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Preparing for and Conducting an Effective Job Interview

Accommodating Persons with Disabilities

Hiring the right person for the right job starts with conducting an effective job interview. As in any interview, you are interviewing a person with skills and abilities to determine if that individual is the best fit for your job opening. The following guidelines ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded a fair and equitable opportunity to present their job qualifications.

Preparing for the Interview

1. Your company's application and interviewing procedures should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA prohibits disability-related questions or medical exams before a real job offer is made.
2. Make sure your company's employment offices and your interviewing location(s) are accessible to applicants
3. Be willing to make appropriate and reasonable accommodations to enable a job applicant with a disability to present himself or herself in the best possible light. When setting up the interview explain what the hiring process involves and advise them that all applicants are entitled to reasonable accommodations in the application and interview and job testing process. For example, if a person who is blind states he or she will need help filling out forms, provide the assistance; provide an interpreter for an applicant who is deaf, if he or she requests one; provide details or specific instructions to applicants with cognitive disabilities, if this type of accommodation is required.
4. Do not let a rehabilitation counselor, social worker or other third party take an active part in or sit in on an interview unless the applicant requests it.
5. Make sure that all questions asked during the interview are job-related. Speak to the essential job functions regarding the position for which the applicant is applying, as well as why, how, where, when and by whom each task or operation is performed. Do not ask whether or not the individual needs an accommodation to perform these functions, because such information is likely to reveal whether or not the individual has a disability. This is an ADA requirement to ensure that an applicant with a disability is not excluded before a real job offer is made.

Conducting the Interview

1. Relax and make the applicant feel relaxed. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. At the same time, remember that candidates (particularly those applying for professional positions) are expected to assume an equal share of the responsibility for making your interaction with them successful.

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2. Do not speculate or try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability. The person with a disability has mastered alternate techniques and skills of living and working with his or her particular disability. If the applicant has a known disability (either because it is obvious or was revealed by the applicant) the employer may ask an applicant to describe how he or she would perform a certain job function if it is an essential part of the job. Remember, all questions should be job-related and asked in an open-ended format.
3. Concentrate on the applicant's technical and professional knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and interests, not on the disability. Remember, you cannot interview a disability, hire a disability or supervise a disability. You can interview a person, hire a person, supervise a person.
4. Disability related questions and medical examinations are prohibited under ADA at the pre-employment offer stage. After a real job offer is made, the offer may be conditioned on the results of disability related questions and/or medical examinations, but only if the examination or inquiry is required for all entering employees in similar jobs and only if all medical information is kept confidential. Disability related questions and medical examinations at the post-offer stage do not have to be related to the job. However, if the offer is withdrawn, the employer must show that the individual could not perform the essential function of the position or would pose a direct threat.
5. If testing is part of the interview process, make sure the test does not reveal information about physical or mental impairments (i.e., make sure it is not a medical examination.) Other tests which demonstrate the applicant's ability to perform actual or simulated job tasks are permitted under the ADA. Inform the applicant before the interview that a test will be part of the interview process. The applicant can then request an accommodation such as a different format for written tests.
6. If you are not prepared to make a commitment to hire her or him immediately, the usual reasons given to applicants who are not hired at the close of the interview apply: "Thank you for coming in, we will notify you in a few days of our decision," "It will be necessary for you to talk with the supervisor in charge of that unit," "The boss isn't available today," and so on.

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.