Someone tells you they're disabled. What now?

Most people get this wrong by saying too much, or by saying nothing. Four things, in order, for the first five minutes.

1 **Thank them.**
It took something to say it. "Thanks for telling me" is the whole first line. Skip "I'm so sorry" and "my cousin has that".

2 **Ask about the barrier and leave the diagnosis alone.**
"What would make this work better for you?" You don't need a label, a letter or a diagnosis to start.

3 **Agree who needs to know.**
Ask who they want told, and who they don't. Then keep to it. This is the bit people remember you by.

4 **Say what happens next, and when.**
Even if the answer is "I'll find out by Friday". A date beats a promise.

Then, the same week

- Mention Access to Work. It can pay for equipment, support and travel, and the person applies. A manager who mentions it early makes the difference.
- Write down what was agreed, in one line, the same day. The decision record on resource three.
- Start the easy things now. Occupational health is a way to get advice, not a gate.

Things to avoid

- Asking for evidence before you'll discuss anything.
- Telling anyone who doesn't need to know.
- Treating this as the first time it has ever happened.
- Going quiet for a fortnight while you work out what you're allowed to do.

> **The rule of thumb.** You can ask what someone needs in order to do the job. What you can't do is make a diagnosis the price of getting it.

From The Small Print, a free monthly session for managers and HR on what to do when disability comes up at work. Hugh O'Keeffe, Disability, Access and Inclusion Consultant. hughokeeffe.com. I'm not a lawyer and this isn't legal advice. Use it as a way in, and get advice on anything already in dispute.