

FOCUS ON ABILITY: INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS WITH DISABILITIES



As employers well know, the job interview plays a critical role in the hiring process, allowing them the opportunity to identify the individual who possesses the best mix of knowledge, skills and abilities for the position available. Below is information that may assist employers in ensuring maximum benefit from an interview when the person being interviewed happens to have a disability.

■ PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Ensure that your company's application and interviewing procedures comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits asking disability-related questions before a job offer is made.
- Check that your application forms, employment offices and interviewing locations are accessible to persons with a variety of disabilities.
- Be willing to make appropriate and reasonable accommodations to enable an applicant with a disability to participate in the interview, explaining ahead of time what is involved in the process. For example, if an applicant who is blind states that he or she will need help completing forms, provide that assistance. Provide an interpreter as an accommodation or other assistance that is reasonable for an applicant who is deaf, if he or she requests assistance in communicating. Provide details or specific instructions to applicants with cognitive disabilities, if this type of accommodation is required.
- Inform applicants ahead of time if they will be required to take a test to demonstrate their ability to perform actual or simulated tasks so that they can request a reasonable accommodation, such as a different format for a written test, if necessary. (Such tests are permitted under the ADA as long as they are uniformly given to all applicants.)

■ CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

- Relax and make the applicant feel relaxed. If the applicant has a visible disability or reveals a disability during the interview, concentrate on the individual, not the disability.
- Treat the individual with the same respect you would treat any candidate whose skills you are seeking. Likewise, hold individuals with disabilities to the same standards as all applicants.
- Ask only job-related questions that speak to the functions of the job for which the applicant is applying.
- Concentrate on the applicant's technical and professional knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and interests.
- Do not try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability. He or she has mastered alternate ways of living and working. If the applicant has a known disability, either because it is obvious or was revealed by the applicant, you may ask him or her to describe how he or she would perform the job.

It is important to note that medical examinations are prohibited under the ADA at the pre-employment offer stage. However, a job offer may be conditional based on the results of a medical examination if all employees entering similar jobs are also required to take an examination. If, after the medical examination, the employer decides not to hire an individual because of a disability, the employer must demonstrate that the reason for the rejection is job-related and consistent with business necessity.

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■ RESOURCES TO ASSIST

A number of resources can assist employers in understanding their responsibilities relative to interviewing job applicants with disabilities.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

www.jan.wvu.edu

1-800-526-7234 (V/TTY)

JAN is a free, confidential service from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) that provides information on job accommodations for people with disabilities, the employment provisions of the ADA and other related legislation.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

www.eeoc.gov

1-800-669-4000 (V); 1-800-669-6820 (TTY)

The EEOC enforces the ADA's employment provisions. The section of its Web site titled "Disability Discrimination" provides access to resources that can answer employers' questions about how to ensure their hiring process is inclusive of people with disabilities.

ADA & IT Technical Assistance Centers

www.adata.org

1-800-949-4232 (V/TTY)

Ten regional ADA & IT Technical Assistance Centers sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research provide ADA information, training and technical assistance across the nation.

Employer Assistance and Recruiting Network (EARN)

www.earnworks.com

1-866-EARN-NOW (1-866-327-6669) (V/TTY)

EARN is a free, confidential service from ODEP that connects employers seeking workers with qualified candidates with disabilities and offers technical assistance to employers on issues relating to hiring and employing individuals with disabilities.

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