

Art Beyond Sight

Bringing Art & Culture to All

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:

People who are Blind or Have Low Vision

STATISTICS

- **Over 20 million** Americans ages 18 and up (about 10%) report “trouble seeing,” vision loss, or blindness.
- By 2030, rates of vision loss in America are **expected to double**.
- Only a small percentage of this group use white canes or service animals – so you can’t always tell by looking.
- Top causes of vision loss in US are cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy.

TERMINOLOGY

- Blindness, low vision, vision loss, visual impairment, partial sight... preferences vary.
- Legal blindness - acuity of 20/200 or less when corrected or field of vision 20° or less (“tunnel vision”).
- Functional vision - the vision a person uses to perform daily tasks.
- Congenital (from birth) v/ adventitious (occurring after age 2) blindness.
- What matters most to you? How a person uses their vision!

SOME MYTHS ABOUT BLINDNESS

- **Myth: Blind people see only darkness.** In fact, only approximately 18 percent of people who are visually impaired are classified as being totally blind and the majority of them can still differentiate between light and dark.
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- **Myth: Blind people have special gifts: a "sixth sense."** People who are blind or visually impaired are not endowed with a sharper sense of touch, hearing, taste, or smell. To compensate for their loss of vision, many learn to listen more carefully, or remember without taking notes, or increase directional acumen to compensate for their lack of functional vision.

American Foundation for the Blind - www.afb.org/section.asp?SectionID=15

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm

National Federation of the Blind - nfb.org/blindness-statistics

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_vision.cf

MYTHS - AFB - <http://www.afb.org/info/for-employers/visual-impairment-and-your-current-workforce/learning-about-blindness/345>

Some material adapted to this format by Art Beyond Sight, with special thanks to the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference

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- **Myth: Most blind people are proficient in Braille and own a dog guide.** Only a small percentage of blind or visually impaired readers are completely fluent in braille; many know enough braille for functional use, such as reading notes and labels. Most people who learn braille as adults do not develop the skill to read rapidly.

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Only a small percentage of blind or visually impaired people use a dog guide. They are invaluable tools and companions for those who do use them. Dog guides are trained to lead the person safely through crowds, across streets, and around obstructions. When the dog guide is harnessed, it's on duty. Once out of harness, the dog relaxes because it's off duty.

- **Myth: People who are blind or severely visually impaired can't work or hold a job.** With the proper training and accommodations, people who are blind or visually impaired can work competitively.
- **Myth: People who are blind or visually impaired cannot access print or handwritten materials.** The advent of computers and technology has made nearly any kind of print accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. Computer software can translate print into speech, magnify screen images, and enlarge text to a readable size. Occasionally human readers take care of the rest.

GETTING AROUND

- White cane
- Service animal
- Sighted guide
- Para-transit and public transportation

SIGHTED GUIDE TECHNIQUE

- **Ask** if someone needs assistance
- **Offer** your arm (do not take theirs)
- **Relax**
- **Communicate** and allow yourself to be coached
- Think **safe**, not necessarily elegant

GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR PATRONS WITH VISION LOSS

- Think and speak putting the **person first**, not their diagnosis or disability.
- Use your normal speaking voice and **make eye contact**.
- Speak **directly to the visitor**, not to their caregiver, friend, family member, dog...
- **Do not ask someone about their disability.** Instead, ask if and how you can assist them - and **respect their answer**.
- Whenever you encounter a person who is blind, **introduce yourself** – even if you already know each other. Always announce when you are entering or leaving a person's space.
- It's fine to use **“visual” phrases** like “See you later.”
- **Be clear and precise** when giving directions. Talking with your hands is fine, as long as you narrate.
- **Ask permission before touching** a person or their belongings.
- Be **patient, respectful, and flexible** – and **enjoy** the interaction.

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