

## **DISCLOSURE IN THE WORKPLACE**

(taken from Volume 9 Discovering Life Skills Employability for People with Disabilities)

### **GOALS:**

- To develop strategies for effectively communicating a disability with an employer and co-workers.
- To gain a better understanding of communicating accommodations and disability related needs with employers.
- To assist in learning the positives of disclosing a disability in the workplace.

### **RATIONALE:**

Persons with disabilities can face many challenges, and among the greatest of these is finding work while assuring potential employers of their capabilities. With a more diverse workforce, this challenge can be turned into an opportunity, if everyone can focus on abilities and skills. Employers too can benefit from this resource pool. It is critical to be able to disclose a disability at the appropriate time, especially when it may affect the job.

### **Warm Up: Stressing the Positive**

Have participants sit in a U-shaped configuration so everyone can see each other. Ask each participant in the group to identify what they feel is their strongest quality. Possible examples include kindness, being organized, a sense of humour, etc.

### **Exercise 1: Accommodation Techniques**

In smaller groups of 3 have each participant share what specific technique/ tools or adjustments they have used to accommodate their own disability in a work or training setting. (Examples: note taking, assistive devices, work place modifications).

### **Questions to Consider:**

In their small groups, have participants share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the following questions:

- Why are businesses employing persons with disabilities?
- How can a business benefit from employing persons with disabilities?

- How can everyone in the workplace benefit from having a diverse pool of employees?
- Have you ever communicated information about your disability to an employer and/or co-worker? How did you feel about the process?

### **Theory: Disclosure in the Workplace**

Define the term *Disclosure*: it is letting people know about your disability. How to discuss your disability with an employer and fellow employees can be a tricky conversation.

Define the term *Accommodations*: it refers to working conditions, tools and technologies needed to help an individual be a successful employee.

Discuss the concept of self awareness with the group. Be sure to explain the importance of being comfortable communicating your disability to others in the workplace. Explain that the level of a person's comfort with his/her disability directly affects others. Openness and willingness to answer questions about the disability and any limitations it poses, while maintaining a right to privacy, helps to reduce uncertainty and put others at ease.

Explain to the group that they may need to educate not only the employer but other employees in the company about their disability. The process is often empowering for everyone involved. Review with the participants that they will need to take charge and talk openly with co-workers, providing them with positive experiences and information.

Review **Theory Box 1 - Speaking About Your Disability At Work** with the group and discuss how this can be helpful to them on the job.

Review **Theory Box 2 - Tips On Disclosing Your Disability In The Workplace**.

Review **Theory Box 3 - Tips for Requesting Accommodations in the Workplace**.

### **Exercise 2: Communicating Your Disability to Others**

Distribute a copy of the worksheet **Communicating Information About Your Disability** to each group member and ask them to formulate their own answers to these questions.

Divide the group into pairs and have them role play with their partner, using their worksheet as a guide to help them respond to their partners questions. Set up the scenario as two individuals being co-workers and they have to communicate information about their disability to a co-worker who does not have a disability.

Once one of the individuals in the pair has had a chance to communicate their disability ask them to switch roles.

### **Exercise 3: Requesting Accommodation Needs in the Workplace**

Divide the group into their pairs (same or different than Exercise 2). Have them help each other determine a list of accommodation needs they have, and list the costs and sources of these accommodations, how these can be provided and if funding is available for any of their accommodations. Identify what they would provide and what the employer would need to provide on the job. (If they don't know some of this information they can just guess for now. This can be set as an important homework assignment.)

Have each person develop a short statement or list of their individual accommodation needs.

Once complete, review the statements and lists as a large group. Encourage discussion about the best time to disclose their disabilities and needs for accommodations.

Wrap up by emphasizing the importance of focusing on what the individual has to offer, their skills, strengths and abilities and to focus on the positive ways of dealing with the disability in the workplace.

### **EVALUATION:**

Ask group members to respond to questions:

- What did you learn?
- What helped you learn (written material, discussion)? What might have been better?
- Do you now have an increased comfort level in talking about your disability with an employer and co-workers?

### **REFERENCES:**

Employment Series for Persons with Disabilities- Tips for Job Seekers

Come out on October 25<sup>th</sup> to receive your free volume that includes the complete lesson material.