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Disability Disclosure

Determining if and when to disclose your disability to a potential employer

If you decide to discuss an issue with an employer, remember not to dwell on limitations. Instead, focus on your capabilities and accomplishments. If your disability is physical, such as a missing arm or leg, talking openly and comfortably about it can help to put the employer at ease. Most employers will probably not ask you questions about your disability openly, but they will usually wonder about it privately. You should respond to these about the facts involved – and avoid leaving them with mistaken or false impressions or ideas. Employers report that they respect applicants who are honest during the interview and tend to see these applicants as trustworthy in later situations.

When discussing your disability with an employer it is critical for you to consider whether or not you will require reasonable accommodation(s) to complete the essential functions of the position for which you are applying. If you will be able to complete all the essential functions without accommodation it is important that you tell the employer directly. If you will require reasonable accommodations you should also state this openly and be prepared to suggest possible options that will allow you to do the job safely and productively.

On the Job

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
Honesty/peace of mind Easy/lets employer decide if disability is an issue	Might disqualify you with no opportunity to present yourself and your qualifications and no recourse Potential for discrimination	If you use this technique you may have a harder time finding work, but usually have no disability-related problems when you do.

During an Interview

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
Honesty/peace of mind Opportunity to respond briefly and positively – in person – to specific disability issues Discrimination is less likely face-to-face	Puts responsibility on you to handle disability issues in a clear, non-threatening way Too much emphasis on issue indicates possible problem; you are not being evaluated on your abilities	How comfortable are you with discussing your disability? Are you too preoccupied with it? These are very difficulty questions, but ones that you can prepare to answer

After the Interview – When a Job is Offered, but before you begin work

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
<p>Honesty/peace of mind</p> <p>If the disability information changes the hiring decision, and you are sure that your disability will not interfere with your ability to perform the job, there may be legal recourse</p>	<p>Employer might feel you should have told him/her before hiring decision was made.</p> <p>Might lead to distrust with employer.</p>	<p>Need to honestly evaluate disability in light of the specific tasks of the job being applied for.</p> <p>Need to be able to explain how disability will not interfere with ability to perform job. This includes job safety.</p>

After You Start Work

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
<p>Opportunity to prove yourself on job before disclosure.</p> <p>If disclosure affects employment status and the condition does not affect ability to perform job or job safety, you may be protected by the law.</p>	<p>Nervousness or fear of having a disability-related problem on the job.</p> <p>Possibility of a disability-related problem before co-workers know how to react.</p> <p>Could change interaction with peers.</p>	<p>The longer you put off disclosure the harder it becomes.</p> <p>It may be difficult to identify who to tell.</p>

After a Disability-Related Problem On the Job

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
<p>Opportunity to prove yourself on job before disclosure.</p> <p>If disability affects employment status but does not affect your ability to perform your job, or affect job safety, may be protected by the law.</p>	<p>Possible employer accusations of falsifying your application.</p> <p>Possibility that your co-workers will not have known how to react to your disability.</p> <p>Can perpetuate disability myths and misunderstandings.</p>	<p>Relationships you establish with co-workers may be hurt if they feel you have been untruthful with them. It may be difficult to re-establish trust.</p>

Never

Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
<p>Employers can't respond to your disability unless you have a disability-related problem.</p>	<p>If disability is discovered, you run the risk of being fired.</p> <p>Nervousness and fear of having a disability-related problem on the job. If you do, you might be hurt by inappropriate first aid.</p>	<p>If you haven't had a disability-related problem for a long time (over two years), the issue of disclosure becomes less critical.</p>

Whenever you talk about a disability or problem, keep it brief. BRIEFLY state the problem and what you have learned from it, say what you can specifically be done to lessen or prevent future problems, and STRESS YOUR CAPABILITIES.

Remember, if you honestly believe you can do the job, you will probably be able to convince the employer to give you a chance.

If you choose to disclose your disability review these tips on explaining possible employment disabilities.

Possible Employment Disability: Alcoholism/Chemical Dependency

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ When it was a problem ❖ What you learned from the problem ❖ How long you've been sober 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Possibly in the interview, especially if it might come out in work history or reference checks

Possible Employment Disability: Depression/Mental Health Problems

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ When it was a problem ❖ That it is under control ❖ What you have learned to avoid it happening again – coping skills ❖ Stress new goals and capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Unless this is likely to come out in work history or reference checks you may wish to avoid mentioning a one-time occurrence ❖ If this is an ongoing problem for you, you should consider disclosing during the interview

Possible Employment Disability: Felony Conviction

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ When it occurred and possibly why ❖ What happened ❖ What you learned from your mistake ❖ Show regret/remorse ❖ Stress new goals and capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Possibly in interview, especially if you are asked or if it might come out in work history or reference checks, you are required to answer honestly

Possible Employment Disability: Learning Problems

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What learning problems you have ❖ How you have learned to work around these problems ❖ Special efforts you've made to improve skills ❖ Stress goals and capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ In interview especially if it might be obvious or your job might require you to do something that would be difficult for you

Possible Employment Disability: Physical Restrictions

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What the physical problem is – educate the employer ❖ What specific limitations are – stress that you would not exceed them ❖ Ways you have learned to adapt physically ❖ Adaptations that could be made on the job to enable you to do the work ❖ Capabilities and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ In the interview even if the employer does not bring up the subject – educate them and put them at ease with your comfort dealing openly with the issue

Possible Employment Disability: Poor Work Record

What you can say	When to say it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Explain why poor record of employment – take responsibility for it ❖ Do not blame others – especially former employers ❖ State what you have learned and why you would stay with their company ❖ Stress your stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ In the interview as it will be obvious from your work history ❖ Possibly could be briefly brought up in cover letter accompanying job application and/or resume

