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Employing Technology in Your ADA Process Just Became More Crucial

In many organizations, the rapid spread of COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in accommodation requests. One of the mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is to provide a timely good faith interactive process. This means employers have an obligation — even during a pandemic — to respond to, interact, and make decisions for employees who request accommodations.

Use technology to ensure you don't miss steps, continue to interact, and document that interaction. Not just important in a pandemic, you'll see the benefits of employing technology well beyond COVID-19 and in the "new normal" that follows.

Get Your Process Online. If there was ever a time to ditch those hardcopy files and sticky notes, that time is now. Start by ensuring all incoming requests for accommodation and documents can be received digitally. This includes medical notes from doctors, many of whom still use fax machines. A number of eFax services allow you to receive medical notes via email for easy placement into your group drive files. Be sure to keep your online filing system up to date and make a habit of saving emails in specific employee folders for easy and searchable access.

Task management software is perfect

for managing reasonable accommodation requests and the disability interactive process. You can easily create templates of tasks based on your four process steps:

1. Collecting clear data
2. Engaging, interacting, and exploring accommodation ideas
3. Scheduling the interactive process meeting
4. Conducting post-meeting activities

Each of these process steps has several subtasks, making task management software even more useful. Applications such as Asana, Monday, or ClickUp allow for greater access across practitioners and allow individuals to create reminders and make diary notes under tasks. This can help keep record of when they have made calls and sent or received emails. This makes it simple to see — all in one place — what you have done as an organization, what's next, and where you are in the larger process for each employee's accommodation request.

Use Technology Creatively. The words technology and innovation have always gone hand-in-hand. In the current business climate, look for ways to use technology to complete practices usually performed in person. For employees who are working from home or in the workplace, consider having ergonomists conduct online assessments

of workspaces. For example, employees can use their phones to videoconference with an ergonomist to show their workstation so the ergonomist can provide individualized assessments and recommendations.

Also, don't delay the interactive process because you can't meet in-person. While in-person meetings are preferred, ensuring a timely interactive process is paramount. Use teleconference or videoconference technology to support comprehensive reasonable accommodation discussions and document these sessions just as you would for in-person meetings. Consider an audio-only teleconference when you are unsure of your employee's bandwidth or level of technological savviness. Use videoconference when a face-to-face meeting is needed, such as for a person who read lips or prefers a visual meeting option. Take advantage of digital signature technology such as Adobe or DocuSign to combine all signatures into one set of meeting notes for your organization's records.

Managing reasonable accommodation requests did not get easier with COVID-19, but the job you do is important to support both the organization's business needs and the needs of disabled and medically fragile employees during this time. Employing technology in new ways can help. Keep up the good work.