

# Managing your Career: Strategies for Students with Disabilities

## Module 5: Workplace Accommodations

### *Slide 1: Introduction to Module Series*

Welcome to Managing Your Career: Strategies for Graduates with disabilities. This presentation was developed by the Academic Advising & Career Centre in partnership with AccessAbility Services to help students with disabilities transition from university to the world of work.

### *Slide 2: Introduction to Module 5*

This is module 5 of 6 in the series and is called “Workplace Accommodations”. My name is Cheryl Leopard, and I’m a Disability Consultant in AccessAbility Services. I’ll be narrating this module.

### *Slide 3: Module Agenda*

Workplace Accommodations is the topic of this module. I’m providing you with an agenda so that you’ll know what will be discussed in this module. The Ontario Human Rights Code is an important law that you need to learn about so I’ll provide you with some information about it. I’ll then provide you with some examples of disabilities that are protected under The Code. Next, I’ll discuss what the word accommodation means and then talk about the legal duty to accommodate. It’s important that you know about your responsibilities in the accommodation process so this will be discussed in this module. I’ll then explain to you the benefits of being accommodated and finally, I’ll provide examples of work accommodations.

### *Slide 4: Ontario Human Rights Code*

It’s important that you know about a provincial law called the Ontario Human Rights Code. Sometimes this law is simply referred to as “The Code”. The Ontario Human Rights Code is a law that protects everyone from discrimination and harassment. It gives everybody equal rights and opportunities in such areas as jobs, housing and services. This ensures that people with disabilities have the same opportunities and benefits at work as people without disabilities. I’ll be discussing some important features of “The Code” in this presentation; however, it’s important that you learn as much as you can about legal matters involving being accommodated at work so please visit the website of the Ontario Human Rights Commission to read a document called, “Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate”. Please see the “Resources to Explore” section at the end of this module to get the website address.

### *Slide 5: Examples of Disabilities Protected Under the Code*

I'm often asked by students if their type of disability will be accommodated on-the-job, so this slide provides examples of disabilities that are protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code. Please keep in mind that the list on this slide is not exhaustive, which means there are other disabilities not listed on this slide that are protected under "The Code". Please take a few minutes to review the information on this slide.

### *Slide 6: What is an Accommodation*

The Ontario Human Rights Code defines an accommodation as: "an adjustment of a rule, practice, condition or requirement of a job to take into account the specific disability-related needs of an individual". It means that the way in which work is done can be adjusted to allow the person with a disability to perform job tasks and participate in the work environment. An example of modifying a job task would be allowing a person who speaks better than they write to submit his/her monthly report orally to the supervisor instead of submitting a written report. An example of modifying a rule in a workplace would be an employer adjusting a rule about no animals allowed on premises to allowing service animals on premises because a person with a disability requires the use of a service animal.

The Ontario Human Rights Code outlines general principles that must be kept in mind when considering appropriate accommodations for employees. The first principle states that appropriate accommodations must respect the dignity of an individual meaning that an accommodation is only appropriate if it values a person's self-respect and self-worth. If an accommodation degrades an individual then it isn't an appropriate accommodation. The second principle of accommodation is that accommodations must be individualized. Each person has unique needs and what may work as an appropriate accommodation for one person may not be a suitable accommodation for another person. The 3<sup>rd</sup> principle involves accommodations that promote integration and full participation in the workplace. This means that a work environment should be barrier-free and inclusive. Where possible, barriers should be prevented and removed so that people with disabilities have access to the workplace. The 4<sup>th</sup> principle involves ensuring confidentiality and this means that any information you provide to the employer about your disability must be kept confidential and only those who need to know are provided with minimal information to provide the accommodation.

### *Slide 7: Duty to Accommodate*

The Ontario Human Rights Code outlines an important legal concept called the duty to accommodate. The "duty to accommodate" is the legal obligation that employers have under the Code to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The goal of accommodation is to allow equal benefit from and participation in the workplace. If you

disclose to an employer that you have a need for accommodations, the employer has a legal responsibility to put those accommodations in place for you unless it will cause the employer undue hardship. When considering if an accommodation will cause undue hardship, the OHRC will consider 3 things: the cost; outside sources of funding and health and safety requirements. Please keep in mind that it is the employer that must prove that an accommodation will cause undue hardship.

*Slide 8: Responsibilities in the Accommodation Process: Employees*

Everyone involved in the accommodation process has responsibilities to make certain that the accommodation process works well. Your responsibilities include telling the employer that you need accommodations. This is important to do because employers may not realize that you require accommodations because many disabilities are considered “invisible disabilities” meaning that an employer can’t tell by looking at you that you have a disability and require accommodations. Another responsibility you have is to cooperate in getting information for the employer about your disability. Keep in mind that you don’t need to tell the employer the name of your disability. You only need to tell them how it impacts you and what accommodations you require. You also have the responsibility of participating in discussions about solutions so this means that you have to be able to tell people how your disability impacts you, what challenges you have or may have in performing your job tasks, and what accommodations may be helpful. Once accommodations are put in place, you are responsible for continuing to work with the employer to manage the accommodation process. This means that you have to monitor your progress and determine if the accommodations are working or if something needs to be changed.

*Slide 9: Responsibilities in the Accommodation Process: Employers*

The employer also has responsibilities in the accommodation process. One of the employer’s responsibilities is to accept your accommodation request in good faith and this means the employer will trust that the accommodation is needed unless there are legitimate reasons for acting otherwise. The employer will only request information that is needed to put the accommodation in place. The employer is responsible to seek expert opinion when necessary to ensure that your needs are being met. The employer also has the responsibility of taking an active role in looking at solutions. It’s also the employer’s responsibility to ensure confidentiality. Employers have the responsibility of responding in a timely manner to your accommodation request. In addition, if the employer requires medical documentation from an expert, it is the employer who must pay for that documentation.

### *Slide 10: Employee's Benefits of Being Accommodated*

There are many benefits for you to be accommodated on-the-job. It's important to discuss the benefits because some of you may be thinking that you won't ask for accommodations even though you may require them. This is sometimes referred to as "going it alone" and this may negatively impact your job performance because you aren't accommodated when you need to be. Knowing the benefits of being accommodated on the job will help you to determine if there's a need to disclose to the employer that you have a disability and require accommodations. In addition, you can use the benefits to inform an employer why they should hire you and put the accommodations in place.

Putting accommodations in place to perform your job functions will help you to improve your work performance because appropriate accommodations will minimize the impact of your disability on your ability to perform the job tasks efficiently and effectively. Another benefit of telling an employer about your disability is that it may help you get a job if the employer has an employment equity program in place. Employment equity programs are a commitment an employer has made to diversify the company's workforce to include certain groups of people including people with disabilities. Disclosing that you have a disability when there is an employment equity program in place within a company, may help to increase your chances of being hired, providing that you have the skills to perform the job. Being accommodated will also help you to retain your job because it's expected that you can perform the essential tasks of the job well in order to continue working in the job. If you don't use accommodations and this results in not being able to perform a job well, you may be dismissed from the job or you may not get raises, which are usually tied to good job performance. Another benefit of being accommodated on the job is that it'll help reduce your stress and anxiety. Typically those people who decide to go it alone have a higher level of stress and anxiety because they may experience difficulties completing certain job tasks. Being accommodated at the start of your job can help you to complete your job tasks effectively, which will reduce your stress and anxiety.

### *Slide 11: Employer's Benefits of Accommodating Employees*

An employer will also benefit from putting accommodations in place for employees who need them. It's important that you know how employers will benefit so you can inform the employer of the benefits if they don't know. Telling employers how they will benefit from accommodating you will help to "sell" the employer on hiring you and putting accommodations in place. The Job Accommodation Network surveyed over 1000 employers. The results of the study showed that the benefits employers receive from putting accommodations in place far outweigh the low cost. The benefits for employers include retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing

workers' compensation and training costs, improving interactions among co-workers and improving company diversity and overall productivity.

*Slide 12: Cost of Workplace Accommodations*

Many employers believe that accommodating an individual with a disability is going to be expensive or difficult. This is not true. According to the OHRC, accommodating someone with a disability is seldom as expensive or difficult as is sometimes imagined. Over 2/3s of job accommodations cost under \$500; many cost nothing at all". I would like you to try to remember this information so you'll be able to provide the employer with accurate information about the true costs of accommodating you if the employer says to you that accommodating you will be expensive.

*Slide 13: Workplace Accommodations*

The next six slides of this module will discuss potential accommodations that can be put in place to help you perform assigned job tasks. There are so many accommodations that can be put in place that it would take me hours and hours to go through all of them with you. So please keep in mind that there are other accommodations that you may require besides the ones that I present here. The Job Accommodation Network has an excellent database that you can search for accommodations that may help you to perform your job functions. Please see the "resources to explore" section of this module to find the link to the JAN database.

Did you know that academic accommodations and work accommodations are similar? Many of the accommodations, learning strategies and assistive technology that you use in university can be transferred to the workplace.

*Slide 14: Assistive/Adaptive Technology*

Many of you may use assistive technology in university to help you be more productive with certain tasks such as reading or organizing your thoughts in written format. Many people, with disabilities and without disabilities, benefit from adaptive devices in the workplace. The good news is that if you already own assistive technology such as Kurzweil 3000, Inspiration, Dragon Naturally Speaking, or an iPod touch, you will be able to use those items on the job as well. Examples of AT that you can use to help you perform your job include: text-to-speech software such as Kurzweil 3000 can help you to read written reports; and speech to text software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking can help you to write reports. It's important that you know that much of the assistive technology that you use at school can also be used at work.

*Slide 15: Examples of Accommodations: Auditory Processing*

We're now going to take a look at some examples of accommodations for auditory processing difficulties. Auditory processing is the ability to hear auditory information such as instructions and questions so having a challenge in this area may mean that you have difficulties hearing information. Some disabilities that may cause auditory processing difficulties include attention deficit disorder, a learning disability, acquired brain injury, hard of hearing or mental health disability. Examples of possible job accommodations that could be put in place to help minimize the impact would be replacing the bell on the phone with an electric light bulb device which lights up when the phone rings; having information repeated or paraphrased, asking for written copy of instructions, or using a floor fan to provide white noise.

*Slide 16: Examples of Accommodations: Visual Processing*

The information on this slide is for individuals who may have visual processing difficulties because of the impact of a disability. Examples of disabilities that may cause difficulties with visual processing are a learning disability, acquired brain injury or low vision. The impact is that you may have difficulties taking in or processing information from the sense of sight. Possible accommodations to help minimize the impact include: working in a room with minimal distractions, being provided with verbal instructions instead of written instructions, using a talking calculator, using a voice-activated computer or using a CCTV.

*Slide 17: Examples of Accommodations: Physical Disabilities*

Examples of accommodations for people with physical disabilities include alternate input device when using a computer, a flexible work schedule, an ergonomic workstation, rest breaks away from the workstation, or a parking space close to the entrance of the building where you work.

*Slide 18: Examples of Accommodations: Cognitive Processing*

If you have difficulties maintaining stamina or concentration because you have ADD, an acquired brain injury, a mental health disability or a chronic health problem, there are many accommodations that may help you. Examples include: working from home, rest breaks away from your work station, breaking up larger assignments into smaller tasks, restructuring the job to include only the essential tasks of the job, use of white noise or reducing distractions in the work area.

*Slide 19: Examples of Accommodations: Cognitive Processing*

If you have difficulties recalling information due to an acquired brain Injury, attention deficit disorder, a learning disability or mental health disability, you may require such

accommodations as : being provided with typed written minutes of meetings and instructions, using written checklists or using to do lists, getting extra time for learning new material or using a digital recorder in meetings.

*Slide 20: Resources to Explore*

This slide contains resources if you wish to learn more about accommodations that may be appropriate for you to use on-the-job.

*Slide 21: Contact Information*

I'd like to thank-you for your time and wish you the best of luck in your job search.

We always appreciate feedback about how to improve the modules in this series. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback. Our contact information is listed on this slide.

*Slide 22: References*

No narration for this slide.