# Strategies for Working with People who have Disabilities
  • Show Overhead #14 [1]

There are many ways that disabilities can affect the ability to perform effectively on the job. Levels of disability and ability are unique to an individual. Most accommodations are simple, creative alternatives for traditional ways of doing things. This section includes examples and suggestions for career development staff and employers. Following these simple suggestions will help people with disabilities to fully participate in work-based learning experiences. They are by no means comprehensive. You and the interns with whom you work will have opportunities to generate uniquely effective ideas.

  • Show Overhead #15 [2]

## Low Vision
  • Show Overhead #16 [3]

By "low vision" we are referring to people who have a visual impairment but have some usable sight. This includes some people who are "legally" blind. For people who have low vision, standard written materials may be too small to read and objects may appear blurry. Others may only see objects within a specific field of vision. Still others see images with sections missing or blacked out. Learning through a visual medium may take longer and may be more mentally fatiguing for people who have low vision than for people who do not.

Examples of accommodations for people with low vision include large print text, handouts, signs, and equipment labels. Many photocopy machines can enlarge text. Some people with low vision may also benefit from having career development publications, job instructions, or other printed materials recorded on audiotape. It may take weeks or months to procure materials in audiotape format. Consequently, it is

essential that career counselors and employers select and prepare their materials well before they are needed.

Other examples of accommodations for people with low vision include providing seating where the lighting best meets their individual needs; making brochures, job announcements, and other information available in electronic format; and equipping computers with large monitors and screen enlargement software.

# Blindness
   • **Show Overhead #17 [4]**

People who have not had vision since birth may have difficulty understanding verbal descriptions of visual materials and abstract concepts. Consider the example, "This organizational chart looks like an upside down tree." If one has never seen a tree, it may not be readily apparent that the structure of note has several lines which can be traced up to one central point. However, a person who lost her vision later in life may find this verbal description easy to understand.



Additionally, demonstrations based on color differences may be more difficult for people with blindness to understand than demonstrations which emphasize changes in shape, temperature, or texture. During presentations, meetings, and job-site demonstrations, a clear, concise narration of the basic points being represented in visual aids is helpful.

People who have no sight cannot read written materials in standard formats. Ready access to printed materials on computer disks or via the Internet allow blind workers, who have the appropriate technology, to use computers to read text aloud and/or produce Braille. Some materials may need to be transferred to audiotape. Since it may take weeks or even months to procure specific materials in Braille or on audiotape, it is essential that career counselors and employers select and prepare materials that are needed by a worker who is blind well before the materials are going to be used.

Other examples of accommodations for people who are blind include the provision of tactile models and raised-line drawings of graphic materials; adaptive equipment, such as talking calculators and tactile timers; and computers with optical character readers, voice output, Braille screen displays, and Braille printers.

In communicating with a worker who is blind, it is important to remember that the visual impairment does not affect his ability to think or to hear. Speak in a normal tone. In addition, consider the following suggestions.

- To start a conversation, touch the person lightly on the arm or address him by name to gain his attention.

- Ask the person if he would like you to orient him to a room and any obstacles you may perceive that it contains.

- Use descriptive words such as, "in front of you at eleven o'clock," instead of vague language such as "over there." Keep in mind that a person who is blind cannot relate to hand or facial gestures.

- Feel free to use visual words such as "look" and "see." Expressions such as these are commonly used by people who cannot see.

- Always ask permission before interacting with a person's guide dog.

## Hearing Impairments
- **Show Overhead #18 [5]**

Some people who have hearing impairments may hear at a functional level with the assistance of amplification devices such as hearing aids. Others hear only specific frequencies, sounds within a certain volume range, or nothing at all.

Individuals with hearing impairments often use some combination of lip-reading, sign language, and amplification to understand spoken information. People who are deaf from birth generally have more difficulty speaking and understanding the structure of language than those who lost their hearing later in life. In a job setting, everyday noises -- fans and lights -- that are not a bother to hearing people, may have a profound effect on the ability of people with hearing impairments to hear. Career development providers and employers should make worksite adjustments to allow interns or employees to maximize their learning potential and success.

Individuals with hearing impairments may have difficulty following instructions when delivered in large and open settings, particularly if the acoustics cause echoes or if the speaker talks quietly, rapidly, or unclearly. They may find it difficult to simultaneously watch demonstrations and follow verbal descriptions if they are watching a sign language interpreter, a "real-time" captioning screen, or a speaker's lips. It may also be difficult for them to follow or participate in group discussions, particularly when they

are fast-paced and unmodulated, since there is often lag time between a speaker's comments and their interpretation to people with hearing impairments.

Examples of accommodations for people who have hearing impairments include the provision of interpreters, sound amplification systems, note takers, visual aids, and electronic mail for meetings and office discussions. Visual warning systems for emergencies may also need to be installed.

The following suggestions can be employed when employers and career counselors communicate with a worker who has a hearing impairment.

- Face the person with a hearing impairment and speak directly and normally to her.
- If an intern who is deaf is using an interpreter, talk directly to the intern, not to the interpreter. The interpreter should be treated as an inanimate object. Focus on the relationship with the intern.
- Use drawings, writing, and gestures to assist you in communicating.
- Make sure lighting levels are adequate.
- Be aware of jargon used on the job and avoid it whenever possible. For example, ADA could mean Americans with Disabilities Act, the American Dental Association, or average daily attendance. Additionally, ASAP (as soon as possible), and BCOB (by the close of business) could be confusing.
- A person with a hearing impairment may wish to use a closed FM amplification system or sign language interpreter when participating in group activities. Upon request, these services should be made available by the career services staff or the employer, depending on who is hosting the activity.
- Find ways to fully include the person with a hearing impairment in group conversations. For example, repeat discussion questions and statements made by other participants in a meeting or presentation.

## Speech Impairments
- **Show Overhead #19 [6]**

Some disabilities affect the ability to speak. Computer-based speech output systems provide an alternative voice for some people who cannot speak. Since electronic mail does not require the ability to speak, it provides an efficient medium for

communication..The following suggestions will assist employers and career counselors in working with an intern who has a speech impairment.

- Concentrate on what the person is saying.

- If you do not understand something, ask the person to repeat what he said and then repeat it back to him.

- Be patient; take as much time as necessary to communicate effectively.

- When appropriate, ask questions which only require short answers, or a nod of the head.

- Avoid communication in noisy, public places. Talk in a private, quiet area when possible, particularly when discussing things that apply only to her.

- Do not speak for the person or attempt to finish his sentences.

- If you are having difficulty understanding what a person is saying, consider writing or electronic mail as an alternative means of communicating.

- Encourage the worker with a speech impairment to participate in discussions.

## Specific Learning Disabilities
- **Show Overhead #20 [7]**

Because a person does not use a wheelchair, have hearing aids, or use a cane does not mean that she does not have a disability. Some disabilities are invisible. These include specific learning disabilities. Individuals with specific learning disabilities generally have average to above average intelligence, but may have difficulties demonstrating knowledge and understanding abstract concepts. Auditory, visual, or tactile information can become jumbled at any point when it is transmitted, received, processed, and re-transmitted. It may take longer for some people who have learning disabilities to process written information. Lengthy reading or writing assignments or tasks may be difficult to complete in a standard amount of time. Some people may be able to organize and communicate their thoughts in one-to-one conversations, but find it difficult to articulate those same ideas at a noisy worksite.

Examples of accommodations for people who have learning disabilities include audiotaped instructions; a quiet workstation location; visual, aural, and tactile demonstrations incorporated into directions; and computers with voice output and spelling and grammar checkers. Also be aware of environmental factors that tend to distract people. Avoid placing people who are easily distracted near high traffic areas

and consider seat, window, and door placement in relation to them. Provide a quiet place for them to work.

The following suggestions will assist career services staff and employers in working with an intern who has a learning disability.

- Discuss with the person confidentially the best ways to communicate instructions. They may include written, verbal, or visual strategies, or a combination of several modes of communication. A tape recorder or electronic mail may be useful for relaying instructions in some instances. She may have developed methods for compensating for the limitations caused by her disability. Discuss options with her.

- Once instructions are given, get feedback from the person to determine if they were understood completely.

- Be patient when the person begins a new job. Decrease his stress level by assigning tasks that he can accomplish and build on his strengths.

- Avoid spontaneous changes in the work schedule and environment. A consistent routine is best.

- Reduce time pressures if possible.

- Give assignments early and let the person pace herself.

## Mobility Impairments
- **Show <u>Overhead #21</u> [8]**

Mobility impairments range from lower body impairments, which may require use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, to upper body impairments, which may result in limited or no use of the hands. It may take longer for individuals with mobility impairments to get from one worksite to another. It may require special accommodations for them to get to field worksites or off-site meetings. Some people with mobility impairments find it difficult or impossible to manipulate objects, turn pages, write with a pen or pencil, type at a keyboard, or retrieve work-related documents without accommodations.

Examples of accommodations for interns and employees with mobility impairments include the provision of office assistants for specific tasks, accessible office locations, adjustable tables, equipment located within reach, work-related materials available in electronic format, and access to job-related resources on the Internet. Computers can be equipped with special devices such as voice input, Morse code input, and

alternative keyboards. Job-related items need to be able to be reached and accessed, and wheelchairs and walkers need space. Avoid clutter and maintain a well-organized worksite.

The following suggestions will assist career services staff and employers in working with a person who has a mobility impairment.

- Offer to help (opening a door, carrying packages) if it makes sense. Ask yourself, "Would I want help in a similar situation?"

- Consider a person's wheelchair or walker as an extension of his body. Therefore, leaning on the wheelchair or walker, or placing your foot on a wheel, is not okay.

- Speak to a person who uses a wheelchair, walker, cane, or crutches in a normal voice strength and tone.

- Talk to a person who uses a wheelchair at eye-level whenever possible. Perhaps you can sit rather than stand.

- Feel free to use phrases such as "walk this way" with a person who cannot walk. Expressions such as this are commonly used by wheelchair users.

# Health Impairments
- **Show Overhead #22 [9]**

Some health conditions and medications affect memory and/or energy levels. Additionally, some people who have health impairments may not be able to work full-time or on a daily basis. Part-time employment will be an important option for some people with health impairments. Be flexible and work to establish a reasonable schedule with workers who have health impairments.

Be aware that some health impairments are chronic and stable while others are sporadic (e.g., severe allergies) and require flexible and variable accommodations. Modify your placements, assignments, and/or methods to accommodate sporadic attendance. Additionally, allow for people with health impairments to take time off during the work day to take medication, have a snack (e.g., for a person who is diabetic), rest, or meet with professionals. They may also need access to a refrigerator to store food supplements or medication.

Be aware of medications that people may be taking and their potential physical, emotional, and cognitive effects. This is particularly important for people taking medications for conditions such as seizure disorders and diabetes.

Observe employees or interns with health impairments to determine if there are times during the day when they are more productive. Observe changes in moods, attitudes, quality of work, or general health. Report concerns to appropriate supervisory personnel.

Examples of accommodations for individuals who have health impairments include the provision of note takers and/or taped instruction; flexible attendance requirements; assignments available in electronic format; and electronic mail for staff meetings, office discussions, and distribution of jobsite materials and notes. Telecommuting is sometimes a reasonable option for people with health impairments.

# Psychiatric Disabilities
· **Show Overhead #23 [10]**

People who have psychiatric disabilities are not always considered mentally ill. A person with an psychiatric disability may need to be provided with unique on-the-job accommodations to prevent from exacerbating behaviors that are not appropriate in the work environment. Applying the following suggestions will assist career services staff and employers in working with an intern or employee with a psychiatric disability.

- Be positive and expect the person to do well. Friendliness is always the correct road to take.

- Be consistent. The person should know what to expect. Carry through with expected actions.

- Make instructions clear. You may want to write instructions down as well as explain them verbally.

- Reward and compliment good performance on the job. Criticism should be done privately. Provide positive suggestions for improving performance.

- Meet with the person privately on a regular basis to determine if there are problems that can be "headed off" before they get out of hand. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

# Summary
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**Show <u>Overhead #24</u> [11]**

To conclude this discussion of strategies, here are some general suggestions for making career services offices and work-based learning programs accessible to all students.

- Have policies and procedures in place for addressing accommodation needs for people with disabilities.

- Make sure your facility is accessible to people with mobility impairments.

- Provide clear signage in large print.

- Discuss with the intern his/her needs and ideas for accommodations.

- Select materials early so that they can be procured in appropriate formats in a timely manner. Using materials which are available in electronic format is a good step toward accessibility.

When working with a person who has a disability, keep in mind that we are all more alike than different. Each person comes to a new job with unique skills and abilities. Internships allow all students to build on current competencies while gaining new skills that relate to their academic and career goals. People who interact with people who have disabilities have a great impact on their on-the-job success. Many employers use team work environments to maximize the potentials of their employees; this structure allows employees to work together to maximize individual strengths while compensating for weaknesses.

Expect that people with disabilities participating in a work-based learning experience are there to succeed. Keep your expectations high. Be positive and proactive in helping them achieve success. Career counselors and employers who follow the succeeding suggestions can help students with disabilities accomplish just that.

- Do not exhibit the dramatic, "Oh my _____, if I was _____ I wouldn't be able to _____ " syndrome! Most likely the participant with a disability has a full life and has learned to positively meet the challenges posed by the disability.

- Avoid labels for groups of people with disabilities such as "the blind" or "the deaf." Instead, say "people who are blind" or "people who are deaf." Never use the terms "deaf and dumb."

- Avoid emotionally-charged descriptors such as "bedridden," "homebound," "crippled," "unfortunate," "pitiful," "stricken with," "wheelchair-bound," or

"confined to a wheelchair." Instead, simply be descriptive such as "he uses a wheelchair."

- Avoid euphemisms to describe disabilities. Terms such as "handicapable," "differently-abled," "physically challenged," and "physically inconvenienced" are considered by many to be condescending. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with in a straight-forward manner.

- Speak directly to a person and focus on her abilities rather than her disability.

- People who have disabilities have the same range of likes and dislikes as those who do not. Not all blind people are musical; not all people who use wheelchairs play wheelchair basketball; and not all deaf people read lips. Talk about things you talk about with other employees -- weather, sports, politics, what you did today.

- If you are feeling uncomfortable about a situation, let the person who has a disability know.

- Be sure expectations such as job performance, behavior, and dress are clearly defined, and that they are met.

- Provide specific feedback on job performance. If you have concerns about performance, mention it. The person may not know he is doing something incorrectly.

- If a person appears to be having difficulty at a task, he probably is. Ask if, and how, you may help.

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| ‹ The Employer's Perspective | up | Four-Step Accommodation Model › |

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