



# *Disclosing Your Disability to an Employer*

Job seekers with disabilities are inevitably faced with the decision of whether to disclose their disability. Disability disclosure is a hotly-debated topic among disability services and career development professionals. However, the decision to disclose, as well as when and how, is ultimately yours. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people with disabilities are not obligated to disclose their disability unless it is likely to directly affect their job performance.

If you have a disability, you must consider whether you can perform the essential functions of the position for which you are applying and if you need any accommodations to be successful. Remember that an accommodation is not intended to compensate for a lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities. Workplace accommodations will only be provided when the employee discloses his/her disability and requests job accommodations.

## Advantages and disadvantages of disclosure

Disclosing your disability can be daunting. Some employers may reject you because of negative, preconceived notions about people with disabilities. Additionally, you may not feel comfortable sharing personal information with strangers. On the other hand, disclosing your disability allows you protection against discrimination under the ADA. It also allows you to speak honestly and openly with your employer about accommodations.

## Things to consider

- Your knowledge of your disability and how clearly you can discuss it
- Your ability to perform the essential job functions without accommodations
- How your disability may affect your ability to perform the job
- The employer's attitude toward people with disabilities
- Your own comfort and trust level with the employer
- Your past accommodations in a professional environment
- Your suggestions for accommodations, if needed

## What to include in a disclosure

- General information about your disability
- The effect of your disability, both positive and negative, on job performance
- The types of accommodations used in the past
- Suggested or anticipated accommodations

## Timing your disclosure

Many experts suggest not disclosing your disability if it is undetectable and no accommodations are needed.

### Resume and cover letter

There is rarely a reason to disclose your disability this early, unless you use TTY or a voice relay for phone calls, or if your disability might be an asset to the position. However, if you are comfortable with disclosing at this point, carefully consider where and how the information is presented. Your resume and cover letter should focus on and highlight your relevant skills and experiences and make brief mention of your disability and your disability management skills.

### Pre-interview

If you have a visible disability or need an accommodation for the interview it is best to discuss your disability and accommodations prior to the scheduled interview so the interviewer is prepared. To initiate conversation about your disability, you might include a question about accessibility or a request for accommodation when you ask about the interview location or directions.

### The Interview

If you have a visible disability, you will want to briefly discuss your disability and assure the interviewer that it will not negatively affect your job performance, especially with proper accommodations. Be prepared to answer any questions regarding specific accommodations but provide examples of how you have already performed many of the functions of the job. Focus on your competency, including skills, experience, and education. If your disability is not apparent, you may use greater discretion about when to discuss your disability.

### After being offered the job

Many people choose to disclose their disability after a job has been offered to ensure that the employer will focus solely on the individual's qualifications and skills. If you determine that you will need an accommodation, discuss it prior to your start date to ensure accommodations are made prior to your arrival.

### During the course of employment

If you discover over time that you have underestimated your need for an accommodation, it is best to disclose your disability to your employer and ask for accommodations before your work performance is affected.

## How to prepare

- Consider developing a personal philosophy about disclosure—what does it mean to be a person with a disability? How does it affect your life?
- Educate yourself about your disability and learn how to discuss it.
- Contact the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) at 800-526-7234 to learn more about potential job accommodations based on your disability and the nature of the job.
- To help you gauge your potential employer's attitudes about hiring people with disabilities, do your research—look at the job announcement, browse the website, talk to current employees, and read company publications.
- Participate in internships or work-based learning to gain an understanding of accommodations needed and provided in a professional environment.
- Prepare yourself for personal or potentially illegal questions about your disability during the interview.
- Seek advice from other people with disabilities who have been successful in finding work.

