

DISCLOSURE

ADA and disclosure: (ADA) states that an individual does not have to inform the potential employer about medical history until a conditional job offer has been made.

Timing for disclosure and whether or not you disclose at all depends on a variety of things; the first of which is the nature of your disability; e.g., is it hidden or evident? When contacted for an interview, you should always ask the employer what the interview process entails so you can determine whether reasonable accommodations will be needed in order for you to participate in the interview process. If you have a physical disability, you will need to know where the accessible entrance is. If a computer test is required and, in order to take the test, you need special software to accommodate impaired hearing or vision, you will need to make arrangements to take the test on your own computer or to have the software you need installed at the test site.

If you have an obvious disability (for example, you are deaf, blind, or use a wheelchair), it will be apparent to the interviewer or interview panel and may require an accommodation for the interview, the job, or both. Though you may have little choice in determining how to disclose your disability, the way you choose to present your disability can greatly affect how the employer will view it.

Are you presenting yourself as a person with a disability who has some skills – or a person with skills who happens to have a disability? Don't be mistaken; this is an important distinction! Employers don't hire people because they have disabilities – they hire people because they have skills. Make sure that you are presenting yourself as an enthusiastic and qualified candidate **FIRST** and someone with a disability, **SECOND**.

If you are applying for a job with an application, cover letter and resume and these information pieces will be sent via the mail or email, there is no obligation to disclose at the time of applying for the job and we recommend that you do not disclose at this time. The one exception would be when you are applying for a job wherein your disability actually makes you a more qualified candidate; for example, a job with an agency that serves or advocates for people with disabilities, like Midstate Independent Living Consultants. You want to be, and should be, judged on your skills as they fit the job. The employer is going to be reviewing all kinds of applications and resumes and evaluating, based on what you have presented on these documents, your skills and qualifications. Remember, you are a qualified, skilled individual, who happens to have a disability, not a person who has a disability and some skills.

Disclosure at the Application Site: If the employer requires you to complete the application on site or to apply in person, disclosure will be early in the hiring process. If you have a cover letter written to submit with your application you should consider addressing your disability in your cover letter if it is an obvious disability. You will need to take time and carefully consider your wording choice for your cover letter if you need to disclose at the application step. Remember to stress your desire to work for the employer and your skills and qualifications and then mention your disability. For example:

“As an individual who has a vision impairment I am confident that my disability will not effect my ability to work or my attendance record. I wanted to let you know about my disability in advance to avoid catching you off guard at the interview. Please feel free during the course of the interview to address any questions or concerns about how my disability might affect my work performance.”

“I believe my skills and experience make me an excellent candidate for the position of _____. I have been in a wheelchair for the past several years, and this experience has taught me the importance of positive outlook, and to have extreme determination to achieve anything I do. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss how my skills can be used to benefit your company”

Disclosure During an Interview: Disclosure in the interview is a personal choice. Again if you have an obvious disability you want to discuss how your disability does not impact your work ethic or the skills that you can offer to the company. Following are some additional suggestions:

- Be prepared to approach each job interview with confidence that you are familiar with the reasonable accommodations you will need to perform that job well. Your potential employer will be impressed with the confidence and know-how that you possess.
- Consider developing a formal accommodation “plan”. In developing this plan, thoroughly research all the accommodation solutions available to perform work-related tasks that you might encounter. Where these solutions are items or tools, arrange to test various brands or models—both to be familiar with the range of options available you, and to learn which ones best meet your personal needs. You should be conscientious about selecting accommodations that are both effective and cost-effective.
- The Job Accommodation network is a great resource. You may have heard this referred to as JAN. You can access accommodation information that is specific to your disability. Much of the data collected from people with disabilities as well as employers indicates that those individuals who disclosed their disability when called for an interview, when it was an obvious disability, had a much better shot at getting a job. Research JAN on-line at:

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/fact.html>

General Rules Disclosure

1. Script your disclosure. Write it down and have it critiqued. Run through it with friends who are employers and with other people in the working world.
2. Rehearse your disclosure script until you feel comfortable and good about it, not only with your lips, but also with your body language.
3. When you prepare your script, avoid being too clinical or too detailed. It may be of great interest to you, but the interviewer wants to know only three things: (1) Will you be there?; (2) Can you do the job as well as or better than anyone else?, and: (3) Will you be of value to the company?
4. Remember your script and be positive about your skills and abilities. The more positive you are, the more you will convey that you are a skilled and qualified candidate who happens to have a disability. Conversely, the more you discuss your disability, the more important it will become in the employers mind.

