

Job Seeking Strategies for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability you might find that searching for a job can be difficult. Often this is because many employers do not have a clear understanding of disabilities, and are not sure how someone who has one can contribute to his/her business. In actuality, there are many individuals with disabilities working very successfully in jobs across the country. Studies show that there are benefits to hiring disabled persons.

It is unlawful for employers to discriminate against individuals because of a disability. Be prepared with a resume that highlights your strengths and skills, *not* your disability. Your goal is to get an interview and show a potential employer all you have to offer his company. Here are some tips for students searching for jobs.

Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Be knowledgeable about your disability.** If your disability is covered by the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* and the *Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act (ADAA)*, find out how the law applies to you. The ADA requires that an employer make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals who have disabilities, unless doing so would cause “undue hardship” to the employer. You can learn more by visiting the ADA home page <http://adata.org/>.
- 2. Create a resume that showcases your skills, abilities, and experiences.**
Match your resume as closely as possible with the description of the job for which you are applying. Using key words from the description in your resume or cover letter will allow an employer to see how closely your skills match what is required for the position. Do not include your disability on your resume. Your objective is to get an interview, not give a potential employer reason to not hire you.
- 3. Apply for jobs that you are able to do.**
Make sure, after you read a job’s description, that you would be able to perform the duties with reasonable accommodations. If a job requires a lot of on-foot field work outside of the office, for example, and you have limited mobility, this would not be the job for you. Some smaller companies may not have buildings with elevator access, for example. Make sure you ask questions about this at your job interview.
- 4. Sharing Information about a visible disability.**
Sharing information about your disability with an employer depends on your individual circumstances. If your disability is visible, it might be best to mention it before you come for an interview. Perhaps the best time to disclose it is after the interview has been scheduled, and you telephone to confirm the details. For example, during the phone conversation, you could mention, “Because I use a wheel chair, could you suggest which entrance to your building would be most convenient?” Or if you will need to be contacted through an interpreter or you will need to be contacted by email or phone be sure and let the employer know of your needs.

5. Sharing Information about non-visible disability.

If you do not have a disability that is visible, it is up to you on whether or not to disclose it to an employer. If you require any kind of specific accommodation, it is probably best to tell them. But, in most cases, you should wait until after you've received an offer, if at all. If your disability is not visible, such as mental illness or epilepsy, you may need to mention it during an interview *only* if you will need special accommodations. If no accommodations are needed, you may not need to mention it at all, if it will not affect your job performance.

6. Be honest about your abilities.

An employer may be concerned that you will not be able to perform the job. Be prepared to share your skills and strengths with him, and cite examples (work, school, recreation) to show that you will be able to do what is asked of you.

7. Market your workplace advantage.

Share with the employer that hiring a disabled person increases workplace diversity. Your disability allows you to look at things from a different perspective, and assists a company in better serving the population of persons with disabilities. Surveys show that people with disabilities tend to stay at a job longer and are not absent as frequently as others.

8. Visit your Career Services office for help creating a resume, cover letter, or to practice interview questions.

Additional Resources:

<http://abilityjobs.com> (A job-searching site for persons with disabilities)

<https://www.disability.gov/> (A government informational site)

<http://www.coloradomesa.edu/eas/links.html> (CMU page for students with disabilities)

<http://askjan.org> Job Accommodation Network