

# Disabilities and the Job Search

Career Lab  
Lucina Hall Room 235

When it comes to the job search, people with disabilities need to use the same tactics as other job seekers. All job seekers need well-written cover letters and résumés. All job seekers need to research potential employers, find opportunities, prepare for interviews, and develop professional etiquette and skills that employers seek. All job seekers need to communicate their abilities, skills, and talents to employers.

However there are some issues that people with disabilities face that non-disabled job seekers do not. When do you disclose your disability to a potential employer? How should you ask for reasonable accommodations? What are your rights under the law? These questions will be addressed below.

## Promote Your Unique Skills

- Disabled persons have developed skill sets that include problem solving, critical thinking, perseverance, resourcefulness, and the ability to adapt and learn quickly.
- Many people with medical conditions have developed special areas of expertise on topics of interest to employers including insurance, benefits, and mastery of adaptive computer software.
- Your communication skills may be highly developed because you have discussed your disability with others, worked with others, and functioned as a team player.

These are all things that show your disability as an asset to potential employers during interviews. Focus on what you can do, not on what you can't do. Don't undersell yourself by hiding the strengths and skills you have developed because of your disability.

## Disclosing Your Disability

*There is no legal requirement to disclose your disability unless it affects your ability to do the job.* Whether your disability is visible or not, you need to decide when to disclose it to a

potential employer without it having a negative impact on your job search.

- Some prefer to reveal their disability on their résumé or cover letter, or when accepting an interview.
- Others prefer to wait until a job offer is made.
- If your disability is not visible and you do not require accommodations at the interview, you might be best to wait for disclosure until a job offer is made.
- If you require an accommodation at the interview, you will need to disclose your disability when you are invited to interview. At the end of the phone conversation you might say something like, "I use a wheelchair. Is your facility wheelchair accessible?"
- If the job you are applying for relates directly to working with disability issues, you may choose to disclose your disability in your cover letter to enhance the possibility of a job offer.
- In special circumstances it might be wise to disclose a disability immediately to prevent future legal action by an employer related to a workplace accident that might be blamed on your disability.

If you do choose to wait to reveal your disability, make sure that your references are aware of that. Information on your résumé such as special schools attended, memberships in specific campus organizations, TDD phone numbers, and previous jobs may reveal your disability too.

## Employer Concerns About Your Disability

Many employers may have concerns about hiring a person with a disability. If you sense this during the interview, it may be to your advantage to dispel any concerns the employer may be reluctant to ask about. Taking charge of the discussion of your disability demonstrates leadership and shows the employer that you have the confidence to bring up a sensitive issue. It also helps

because the employer has legal limitations in the discussion of an applicant's disability.

Seek advice from your advisor at the Career Center or Disabled Student Development if you are not sure when to disclose your disability. If you do decide to disclose before personal contact with the employer, do it in your cover letter rather than your résumé.

### **Requesting Reasonable Accommodations**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers with fifteen or more employees are required to provide reasonable accommodations at their expense to enable you to apply and fairly compete for jobs. Be sure to inform the employer about accommodations you need for the interview.

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a good resource to guide you through the process of requesting an accommodation. Staff at JAN will give you suggestions about possible accommodations needed for your interview or to help you perform your job. JAN will also provide this service to your employer, but it is to your advantage to take leadership on this issue and contact JAN first, then provide your employer with that information as well as contact information for JAN. The web address for JAN is <http://www.jan.wvu.edu>.

### **Your Rights and Responsibilities Under the Law**

As you conduct your job search, you may encounter questions that may be illegal or are unnecessary in determining your competency or qualifications for the position you are applying for.

Be aware that if you decide not to answer certain questions, your chances of employment could be jeopardized. Employers are within their rights to refuse to hire anyone who will not complete a job application.

Your state of health and disability is a topic that some employers deal with inappropriately. The *Americans with Disabilities Act* was passed to prevent employers from discriminating against job applicants with disabilities and from discriminating against employees who develop or reveal a disability while employed. Under the ADA an employer may not discriminate against a person with a disability

if they are able to perform the duties of the job without undue hardship on the employer. Employers with fifteen or more employees must make "reasonable accommodations" so that employees with disabilities can enjoy equal employment opportunities.

### **What Employers May Not Ask Regarding Your Disability**

- Employers may not ask if you have a disability.
- Employers may not ask questions about the nature of a visible disability.

### **What Employers May Ask Regarding Your Disability**

- Employers are permitted to ask if you are able to perform the duties required for the job.
- Employers may ask if you require any accommodations to perform your job.

*This information is intended as an educational service, not as legal advice.*

### **Visit the Career Center**

The Career Center in Lucina Hall 220 offers career advising, job fairs, on-campus interviewing, workshops, and other programs to help you find a career, internship, and job. Cardinal Career Link, available on the Career Center's website, lists on-campus jobs, off-campus part-time jobs, internships, and full-time jobs.

The Career Center is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday (7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the summer). Drop-in advising is offered Monday-Wednesday from 1 to 3 p.m. and Thursday-Friday from 10 to noon.

If you have highly specific or in-depth questions or concerns, you may be referred to an individual appointment with a professional staff member specializing in your major. Schedule an advising appointment through Cardinal Career Link at <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/careerlink>.

## Resources in the Career Lab, Lucina 235

The Career Lab in Lucina Hall 235 has information to help you with your career and job search. Adaptive computer technology including Window Eyes and Zoom Text are available. Headphones and a trackball mouse are also available. Here are a few of the resources available.

### Books

*Every Employee's Guide to the Law*

*Expert Resumes for People Returning to Work*

*I'd Rather Be Working*

*Job-Hunting for the So-Called Handicapped*

*Job Search Handbook for People with Disabilities*

*Overcoming Barriers to Employment*

*Six Steps to Employment for People with Disabilities*

### Web Resources

Career Center Home Page: <http://www.bsu.edu/careers>

Cardinal Career Link: <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/careerlink>

Career Management Action Plan: <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/cmap>

Quest (Ball State Career Center): <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/quest>

KEY Careers: <http://www.bsu.edu/keycareers>

Career Center Publications: <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/publications>

Great Links to Explore: <http://www.bsu.edu/careers/links>

Americans with Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov/>

Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD): <http://www.cosdonline.org/>

DisAbility.gov: <http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/>

Disabled Person: <http://www.disabledperson.com/>

EarnWorks: Disability Network: <http://www.earnworks.com/>

EntryPoint.org Internships for Students with Disabilities: <http://ehrweb.aaas.org/entrypoint/>

Federal Disability Workforce Consortium: <http://www.fdwc.info/>

Federal Laws Prohibiting Discrimination: <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html>

Job Accommodation Network: <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Office of Disability Employment Policy: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/index.htm>

Pat Criscito.com Employment Law: [http://www.patcriscito.com/Bookstore/employment\\_law.html](http://www.patcriscito.com/Bookstore/employment_law.html)

SOAR: Online Accommodation Resource: <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/soar/>

Social Security Online: <http://www.ssa.gov/work/>

Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities:

<https://wrp.gov/LoginPre.do?method=login>

If you need adaptations or accommodations for any of our educational programs or publications because of a disability, please contact  
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