap-up

In closing, the facilitator can ask the group for a summation of ideas and thoughts generated from the discussion. While some may be personal reflections, there will likely be other thoughts and ideas that will indicate possible activities for agencies to improve customer service in the future. The facilitator should note these for the Center leadership to pass along at the close of the meeting. In keeping the event light and humorous, it is important to leave the session with the reminder of our shared commitment to customer service in everything that we do: *"This is why all of us are involved in this work. All of us are uncertain in new situations, and we all have things that make us laugh when we look back. We need help from our colleagues and partners to be able to grow in these situations, and that is why these conversations are important."*

## Leading the Discussion

### Welcome and Opening

Facilitators should use their understanding of the office culture and audience to frame and shape the approach to each phase of the meeting. The script (included below) is provided as an example for and support to the facilitator in his/her own approach, and can be helpful in capturing the opportunities presented. The questions may help provide direction.

**Note: The facilitator is not required to follow the script.**

If the discussion progresses naturally and direction is not needed, it is acceptable to stray from the suggested questions. Have fun with the group and allow discussions to occur naturally.

### Example Script

*"Hello! It is great to see all of you here in beautiful (town or city). I'm so happy to be here to support your work in providing the best customer service."*

(Make an introduction and share a personal experience – ideally, a humorous experience – of a customer service mistake. Ask each person in the room to share his/her name, agency and role and, if not more than 20 attendees, share a humorous personal customer service-related experience.)

*"If you haven't already gathered from our introductions, we're here today to discuss customer service – and how we can learn from our mistakes and become better at it over time. Above all, it is a natural part of the human experience to make mistakes, and it is also the better part of human nature that we work to improve as we go so that we can support the dignity of our customers, our colleagues and ourselves."*

*Today, we are going to focus on customer service – those services that we offer to all of our customers and visitors – as it relates to job seekers who are blind. There are no wrong questions or answers, and we encourage you to contribute to the discussion."*

*We are here to learn about ways we can improve our own customer service delivery to ensure that job seekers feel comfortable and welcomed."*

## The Invisible Man

*"This first short video is one that we like to call 'The Invisible Man.'"*

Play the first video. Stop after it is finished. Lead participant discussion on the following questions, allowing time for reflection and discussion.

- *What happened in this scene?*
- *What do you think the people working in this office were thinking? Why did they react the way they did to the person coming in with the cane?*
- *What do you think the blind person was thinking in this situation?*
- *Have you had an experience like this before?*
- *What could the people in this office do in the future to improve the experience of blind people coming into the office?*

*"OK, let's see what our actors have to say."*

Play the recording of the actor discussion, the next stop on the playlist.

- *What are your reactions to the actors?*
- *Are there any additional changes you might make now that you have heard from the actors?*
- **Key Point:** *Avoiding a customer or colleague does not create a helpful environment. Respond to the individual. He/she will not only appreciate the response but will also be able to move about the day to accomplish his/her desired task(s).*



*Mike Harvey, Iowa Department for the Blind, shown here in "The Invisible Man."*



*Emily Wharton and Mike Baker in "The Red Carpet."*

## The Red Carpet

*"Well, we just saw an example where an individual was avoided and ignored upon entering an office. Do you think it's possible to get too much attention? Let's see."*

Play the second vignette, which is the next stop on the playlist. When the vignette is completed, lead group discussion on the following questions.

- *What happened in this scene?*
- *Do you have an idea what the woman who greeted the visitor may have been thinking?*
- *How do you think the blind person felt in this situation?*
- *Have you observed or been a participant in a situation like this before? Please explain.*
- *In light of this example, how would you suggest supporting co-workers in your office in supporting a comfortable customer experience?*

*"Now let's see what our actors have to say about this."*

Play the actor segment related to "The Red Carpet" vignette.

- *What are your reactions to the actors?*
- *Are there any additional changes you might make now that you have heard from the actors?*
- **Key Point:** *Making assumptions about any customer walking through our doors can start the relationship off poorly. Asking questions of the customer so they can share what they need and how they would like to be supported will assist you in not only building a more welcoming environment but also in creating a working relationship with the customer.*

## The Disabled Computer

*"All offices face the challenge of full programmatic access with services for all customers. Let's take a look at one customer's experience."*

Play "The Disabled Computer" vignette. When it is finished, lead discussion using the following questions:

- *Explain what happened in this situation.*
- *From a customer service standpoint, what do you think is the greatest concern regarding what we saw?*
- *Have you had similar experiences in your offices? How are you addressing programmatic accessibility in your office now?*
- *What would be a good strategy in the future to make the services accessible?*

*"Let's see what thoughts our actors have for this situation."*

Play the actor discussion of the "Disabled Computer" scenario.

- *What are your reactions to the actors?*
- *Are there any additional changes you might make now that you have heard from the actors?*
- **Key Point:** *Know what accessible features you have available in your location and who is responsible for ensuring they are maintained. Having accessible materials, programs and software is not helpful if they are not updated or maintained.*



*Nami Wallace, Mike Harvey and Al Bickell in "The Disabled Computer."*



## The Cold Call Job Application

*"Our final vignette features a little different twist. In this situation, an individual has come into an office to apply for a posted job opening -- and this office could be any business or service agency in your community."*



*Al Bickell, Mike Harvey in "The Cold Call Job Application."*

Play "The Cold Call Job Application" vignette. When it is finished, lead the discussion with the following questions:

- *What is your reaction to what you saw in this example?*
- *How would you describe the applicant's reaction to the response he received?*
- *If you were providing business services to this employer, and he requested your suggestions with regard to interviewing and employing people who are blind, how would you support this employer?*
- *If you were providing support to the job seeker in this scenario, how would you advise him?*
- *Are there things that we can do in the future to support employers and blind job seekers in making stronger employment connections for qualified workers who are blind?*

*"What do you think our actors have to say about this one?"*

Play the actor discussion on this, the final video on this playlist.

- *What are your reactions to the actors?*
- *Are there any additional changes you might make in working with employers now that you have heard from the actors?*
- **Key Point:** *When working with employers, if you are able, make sure to review the job descriptions and understand the essential functions of the position. Often, what is written as a requirement is not necessary to meet the essential functions of a position.*

## Wrapping Up

*“The ability to go to work is an important part of the human experience. Our role as partners in the American Job Centers is to ensure all of our customers have our support in achieving in-demand skills and knowledge so that they can prepare for and obtain meaningful employment. We hope that through this training, you were able to explore your own strengths and challenges in serving customers who are blind, and that you are able to take away some ideas on how you can better assist customers to reach their employment goals. Thank you for taking the time to attend this training today. Please contact IDB if you have any questions or concerns in regard to serving individuals who are blind.”*

## Final Credits

**The Iowa Department for the Blind:** The Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) is the state agency providing Vocational Rehabilitation services for individuals who are blind or have vision loss in the State of Iowa. IDB has a complete program of Vocational Rehabilitation services for eligible individuals, including adjustment to blindness, preparation for work, reader services, specific occupational training and placement, and on-the-job follow-up. IDB operates the Orientation Center for the Blind (OCT) and administers the Independent Living Program and the Business Enterprises Program, a food service vendor training program. IDB also houses the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, which provides books and other materials in alternative formats to Iowa residents who are unable to read standard print materials.

**WINTAC:** The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) was established by the Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) to provide support to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies in their implementation of WIOA. The five main areas of focus for WINTAC are 1) Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS); 2) Section 511 Requirements; 3) Competitive Integrated Employment; 4) Integration into the Workforce Development System; and 5) Common Performance Measures.

**Central Media Designs:** Central Media Designs is a multimedia company that specializes in video production, and is an approved vendor with the US Government. Zach Dannen, co-owner, has captured collaborative customer service initiatives in American Job Centers on video in previous work for WINTAC and National Disability Institute.



## The Actors

**Alan Bickell:** Al Bickell is the Director for the Business Enterprise Program as well as the Orientation and Adjustment Center at the Iowa Department for the Blind. He graduated from Drake University with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. He has worked mainly in the private sector as a marketing consultant and owned a popular bar/restaurant in West Des Moines for a number of years. He returned to the blindness field in 2015 to teach in the Orientation Center and took over as Director in February of 2017. In his free time, he plays guitar and enjoys playing with his dogs and spending time with family.

**Michael Harvey:** Mike Harvey is an instructor in the Orientation Center at the Iowa Department for the Blind. He holds a master's degree from Louisiana Tech University in Education with a concentration in teaching blind students, and holds the National Orientation and Mobility Certification through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. In addition to being bilingual and working as a translator for a medical clinic serving Spanish-speaking individuals, he has worked in radio production and has been a high school wrestling coach. Mike has a passion for ensuring that all of his students achieve the skills they need to be successful, both in employment and in life, and not to allow their blindness to hold them back.

**Nami Wallace:** Nami is an instructor in the Orientation Center at the Iowa Department for the Blind, providing instruction in the areas of Braille, Home Economics, Computers and Technology, and Orientation and Mobility. She received her certification from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board in Unified English Braille and Orientation and Mobility, and holds a graduate degree in Psychology and a graduate certificate in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind. Nami strongly believes that the real problems of blindness do not lie in the physical loss of eyesight but rather in the misconceptions about blindness held so widely by the general public and by many blind persons themselves. Nami pushes her students to challenge these misconceptions in their journey toward employment and independence.

**Emily Wharton:** Emily Wharton has served as Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind since 2016. She earned a BA in English and a Certificate of Public Management from Drake University and an MFA in Writing from Hamline University. She has worked in blindness rehabilitation since 1998. She was the recipient of the National Braille Press's Touch of Genius Award and the Dr. Jacob Bolotin Award from the National Federation of the Blind for her Code Master adult braille learning system in 2013. She is a passionate advocate for braille literacy for blind children and adults, website and electronic systems accessibility, and the removal of barriers to employment for blind people. In her free time, she enjoys poetry, woodcarving, tabletop gaming, cooking and taking walks with her wife and their two spoiled dogs.