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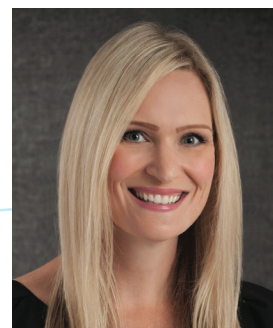
# @work

Official Publication of Disability Management Employer Coalition

## Americans with Disabilities Act

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# Managing Reasonable Accommodations for Employees with Significant Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was put in place to help people with disabilities. But today, too few significantly disabled Americans are able to enter or stay in the workforce.

Many human resource practitioners are experiencing accommodation fatigue. We spend the vast majority of our time managing accommodations related to issues such as conflicts with supervisors or an employee's inability to maintain regular and reliable attendance. Given the sliver of time we have left, when we meet someone who is significantly disabled, we sometimes assume the worst: that we will not be able to find a reasonable accommodation for them.

The burden of researching and understanding options may fall to the disabled person, who must know how to accommodate their particular restrictions and teach others how to do that. As disability compliance practitioners, how can we revolutionize this and help relieve our employees of this burden? What should you do when you are faced with a significantly disabled candidate or employee?

*Know basic etiquette.* Always talk directly to the person with a disability, not to a facilitator who might be assisting with the interaction. And don't be afraid to ask an employee about their

preferences — from how they would like their disability referred to (e.g., blind versus vision impaired) to their general communication preferences (e.g., video conference or email).

*Dig deeper.* Take time to do some basic research with the employee. For example, if the employee is visually impaired, understand there are different degrees of what your employee may be able to see; this will be relevant in workplace accommodation discussions. Don't be afraid to ask if the employee would be comfortable explaining if they have any sight, if they can see light and dark, shapes, and so on. Don't assume you understand, and don't be afraid to ask the employee to help you. The more you know, the better you will be at brainstorming accommodation ideas with the employee. Don't let your fear of saying the wrong thing get in the way of saying the things that can bring about understanding!

*Know your resources.* The Job Accommodation Network has an online accommodation resource with detailed information about many medical conditions or types of functional limitations.<sup>1</sup> Other online resources can provide information about the employee's medical condition; doing this research demonstrates that you are working in good faith to support the employee.<sup>2</sup>

An Internet search can also help you locate a disability advocacy group such as the National Federation of the Blind that has even deeper knowledge about key accommodation needs. Don't be afraid to reach out to experts in the field or consider bringing in a disability consultant to assist you to learn on the job. Incredible adaptive solutions are available to assist persons with disabilities to fully participate in your workforce.

You are not expected to know all the answers, but seeking out ideas and options is one key to an interactive process of accommodation that shows good faith and produces positive outcomes!

## References

1. Job Accommodation Network. *Searchable Online Accommodation Resource*. Retrieved from <https://askjan.org/soar.cfm>
2. Popular online resources include: Medscape.com, SmartPatients.com, MedlinePlus.gov, Drugs.com, MayoClinic.org, Orpha.net, Medgadget.com, and WebMD.com.