

Navigating the Workforce: Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world, accounting for 1 in 5 people. Nonetheless, there continues to be a general misunderstanding of a person's disability and its impact on the workforce. A disability, whether physical, mental, etc. should not limit a person's job aspirations. However, an important part of a successful career and satisfaction in your work is finding a good fit in both your field of choice and in your specific employer. This includes finding a workplace with high standards of accessibility, accommodations and an overall accepting and diverse work environment.

Common Job-Seeking Challenges for Individuals With Disabilities

- Discrimination by employer during the hiring process
- Limited understanding of job-seeker rights
- Lack of disability resources at student's college/university
- Lack of career planning resources at student's college/university
- Lack of access to career counseling
- Inability to meet specific skills required for a job
- Limited local jobs that match their skill set
- Underdeveloped leadership skills
- Limited experience communicating with employers
- Fear of disclosing disability
- Limited professional experience

Preparing Well for the Workforce

The best way to prepare for life after college is to gain the necessary experience to develop your skillset! Choosing extra-curricular and work-based learning opportunities (whether paid or unpaid!) can help you explore interests and find what career path might be best for you. Marketing your *abilities* is key to finding a job that's a great fit, and these experiences can help to develop those skills and abilities that are essential, all while building your resume.

These experiences may include:

- Internships
- Academic & Professional Organizations
- Clubs
- Student Government
- Volunteerism & Service Learning
- Study Abroad
- Part-Time Jobs

Be sure to visit the Career Services Office for more information on possible work-based learning opportunities!

Job Searching

You can continue to utilize popular job boards and posting sites such as Monster & Indeed. You may find a great fit there! However, you can also explore a number of job posting sites that are specific designed to help individuals with disabilities find a job!

abilityJOBS: Employers and job seekers can connect on, an accessible platform for individuals with disabilities. They also provide tips for disclosing disabilities and learning interviewing techniques.

Disability Job Exchange: America's Job Exchange offers an alternative portal for job seekers with disabilities called Disability Job Exchange. They also have a team of advisors willing to provide resume and career advice.

disABLEDperson: Another resource is disABLEDperson. This site is operated by a 501(c)(3) charitable organization whose goal is to reduce the disproportionately high employment rate of people with disabilities.

Disclosing Your Disability

While the Americans with Disabilities Act has determined that job applicants have no obligation to disclose their disability (and prohibits employers from asking about it), it may be beneficial for you to do so.

If your disability could impact job performance or will require reasonable workplace accommodations, disclosing your disability would help your employer to understand your needs and abilities.

You must disclose your disabilities if you require accommodations to fulfill job duties, and employers are only obligated to provide accommodations if you adequately inform them about the related disability.

When To Disclose & to Whom

It's important to take into consideration your specific needs and the requirements of the job when determining when to disclose your disability to a potential employer. You may choose to do so with your application/cover letter, during the interview, after receiving a job offer, or during your course of employment. For example, if you will require accommodations in the interview (such as assistive technology, an assistance animal, or a sign language interpreter),

you may want to disclose prior to your interview or in your cover letter, in order to allow for the potential employer to prepare accordingly.

Regardless of the timing, be forthcoming and proactive about the disclosure if you are going to be in need of accommodations. Providing your own practical suggestions for job accommodations is a great way of showing your commitment and willingness to meet the requirements of the job. If accommodations are not necessary for the job, it may not be beneficial to disclose your disability at all.

Only disclose your disability on a need-to-know basis; this minimizes the potential for discrimination to play a factor in your employment. This will very likely include Human Resources but may also include your direct supervisor. In the event others around you will need to be directly involved with an accommodation, then they would also need to be notified.

What to Disclose

- General Information about your Disability
- How your disability affects your ability to perform key job tasks
- Types of Accommodations that have worked for you in the past
- Types of Accommodations you anticipate needing in the workplace

Keep in mind that the same disability can present differently for each individual. Helping your employer understand how you can do your job effectively is important. Don't simply provide your disability, provide additional context of your need and a list of potential accommodations. If no accommodations will be needed, disclosing your disability is likely not necessary.

If you have an apparent disability, it can be helpful to discuss how you will complete the essential skills required for the job. This can affirm the employer that you are well suited for the position.

Only provide details about your disability as it applies to your work performance and necessary accommodations.

The Interview

Confidence in your abilities and preparation are keys to success in any job interview. Proving that you have the skills, experience and qualification necessary to fulfill the requirements of the position is the goal of the interview. Having a disability can make this feel particularly challenging but remember- they contacted you for an interview! You should have an equal shot at success.

If you have a physical disability, determine and address any accessibility concerns at the location ahead of time. This can eliminate a significant source of stress on the day of your interview.

Remember that you are under no obligation according to the Americans with Disabilities Act to disclose your disability, though if you choose to, the interview is a common time. Addressing an apparent disability early will allow both you and the employer to focus on your qualifications during the interview.

If you plan to address your disability during the interview, whether visible or invisible, do so positively. If you are unsure about how to do so, it can be helpful to write a script and practice it with someone you trust. Be sure to talk about your *abilities* and how you plan to accomplish the essential duties of the job!

What Can/Can Not Be Asked

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, an employer cannot ask if you have a disability or how the disability affects you. However, they can ask if you can perform the essential job functions with or without accommodations. They can also ask you how you plan to do so or ask you to demonstrate.

Know Your Rights: Americans with Disabilities Act

When seeking work, it's essential to understand your rights under [the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA). Signed into law in 1990, the law makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate against applicants with disabilities. It also protects employees, requiring equal access to opportunity in workplaces and academic institutions. If you are qualified to perform the work and have a disability, the ADA protects your right to find work, with or without reasonable accommodation.

Your Rights

- Have information about your disability treated confidentially & with respect
- Choose to disclose at any time during the hiring process
- Receive reasonable accommodations for an interview
- Be considered for a position based on your skill and merit
- Have respectful questioning about your disability for the purpose of determining whether you need accommodations and if so, what kind.

Your Responsibilities

- Disclose your need for any work-related reasonable accommodations
- Bring your skills and merits to the table & communicate them effectively
- Be truthful, self-determined, and proactive-be your own advocate!

Resources

[U.S. Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#): outlines laws that prohibit workplace discrimination and defines disability discrimination and workplace accommodations.

[Job Accommodation Network](#): a comprehensive resource (for both employers and job seekers). They provide exceptional practical guides for requesting reasonable modifications under the ADA.

[Respect Ability](#): source for news, education and other resources regarding issues facing people with disabilities