

ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE FOR DEAF WORKERS IN SOFTWARE COMPANIES



Introduction

More and more companies dedicated to software production are committed to inclusiveness, hiring people with disabilities and other minorities. Companies such as Wizline, Accenture, Spam, among others, have hired Deaf Engineers to collaborate with them. This is certainly a very positive aspect on the part of these companies that brings many benefits to them and of course to Deaf employees. However, companies are not always prepared to work with Deaf people, which can cause problems in the development of the projects in which they participate. This guide made by a Deaf Software Engineer, Alfonso Balderas, contains suggestions that have enabled him to work properly in the renowned company Wizline.

Challenges of Deaf People

When a Deaf person enters to work in a Software company, he/she faces different situations that can affect his/her performance in the company if they are not properly taken care of, these are the following:

1.- Failure to inform team members that a Deaf person will be integrated. This can cause a great deal of confusion in the hearing team members, who may even experience fear of not knowing how to communicate with the Deaf person, since in many cases it is the first time they have interacted with someone Deaf.

2.- Communication in meetings. Platforms such as Zoom that did not have a subtitling system are usually used for meetings. This is very difficult for the deaf person because they do not know what is being said in the meeting.

3.- Lack of sign language interpreter. When there is no interpreter to act as a bridge of communication, it is very difficult for the deaf person to clearly understand what is explained in meetings that are important, where new projects are presented or weight assignments. By not clearly understanding what is expressed, it is difficult for the person to give their ideas or proposals or even express any doubts they may have about the project.

4.- Written Spanish. The natural language of deaf people in Mexico is Mexican Sign Language (LSM), Spanish is a second language just as English is for Spanish-speaking listeners. Due to the educational gap in our country, most deaf people did not have access to a bilingual education, so their knowledge of Spanish is basic. LSM is completely different in grammar and syntax from Spanish, which means that sometimes deaf people do not clearly understand what is written to them. Therefore, written communication in Spanish is not always the best option, added to the fact that sometimes a very formal or very colloquial Spanish is used, which can make the task of understanding difficult. It is worth clarifying that the level of Spanish of deaf people is not related to their knowledge in Software development, since many of them are very skilled in their work and know programming languages and codes well regardless of their background. Spanish is basic.

Accessibility Adjustments

Work team

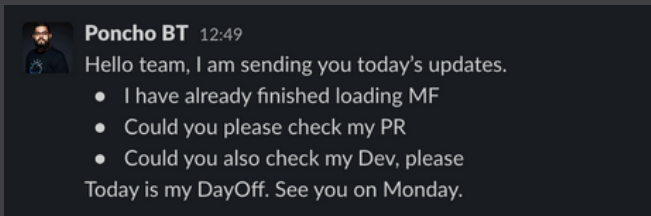
It is important that the team with which the deaf person works is informed in advance about the condition of the new member. A small awareness workshop can be held, where they learn how to work with deaf people and aspects of their culture, such as their level of Spanish, and how they can communicate with them. The same deaf person can give this workshop with the help of an interpreter, as well as a short sign language course, one day of the week for about 15 or 30 minutes that allows team members to learn the basic signs to communicate with the deaf person.

Communication at meetings

In meetings, it is possible to use a platform such as Google Meet, which has automatic subtitles and not only indicates what people are saying, but also allows the person who is speaking to be identified. Here I attach the platform link: <https://meet.google.com/>

Daily

In the case of the Daily, or daily meetings, it is suggested that the deaf person send their comments, tasks and progress before the meeting through some internal messaging channel of the company so that the team members can read it during the meeting. For example, the following image shows how the developer sends his progress and requests through Slack, the communication channel of the company where he works.



Sign Language Interpreter

Planning, Review, Retrospective, Refinement or any other meeting where sensitive or important information is to be discussed, it is best to have a sign language interpreter to act as a communication bridge so that the deaf person can clearly understand the project and in turn can express their proposals and solutions to the project and that others can understand without problems.



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