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Making Management Decisions about Accommodations

An accommodation in the workplace is a reasonable adjustment to a job or work environment that makes it possible for an individual with a disability to perform job duties. Put another way, an accommodation is an investment an employer makes in his or her business in order to make the business more efficient or profitable. For example, when word processing systems were proven to be much more efficient than typewriters, businesses invested in personal computers for their employees. Similarly, employers send employees to staff training classes and seminars to upgrade their skills. Decisions about making worksite accommodations for people with disabilities should be made in the same light as decisions about staff training or buying new office equipment. Successful accommodations are beneficial both to the employee and the employer.

Some Issues to Consider: When an employee with a disability requests an accommodation, the employer and employee should discuss the job duties, how the accommodation will assist the individual in performing his or her job, and possible alternative solutions. Among the issues to be considered are:

- What are the functional limitations of the individual seeking the accommodation?
- What specific job tasks are affected by the individual's functional limitations?
- What types of equipment are used/needed to perform the job?
- Are there work place policies or procedures that affect the individual's ability to perform the job?
- Are all the necessary areas of the work environment accessible for this individual?

JAN: Opening Doors To Job Accommodation

What is JAN? The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, is a toll-free resource for anyone who has questions about job accommodations, or about the employment sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Trained consultants respond to questions, discuss specific job accommodations, and suggest additional resources to assist you.

Who should use JAN? Employers, persons with disabilities, service providers, rehabilitation counselors, or anybody involved in helping a person with a disability obtain or retain a job.

How does JAN work? All calls to JAN are kept confidential. If you are calling about accommodating an individual on the job, the more you tell the consultant about the required tasks and the functional limitations and abilities of the individual, the better the consultant will be

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able to help. When you call, the following steps occur: (1)The receptionist listens to each question and transfers the caller to the JAN consultant who is most knowledgeable in that particular area. (2) The consultant asks questions to obtain the information needed in order to develop the best solution(s). (3) The consultant searches a database of previous accommodations and provides as many potential accommodation options as possible.

- These may include:
 - different approaches to job tasks
 - proposed policy changes
 - commercially available products
 - different ways to use existing products
 - resources for device modification/fabrication.
- The consultant provides methods of implementing and maintaining the accommodation(s) and recommends processes for reviewing the effectiveness of the accommodation(s).
- JAN staff will prepare and send materials in the format requested. Information can be sent electronically, faxed or mailed using the U.S. Postal Service.
- As follow-up, the caller may be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the recommended accommodation(s) and their usefulness. This feedback helps JAN improve services and assist future callers with accommodation solutions.

What has been the result of JAN services? Following are examples of accommodations recommended by JAN that have assisted companies and agencies in hiring, retaining and promoting people with disabilities.

Call Request: *Because of low reading skills a child care assistant with a learning disability had difficulty preparing lessons based on children's books.* **Accommodation Used:** The employee was given a videotape of various children's stories and effective hand motions to review. COST: \$50

Call Request: *A new restaurant employee who is legally blind used a service dog to travel to and from work. The employee did not need the dog to perform her job duties.* **Accommodation Used:** A dog crate was placed in a back office with a clear path of travel in and out of the facility. The dog was crated during the work day and was out of any contact with food products or supplies used in the restaurant. COST: \$75

Call Request: *A company vice president with arthritis had difficulty maintaining stamina during the workday.* **Accommodation Used:** The employer provided flexibility in the vice president's work hours and a recliner for her office so that she could change body positions to cut down on fatigue. COST: \$750

Call Request: *A cashier with mild mental retardation had difficulty making change.* **Accommodation Used:** The worker used a talking calculator and a chart of bills and coins. COST: \$150

Call Request: *A worker who is deaf was responsible for inspecting underground water utilities. When the employee was underground alone, co-workers above ground needed to communicate with him.* **Accommodation Used:** A wireless portable vibrating paging system was purchased for the employee. COST: \$445

For additional information contact: The Gulf Coast Business Leadership Network - 281-474-7887 or E-mail at gcbln@imagineenterprises.com

The information for this fact sheet came from the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. This program promotes best disability employment practices to enhance employment opportunities for job candidates who happen to have disabilities.