

The Employment Process

Tips for Employers: recruitment, hiring, accommodating

Hiring people with disabilities offer employers a significant advantage: it helps you access a new pool of qualified and competent employees who will add to the diversity of your workforce.

The Hiring Process, A Few Simple Guidelines

The key question when interviewing an applicant is if the applicant has the necessary skills, experience, education or background to successfully perform the essential functions of the job, regardless of a disability.

Who is qualified?

Someone who can perform the essential functions of that position, with or without reasonable accommodations. As an employer it is your responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations throughout the employment process, if requested. This includes job announcements, application procedures, hiring, compensation, advancement, training and other opportunities of employment.

The following tips will help you to comply with the law and help you find qualified applicants that you may have missed in the past. Let's look at the phases of the employment process and what you can do.

1. Relax. Put yourself and the applicant at ease.
2. Positive communication empowers both you and the applicant.
3. It is not appropriate to mention the applicant's disability unless he or she raises the topic first.
4. If a disability is discussed, use non-offensive language, such as disability instead of handicap; wheelchair users instead of wheelchair bound; or individuals with a disability, instead of disabled individual.
5. Be willing to regard any information volunteered by the individual about his or her disability as confidential.

The Recruitment Process

Announcing Job Openings

Advertise and provide instructions for a job posting in multiple formats. Notify applicants about the availability of reasonable accommodations. Keep the application simple and to the point. Focus job announcements on essential functions.

The Interview

It is the responsibility of the applicant to request a reasonable accommodation and the employer may require documentation of that need. The accommodation has to be an effective, not necessarily the one requested. Job-related tests cannot be designed to screen out people on the basis of a disability. If testing is required in the interview process you may consider the following as accommodations: more time for testing, a different format, simplifying the language, breaks and/or alternate forms of testing.

Suggestions for the interview include the following if requested:

- Conduct the interview in an accessible location
- Allow other individuals to sit in on the interview.
- Arrange for an interpreter or assistive listening devices, if the applicant is Deaf or hard of hearing.
- Adjust the length of the interview.

Appropriate questions. During the interview you should ask every applicant the same questions. Remember, the focus is the knowledge, skills and education for the position, and can the applicant meet those.

Considerations include:

1. You may obtain information about the applicant's ability to perform essential tasks and whether or not an accommodation is required, but not ask about a disability.
2. Ask all applicants the same questions. Focus on the applicant's ability to perform job functions; the technical and professional knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and interests.

3. After making a conditional job offer, an employer can ask if the applicant can perform the essential functions as outlined in the job description, with or without an accommodation. Keep in mind that all applicants may have different ways to complete the essential job functions.
4. A job offer may be conditional upon a medical exam only if the same standard applies to all applicants.
5. After an employer has established that the applicant is qualified, and the disability would have an impact on the specific job functions, the employer may ask how the applicant would perform these functions, and with what accommodation.
6. An employer can ask if an applicant can meet the requirements of regular work hours, leave policy and attendance, but only if all applicants are asked these same questions.
7. Treat all applicants the same.

Reference Checks. When checking references, be certain to follow the human resource policies of your organization. You may ask the previous employer about:

- Job functions and tasks performed.
- Quality and quantity of work.
- How job functions were performed.
- Attendance record, but not related to a disability.

Hire the person who is best qualified for the job.

Retaining a Qualified Workforce

Creating an environment which promotes respect and dignity of all employees is essential. The leadership you provide ensures all employees are able to complete their work in a friendly and safe environment. Ensuring a safe and accessible workplace includes both physical and attitudinal perspectives.

Physical accessibility: Physical accessibility is necessary for both employees and the customers of a business. Questions to keep in mind include:

- Are there designated parking spaces for persons with disabilities that are close to the entrance of the worksite or business?
- Is there a pathway without abrupt level changes or steps that lead from the parking area to the entrance?
- If ramps are used to provide access, are they appropriately graded and are handrails provided?
- Are the doors wide enough (36 inches) for people using wheelchairs?
- Are doors easy to open (e.g., not excessively heavy, with easily grasped handles or automatic)?
- Is the personnel office in an accessible location?
- Are pathways to the bathroom, water fountains, and public telephone accessible? Can people with disabilities use them?
- Are elevators accessible to all persons with disabilities (e.g., control panels lower than 54 inches from the floor, raised symbols or numbers on the control panels)?
- Is signage appropriate and accessible for persons with visual, learning, and cognitive disabilities (including the use of symbols and graphics)?
- Does the emergency warning system include both audible and visual alarms?

The Department of Labor offers extensive information for businesses. For additional information: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/business/recruiti.htm>

For additional information visit:

The American's with Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov/>

Job Accommodation Network <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Department of Labor sites: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/business/worksite.htm>

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/ek97/process.htm>