Building a Stronger Accessible Transit Workforce

Mary Liz McNamara
Asset Based Consulting

Workforce Development is more than training

- **Listen:** Learn from employees' experiences and challenges.
- **Discuss:** Create opportunities to talk openly about disability and accessibility.
- **Practice:** Work through situations employees encounter every day.
- **Support:** Provide clear procedures, useful tools, and ongoing coaching.
- **Improve**: Use what we learn to strengthen both employee performance and agency operations.

Start with employees’ actual experiences

- **Ask:** What's working? What's difficult?
- **Listen:** What do employees already know? What experiences do they bring?
- **Identify:** What's getting in the way of doing their jobs well?
- **Respond:** What training, tools, support, or changes would help?

Building an inclusive workplace starts with conversation

- Use **small-group discussions** where employees can speak openly.
- Invite people to **share experiences** with disability from their work and personal lives.
- Recognize that **employees bring different experiences**, perspectives, and assumptions.
- Create an environment where **people can ask questions** without fear of embarrassment.
- **Connect what people share to everyday interactions** with riders and coworkers.

Building practical communication skills

- **Person-centered communication**: Ask, listen, and avoid assumptions.
- **Plain language:** Make information clear, specific, and understandable.
- **Active listening:** Confirm important information and next steps.
- **De-escalation:** Acknowledge frustration and respond without defensiveness.
- **Emotional labor:** Recognize the pressures of customer-facing work.
- **Practice:** Apply these skills through realistic scenarios and feedback.

Improving Communication Across Roles

- **Understand each other's responsibilities.** Know who handles what and when to involve someone else.
- **Share accurate information.** Communicate clearly, briefly, and consistently across departments.
- **Confirm understanding.** Use repeat-back and clear handoffs to reduce misunderstandings.
- **Clarify next steps.** Make sure someone is responsible for following up.
- **Solve problems together.** Use communication breakdowns as opportunities to improve procedures, not simply assign blame.

Give employees tools they can use

- **Communication templates:** Help employees respond clearly and respectfully in common situations.
- **Checklists and job aids:** Make important steps easier to remember and follow.
- **Clear escalation procedures:** Help employees know when to involve a supervisor or another department.
- **Documentation tools:** Support consistent reporting and follow-up.
- **Coaching and feedback:** Help supervisors reinforce skills and support employees.

Make the learning stick

- **Reinforce skills on the job.** Supervisors provide coaching, feedback, and opportunities to practice.
- **Keep conversations going.** Make disability and accessibility part of regular workplace discussions.
- **Ask for feedback.** Encourage staff to identify challenges, share ideas, and suggest improvements.
- **Review what is working.** Use observations, customer feedback, and service data to identify areas for improvement.
- **Adjust and improve.** Update training, tools, and procedures based on what employees and riders experience.