

Part I

The Disability Factor

How to Position Yourself as a Job Candidate with a Disability

This book is divided into two parts.

Part I talks about how to develop and competitively present yourself as a person with a disability to the world of work.

Having a known or visible disability can often create negative reactions or understandings about your employment potential. This is especially true if you express yourself in ways which reinforce these stereotypes. People, including many employers, will make quick judgments about who you are and what your potential is when they learn that you have a disability. And, their impressions can often be negative.

So, building your professional skills must start here.

The lessons in this part of the book explore the various ways you might best represent your disability in the world of work. The ideas and approaches which follow can vary based on your style and personality. Accept these ideas as important considerations in order to present yourself in the best light possible.

Take these concepts as starting points for you to refine further in ways which are most comfortable for you. One word of caution, however: while you can adapt these techniques to your circumstances, don't stray too far from the basic truths and realities these practices represent.

Also, it's important for you to be honest with yourself. Step back and understand how you currently define and show your disability identity. In order to get an objective assessment, you might even ask people close to you to give you feedback on this side of your personality. So you might ask them, "If you were an employer, how would you respond to me as a job applicant with a disability?"

What may be working for you now, either in school or at home, may not work for you in the workplace.

Be prepared to analyze and adjust your disability strategy, in order to become more skillful and successful in the world of work. Fashion your approach in a way which makes you more professional.

Lesson 1 — The Disability Experience

Let's begin with this subject by considering the idea of labels. People have an inescapable need to give other people labels and, as a result, we all get them.

It begins the instant we're born. At that very moment of arrival, someone in the delivery room announces to the world, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl." And, the labeling process has begun.

As we grow older, more and more labels are given to us: She's tall for her age. He's short. She's a good sleeper. He's not.

In school, we continue to get labels: She's good in math. He's a book worm. She's a wild child. He's always late.

So, naturally, when a disability becomes apparent, whether it's from birth or later in life, that label is slapped onto a person's back.

Most often, the "disability label" tends to overpower other people's ability to see who people really are and what they can do.

"He's dyslexic." "She has epilepsy." "He uses a wheelchair." "She has Cerebral Palsy." For too many people, these labels say it all. All the other labels we had been given before, or may earn later, seem to be over powered by the disability label. This powerful label or identity tends to push aside all the other characteristics or abilities we have. The disability label takes center stage. A primary identity is most likely to become the "disability label."

Sadly, labels are for the benefit of the people we meet, not for people with the labels themselves. People find it far easier to identify, understand and categorize individuals if they can simply put a label on them, rather than to try and go deeper into their character, capabilities or potential. Unfortunately, it's often easier for people to simply say, "Oh, Jim – he's the blind guy", rather than, "Oh, Jim – he's the tall man with blue eyes who loves sports, is good in math, graduated from college, knows accounting, is a great project manager, can supervise people, etc."

So, labels are society's shorthanded way of bringing simplicity to the complex subject of understanding people.

There's a serious downside to this labeling shortcut that we all practice. That downside is that too often people accept the labels assigned to them and, in turn, allow those labels to overly define them and restrict who they really are. When we accept the broad labels given to us by others, it's very likely that we may be giving up our power to the label.

This is especially true about the disability label.

While society has made significant advances in accepting and integrating people with disabilities into many aspects of life, the unfortunate truth remains that the general public still holds negative attitudes, understandings and practices around the label "disability." Persistent negative attitudes have forced people with disabilities to deal with unnecessary barriers and challenges.

These unnecessary barriers start in peoples' minds, where nondisabled people seem to think about the disability label in both negative terms and outdated ways. When they see or learn that a person has a

disability, their first thoughts (and sometimes final conclusions) are “People with disabilities are different, they’re less able, or unable to perform tasks well.” As a result, they think, “We should not expect them to be where nondisabled people are.” That includes being in the workplace.

These thoughts may not actually be spoken, but they’re “heard and felt” by people with disabilities who have learned how to recognize the negative looks and reactions people send their way. The instant a disability label is slapped on to a person with a disability, it often feels like that’s all others can see.

It’s both confusing and interesting to see how someone’s focus and conversation shifts when they suddenly realize that this person has a disability. Often, their reactions and expectations go negative. One minute they seem to accept you as a person. Everything is fine. The next minute, when they “discover” that you have a disability, their mood changes. They are suddenly a different person. You can see their demeanor shift and change. It’s as if you’ve moved from being a new acquaintance, potential friend or employee, to being someone they have to be careful with; or, should not expect to include in their life or workplace. But, you’re the same person you were before the disability was observed. Your relationship may have been progressing nicely with the other person, then the disability enters the picture and it all changes.

What a difference the “disability label” makes!

Of course, other groups of people have similar labeling challenges. If you’re from a certain minority, ethnic, religion or gender identity group, some people tend to only see that label and immediately associate you with negative or stereotype images and thoughts. They’ve put you into a box, wrapped it up and moved you off to the side of their sense of inclusion and equity. That’s exactly how labeling and stereotyping leads to discrimination, at the individual and society-wide levels.

In most cases, these types of negative reactions have lessened over the years from what they used to be. Civil rights sensibilities have helped society move away from the dramatic knee-jerk reactions of the past. We are making progress towards a greater sense of the individual rather than just using their labels or identities. Still, most people will agree, we haven’t achieved full acceptance for the more complete humanity behind the labels.

While the general public seems to have made some progress with minorities, religions, gender identity and ethnicities, there has been relatively slower progress around disability. The disability identity still creates, in too many peoples’ minds, a biased reaction that usually expresses itself with negativity. They most often think, “You can’t be a full member of society if you have a disability.”

One obvious consequence of these traditional negative attitudes towards people with disabilities is a failure to provide full disability access in buildings, facilities, paths of travel, transportation systems, education, housing, internet sites, products, equipment, travel, voting, recreation as well as places of employment. The list seems never ending.

Everywhere we turn, some nondisabled architect, engineer, city planner or program operator assumes that people with disabilities will not be coming to their location, so they fail to automatically design

public or private locations with access in mind. When this happens, people with disabilities get designed out.

In addition, we're still evolving away from longstanding design principles which utilized the specifications of an "average man" – in height, reach, strength, and ability – for designing buildings, facilities and products. Complicating access is the historical tradition which dictates that important buildings and facilities be designed to impress or humble those entering their spaces. Since Greek and Roman times, both public and private buildings needed to have long flights of stairs leading to grand entrances in order to show to those entering the power and importance of the building's occupants. It was felt by those in these buildings that they could gain an advantage over those entering them by having people "look up" to both their entrances and authority. This design style can still be found in our buildings today. The problem with this classical design style is it perpetuates inaccessible design for people with disabilities. These early design principles have evolved a great deal to include others, but they are not yet fully and routinely adjusted for people with disabilities.

As we think about these design traditions, it has been observed that if it weren't for inaccessible buildings, programs and negative attitudes around disabilities, the word disability wouldn't have the negative meaning it has today.

In other words, if building and program designers would always follow the idea or definition that the "general public" automatically includes members who happen to have a disability, then we'd be well on our way to full inclusion for people with disabilities. This principle of design is called "universal design." It teaches us that when designing building or programs, we should design them for everyone who is part of the "general public" – including people with all types of disabilities. So buildings should have ramps and elevators for people with mobility disabilities, Braille signs for people who are blind, and visual cues for people who are deaf. Programs, meanwhile, could include accommodations such as sign language interpreters. Unfortunately, we're not quite there yet. We are making progress but have a way to go.

This failure to routinely and always design our buildings and programs for a "general public," which includes all its members (including people with disabilities) continues to perpetuate an artificial separation or discrimination that need not exist. Society has a serious shortcoming when it comes to understanding that people with disabilities are a major portion (15%) of the general public.

We must understand that these negative and illogical attitudes about disability are deeply ingrained into society's consciousness. These negative attitudes have their tradition in both world history and religion. During earlier times, when societies were rural and based on agricultural or manual occupations, not being physically or mentally "fit" meant that you weren't able to contribute to the community's well-being. You were considered "sick" or an "invalid" (words of those times) and must be protected and held back. You were neither expected nor encouraged to move about in the community or participate in any of its activities, including work.

In addition, most of the world's major religions have, at times, depicted disability as something to be cured by a miracle, as an object of charity or a curse on the family for prior sins. Not too long ago, one of

the world's major religions thought that seizures were a sign of being possessed by the devil. These myths or misconceptions still hold great power over how people think about disability.

The historical drag of these long-held practices, beliefs and traditions about disability continue to haunt us today. These are powerful forces to overcome. These longstanding beliefs linger in peoples' minds and express themselves in the present-day biases, stereotypes and negative attitudes about people with disabilities.

The human crime of all this negative thinking, history, and practice is that we are losing the potential contributions of a large segment of our population. Plus, their civil and human rights are being limited, which is a stain on our democracy.

Also, think about the economic losses these exclusionary practices represent for the nation when people with disabilities are blocked from working. Many nonworking people with disabilities are forced to seek disability benefits payments to survive. Add to these costs the further economic losses of unrealized pay checks and income taxes, and the numbers quickly grow.

Curiously, they're even some seemingly positive thoughts which present more attitudinal barriers on top of the negative labels and traditions described above.

For example, there are the "super-human" amazing stories about unbelievable feats and accomplishments of some people with disabilities that we hear about from time to time. This is when nondisabled people marvel at the heroic and unimagined accomplishments of people with disabilities who have done something against "all the odds."

"Wow, look at what that person with a disability has done, they're amazing!"

These are the "inspiring news" stories you may read or hear about in the media, like "Blind man climbs a Mount Everest," or "Paralyzed man swims the English Channel." Sure, these are admirable accomplishments, but why does the news only tell these amazing stories when the important news is about people with disabilities being average – living average lives as workers, parents, home owners, volunteers, community leaders, etc.

As a result of all these too low and too high extremes, disability discrimination remains a drag.

It makes no sense. It's wrong. It's illegal. Yet, it lingers.

All of this can be very discouraging for people with disabilities as they think about working and a career. It can make it all seem impossible.

We must recognize these harsh realities and commit ourselves to dealing with them at every turn. We must know that all these labels, negative messages and inaccessible attitudes can be surmounted. The looks, the obstacles, the condescending words, the pity, and unequal treatment can be beaten back. We must constantly remind ourselves not to allow these negative forces drag us down or hold us back.

The real danger of all of this is that it tends to force the person with a disability to accept or internalize the negative notions about who they are.

So, if you are a person with a disability and have negative feelings about yourself, understand why this happens and never blame yourself or feel inadequate for being discouraged. As we've discussed in this Lesson, these are longstanding and deeply held traditions which are gradually changing and will dramatically change for you when you become determined not to give in.

Don't be discouraged.

Don't let ignorance win.

Lesson 2 — Creating a New Experience

What can we do about this negativity and oppression? Can we do anything? Well, discrimination (and that's what this is) is most oppressive when you let it happen. If left unchallenged, negative attitudes and practices surrounding society's concept about disability are confirmed.

Negative attitudes will only be reversed when the oppressed person or group decides not to accept or to comply with the stereotypes imposed on them. People with disability must teach society a new lesson about their potential.

Imagine that you were a woman in the 1950's. During that time, society expected you to be a house wife and not to work; or, if you did work your occupational choices were severely limited. There were many unhappy and unfulfilled women who were forced by society into these stereotype roles.

During the 1960's, and continuing today, women decided that society's attitudes about their role were wrong and they have been leading a movement to teach society new values. Women decided to take control of the conversation and redefine their roles. Their struggle isn't over, but it's well underway and we see strides forward every day.

The same journey has been undertaken by minorities and other oppressed groups or classes of people.

People with disabilities have begun a similar journey dedicated to teaching society the truth about who they are and what they can do. Just like the efforts of women and minority and oppressed groups, the struggle isn't over, but there is progress toward change.

As we look at other social movements, the lesson to be learned is each person with a disability has a responsibility, an opportunity, to make a statement about a new disability reality – their disability reality.

In other words, you don't have to accept existing negative attitudes or expectations or discriminatory practices. You don't have to let others define who you are and who you want to become. You can and must control your destiny. You can and must educate those around you about your true potential.

Regarding your employment potential, you must build up your self-confidence, have a plan and get busy achieving your plan. You must learn the lessons of this book. You have the power to make it happen when you're determined.

The beauty about this strategy is that it not only gives you power to control other people's thinking about you, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, if you want to become an engineer, manager or a teacher, your determination and hard work will likely lead you to success. If you wish it, it will happen! Conversely, if you don't wish it, it's far less likely to happen. Let's be frank, if you're not determined, you're not likely to succeed.

You have the power to control your destiny because you, not society, should control and define who you are and who you want to do. Your personal power is how you define yourself to others through your words and actions. Your personal power is how you present yourself to others and how you expect them to perceive you.

By practicing this self-determination or personal power, you can begin to beat back those negative perceptions and stereotypes about your disability. You can "will" yourself to success. Be positive and push back the negativity that may come your way. It's amazing how people respond to your determination. They most often embrace it because they admire your zeal, tenacity and will power to take control of your situation.

With the right zeal, motivation, and presentation, you will no longer appear "disabled" to them as they usually understand the meaning of this label or word. It may change the entire perception of disability as well.

For example, if you use a wheelchair, chances are when you enter a room other people see the wheelchair before they see you. Moreover, while you're in the room the wheelchair might be all they see when they look at you. Plus, the wheelchair, not you, establishes their expectations about you. And, you can bet that their expectations are not totally positive.

In such a situation, you must begin to practice using your personal power to define yourself in a more positive and complete way. You are not your wheelchair. You are a competent, talented and interesting person who happens to use a wheelchair. You have a personality, intelligence, ambition, experience, and sense of humor. It's up to you to let those parts of yourself fill the room and override society's inability to see beyond the wheelchair. You need to (and can) beat back the negativity in the room by pulling the attention away from your mobility device and putting it on you with your personal power (personality, determination, and passion).

Attitudes are powerful – both theirs and yours. However, one of the beautiful aspects of human beings is that we can learn when we get new information. In the example described above, the nondisabled person assumes when they see the person in the wheelchair that he or she is "confined" to a wheelchair and "unable" to do many things. In addition to having been taught to think like this by society, they assume that if they were similarly "confined" to a wheelchair, they couldn't work in their jobs. And,

more importantly, they assume that they (and by extension you) couldn't do the job you may be seeking with them.

How wrong they are!

This is a teaching moment. In the example above, if we take advantage of this teaching moment, the person in the wheelchair might fight back by simply saying, "Hi, my name is Jill, and it's so nice to meet you." Then, the person using a wheelchair should keep the conversation going in a friendly and self-confident manner until the point is made about the person – not the wheelchair. By transforming herself into a likeable, knowledgeable and friendly person, people are more likely to begin to see Jill as a complete person, rather than just a "disability label."

Plus, by being proactive and presenting herself in a positive and powerful way, Jill is helping to further advance the equality of not only herself, but also the millions of other people with disabilities who will profit from her example.

So, if you have a disability, stop accepting society's negative disability related expectations about you. Know they will be coming your way, especially in the world of work. Develop a personal strategy for taking the power back through the force of your personality. Teach your audience and society a new lesson about disability and who you are. Speak up about your interest, skills, experiences, and you will begin to push away those artificial barriers.

And, never let other people's beliefs about you make you afraid, mad and hold you back. Believe in yourself. Develop your personal power in a positive way and you will change the conversation.

In later Lessons, we'll explain more on how to do this. For now, commit yourself to developing your personal power to change the negative conversation.

Lesson 3 — A New Perspective for the Workplace

Whenever we start a new activity, sport or job, if we want to be successful, we must prepare ourselves.

For example, successful athletes don't just take to the sport's field and compete without studying, preparing and practicing the sport. They first learn the rules of the game. Then, they get in shape or proper condition and practice the game's various plays or skills. Finally, and most importantly, they assess their mental readiness or toughness to compete.

It is this last item, your "mental readiness or toughness to compete" which is the most important place to begin your journey toward becoming a successful employee who happens to have a disability. It's fundamentally important that you develop your mental toughness to compete and win.

Once you develop positive and correct attitudes about yourself (mental toughness), all the other preparation and practical steps will be easier to master.

The ideas below are designed to help build a positive perspective on disability while rejecting society's outdated myths and stereotypes about disability and employment. These ideas are the way things should be, not necessarily the way things are now.

The considerations listed below can help you better prepare yourself for the road ahead. And, as you think about these new perspectives on disability, let them become your foundation for teaching others who you really are.

With these concepts in mind, you will become a more interesting and powerful job candidate for employers to consider. And, in the process, it will help to shift society's misconceptions about workers with disabilities – one person at a time.

1. Disability is normal

Say this short sentence to yourself: “Disability is Normal.” Say it again. Say it out loud. And, once more – “Disability is Normal.”

Let that sentence wash over you for a few thoughtful and reflective moments. “Disability is Normal.” After you say this to yourself a number of times, how does it make you feel? What's your reaction? How does it impact how you think about disability and about yourself? If you're able to embrace this idea, that you're normal and valuable, just like everyone else, how might this principle begin to impact your self-confidence? How might it impact the self-confidence of people with disabilities every?

If you have a disability, this statement might be very hard for you to accept because so much of your life experience has told you that “you are different” and possibly worse. For example, when you may see the signs that says, “The disability entrance is in the back”, this message emphasizes that the main or “normal” persons' entrance is different from the special or separate entrance for you. In many ways, most of society's messages to you are that you are different and not included in the mainstream or not normal.

So how can “disability be normal”?

When you were growing-up with a disability, did your teachers or relatives ask your friends or brothers or sisters who were not disabled, “what are you going to be when you grow up?” Did they ask you? If not, how did you feel when they didn't ask you this question?

When you were at school and sports or other class events and activities were happening, were they open to you?

Maybe you even took a “special” bus to school, while others took the “regular” bus.

What's “normal” about that?

The fact is that in many cases, disability takes extra time, effort and expense.

As a result, we can sometimes look at disability as a “drag.”

So, how can “disability be normal”?

Well, in fact, disability is a very common characteristic or trait of human beings. Did you know that at least 15% of the world’s population has a disability? Well, it’s true. This means that over 1 billion of the world’s 7 billion people have a disability. That’s more than three (3) times as many people as there are in the United States. So, disability is not rare: in fact, it’s quite a common. It’s so common or prevalent that it should be considered a normal part of the human condition. It’s like any other groups or segments of the human condition. It’s like being tall or short (there are more disabled people in the world than people over 6 feet tall).

Take any segment of society – your class, your school, your community, your state, your country, the world. Where groups of human beings exist, you will surely find people with disabilities among them. It’s both a normal and naturally occurring phenomena in society. So, why can’t we view people with disabilities as a normal part of the human condition and, in turn, always count them in and not out?

If we could begin to think this way, to always expect people with disabilities to be among us, we would begin to normalize both our expectations and readiness to include them fully in all that we do. Such an attitude (a new attitude) to make disability normal must become part of our new perspective.

Accepting society’s perspective that disability is different from the normal range of the human condition or experience not only sends society the wrong message, it takes your power away.

Now, how do we turn that negative around?

Well, this nation, every state, and most localities have passed numerous disability nondiscrimination laws, as well as pursued numerous public education programs designed to change this exclusionary thinking. However, these laws and efforts may not help you when you present yourself for employment.

So, it’s important for you to believe in yourself as a “normal” person, so that others will likely follow your lead and include you.

Don’t just believe it, know it. The truth is that you are a normal person.

Disability is a normal part of the human condition.

Let’s begin to think this way. It can build your self-confidence to see yourself, not as a disabled person looking for a job but, as a job candidate who, like all other job applicants, may be tall or short, male or female, have a disability or not.

Be prepared and confident about this fundamental truth.

Not only should you feel this way about yourself; but, you should also act this way in your life – be normal.

It’s normal to:

- Go to school
- Work
- Travel and take vacations
- Participate in recreation and sports (even through “adaptive” recreation)
- Exercise full citizenship -- VOTE
- Have friends, a partner and, maybe, a family

Make disability a normal part your life.

2. Diversity includes disability

Let’s begin this topic by recognizing and promoting the idea that diversity in the work place is not complete until it includes workers with disability. Diversity, by definition, must include people with disabilities.

As you know, employers have widely embraced the idea that having a diverse workforce gives them a better workforce and, in turn, a stronger company. Both practice and research have demonstrated that when employers include women and minorities, they get a broader perspective within their organizations which results in better performance and productivity. A more diverse workforce means better work teams, more ways of looking at problems and more experiences to consider when solving problems.

Plus, having a more diverse workforce can increase an organization’s ability to better serve and market to the groups they represent. In other words, organizations can perform better and make more money when they utilize the insights of their employees who are women and minorities in crafting how to market to these publics. If an organization’s workforce is limited in just one perspective – let’s say mostly white males – fewer life experiences are involved in the organization’s discussions on how to reach other segments or publics in the marketplace (women and minorities). A monolithic work force, containing just one perspective or category of workers, tends to reduce the richness of the organization’s ability to think more broadly and “outside of the box.”

With the awareness and attention currently being paid by employers to the value of diversity, you should consider preparing yourself to promote the idea that disability (including your disability) is an important addition to employers' diversity efforts. Having workers with disabilities in their organization can help them expand their diversity capability. If you have a disability, you can help them reach those goals.

Given that around 15% of both our nation’s and world’s population report having a disability, you can remind a potential employer that people with disabilities represent an important market share. If you can help an organization more effectively reach and better serve this additional 15% of the public, that is an added value to your job candidacy. And 15% of the nation’s population represents a very large market share for any organization, especially if they haven’t thought about it before. According to the American Institute for Research, people with disabilities spend \$480 billion each year. In comparison, African Americans spend \$501 billion, and Hispanic Americans spend \$582 billion. (People with disabilities are a part of every other population group too – including African Americans and Hispanic

Americans). Given these numbers, imagine the power of your suggestion that a company can sell their products or serve 15% more people in the marketplace. This can be a great selling point for around the idea of hiring workers with disabilities who can potentially help a company's diversity and marketing efforts. When an organization overlooks this part of the population (a significant market share), the organization or company will be less competitive in the market place.

If you are job applicant with a disability, your connection to this "disability market" is a valuable selling point for why employers should hire you. With your life experience, understanding, knowledge and insight about people with disabilities, you can help their organization reach out and better relate to the disability public. Your disability identity connection can help the employer develop better products and services for people with disabilities, engage them, and bring in more customers and sales. That can be a powerful message in an interview – one that can land you a job and build a career.

Perfecting your message around this aspect of diversity, however, will take some effort on your part. As you prepare yourself to represent the disability constituency and its market share, you must first study the disability community more fully, so that you can truly describe yourself as valued added to an employer's disability diversity capability. You must prepare yourself for this role. Do your research. Do your homework and learn "how to" enhance your ability to represent people with disabilities within a company or organization.

There are many ways to do this. For example, get involved with community disability organizations and learn more about what other people with disabilities are feeling and saying. Learn about disability demographics (numbers); disability culture; disability organizations; how to best be approach or market to people with disabilities; and more. In order to be credible in this way, you need to learn as much as you can about your disability community. Begin to develop this capability as a positive asset to your employment candidacy.

More details on this subject can be found in Lesson 12 below.

3. Having a disability is an asset

As we discussed earlier, disability is often viewed by an employer as a limitation, inability or liability.

When people think about disability, they think first and sometimes only about related "functional limitations." They think about the things people with disabilities can't do. They think if somebody is in a wheelchair, blind or deaf you can't perform in a job because they can't walk, see, or hear.

But if you have a disability, that's just the cover of your book. It's not the story inside. And, we all know, "you can't judge a book by its cover."

So, let's consider the story inside the book. Have you ever thought about the fact that managing a disability has likely given you skills and experiences that may have made you a better person? And, perhaps, a better job candidate? Or that the experience of handling a disability develops skills which might be useful in the workplace? And that you might be able to brag about those skills when presenting yourself for a job?

Often, having a disability teaches a person new skills or makes certain skills better or more complete. A disability can challenge you to plan more carefully; to develop other strengths and capabilities more completely; to problem-solve in more complex ways; and to help others better accept and understand disability by educating them about it.

For example, managing a disability often forces you to plan your activities of daily living more carefully. If you're in a wheelchair, you can't forget or ignore the morning alarm because you can't sleep in and later expect to jump out of bed, at the last minute, and rush to work. You need to have a disciplined and well-timed morning routine which cannot vary. You must be organized and practice time management skills.

Plus, if you have attendants supporting you, you must recruit them, interview them, train them, supervise them, evaluate them, pay them, and even fire them when necessary. These skills are similar to being a workplace supervisor.

When you encounter disability discrimination in its various forms, you have to advocate for yourself and calmly explain to others the facts about what you can do which they don't seem to understand. These are vital communication skills designed to influence or "sell" others. They also translate perfectly to the workplace.

If you think about it, many disability-related experiences and tactics can be translated into workplace skills.

These might be:

- time management
- setting priorities
- program or project management
- supervision
- payroll and bookkeeping
- educating and persuading people
- determination and hard work

Now, this isn't to say you're a seasoned professional or expert in these skills; however, your disability experience has taught you some valuable lessons and given you some noteworthy experiences which can translate to a job and the workplace.

So, having a disability is like having a job. It's likely to have developed and improved these and other skills. This way of evaluating your skills is similar to the way veterans evaluate their military experience in terms of civilian jobs. Or how a stay-at-home parent might share their experience after managing a household and raising the kids.

Think about all the different experiences and skills around managing your disability which you have developed. Categorize them into workplace talents like maturity, discipline, judgment, as well as the listing above.

As we will reveal later in this book (Part II) these qualities are the top skills which employers want. Don't ignore or underestimate the value of the disability experience as an asset to your candidacy for a job.

4. Accommodations or adjustments

Often, having a disability means finding yourself in situations – especially in the workplace – where you need to request a disability-related accommodation. You begin by describing to your boss how you can't do something that the job requires you to do because of a disability and that you need assistance, new equipment, or a rearranging of your job duties or work times to perform the job itself.

To most employers, the subject of an accommodation for a worker with a disability sounds rather special and different as well as requiring extra effort and expense. The reality is that most accommodations are relatively easy to provide and lead to better job performance by the employee. For example, voice dictation software usually costs under \$200 – a relatively small expense for most organizations – and a more flexible schedule that allows working from home won't cost any money at all.

Let's imagine that you have landed a job and now need to request an accommodation. Since your employer is probably covered by a law on this subject, they're likely to be very careful to respond to your request appropriately. However, you may still feel awkward or sense uneasiness in the conversation. You may feel like you're imposing on your boss and this request is making you may feel vulnerable because you are different from the other workers. Plus, there is a power differential between the boss and you, so asking or "telling" the boss to do something for you is often a hard conversation to have.

Sometimes, these feelings are so powerful that they cause people with disabilities not to ask for needed accommodations. They don't want to upset either the boss or their co-workers. They don't want to feel "special" and "different." They want to do their jobs without the fuss of asking for disability-related job accommodations. They want to be a "regular" worker, just like everyone else.

The fact is that every worker, disabled or not, asks or requests accommodations all the time. And the ones that aren't directly related to disability are often granted by a supervisor without any of the negative feelings that can surround a disability-related accommodation.

Why?

Well, that's because these other accommodations aren't called disability accommodations. They're thought of as routine work adjustments, performance improvements or enhancements. These are things are regularly granted to workers so they can be productive.

For example, in the modern economy many new workers also get new chairs (especially if the organization has worn-out or uncomfortable ones). They call these special chairs "ergonomic chairs." They fit the individual size of a person and improve their workplace performance by reducing repetitive injuries and related workers' compensation costs. That's a job accommodation. Other examples of these normal or typical workplace accommodations are when workers adjust their work hours for child-care

needs or work from home to keep a doctor's appointment, meet the plumber or cable guy, and more. These are all workplace accommodations, adjustments or performance enhancements.

In many ways, they are the same as disability job accommodations.

So why is there tension around a disability workplace accommodation when there is none for these other similar workplace adjustments?

The answer is anchored in years of negativity and fear about disability. It's that old bias and prejudice about disability not being normal and outside the mainstream.

Well, it's time to move disability accommodations into the mainstream of work place adjustments. Think about it. What are disability accommodations anyway? They're ways to make a worker more productive. So, let's start to describe the subject of disability accommodations as one about productivity improvements.

Nothing warms the heart of a boss more than an employee who says, "I think I can improve my productivity and performance if I could use this device, technique, or work place adjustment." Disability accommodations should be described as methods for improving a person's productivity. For more information on this subject, be sure to read the Lesson 7 on "Accommodation Strategies" below. For now, start thinking about disability accommodations as common, routine, everyday work place adjustments designed to make you even more productive for your boss and company.

5. Familiarity overcomes fear

As we know, disability often generates a mild form of fear or apprehension in our nondisabled friends.

When this happens, the nondisabled person may "pull back" and look for ways to get away from the situation (like not hire you). You need to understand this reaction and develop the skills needed to counter it.

This "disability fear" reaction comes from several places. It can come from either (or both) the historical or religious traditions mentioned in Lesson 1. Remember, for all of recorded history (and that's a long time), disability was feared as either a drain on the community and/or an object of pity or charity. These longstanding traditions linger in our minds.

Another possible source of "disability fear" is more selfish or self-centered. When some people encounter people with disabilities, they worry about how to react and what to say and not say. They worry about being politically correct. They're thinking, "If I say the wrong thing, I'll be embarrassed". So the easy way around this fear is to limit the nondisabled person's exposure to the person with a disability. In order words, the less time with them, the less opportunity there is to make a mistake. If this fear is haunting the nondisabled person, you'll likely find them person anxious and reluctant to engage in a conversation (like the job interview).

A third source for "disability fear" may be based on the nondisabled person's sense of their jobs duties. It's not their job. They may feel that haven't been prepared or educated on how to interact with people

with disabilities. There are “special” rules, resources, and techniques for serving people with disabilities and they don’t feel like they know them. When this fear arises, the nondisabled person may want to move you along swiftly (send you on your way) to the “disability office” before their incompetency shows.

And, lastly, the fear around disability rights may be another potential source for a nondisabled person’s reluctance to engage or talk with you. This is especially important in work or employment related situations. If you’re a job applicant with a disability an employer may want to move you along quickly (but legally) to get away from you and the laws that protect you. They don’t want to get a disability complaint or law suit.

Nondisabled persons’ fears about interacting with people with disabilities need to be recognized, understood and then carefully handled. Learn to recognize these behaviors. And be prepared to respond to them because your interests may depend on your ability to calm, educate and encourage these ill-informed people on how to get past their fears and apprehensions.

Here are some techniques to try.

First, try to understand that these nondisabled people need your help. They’re a lot like a drowning person. They feel like they’re about to drown in their fears and need to get out of the water as soon as possible. So become the lifeguard: throw them a life ring when they need your help to work through their fears and apprehensions. Don’t get mad or be impatient with them, as it will most likely be in your best interest to manage the situation in a more positive way. While it may feel natural or normal to want to “fight” this disability discrimination (let them drown), try to remember that it’s more likely ignorance and self-doubts that generate the behavior, rather than a mean-spirited desire to put you down, insult or to overtly discriminate against you. Instead of getting defensive or angry, respond to this situation in a professional and logical manner.

Now that you better understand their fears, begin by being pleasant. Try to calm them down by smiling. You may not feel like being nice and friendly, but familiarity and personality (your “likeability”) can help to disarm their negativity. So, be nice or cordial. Maybe say something nice about the weather, about the other person, about anything. Even thank the other person for their willingness to try to help you. If something humorous can be said, make them laugh. Even consider apologizing for bothering them: “I’m really sorry to bother you, but I really need your help.” Be sincere. Try and make a personal connection. Remember that “familiarity overcomes fear.” These techniques are likely to help the other person to begin to see you, not the disability. There’s a general truth in the idea that once people begin to know each other on the personal or human level, the apparent differences or fears between them begin to fade away. With such a shift, a more positive interact becomes possible and even likely.

So, when encountering these situations, lead with your human warmth, personality, and good will. Help them to get to know you and not your disability. Help them to get to that place where you’re just two people talking with each other.

The rewards you'll gain from utilizing this strategy are worth the extra energy you'll need to respond to these challenges. In addition, these techniques will also enhance your professional skills.

Familiarity overcomes fear.

6. Self-advocacy in the work place

As a person with a disability, you face barriers and discrimination all the time. No doubt, you've been encouraged and taught how to self-advocate for yourself. And, most likely, you've had to self-advocate for yourself numerous times in a variety of situations or settings, and sometimes in an assertive or confrontational manner.

The point of this topic is to offer you several finer points about self-advocacy. These finer points will seem worthwhile when you pursue your self-advocacy in professional or workplace situations.

First of all, what are we self-advocating for? Are we seeking "equality" or "nondiscrimination?" What's the difference?

Well, the principle of equality represents equal opportunity and treatment. If one class of people gets an opportunity or advantage, another protected class should get an equal opportunity or the same opportunity. For example, in public accommodations (theatres, hotels, restaurants, shops, etc.) they can't prevent protected classes (women, minorities, etc.) from entering.

But, equal opportunity is not going to help much when the subject is disability access. For example, you may be welcomed to enter a theatre, hotel, restaurant, or shop – however, if there is a flight of stairs at the entrance, but you can't walk up those steps, you're still discriminated against by that business.

The subject of disability rights is more than equal opportunity. It's about nondiscrimination practices.

Under the disability "nondiscrimination" legal principles, it may be necessary for a business to take a specific action or make changes to the way that a building is built or operated. For example, the building owner may need to create an accessible entrance, possibly by building a ramp or installing a lift.

So, we're about more than equality of treatment – we're about equality of access and services. That's the end goal. However, to reach that goal, the real legal principle is "nondiscrimination." Be sure to understand the difference and learn how to explain it clearly so that others can understand and better meet your needs for access.

Self-advocating for equal access and services at a community movie theatre is one thing. Here you might simply file a complaint with a city official about the lack of access (say, accessible seating) or even talk directly with management as a first try. However, it may be very different when it comes to self-advocating for yourself in the work place. First, this is a professional environment, meaning you have to work with these people and you don't want to unnecessarily anger them, especially your boss. If you do, it might hurt your employment situation.

So, how can you professionally assert your nondiscrimination needs in a workplace situation?

For starters, try not to make the subject confrontational. Don't get visibly upset or angry. Don't make harsh and threatening demands. Don't immediately file a disability complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or threaten to sue. Sure, you are likely to be angry and disappointed as well as right, but do not openly display that anger in the work place. To do so may reflect how you feel, but it might negatively affect your workplace standing. To keep you in good standing with your fellow workers as well as the boss, you must bring up and pursue the subject in a professional way.

Think about shifting your self-advocacy tactics. When you need something, do you sternly "tell" someone what you need, or do you politely "ask" someone? Do you "push" the person to do what you need, or do you "pull" them towards your way of thinking? Have you heard the old saying, "you get more with honey than with vinegar"? In other words, how do you both preserve positive relationships and get what you need at the same time?

In a professional situation, the smoother way – the way that keeps a good working relationship in place, while still making your point – is to be diplomatic. Shift your disability advocacy style from "telling" people what they should do to enlightening people about what will work better for everyone (including you).

Okay, suppose you use a wheelchair and one day you arrive at work and find that the hallway to your desk is partially blocked with boxes or supplies. Or you've been given a new assignment that requires you to perform certain tasks which, due to your disability, you cannot do. Such situations may create barriers to you doing your job. Both examples may even represent a disability related discrimination practice or situation.

How should you deal with these challenges in a professional way? Well, begin by attempting to identify solutions or fixes to the problems. Think for a moment, before you speak up, and try to devise solutions or accommodations which seem to be the most cost-effective ways of achieving the desired results. With regards to the boxes now blocking your path of travel, identify where else they might be stored. If it's a new work task that you cannot perform because of your disability, identify specific accommodation strategies, equipment or techniques that will enable you to do your job. In short, devise solutions to the problems even before you present them to your boss or co-workers.

As we may know, bosses love employees who alert them as soon as possible to work-related issues or problems and, at the same time, have developed thoughtful solutions to resolve these problems. After all, that's why your boss hired you: to help solve workplace problems.

This strategy accomplishes several things. First, it shows your maturity (professionalism) by not getting angry as soon as these challenges arise. Second, it demonstrates your problem-solving skills. And, third, it shows your sense of teamwork by not singling out the inconsiderate person (your boss or co-worker) for putting the boxes in the hall way, or the boss for thoughtlessly giving you a new task which your disability prevents you from doing. Rather, you chose to focus your energy on creating a better performance solution for the organization – which also solves your accessibility needs. The worker who

placed the supplies in your way will thank you someday for your professionalism (he owes you a favor for not getting him in trouble).

So, our goal or strategy is still to self-advocate in the face of disability discrimination. However, our tactics are adjusted or fashioned for the workplace. We are seeking to achieve our rights both in a more workplace-appropriate manner as well as in a way which showcases our skills and professionalism. In this way, your self-advocacy skills are working for you and you have demonstrated them in a way which preserves and might even improve your workplace performance.

Of course, if this strategy fails and the disability discrimination persists, there are always the formal complaint procedures which are discussed later in Lesson 10.

7. Dignity of risk

Given the history of society's attitudes and perceptions around disability, it's not surprising when we hear it said that "we must keep them safe from injury." Or, that we must protect persons with disabilities from getting hurt.

This becomes a problem when employers or program operators say, "I can't let people with disabilities in because they might hurt themselves." Sure, they're thinking about safety. Thoughts about safety are anchored in the principle that it should always be the first consideration. "Safety First" signs may be posted or just flashing on and off in the program operator's head.

Now, that's not to say that "safety" is unimportant in the work place. It's very important.

But, there's a difference between not wearing your hard hat in a construction site versus being told that you can't be hired because, "if there's a fire, we can't get you out of our office building." While this may or may not be true, if it were applied universally – for example, on airplanes – all wheelchair passengers would be barred from flying. Yet, they aren't. We see people in wheelchairs flying in airplanes all the time.

What's the difference?

Well, at the construction site, EVERYONE wears a hard hat. It's a proven fact that in construction sites, things fall from above and hit people on the head. The wearing of a hard hat is a no brainer. So, people in wheelchairs can work in construction on tasks they can perform (like being the architect), as long as they wear their hard hat.

In an airplane or office building, rather than excluding people with disabilities from either flying or working because of safety concerns, we might modify the situation with enhanced measures to facilitate emergency evacuation. There may be evacuation chairs and a "buddy" system in place specifically designed to get a person with a disability out of a burning building. We might have "safe zones" or shelter in place locations where people who cannot evacuate the building during a fire (for example, because they can walk down the stairs) can wait for rescue by the fire department.

When a disability is in the picture, too often people try to “protect” people with disabilities from “dangerous” situations. This is a form of paternalism or the suffocating thought, “let me take care of you.” This paternalism can be stifling and against the idea of disability rights. People with disabilities should have the same right to assume reasonable risks (for example, a potential fire in an office building or on an airplane ride) in order to participate more fully in life.

Now, people with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations around safety considerations. That’s where we should focus our “safety first” sensibilities: on seeking to create reasonable accommodations in dangerous situations. In other words: reduce the risks through reasonable accommodations, as best we can, without unreasonably denying the opportunity to participate. And, after these reasonable safety considerations or accommodations have been implemented, allow the possibility of declaring a “dignity of risk” to balance risks with opportunities. Remember, no one would be able to fly in an airplane or work in a tall office building if we wanted to establish an absolute level of safety for everyone.

Without having a right to take reasonable risks, we may lose the opportunity to succeed in life.

We can be both safe and reasonable.

8. With rights come responsibilities

Under federal and many state laws, our nation has determined that people with disabilities have a civil right to participate in education, employment, public accommodations, transportation and communications. These activities cannot discriminate based on a disability.

Not too long ago, before 1990 (the year that the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed), it was legal for most private sector employers to look at a job candidate with a disability and say, “I don’t want to hire you because you have a disability.” Now, they can’t: it is against the law and if they get caught doing it, they may find themselves in court facing discrimination charges.

That’s pretty powerful stuff.

People with disabilities have only recently gone from being blatantly denied jobs because they have a disability to being protected from disability discrimination by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Washington, DC.

Having rights like that is a pretty exciting development. Having the EEOC available to back you up can give you a sense of power, especially when discrimination and disability-related negativity come your way.

Along with rights, however, comes responsibility.

Let me tell a story. One of my heroes was a gentleman named Justin Dart, Jr. He was a hero to many and instrumental in the fight to get these rights for people with disabilities made into law. I heard him speak many times about disability discrimination and for disability rights laws. What most impressed me about

his speeches was the fact that whenever he invoked the concept of these rights, he always paired the word “rights” with the word “responsibilities.”

What did he mean when he coupled these two words together (“rights” and “responsibilities”)?

What he was telling us is, “yes” we must have legal rights for people with disabilities; however, people with disabilities hold an equal responsibility to pursue those rights correctly.

That is to say don’t abuse these disability rights. Don’t make demands about your disability rights without making a commitment to do the right thing and to do your best to meet your responsibilities to perform.

Part of the reason that he paired the concepts of “rights” with “responsibilities” was he recognized that these rights depend on the good-will of the public. If we (people with disabilities) are not responsible in the way we use them, or if we abuse them, we could lose public’s support or the good-will that created them in the first place.

We must always use our disability rights responsibly to preserve these rights for future generations.

In addition, these rights were fought for by our disability rights leaders of the time. Many brave and heroic men and women with disabilities endured hardships and discrimination to win these rights for everyone. They helped to draft legislation and held protests across the country. The best way to thank them for all that have done for us is to honor their memory by exercising our rights in a responsible way.

In a work context, these rights should not be used to either get out of work or to hide your failure to perform. If you meet your responsibilities to perform, then your rights will be better respected.

Out of respect for these rights, always do the right thing. Let’s commit ourselves to safeguarding these rights with the dignity and respect they deserve.

As we end this Lesson, there is much more to consider about leaving the old disability attitudes behind and replacing them with a new disability perspective. Feel empowered to think further and even disagree, adjust or expand your beliefs around these thoughts. Think about these subjects as you get ready for the world of work. The whole point of this Lesson is to challenge you to re-think who you really are and how you want to communicate yourself to others.

Lesson 4 — Key Disability Values

Building on the “new perspective for the workplace” topics outlined above, let’s consider these additional disability values or ways of thinking. These values can help make you a more powerful and confident person both in general as well as in the workplace.

1.) Define yourself

As we know, there are many different disability categories. They include visual impairments; blindness; hard of hearing; deaf; cerebral palsy; multiple sclerosis; intellectual disabilities; amputee; mobility

impaired; learning disabilities; speech impaired; psychiatric survivor; brain injured; stroke; autism; and more. This list goes on.

Plus, there are dozens of definitions for the word “disability.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers this one: “a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions.” The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 defines a person with a disability as “a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment”

Most, if not all, of these disability names and definitions approach the subject from the perspective of what a person can't do, rather than from either of the perspectives of what they can do or do in a different way.

Disability definitions assume that the way people without disabilities usually do things is the right, typical or only way.

If you can't walk up stairs, by definition, you are disabled. But what if you were in a wheelchair and there were no stairs in your way, just ramps, wide entrances and elevators everywhere? What happens to the definition of disability then? Are you still “mobility limited” in such an environment?

What if you are a “neuro-diverse” person (on the autism spectrum) and you tend to concentrate on one aspect of your environment while ignoring or failing to recognize the social cues of the people around you? Is that a disability which should be viewed as “abnormal” or is it just a different way of sensing your environment? And can it be further described as an enhanced ability to concentrate and observe things more completely than others might?

What about people with dyslexia who either can't or have great difficulty reading the printed word? When their books are in electronic format and they can use assisting software programs, they can usually read and learn as well as everyone else. Plus, as a result of dyslexia, they might be able to observe patterns more readily and “see” or imagine things in the abstract better than those who can easily read the printed word.

The point is that people with disabilities are individuals with different styles, techniques and capabilities. They shouldn't be confined to the definitions society has traditionally imposed upon them.

In addition, the disability way of doing things can even represent a strength or quality like those suggested in the examples above.

Unfortunately, current disability definitions hamper society's ability to understand these deeper meanings.

So, it's important for both people with disabilities and society to begin to understand disability in a more complete way – beyond traditional disability terms and definitions. Accepting disability-related

differences and styles as normal variations of the human condition and even, sometimes, as strengths is the greater truth.

This thought process starts with you. Just as we normalized disability and disability-related job accommodations in Lesson 3 above, we might begin to also think and talk about our individual (disability) differences in these new ways. This is how we do things. We do things in individual ways or styles. Be positive, not negative as traditional definitions suggest. And, sometimes, our ways of doing these things differently brings added strengths and capabilities to situations (including a job).

Learn how to become an effective communicator about your disability-related differences and strengths. Then, in order to help educate those who need to know the deeper truths about your disability, talk about your disability accurately, carefully and at the right time in these more positive ways.

Define yourself.

2.) Self-determination

Self-determination is you (not others) making choices and decisions about your life.

Self-determination is believing that individuals (you) must and can control their success and destiny.

Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities which help people set goals for themselves, as well as take the initiative to reach these goals. It is about being in charge. It means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for your life.

Being self-determined leads to higher quality of life.

Being self-determined leads to more positive post-school outcomes, including employment, independent living, and community inclusion.

Practicing self-determination also means that you're ready to accept responsibility for the consequences of your decisions or choices.

The development of self-determination skills is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout one's life. Self-determination is important for all people, but it is especially important – and sometimes more difficult to learn – for young people with disabilities.

Well-meaning individuals sometimes try to "protect" youth and adults with disabilities by making decisions for them. They believe that people with disabilities can't think for themselves and they need our help.

Self-determination involves having self-awareness, assertiveness, responsibility, creativity, pride, problem-solving and self-advocacy skills. To take charge of your own life, you must be able to set goals, evaluate options, make choices and then work to achieve those goals.

Let's focus on two subjects associated with self-determination.

The first one is anchored in the part of the self-determination definition which states, "Self-determination is believing you can control your own success or destiny."

Have you ever noticed the fact that people with disabilities with similar abilities often end up achieving very different employment outcomes?

Let's imagine that there are two people who have the exact same disability. They share similar backgrounds, experiences and even attended the same schools while earning the same grades. Yet, they achieved very different career results. One has a successful career and the other doesn't work at all.

What made the difference?

Of course, there may be many reasons for their different outcomes; however, success most often happens when someone embraces the self-determination sentence above which says, "You can control your own success or destiny."

In our example, the successful person was motivated by this value and chose to think about it every day. She used this principle to keep going, growing and working hard to make it happen. The other person may have decided that it was all just too hard and let the negativity around the subject of disability and employment become her reality.

As a result, one is both financially and occupationally well-off while the other isn't.

Even though our example is made-up, in real life it happens too often. During my many years working in disability employment programs, whenever I asked people with disabilities who are successfully working, "How did it happen for you?" they always tell me the same thing: "I was determined to succeed."

Values are important.

The other subject around self-determination worth noting is associated with personal behaviors or conduct. As mentioned above, self-determination also means, "You are ready to accept responsibility for the consequences of your decisions or choices."

How does that work when one of the symptoms or limitations of your disability may make it more difficult for you to follow and obey laws, rules or expected behaviors? Does your disability excuse you from these requirements? Is that just the way you're built? Can you say, "It's not my fault, it's my disability"?

Consider these key facts of life.

If it against the law or a rule to do something, yet you do anyway, a disability is not a good excuse to avoid the consequences of your behavior. If having disability was a good excuse for disobeying rules, where would that end? If it was an excuse, how could you ever be ready for a life in society with full and equal citizenship?

And let's remember that we've already recognized that part of the reality of having a disability is the necessity of taking extra time, expense and effort around adapting or accommodating ourselves.

Think about it this way -- if you can't walk, does that excuse you from attending school because you can't get there? Or does it prevent you from leaving your home to go out to eat or see a movie? No, you are expected to and should want to take personal responsibility to get a device (maybe a walker, wheelchair or scooter) in order to be able to get yourself to school and into the community. It helps you live a full and integrated life.

Similarly, if a disability makes it harder for you to obey rules, it is up to you to find accommodations for this part of your disability. It's your responsibility to try to find ways to manage or control these types of disability-related behaviors or limitations. Only in this way can you participate in life as you need and should.

For example, if you have behavioral "triggers" which create situations where your bad behavior will likely appear, try to identify and avoid them whenever possible. If you start to feel angry or that you want to lash out, move to a space where you can take a "time-out" and wait for the feelings to pass. And always try to find a person or professional who can help you build accommodation strategies around this part of your disability. Don't just let it happen. Take the time, expense and effort necessary to find a better way forward.

With that in mind, what about the most dramatic example of excusing bad behavior because of a disability? It's called the "insanity defense" (a legal principle) or "not guilty by reason of insanity." In such a situation, a person's psychiatric disability must have been so severe that, at the time, they lacked the ability to know what they were doing. The fact is this defense is often the hardest to prove and even if your lawyer can prove it, you're still likely to end up in either in jail or a psychiatric hospital for a long time. This is not what we're talking about here. What we are talking about here is showing bad behavior which you know is happening (or which you know may happen soon), yet you've chosen not to manage it.

While a disability may be the reason for the bad behavior, it's most often not an excuse. It's almost always your responsibility to try to manage yourself and find the necessary accommodations to follow rules and behave yourself as expected.

While in school, you may encounter more patience and understanding about such disability-related limitations or behaviors; it will be different in the workplace. They're not likely to be tolerated there.

Follow the values around "self-determination." Take charge of your own life. Set goals, evaluate options, make the right choices and work to achieve your goals.

Your workplace success or failure will largely be determined by how well you embrace the values around "self-determination."

3.) Disability pride

Being a person with a disability means that you're a member of a specific minority class or group. And, often, minority groups find it both necessary and advantageous to form associations with others of the

same group or category. They do this in order to better represent their interests and needs as well as to become stronger as individuals by learning from each other. People with disabilities have followed this same path and organized themselves into numerous national, state and local groups.

The reason behind the creation of these disability organizations leads to an important point relative to your professional development. As has been discussed earlier, for many years nondisabled people have held low expectations and negative attitudes about disability and employment. It wasn't until the middle of the 20th century that things began to dramatically change, and significant progress began.

During the early years of the 20th century, well-intentioned nondisabled people decided it was time for society to become more supportive of their fellow human beings who were "handicapped" (the term of the time). They want to help "the handicapped" have access to the built environment, education, employment and other basic human experiences. These well-intentioned nondisabled people spoke "on behalf" of people with disabilities. They followed a strategy of trying to achieve these advances based on public education and awareness programs.

These early efforts made some progress and created many new opportunities. However, the most important accomplishment of this beginning movement was the creation of higher expectations for equality among people with disabilities themselves. With these higher expectations, people with disabilities realized that it was important for them to take over the lead in their struggle. They wanted to take control over the policies being decided. They wanted to take the lead in the effort and no longer be "helped" by their nondisabled advocates. The new principle that resulted was called disability "self-advocacy" or "consumerism." People with disabilities speaking up and deciding for themselves what their new policies and programs should look like. They were the consumers or customers of these programs and they should take control and lead the movement themselves. This change in leadership was marked by a shift from "paternalism" (being taken care of by others) to "consumerism" (taking care of yourself).

And, this taking of control of your destiny is a point of pride or "disability pride."

Following this important value, you should always strive to advocate for yourself. It's the right thing to do. Moreover, it's your duty. No one is in a better position to make the case for you than you. By taking charge of your situation, you're building your self-confidence and leadership capabilities. And, doing so will make you a stronger and more attractive job candidate.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with asking others for advice when making decisions. Listening to others can give you more ideas and information upon which to make your own decisions.

Making your own decisions is being proud of yourself as a person with a disability. When people see your pride, they will admire you for it.

So, have and show pride in your disability identity.

If you're not yet connected to a disability group or organization and you think that might offer you support, consider connecting to a disability group which matches your interests. It will not only help you to build your disability pride and self-determination – it can also help you to better represent the disability perspective in your job. For example, being organizationally connected with other people with disabilities puts you in a better position to help a potential employer understand how they might more effectively “sell” or “offer” their products and services to 15% of the general population. (This idea will be covered in more detail in Lesson 12 below.)

Here is a listing of disability organizations for you to check out and possibly connect with:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_disability_rights_organizations You can also search online for disability organizations in your local area (there may be more than you think)!

Lesson 5 — Discrimination Threat and Performance

As we've discussed, disability discrimination can be either subtle or obvious. In its subtle or less-obvious form, it can be much harder to evaluate and manage. For example, a job interviewer might be smiling and polite with a job applicant with a visible disability; however, this interviewer may seem to be less engaged or involved as one might want or expect. Or, the employer may say something seemingly innocent which may suggest a bias against a disability. For example, if you're a blind job applicant, they might say, “do you realize that there is a great deal of reading to do in this job?” Is that discrimination? Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

How you respond to such situations will determine your success in either the job interview or in other professional situations.

Being aware that such negative disability related comments can (and do) happen all the time, the question becomes, “What to do about it?” – and, “When to do it?”

There are no hard and fast rules.

Some might immediately challenge such behaviors. Others might choose to ignore them for fear of reducing or even destroying any chance of getting the job. It's hard to know what to do and when to do it.

One thing that you want to be aware of in such situations is that how you react has a direct impact on your performance, especially in an interview. Having a feeling or fear that someone is not treating you fairly can have a significant impact on your ability to perform in most professional situations.

Think about it.

During an interview, your attention and concentration should be totally committed to focusing on how to answer the questions you're being asked. The minute your brain begins to focus on the possibility that the job interviewer, employer or co-worker is making comments or asking you questions which suggest a bias or discrimination against your disability, you will begin to lose focus on the task at hand. Research shows us that such reactions often diminish your ability to perform. And this fact is important

to know, especially when you are engaged in the all-important job interview or professional meeting. During these times, you will want to be at your peak performance.

This reaction to potential discrimination threats is called “stereotype threat.” Sometimes, these situations or comments might be called, “micro-aggressions” or small negative comments.

Whenever you feel threatened by discriminatory thoughts, comments, looks, actions or feelings, your brain goes on high alert. You become hyper vigilant about this apparent discrimination and begin to dedicate much of your attention and brain power on devising strategies to defend yourself. Research conducted by Dr. Claude M. Steele (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvwvbiwRkg>) shows us that in such situations, your performance will significantly fall off.

Now that you know about “stereotype threat” and how it can diminish your performance, what can you do to protect yourself from its negative effects? First, recognize when it’s happening to you. Know that it’s normal and to be expected. In fact, it happens to everyone, whenever they’re made to feel like an outsider or not welcomed. So, as a person with a disability, be alert to identify when you feel these emotions entering your being. When you do, know how they can adversely affect you and your performance.

Dr. Steele recommends a technique to lessen the negative performance impacts of “stereotype threat” by putting these small discrimination signals (micro-aggressions) aside to try and maintain your peak performance. He suggests using a three-strike rule when faced with these situations. This strategy will help to keep calm and, in turn, be at your best.

The three-strike rule is simple. The first time someone says something that suggests discrimination based on disability, “let it go” (strike one). Don’t react. Don’t even think about it. Put it out of your mind, for the time being, so your performance is not negatively impacted. The second time the same person sends another seemingly negative signal or says something that might offend you again, “Let it go” (strike two). The third time this happens, be prepared to stand up for yourself as you should (strike three and you’re out).

By tempering your response in this gradual way, you help to calm the feeling of “stereotype threat” building inside of you and the related hyper-vigilance it creates which reduces your performance. So, don’t give up your responsibilities to defend yourself, but do it in a way which helps you get better professional results.

Also, by allowing someone two strikes (two apparent wrongs) you may find the threat naturally melting away. In fact, the three-strike rule allows for situations where *you* might be wrong (possibly “misreading” the seemingly negative comments). In which case, you didn’t have to confront that person and jeopardize the relationship. Plus, your performance was kept higher longer. This is an important strategy to practice, especially in an employment setting.

You might also consider evaluating the particular relationship and circumstances, as sometimes it might be wise to consider avoiding the “three-strike” strategy altogether. In other words, the situation is too important to call the person “out” on strike three.

This may be the exception to the rule while you’re holding out hope that you can get what you want from the meeting or encounter. If you stay calm and away from any confrontation, regardless of the number of times threats seem to come your way, you might still achieve your goals. Remember, you can always go back to that person, after the event, and discuss your concerns once the outcome has been decided. Be flexible in your response to “stereotype threat” in order to achieve the best possible results for you.

Lastly, consider the idea that some people are more hyper-vigilant around disability discrimination than others are. Observe yourself and measure your level of vigilance or alertness around disability discrimination. Then, consider the impact this hyper-vigilance and “stereotype threat” may have on both your professional performance as well as in other relationships. Adjust your level of vigilance based on your preference for either making a point in the moment or getting better outcomes for yourself.

Lesson 6 — The Disability Message You Want to Send

As we’ve discussed, disability often conjures up all sorts of fears, biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions. As we make progress towards full equity and inclusion for people with disabilities, society is steadily moving along the path of positive disability awareness, acceptance and respect. While on this journey, different people, in different situations and at different times, will display different levels of understanding and support for disability rights.

This journey is going to take time before we all reach the finish line (full acceptance without any reservations). As nondisabled people become increasingly aware about disability rights, they find themselves struggling between the old myths and misconceptions about disability and the new truths about disability equity and inclusion. Think about it – half of your mind knows that disability rights should be honored and the other half has trouble with that concept because you sometimes think that people with disabilities are unable to do things (like working).

As mentioned earlier, one of the results of this conflicted thinking is something called “political correctness” – or knowing that there is a right thing to say, but not knowing exactly what it is or feeling the opposite.

You’re just not “there” yet.

This conflict tends to make nondisabled people both fearful and reluctant to engage with or talk to a person with a disability. This fear can be summarized this way: “if I don’t know what to say, or if I’m afraid I’ll say the wrong thing, I better not say anything at all.”

This reaction is common and widespread, even in the world of work.

To see an example of the fear around being politically correct, watch the movement of a person with a visible disability (such as a person using a wheelchair or a blind person with a guide dog) through a crowd of nondisabled people. Watch those people move out of the way or even turn away from the person with a disability passing by, not even saying “hello” when they might otherwise.

Now, they may be just getting out of the way. But, having talked to these folks after observing these situations, I’ve learned of their basic fear of having an interaction with the person with a visible disability because they’re not sure what to say. So, they calm their fears by moving away and avoiding the whole subject.

This response is anchored in fears around being political correctness or saying the wrong thing.

So, imagine if you’re a nondisabled job interviewer or supervisor of an applicant or employee with a disability and you have these fears, you might express them by either avoiding or limiting your interactions with the person with a disability.

Hence, we need to recognize these fears and develop a professional strategy to respond.

One way to begin is simply to smile. It’s amazing how effective a smile can be. Smiling sends the message that “I’m not angry.” It signals that you want to be friendly towards the other person and not confrontational. So, be sure to smile and that will begin to calm the other person down.

Remember, they may simply be afraid because they don’t know how to act. It might seem silly or unreasonable, but it’s often the case.

Another strategy to beat back the “I’m afraid I’ll say the wrong thing” fear is to be ready to let the person say the wrong thing. This strategy relates back to Lesson 5 above, on “Discrimination Threat and Performance.” Remember, being hyper-vigilant to apparent acts of discrimination can affect your performance. Here, too, you might let it go and let people feel comfortable saying the wrong thing without being corrected by you.

You can correct them by example -- by being friendly and supportive and helping them to see you in that way. By doing this, you’re more likely to educate them about disability equality. And you’re more likely to do so in a way which will more positively promote your full acceptance.

It’s amazing how much disability discrimination comes from fear around “political correctness” and saying the wrong thing.

Change this unintended discrimination with your friendliness, warmth and personality.

Lesson 7 — Accommodation Strategies

In addition to the idea of normalizing the concept of disability related job accommodations, as was discussed in Lesson 2 above, a job applicant or employee with a disability must be completely prepared around his or her specific job accommodation needs.

Imagine that you are an employer and a job applicant with a disability enters the interview room. You have a number of promising job candidates to consider. You have work that needs to get done back at the office, so you need to get the new person hired as quickly as possible. As the employer doing job interviews, you are very mindful of your boss who will examine how well you did selecting the new employee. So, who you select reflects on your own performance. You're also thinking about how your organization's budget is stretched, so you need to be cost-effective with this hire. Plus, who you select must fit in well with your other employees and customers. If this new hire doesn't fit in well, you are going to lose some respect from your boss, co-workers and customers. If you don't pick well, your job standing and promotion potential may suffer. As the job interviewer or employer, all these thoughts are racing through your mind as you interview and consider all the job applicants you are interviewing.

So, it isn't just the job applicant who's nervous in a job interview.

Then, a job applicant with a disability comes into the interview room. With all the other pressures facing the employer, how do you think the employer might react when you simply say, "I need a disability-related job accommodation"? Most likely, the employer's first reaction will be, "this is a problem." And, when there is a problem lacking any clear solution, people may get nervous and want to avoid the subject. If this is going to be your announcement ("I need a disability related job accommodation"), you need a well-conceived plan to meet these fears and negative reactions immediately. So, let's plan your strategy to respond effectively.

The first thing to do is to recognize the employer's perspective on this subject and devise your strategy to help them through the conversation as easily as possible.

As we've mentioned, one of THE most appealing characteristics of a job candidate or any employee is the person's ability to solve problems. If you think about it, that's the main reason why employers hire people -- to help them solve problems and to get things done.

Employers want to hire job applicants or employees who present problems along with suggested solutions in the same sentence or statement.

Knowing this, as soon as you announce your disability accommodation or performance enhancement needs, you must be prepared to describe them with specific job accommodation solutions which are likely to work in this particular job setting at a reasonable cost. Be sure to include the name of the equipment or describe the technique clearly and in full detail. If you need equipment, indicate the manufacturer, make, model, where it can be found and what it costs. Answer immediately any and all possible questions about how this can work. When you bring this subject up, you must be ready, confident and complete.

In order to do this in a professional manner, you must prepare yourself, in advance of your revelation to the employer, by consulting with others about workable accommodation solutions for this particular job. Don't just give general accommodation ideas or solutions. Describe job-specific accommodation solutions which fit well with the job in question.

One great resource that you should contact (it's free) is the Job Accommodation Network (JAN).

Ask them to help you build your job specific job accommodation statement. Call them on 1-800-JAN-7234. When you call them (you can also contact them online at <http://askjan.org/>), be ready to describe two things: 1) your functional limitations (what does your disability prevent you from doing, like standing, walking, speaking, hearing, etc.); and 2) what are the specific or known duties of the job you are applying for (i.e. computer work, customer service, physical duties, etc.). Then, tell them which duties you need help with (reasonable accommodations). With this basic information about your situation, they will help you define your specific job accommodation needs. Do this and you will be prepared to both calm your possible new boss and show him or her how great of a problem solver you are! You'll reduce their anxiety about considering you for the job because of your clear and precise statement. Such a strategy will likely minimize the employer's fears around this subject.

So, ask JAN about any job-related needs you might have. They're the best.

Also, be sure to update or prepare a new job-specific accommodation statement for every job interview you have. One size may not fit all.

Certainly, there are other resources for developing your job accommodation statement or answer. Local rehabilitation, education and disability agencies can help, as well as your area's Center for Independent Living (more on these agencies in Part II, Lesson 6).

Practice your job accommodation speech within the context of you wanting to be as productive as possible in the job you're seeking. They are productivity boosters, aren't they? That's how you should promote them to your possible new employer. If you describe your job accommodation needs in this way, you may find the subject more welcomed.

There are two additional benefits about the subject of job accommodations and workers with disabilities which you might express.

Your disability-related job accommodations are more than just for you. They are also for other possible employees with disabilities who might follow you (including existing workers who may become disabled). The reality is that people in this nation (and the world) are moving in this direction. They are learning about the need to reshape their understanding and environment to fit everyone, including people with disabilities. The experience of providing for your job accommodations will help to further educate your employer, co-workers and even customers about this subject. The result of your efforts to become a working member of society will add one more example moving us all forward. So, in a sense, you are not just representing yourself – you're representing other people with disabilities who will follow you.

The second overall point about job accommodations is that it works both ways. When you receive needed job accommodations, you are not only gaining better access to your job; your new employer, co-workers and customers are also gaining "access" to your knowledge, ideas, and performance. It's a win-win situation for both you and your organization.

And, finally, understand what is meant by the term “interactive process” which is an important concept in the disability job accommodation discussion with an employer.

The “Interactive process” is a key legal term associated with disability rights. It says that when discussing and resolving disability-related barriers or accommodations, the person with a disability should be consulted and their ideas seriously considered in the resolution of the matter.

Therefore, whenever disability-related job accommodations are under consideration, you need to be prepared to participate effectively in the “interactive process.”

So, calling JAN or asking another job accommodation specialist to help you decide what disability related job accommodations you will want to ask for will help you to be more fully prepared for this conversation.

Lesson 8 — Disclosure Strategies

Now that we understand more about both the employer’s realities around choosing who to hire and how to best present your job accommodation needs to an employer, let’s talk about “when” you should disclose your disability-related job accommodations.

This subject is anchored in a truth about what employers are looking for in a prospective job applicant. Sure, they want a problem-solver and productive worker, but they also want an employee who has a sense of “loyalty and integrity.” They want a worker who tells the truth and who do so with honor and good character.

These values are not only important during a job interview; they’re also among the key skills to general workplace success.

In the workplace, you can’t always be the worker with the best ideas or be the best performance, but you can always display “loyalty and integrity.” You can always tell your boss the truth, as you understand it, and do so with a sense of duty and honor.

So, on the subject of disability disclosure and the need for disability job accommodations, do the right thing at the right time. Do it with “loyalty and integrity.”

Here’s how.

Generally speaking, there are two ways that disability disclosure can unfold. It depends on whether your disability is visible (can be seen or observed) or invisible (not apparent or obvious).

If it’s visible, as soon as you enter the interview room the employer or interviewer will see your wheelchair, white cane or hearing aids, etc. If this is how you present, know that as soon as you enter the interview room the employer is likely already asking himself or herself many questions about your visible disability. And, you must realize, they cannot ask you many of these questions out loud because it might be against the law to do so.

Here are some of the unasked questions the employer or interviewer is quietly asking themselves:

1. *How can this person do this job with that disability?*
2. *If I had that disability, I don't think I could do this job. Can they?*
3. *I've heard that disability accommodations are expensive – aren't they?*
4. *If I hire this person, what will my boss, fellow workers or customers say?*
5. *If I hire this person, would I be able to fire them, if necessary? Would I be stuck with them?*
6. *Oh, a person with a disability – doesn't that mean more laws, more costs, more potential liabilities (law suits)?*
7. *I have other job candidates without disabilities waiting for an interview, why don't I just get to the next applicant?*

These are potentially job-killing interview questions which you will never hear asked in an interview. The reasons you will never hear them is the job interviewer understands that they are, at least, politically incorrect; and, more than that, against the law (see Lesson 10 below).

Even though you aren't asked these questions, answers will likely emerge in the mind of the employer. Unfortunately, though, the person thinking these questions will imagine the answers without your input. This will probably result in answers which are likely not going to be in your favor – or at least, probably not accurate.

Hence, if you enter the interview room with a visible disability, you have no alternative but to “take the bull by the horns.” That is to say, be sure to weave answers to the employer's unasked questions above into your answers to the general interview questions asked. So, if you have a visible disability, you must begin your disclosure strategy immediately and in this way.

The best way to start answering these unasked questions is to be friendly and likeable. As mentioned earlier, there's an interesting truth about discrimination. The more you get to know the person you're discriminating against, the quicker you will back away from these negative thoughts and behaviors. People don't discriminate (generally) against people they know and like.

Then, in a friendly way, begin to respond to those unanswered questions by disclosing facts about your abilities which tend to reject the negative disability thoughts generated by those unasked questions listed above.

Later in this book, we're going to talk about how to best prepare for a job interview. More will be revealed about how to prepare your answers to the unasked disability questions listed above. For now, if you have a visible disability or when you might reveal an invisible one, make note of the importance of responding to these unasked questions on your own.

On the other hand, if you have an invisible disability (that is, the employer can neither see nor knows about it, unless you mention it), your strategy will be different. The difference will be around either timing or deciding if there really is a need to mention it at all.

The timing question stands on one key principle or revelation. That is if (and when) you see the need for a disability-related job accommodation. If you have an invisible disability and you don't perceive any disability-related job accommodations are needed in the job you are interviewing for, then there seems to be no need to disclose or bring it up. You might skip the subject for now.

However, the moment may arrive when you recognize the need for a disability-related job accommodation. That's the correct moment or time to mention this subject. Think about the "loyalty and integrity" values which are so important to an employer. If you realize that disability-related job accommodations are needed, you must not delay the discussion with the employer. If you do, you might tarnish your reputation around honesty in their eyes. You may lose the job if you wait too long to bring up the subject because the employer may realize you've not been forthcoming on something very important.

If you're not sure you will need a job accommodation, but the question still enters your mind, that may be a signal to consider addressing the subject immediately. Again, if you delay and the employer later learns about your needs and senses you delayed talking about it, their opinion of you may go down.

Again, be guided by the values of "loyalty and integrity."

These are the general strategies around disability disclosure in employment. While these are broad rules to follow, each person or situation is different. Whenever you're not sure what to do, ask someone you trust for advice. When it's time to disclose a disability-related job accommodation to an employer, remember to follow the guidelines of being able to describe specific accommodation strategies and doing it with a sense of "loyalty and integrity."

Lesson 9 — A Brief Disability History

People with disabilities are an important part of our Nation's history. For example, a person with cerebral palsy signed the Declaration of Independence (Stephen Hopkins of Delaware); another was elected to four terms as President of the United States (Franklin D. Roosevelt), and millions more made both big and small contributions to our country in every field and occupation.

While this type of history is important, that's not the history we're going to review in this Lesson.

Rather, in preparation for the next two lessons (11 and 12) we're going to learn something about the social and legal rights history of disability as it relates public policy. We should understand that various disability-related laws and policies didn't just appear out of nowhere.

For most of human history, progress in this area has been slow.

Over the centuries, the phases we've gone through can be captured in six (6) different stages of development. Each one built a foundation for the next one. Even today, some parts of the world are at different stages than others. Plus, sometimes we go backwards as well as forwards. And this progression or journey isn't over yet. We still have more to accomplish before we cross the finish line. Here's one

way to capture this history in very broad terms. These are my six (6) phases or stages of civilization's disability social development.

1. Discarded and Ignored. A period when societies lived or died based on the ability of every member to contribute to their survival. Communities needed warriors to defend the group, hunters and farmers to provide food, and builders to create shelters. If you could not contribute to these basic needs, you were unable to contribute to a community's survival. This meant people with disabilities were seen as a drain or drag on the community. They were ignored and excluded. The most dramatic examples of this include ancient Sparta (400 BC) when babies born with physical disabilities were thrown into the sea because they had no value. Some more recent examples of this are the Nazi regime (1933-45) when certain people with disabilities were eliminated from society because they were inferior to a "master race" culture; and, local city "ugly laws" enacted in the United States (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugly_law)
2. Pitied. As communities moved beyond mere survival, they were in better and more understanding place to care for their individuals with disabilities. The models during this stage were based on both social and religious principles of showing pity for the less fortunate, and doing the right thing through volunteer and charity efforts.
3. Given Equality. The next phase was based on encouraging nondisabled people to do good works and open their businesses and places of employment to people with disabilities. We ask people to voluntarily change both design principles and program practices to give people with disabilities access. In employment, employers are asked to consider "hiring the handicapped" but can say no if they didn't want to. Equality is a nice thing to do but not a legal right.
4. Demanded Equality. This period or phased was marked by laws and regulations which made it a matter of public policy to design buildings and programs in an accessible manner, as well as not to discriminate against people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation and communications. The hallmark legislation of this era in the United States is the "Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990."
5. Earned Equality. With rights come responsibilities. It's not enough just to have legal rights. We can and must take up our responsibilities to fully participate in society (including independent living, self-determination, and competitive employment). Rights are protections from unfair or unjust actions, but success still needs to be earned.
6. Normalized Equality. In the future, the world will arrive at the natural conclusion that disability is a normal part of the human condition; and, therefore, people with disabilities must be logically and routinely included in the concept of the "general public." With this routine full inclusion of people with disabilities in everything, the word "disability" will cover fewer and fewer people. As science and technology advances, a time may come when all people with disabilities can fully participate in all that society has to offer. Then, the word disability may lose its historical meaning and equality will naturally or normally happen for all.

The value of understanding disability history in this broad way is that we can better understand and appreciate where we've been, where we are now and where we need to go in the future.

With such a broad historical frame work in place, we should now focus more precisely on the disability-related social and legal history in the United States.

Did you know that before 1975, it was legal for local public schools to tell students with disabilities and their parents, “I’m sorry, we can’t serve you in our public school because of your disability”? Also, did you realize that before 1978, it was legal for private sector employers who were government contractors to say, “I’m sorry, I cannot hire you because of your disability”? And, did you understand that before 1990, it was legal for other private sector employment to say the same thing? It’s hard to imagine that just 20 to 40 years ago these rights in education and employment did not exist.

How did we break these longstanding discriminatory practices in the U.S.?

The journey began after the American Civil War, when thousands of permanently injured soldiers returned home to find no public programs to help them continue their lives as persons with disabilities or disabled veterans. In response to this social challenge, numerous local charitable efforts were begun to assist some of these disabled soldiers. It was the humble beginnings of a civic sense of responsibility to address the disability needs of this category of people (civil war veterans) with disabilities.

The next advance was fifty years later during the time World War I. This war produced thousands of military service members with disabilities. This time, and for the first time, the federal government stepped in and passed a law authorizing rehabilitation services for these disabled veterans.

Soon after this program took effect, the U.S. Congress passed a “Civilian Rehabilitation Act of 1920,” which established the beginning of our state-federal vocational rehabilitation program for citizens with disabilities. This first civilian rehabilitation program only served people with physical disabilities.

Years after the passage of the “Civilian Rehabilitation Act of 1920,” this program was expanded to serve people with mental illnesses or psychiatric survivors.

During these early years, the only way (there were no laws) to get employers to consider hiring individuals with disabilities who were “rehabilitated” was to encourage, education or promote the idea that “it was good business to hire the handicapped.” A concept called “selective placement” was advanced. Under this principle, the person with a disability should be placed in a job where their disability did not affect their ability to perform that job.

Next, in 1948, after World War II, the first disability-related nondiscrimination rules advancing the employment of disabled veterans in federal government jobs were made into law.

During the 1950’s, things started to move more quickly. The vocational rehabilitation program was expanded to serve people with intellectual disabilities, and the Social Security Act was amended to create disability payments.

In 1968, the “U.S. Architectural Barriers Act” was passed. This law required certain federal public buildings to include accessible design features for people with disabilities. Formal accessible design standards were first devised to support the law’s implementation.

In the 1970's, the courts declared that treating Kindergarten through 12th grade students with disabilities differently (not letting them into public schools) was a denial of the equal protection and due process provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

And, in 1973, Section 503 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were enacted. This law (503 & 504) took the next step (a giant leap forward) establishing both greater employment and accessibility rights for people with disabilities.

In 1975, the U.S. Congress implemented Public Law 94-142, "The Education of the Handicapped Children Act," which finally required local public schools (K-12 only) to provide a free and accessible public-school education to students with disabilities. The six major requirements of this law (now titled "IDEA" or "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act") are to provide:

- Individualized Education Program (IEP),
- Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE),
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE),
- Appropriate Evaluation,
- Parent and Teacher Participation, and
- Procedural Safeguards (Due process).

The advances of the 1970's (above) were driven by the advocacy and hard work of people with disabilities themselves.

During this time frame, people with disabilities started to organize a consumer's movement taking charge of their programs and policies. It was a time of race-related civil rights and women's rights campaigns. People with disabilities were soon to follow these examples and join the action.

There a wonderful PBS documentary which tells the story of the birth and early years of the disability rights movement, called "Lives worth Living." If you want to learn more about your disability history, be sure to watch it. See the movie's trailer here: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/lives-worth-living/>

This disability rights or consumer's movement promoted the following principles, which remain important to us today.

- Call us "people with disabilities," not "the disabled" (people-first language).
- End paternalism (being taken care of) and embrace empowerment (taking care of ourselves).
- People with disabilities promote the principle "nothing about us without us."
- Disability is not an aberration, a problem to be solved, or an illness to be fixed or cured – it's a human identity that needs to be acknowledged and accepted.
- Having a Disability is cultural experience. We have a disability culture to define, document and embrace. We promote disability pride.
- Disability limitations only exist because of negative attitudes, inaccessible places and programs.
- Negative attitudes need to change, not us.

- Our goal is not equality; it's nondiscrimination. Equality suggests similar treatment. Nondiscrimination means accessibility or the elimination of these artificial barriers (steps with no ramps; printed matter with no electronic or Braille copy, etc.)
- With rights (access) come responsibilities to exercise full citizenship (including working when possible).

These strategies continue to be relevant today.

Lesson 10 — Disability Employment Laws

Now, let's learn more about the key details around our current disability rights laws. We will review just the key or relevant employment laws that are important to our quest for a successful career. These are:

- 1) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and,
- 2) the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Before we begin, there is one important caution to consider. It is ALWAYS important for you to read or study these laws and regulations yourself. Don't rely on what others may tell you these laws say. Most often, what you hear will be inaccurate, incomplete, out-of-date, or self-serving. And, there's nothing more frustrating than trying to pursue your disability rights when you don't accurately know what they are or how they really work. So, study them yourself. Do your own research and go to the federal government's enforcement agencies directly, as they are your best sources for accurate information.

I. The Rehab Act of 1973, as Amended

Title V, of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in:

- programs conducted by Federal agencies;
- programs receiving Federal financial assistance;
- Federal employment; and,
- Federal contractors employment practices.

The standards for determining employment discrimination under Title V of the Rehabilitation Act are the same as those used in Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There are three key sections of the Title V of the Rehab Act which you'll want to become familiar with. These are: Sections, 501, 503, and 504.

Section 501:

Section 501 prohibits discrimination and requires affirmative action and nondiscrimination in employment by Federal agencies of the executive branch of our U.S. Government.

This means that all our Federal government agencies are required, under Section 501, to actively recruit, hire and advance people with disabilities in their recruitment and hiring efforts. In other words, they must take affirmative action to both reach out to and encourage people with disabilities to apply for their jobs; and, in turn, give them every consideration. They must not discriminate against a disability, if the job applicant with a disability is otherwise qualified for the job. And, to this end, the agency's employers must be prepared to provide reasonable accommodations to enable either that job applicant

or employee with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job which they are otherwise qualified to perform.

This law is enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The key legal terms that have been underlined in this Lesson are further defined below in the “Definitions” section.

It’s worth noting that, as a result of Section 501, the Federal government represents a great career possibility for people with disabilities. In addition to having this extra responsibility to engage in affirmative action to hire people with disabilities, the Federal government offers thousands of interesting job possibilities and special hiring authorities like Schedule A. Here’s more about the Schedule A hiring authority for people with disabilities:

https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/abc_applicants_with_disabilities.cfm

For more about the jobs our Federal government is currently offering see www.USAJobs.gov/

Section 503:

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination and requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$10,000 to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities.

This law is enforced by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) within the U.S. Department of Labor.

Over recent years, Federal contracting has become big business. It’s become so huge, it’s being called our “fourth branch” of government, after the traditional three branches of the Federal government (executive, judicial, & legislative).

There are more than 1 million private employers or companies with Federal contracts or subcontracts covered by Section 503.

Section 504:

Section 504 says, “No otherwise qualified disabled individual in the United States, shall, solely by reason of a disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency, or by the United States Postal Service. Federal financial assistance includes any federal money, resources or benefits received.”

Section 504 defines a covered employer as “any State or its political subdivision, any instrumentality of a state or its political subdivision, any public or private agency, institution, organization, or other entity or any person to which federal financial assistance is extended (granted or given).”

Examples might include public and private educational organizations, housing, transportation, and much more.

Each individual Federal agency has its own set of Section 504 regulations which apply to its own programs.

Requirements common to these regulations include reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities; program accessibility; effective communication with people who have hearing or vision disabilities; and accessible construction and alterations of their buildings and facilities.

Each agency is responsible for enforcing its own regulations. Section 504 may also be enforced through private lawsuits. It is not necessary to file a complaint with a Federal agency or to receive a "right-to-sue" letter before going to court.

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. The law also requires an employer to provide reasonable accommodation to an employee or job applicant with a disability, unless doing so would cause significant difficulty or expense ("undue hardship") for the employer.

The ADA covers employers with 15 or more employees.

As noted earlier in this Lesson, the ADA's nondiscrimination standards also apply to employers covered under Section 501, 503 and 504.

Also, as noted earlier, employers may not ask job applicants about the existence, nature, or severity of a disability.

Applicants may be asked about their ability to perform specific job functions. A job offer may be conditioned on the results of a medical examination, but only if the examination is required for all entering employees in similar jobs. Medical examinations of employees must be job related and consistent with the employer's business needs.

Definitions (some of the key terms underlined in this Lesson are further explained here)

Person with a disability: an individual with a disability is a person who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or,
- has a record of such an impairment; or
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

Qualified: a qualified employee or applicant with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform the essential functions of the job in question.

Essential functions: consideration shall be given to the employer's judgment as to which functions of a job are essential; and, if an employer has prepared a written job description before advertising or

interviewing applicants for the job, this description shall be considered evidence of the essential functions of the job.

Accommodations: reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to:

- Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.
- Job restructuring, modifying work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position;
- Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies, and providing qualified readers or interpreters.

An employer is required to make a reasonable accommodation to the known disability of a qualified applicant or employee if it would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. Reasonable accommodations are adjustments or modifications provided by an employer to enable people with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunities. Accommodations vary depending upon the needs of the individual applicant or employee. Not all people with disabilities (or even all people with the same disability) will require the same accommodation. For example:

- A deaf applicant may need a sign language interpreter during the job interview.
- An employee with diabetes may need regularly scheduled breaks during the workday to eat properly and monitor blood sugar and insulin levels.
- A blind employee may need someone to read information posted on a bulletin board.
- An employee with cancer may need leave to have radiation or chemotherapy treatments.

Undue Hardship: an employer does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation if it imposes an "undue hardship." Undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as an employer's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation. An employer is not required to lower quality or production standards to make an accommodation; nor is an employer obligated to provide or pay for personal use items such as glasses or hearing aids. An employer generally does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation unless an individual with a disability has asked for one. However, when an employer believes that a medical condition is causing a performance or conduct problem, they may ask the employee how to solve the problem and if the employee might need a reasonable accommodation. Once a reasonable accommodation is requested, the employer and the individual should discuss the individual's needs and identify the appropriate reasonable accommodation (the interactive process). Where more than one accommodation would work, the employer may choose the one that is less costly or that is easier to provide.

Key Features of Disability Employment Protections under Federal Laws

<u>Law</u>	<u>Section 501, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Section 503, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Section 504, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Title I, ADA</u>
Who is covered	Federal employers	Federal Contractors--\$10,000	Received Federal Financial Assistance	All Employers with 15 or more employees
Requires	Affirmative Action & Nondiscrimination	Affirmative Action & Nondiscrimination	Nondiscrimination only	Nondiscrimination only
What is covered	Employment	Employment	Program access & employment	Employment
How to obey	Reasonable accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations
Not required when	Undue hardship	Undue hardship	Undue hardship	Undue hardship
Who enforces	EEOC*	OFCCP/DOL**	***Individual federal agency	EEOC*

*EEOC, see: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/disability.cfm>

**OFCCP/DOL, see: <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/pdf/pdfstart.htm>

***Individual federal agencies – visit agency’s website and search for “disability complaints”

In summary, these two laws (Rehab Act of 1973 and Title I of the ADA) establish the framework for disability rights in employment.

In addition to knowing our disability rights, it’s important for us to consider the subject of when and how to effectively pursue these rights. It’s one thing to have rights; it’s another to be clever, smart and appropriate on how to pursue them, especially in an employment situation.

As we’ve discussed in earlier Lessons, disability-related employment discrimination is often the result of fear, misconception and a lack of knowledge. Fear about working with people with disabilities (“will I say or do the wrong thing”); misconceptions about their potential to perform in a job (“if I had their disability, I couldn’t do this job”); and, a lack of knowledge on how to provide reasonable accommodations (“I’m not sure how to do it or how much this will cost my company”). Thus, disability

discrimination in employment often can and should be corrected early and artfully by addressing directly these fear factors – rather than going immediately to court.

Remember that employers are very aware of these disability laws and are generally fearful of getting sued. So, if you begin to sense their fear about your ability to do the job, respond to that fear with facts, examples, and explanations on how you can do that job. In other words, instead of letting a line get drawn into the sand, where thoughts about confrontation and lawsuits are entering the situation, help them to solve this problem by adding more positive information about your capabilities. Remember, employers want to hire people who have communication skills, marketing skills and can solve problems. By showing these soft skills in this situation, rather than getting upset, you will impress them.

And here's one more good reason for being prepared, friendly and ready to use your persuading skills rather than your suing skills. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) employers win most of the disability discrimination cases brought against them by workers with disabilities. The reason why is that it's very hard to prove discrimination against an employer. Employers know these laws and how to protect themselves. They are likely to defend themselves by saying, "well I found another job candidate who had more skills," or "you didn't have all the skills or experience I was looking for."

In addition, once you've sued an employer for disability discrimination, you jeopardize your ability to get another employer to consider you for employment. The other employers you approach next may learn about your prior legal action and, as a result, want to stay as far away from you as possible.

So, you can win the battle against discrimination by filing a complaint. However, be careful not to lose the war. After all, what you want is to get a good job and have a successful career.

Lesson 11 — Social Security Work Incentives

This Lesson is about how to manage your Social Security disability-related payments in a way which best supports your ambitions to work.

First, the big picture.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, adults with disabilities experience a poverty rate of 49.7%. This means, if you're an adult with a disability you have about a 50% chance of being in poverty. The overall poverty rate for all adults (nondisabled) in the United States is 13.3%. That's a big difference.

Social Security benefits are important and necessary for many people with disabilities, especially those living in poverty; however, they may come at a price.

First, the payments are low and may ultimately mean a life of poverty.

Plus, in order to get payments, you have to "prove" you're unemployable. If that's the case, so be it.

If it isn't, or might not be, consider the financial and other benefits of working.

Social Security disability-related benefits can be a life-saving resource to help you through a time in your life where you need the support; however, if you can work, you will always be better off financially with a job.

Let's begin by reviewing the basics about both SSI and SSDI.

SSI (Supplemental Security Income)

SSI is authorized under Title XVI of the Social Security Act.

SSI is a needs-based program. That is to say, you must be seen as unable to work because of disability and you have little money or financial resources in the bank to support yourself. SSI's resource limitations are \$2,000 for an individual; and, \$3,000 for a couple. This means if you have more than \$2,000 (if single) or \$3,000 (if a couple) in your checking or savings accounts, you are likely to be determined not financially eligible for the program.

If you get in, SSI provides a monthly payment which varies from state to state (the federal monthly payment is currently \$750 per month and there are some state variations, e.g. California is higher because the State adds to that amount which in 2018 raises the monthly amount for an individual to \$910.72). This monthly payment is designed to help you pay for all your living expenses (food, clothing and shelter, etc.). In today's economy, this level of benefit is a "poverty-level" existence.

SSI automatically qualifies you for Medicaid (in California, it's called Medi-Cal) insurance, a medical insurance program, which will give you access to medical care.

SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance)

SSDI is authorized under Title II of the Social Security Act.

SSDI is an entirely separate program from SSI. Even so, some people may be eligible for both at the same time. In order to be eligible for SSDI, applicants must demonstrate a qualifying prior work history. And, that work history must have paid Social Security taxes (FICA) for a certain number of years (generally five to ten years).

If enrolled in SSDI, you will get a monthly payment which is determined by a formula based on your average lifetime earnings. The most recent national average for SSDI monthly payments was \$1,171.

In addition, upon SSDI enrollment, you may also be eligible to receive Medicare Part A (to pay hospitals) and Part B (to pay doctors) as your medical insurance.

These descriptions of both SSI and SSDI are general because actual benefits are based on individual factors and State variations; hence, for more details about your situation ALWAYS call or visit your nearest Social Security Office.

There is a "bible" on these Social Security programs which you may wish to review for more details on both SSI and SSDI, as well as the work incentive programs listed below. It's called the (SSI/SSDI) Guide to

Work Incentives or “Red Book” (because it has a red cover) and can be viewed here:

<http://ssa.gov/redbook/>.

You should also keep up with the news around the future of these programs. They may change significantly. That’s possible because these Social Security programs are dependent on the U.S. Congress’ willingness to keep the money flowing to support the current levels of eligibility and benefits. And, the reality is these programs are spending more money while supporting an ever-growing number of individuals. Over the last 10 years, both SSI and SSDI have seen a sharp rise in the numbers of people using the programs. These upward trends are expected to continue. As the financial costs of these programs rise, mounting pressures are building in the U.S. Congress to do something. And, that may mean less money and more difficult eligibility in the future.

Now, we could count on the U.S. Congress to keep the programs going as they are currently designed by raising Social Security and other taxes to get the additional money needed to support the ever increase number of beneficiaries; or, we must worry about the real possibility that these programs may significantly change. Many people believe that significant changes are needed to these programs in order to control their ever-increasing costs.

While it’s quite likely that significant changes will occur during the next several years, during your life time, (the next 20 to 30 to 40 years) more dramatic changes to these programs are a real possibility.

The question you must ask yourself is, “In whose hands do I want my future held?” Do you want your economic security in the hands of politicians, or do you want it in your own hands – if that’s possible?

So, when or if you come to that fork in the road between SSI/SSDI enrollment and working, think long and hard about what’s possible for you and which direction is better for you over the long term. If you believe working is possible, consider the merits of developing your professional or workplace skills as soon as possible, thereby taking personal control over your economic future.

If you must enter either SSI or SSDI, well you must. Go ahead, and let’s be thankful that these programs are available.

If you become or are currently a recipient of either the SSI or SSDI programs, keep alert for the possibility of your employment potential improving. At that time, the SSI and SSDI work incentives below will become important employment resources.

SSI/SSDI Work Incentives

As an SSI or SSDI recipient, here are some important work incentive tools available to you in order to help you make the smoothest transition possible from benefits to work.

As noted above, in order to receive SSI or SSDI, you must be unemployable or not able to work at all. So, when you start working both benefit levels and eligibility can be impacted.

The Social Security Administration offers you the work incentive tools listed below to both encourage you and protect you for a time so that you can test your ability to work. Having these work incentive tools allows you to both test and better understand your employment potential.

Here they are.

General Income Exclusion and Earned Income Exclusion

Remember that we noted that the national average payment in 2018 for SSI was \$750 (each State may be different). If you decide to try working, when you report to your SSA office that you're beginning to earn income, you can expect your \$750 monthly payment to be adjusted or reduced slightly.

When you begin to earn income, under SSA's work incentive programs, before these reductions are applied, you can automatically deduct something called a "General Income Exclusion" (\$20) as well as an "Earned Income Exclusion" (\$65) from your monthly earnings. So, if you work and earn \$400 in a month, you get to immediately deduct the combined general and earned income exclusions of \$85 ($\$20 + \$65 = \85, then $\$400 - \$85 = \$315$) leaving \$315 to report as earned income.

From this amount, the Social Security Administration will reduce your monthly check by \$1 for every \$2 you've earned. So, in this example, your monthly check of \$750 would be reduced by one-half of \$315 – or by \$157.50.

Still, you've made more money that month by working. You've made \$592.50 in a reduced SSI payment (reduced from \$750, so $\$750 - \$157.50 = \$592.50$).

Plus, you've earned \$400 at work, for a grand total of \$992.50 ($\$592.50 + \$400 = \992.50).

But, more deductions from your earned income are possible.

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs)

Under this additional earned income deduction or incentive, you may also be able to deduct more from your employment earnings: any disability-related working expenses that you incurred, such as medicine needed in order to allow you to work, can be considered "Impairment Related Work Expenses" (IRWEs). You can only deduct these and other disability-related work expenses if you are not reimbursed for them (for example, by your health insurance). There is no comprehensive list of disability work related expenses, so follow the idea that because of your disability, these additional expenses were necessary in order to enable you to work and may be deducted as IRWE's.

Be sure to collect and be prepared to submit each month all your receipts for these IRWE expenses to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

So, if you spend \$200 a month on IRWEs, you may also deduct that amount from the \$315 of countable income above.

In this example, we're now down to \$115 of earned income ($\$315 - \$200 = \115) of which one half, or \$57.50, is to be deducted from your monthly SSI check.

So, in this example, utilizing the IWREs in combination with the other deductions, you will get a reduced SSI check for \$692.50, plus your \$400 of earned income for a combined \$1092.50.

Here's the complete calculation

EXAMPLE with DEDUCTIONS

Your SSI Monthly Check	\$750.00
Your Monthly Pay Check	\$400.00
Subtract Both Automatic Deductions (\$20 +\$65)	\$85.00
Subtract Your Monthly IRWE Deductions	<u>-\$200.00</u>

Your Benefits <u>Base</u> Amount	\$115.00
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(Job Check = \$400 minus both \$85 and \$200 = \$115)

SSI Benefit <u>Reduction</u> Amount is half of \$115 <u>Base</u>	\$57.50
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(SSI is reduce \$1 for every \$2 of \$115 Base or a \$57.50 Reduction)

SSI Monthly Check	\$750.00
Actual Benefit Reduction (Calculated Above)	- <u>\$57.50</u>
Actual Monthly SSI Check	\$692.50

(\$750 minus \$57.50 equals \$692.50 or Your Adjusted SSI Payment)

<i>Actual Monthly SSI Check</i>	<i>\$692.50</i>
<i>Actual Work Check</i>	<i><u>+\$400.00</u></i>
<i>Actual Total Monthly Income</i>	<i>\$1092.50</i>

Blind Work Expenses (BWE)

If your disability is blindness, you have an alternative IRWE to use. It's called the "Blind Work Expenses" (BWEs) option. If you are blind, you should use this option (not the IRWEs) as it offers more things to deduct. If you are not blind, you cannot use BWEs (instead use IRWEs above). Expenses that can qualify include: a service animal, including the animal's cost of food and upkeep; transportation to and from work; licenses, fees, or taxes; attendant care services; meals eaten during work hours; medical and non-medical equipment or supplies; and, other work-related equipment or services. Remember, you must be blind in order to use this listing; and, you must also collect receipts and not have been reimbursed for these expenses by either insurance or another entity.

Both the IRWEs and BWEs must be approved by your Social Security office before these deductions can apply. Be sure to work closely with them.

Student Earned Income Exclusion

If you are under the age of 22 and a full-time student in school, you can utilize the "Student Earned Income Exclusion" work incentive to help protect your SSI monthly payment. Under this program, you can make up to \$1,820 per month (not to exceed a total of \$7,350 for the year) and not have any of that earned income affect or reduce your SSI payment. (These amounts were for January 2018 and go up each year). This is an especially attractive program designed to encourage full-time students who are under 22 years of age to seek out those all-important summer (or school year) jobs and internships.

Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

Okay, now that you have an earned income from working, and in view of the SSI asset limitation of \$2,000 in your checking and savings accounts, you may be wondering, "how do I remain eligible for the SSI program with the extra money piling up in my checking and savings account?" Well, consider opening a "Plan to Achieve Self-Support" plan, or PASS plan, with the Social Security Administration. PASS is a special savings account that you can use to deposit either your earned income or SSDI monies (if you are doubly eligible for both SSI & SSDI) for either job-related or career-related expenses (e.g. going to additional school, starting a business, etc.).

Please understand that if you're on SSI, you cannot put that SSI money into your PASS account (you can only put in your earned income or SSDI). But, when you put earnings into your PASS account, these monies will not be counted as income which would otherwise lower your SSI monthly check. Plus, your new PASS savings account can protect you from being disqualified from SSI's basic requirement to have no more than \$2,000 (individual) or \$3,000 (couple) in your savings and checking accounts. You must ask Social Security if you can set-up a PASS account and you must complete a written plan outlining how you expect to use these PASS funds to further your work ambition (start a business or further education).

Section 1619(a)

Section 1619(a) allows SSI recipients who are working to continue to receive SSI payments even when their earned income (gross wages and/or net earnings from self-employment) is at the level which would otherwise stop those payments (that means you're earning more money than is usually allowed). This threshold is called SGA or "Substantial Gainful Activity." Section 1619(a) eliminates the need for the

trial work period or extended period of eligibility under SSI. If you are blind, this section does not apply to you because current law doesn't apply the SGA requirement to individuals who are blind.

To qualify, you must:

- Have been eligible for an SSI payment for at least 1 month before you begin working at the SGA level;
- Still be disabled; and
- Meet all other SSI eligibility rules, including the income and resources tests.

Under Section 1619(a), your eligibility for SSI will continue for as long as you meet the basic eligibility requirements and the income and resources tests. The SSA will continue to figure your SSI payment amount in the same way as before. If your state provides Medicaid to individuals on SSI, you will continue to be eligible for Medicaid.

Section 1619(b)

If you have a disability and return to work, you can make a significant amount of money and still keep your SSI-linked Medicaid without additional expense (even if you earn enough money that your SSI is reduced to zero). The exact amount of money you can earn under the "1619(b) –Medicaid while working" policy varies depending on the state you live in (in 2018, the earnings thresholds ranged all the way from \$27,322 in Alabama up to \$66,812 in Connecticut). If you make more, many states also have "working disabled" programs where you can keep still keep your Medicaid with some amount of premium payments required by you. Note that under the "Individual Threshold Amount" provision, if approved, you might be able to make more than your state's regular earning limits under 1619(b).

Ticket to Work

Social Security's "Ticket to Work" Program is a free and voluntary program available to people ages 18 through 64 who are blind or have a disability and who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The goals of the Ticket to Work Program are to:

- Offer beneficiaries with disabilities expanded choices when seeking service and supports to enter, re-enter and/or maintain employment;
- Increase the financial independence and self-sufficiency of beneficiaries with disabilities; and
- Reduce and, whenever possible, eliminate reliance on disability benefits.

The beneficiary does not need an actual paper Ticket to participate. Under this program, eligible beneficiaries with disabilities who are receiving monthly SSI/SSDI cash benefit payments are entitled to participate by signing up with an approved service provider of their choice. This can be an Employment Network (EN) or a State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. Ask the VR or community employment agency you might want to help you get to work if they accept the Ticket to Work offered by SSA. If so, they will coordinate and provide appropriate services to help you find and maintain the employment you seek and at no cost to you. These services may be training, career counseling, vocational rehabilitation, job placement, and ongoing support services necessary to achieve employment.

Trial Work Period

The Trial Work Period is an employment incentive for SSDI beneficiaries who want to try working again. The trial work period lets you test your ability to work or run a business for at least 9 months. These months need not be consecutive. During this trial work period you will continue to receive full SSDI benefits.

Reinstating Eligibility without a New Application

If you have been made ineligible for SSI payments due to working, you may be able to restart your SSI cash payment again without starting all over with a new application. Ask SSA about how you can restart your SSI benefits and/or Medicaid if your work has ended. If your cash payment and Medicaid benefits ended because of your work and earnings and you stop work within 5 years of when your benefits ceased, the SSA may be able to re-start your benefits.

Medicaid Buy-in

Many states also offer a program referred to as the Medicaid buy-in program. Earning limits differ from state to state, but as an example, in California, participants with a disability can earn up to \$56,000 per year and still remain eligible for Medicaid. Participants pay a premium based on their earnings and receive full-scope Medicaid coverage. In California, the Medicaid buy in also provides an additional savings vehicle. Participants can save unlimited funds in a recognized retirement vehicle such as an IRA, 401K, or 403B without triggering SSI asset limitations. This is one great way to build up savings in excess of the \$2,000 asset limit for those receiving SSI linked Medicaid.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges of using any of these work incentive programs is understanding them and following the rules. This lesson is designed to get you started understanding the work incentive associated with SSI and SSDI. At least now you know there are several important work incentive programs that you might consider using. As always, consult the Social Security Administration office for the details about how these might apply to you. Don't hesitate to contact them!

And, if you live in a state which has on-line personal benefits calculators, you don't even need to know all these facts – you just need to go to and use these websites to determine the potential impact working might have on your benefits. They are called Disability Benefits 101 or DB101 websites. Here are the states with DB101 websites: AK, AZ, CA, KY, MI, MN, MO, NJ and OH. You can find these state's website links here: <http://www.db101.org/>

ABLE Act

Lastly, there is a related program offering under "The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act" which may be helpful. This law allows people with disabilities to put private or personal funds into a special tax-advantaged savings account (called an ABLE Account) for future approved disability-related expenses.

ABLE Accounts allow people with disabilities to work, save and invest to build a more economically independent future for themselves and their families. ABLE is the first piece of legislation that specifically recognizes that there are added costs to living with a disability.

ABLE Accounts are operated at the state level, although many states also allow non-residents to open accounts through their program. Investments in the accounts grow tax-free, and the accounts themselves can reach a maximum of \$300,000 or more, depending on the state they are based in. These funds are NOT counted as assets for the purposes of SSI unless they reach more than \$100,000, and *all* funds in an ABLE account are not counted as assets for Medicaid and other means-tested programs (check current program rules in your State).

Qualified ABLE expenses include:

Education - including tuition for preschool thru post-secondary education, books, supplies, and educational materials related to such education, tutors, and special education services.

Housing - Expenses for a primary residence, including rent, purchase of a primary residence or an interest in a primary residence, mortgage payments, real property taxes, and utility charges.

Transportation - Expenses for transportation, including the use of mass transit, the purchase or modification of vehicles, and moving expenses.

Employment Support - expenses related to obtaining and maintaining employment, including job-related training, assistive technology, and personal assistance supports.

Health Prevention and Wellness - Expenses for health and wellness, including premiums for health insurance, mental health, medical, vision, and dental expenses, habilitation and rehabilitation services, durable medical equipment, therapy, respite care, long term services and supports, nutritional management, communication services and devices, adaptive equipment, assistive technology, and personal assistance.

Other Approved Expenses - Any other expenses which are approved by the Secretary under regulations and consistent with the purposes of this section.

Assistive Technology and Personal Support - Expenses for assistive technology and personal support with respect to any item described in clauses (i) through (vi).

Miscellaneous Expenses - Financial management and administrative services; legal fees; expenses for oversight; monitoring; home improvement, and modifications, maintenance and repairs, at primary residence; or funeral and burial expenses.

For more information on the ABLE Act and ABLE Accounts go to: <http://ablenrc.org/about/what-are-able-accounts>

Lesson 12 — How to Represent the Disability Community

In Lesson 2 (above) on “A New Disability Perspective,” we offered the idea that “diversity includes disability.”

Given the value employers are placing on investing in a diverse workforce, hiring people with disabilities should become an increasing part of their strategy. The reason why employers are interested in hiring a more diverse workforce is that they’ve come to understand that having workers from minorities, different genders, ethnicities and religious backgrounds means their organization’s workers have different life experiences and various perspectives which can improve problem solving and planning. Research shows that the more diverse an organization’s workforce is, the better the organization’s performance and, in turn, the higher their profits.

Think about the richness of having these different experiences and backgrounds on a team.

Also, a diverse workforce better matches the make-up of the customer market companies and organizations are designed to serve.

In the spirit of diversity, employers are increasingly understanding that this consideration needs to include people with disabilities.

Fifteen percent (15%) of the population consists of people with disabilities. That means 15% of possible new job applicants can be recruited from this constituency, as well as 15% of potential new customers or participants with disabilities can be found.

Therefore, you as a person with a disability might be able to tell your employer that, if they hire you, you can help them to broaden their diversity to include more people with disabilities.

A word of caution about this possibility.

Don’t feel like you must take this role on for yourself. It’s completely optional.

If it doesn’t seem right for you to represent yourself in this way, or if you choose not to, that’s perfectly fine. It’s not necessary to assume this role in order to become a competitive professional. It’s extra credit.

Also, don’t even mention this possibility unless you are both ready and prepared to perform this role.

If at this point you want to skip this idea, just remember the potential of this additional role. Someday in the future, you may decide the time might be right for you to help your organization in this way.

When and if you want to develop this capability, this Lesson will help you to prepare yourself to represent the disability perspective.

When and if you are ready, here’s what you might do to prepare yourself for such a role:

First, know some basic facts.

- As you learned earlier, data tells us that about 15% of the population in the USA reports a disability. Learn more about these numbers here: <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org>
- The total after-tax annual disposable income for working-age people with disabilities is about \$490 billion, which is similar to that of other significant market segments, such as African Americans (\$501 billion) and Hispanics (\$582 billion). Disposable income is what people have left to spend after they pay their taxes.
- Discretionary income for working-age people with disabilities is about \$21 billion, which is greater than that of both the African-American and Hispanic market segments combined. Discretionary income is what people have left to spend on things they want to buy after necessities (rent, food, debt, etc.).
- And, when you add in the spending power of their families, all these numbers double. For more information visit: <https://www.air.org/system/files/downloads/report/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf>
- Companies and organizations can reach this market share by following three important steps. These are: 1) design buildings, programs and products in an accessible way; 2) market to the population (target to and include people with disabilities in advertising); and 3) hire people with disabilities (like you) for this added element of diversity and for internal advice on this subject.

Next, study the company's history and current approach to this subject. You should seek a better understanding as to what extent the organization already understands, embraces, and implements a full-service model which includes hiring and outreach to people with disabilities. Ask questions about this part of their operations. Gather current information before you address the subject. If everything is working fine, then your approach should be to compliment them about what they are doing and offer your support around what is happening. Be a good team player. Be a smart employee.

Once you have studied the organization's current efforts, survey the political considerations around how best to pursue the idea (always in a positive way). Be a source of ideas on how this might happen. Remember, bosses like employees who identify problems along with suggested solutions.

Be sure to suggest the economic, social, and public relations value of such an effort. Plus, positive action in this area can be viewed as a demonstration of the company's enlightened policies and sense of corporate civic responsibility.

Remind everyone that the need for an organizational effort to improve its service to customers with disabilities is not just a company-specific challenge. It's part of a broader shift in public attitudes about the equity and inclusion of its citizens (and customers) with disabilities. Outmoded ideas and limited expectations about the potential of people with disabilities to actively participate in all activities are fading away. More positive attitudes are emerging. It's time for us all to re-think our attitudes and efforts to include people with disabilities more completely.

In fact, to miss this opportunity may be to fall behind your competitors.

In addition, suggest items from the following list which may best suit your company's situation. And be alert to add other suggestions, ideas or considerations not specifically mentioned below.

Study of your operations — In order to make sure they are accessible, first conduct a preliminary survey or review your company's physical access to both employees and customers with disabilities, as well as look at their accessibility policies and procedures (reasonable disability job accommodations and program access). Include a review of the organization's web presence or site to people with different disabilities to see how accessible it might be (for example, to blind people who use screen readers or to people with learning disabilities).

Identify disability resources which can help you answer your technical assistance questions on physical, program and web accessibility standards. Learn something about the basics regarding what physical as well as programmatic access means by reviewing accessibility considerations (see <http://www.access-board.gov/gs.htm> and <http://www.ada.gov/civiccommonprobs.htm> for guidelines).

With regards to digital or internet access to people with disabilities, it's getting more and more important because so much business happens this way. Ask people with disabilities (especially those who are blind and visually impaired) to test your websites and give you feedback on what might be improved

Develop a plan — Think about who should be consulted or involved in this overall effort. Suggest which parts of the organization should be included in a team to study this suggestion. Be specific. Here's a design to consider as you sketch out your initial plan.

- Seek Top Level Commitment – The first positive step in such an effort is to get the company's leader to make a clear written or spoken commitment supporting better access for customers and employees with disabilities. This can best be accomplished by the head of your organization making this objective an organizational priority. Can it become a part of the organization's strategic or long-range plan? With the leadership's backing, progress is more likely to follow.
- Begin with Your Organization – Given the prevalence of disability in all segments of society (about 15%), it's fair to say that people with disabilities are already in your organization. Many may have invisible disabilities and may feel compelled to hide their disabilities from the organization, for fear of not being understood or even discriminated against. A good place to start is within your organization. Develop the organization's disability culture by welcoming these employees with both a statement and positive supports. Make your office or workplace disability-friendly as an example in support of the broader effort.
- Display a Welcoming Place – People with disabilities look for signals and signs indicating whether or not they are welcomed by an organization. In addition to the positive and welcoming attitude that needs to be learned and practiced by employees, company advertising should show people with disabilities as part of its customer base. This can be done by including a person with a disability in your advertising and making statements

around their full inclusion. See: <https://www.oath.com/2018/05/17/oath-national-disability-leadership-alliance-and-getty-images-l/>

- Use People-first Language -- People with disabilities are people first. Whenever referring to them, place the noun before the adjective. For example, use the term “people (or students) with disabilities,” not “the disabled.” Still, be flexible with language: if you are interacting with an individual with a disability, follow their lead on how they prefer to be identified.
- Meet the Disability Community – Identify key local groups of people with disabilities to meet with and get their input for your efforts. Consider calling on your area’s Center for Independent Living, local disability rehabilitation organizations, and other community disability groups to learn their disability perspective. In addition to building bridges with these organizations, they may be able to offer you additional recruiting sources for new job candidates with disabilities to consider.
- Create a New Perspective – Help your organization to consider a new perspective about disability, one which is more up-to-date with society’s advances. If we can embrace the ideas and practices outlined in Lesson 3 above, then we’ll all be in a far better place to make meaningful progress.

The presentation — Before you decide to bring this subject up, outline what you might say about it to your boss and others in your organization. It’s just like preparing for any business presentation: develop your talking points before you make your case. Make an outline of the key facts (data) and potential benefits to your organization as they attempt to reach out more effectively to this segment of the population. Study demographic numbers. How many people does your organization serve each year? Do they know how many might have disabilities? Consider the legal risks that may exist if the organization is not meeting its nondiscrimination requirements under applicable disability laws (local, state and federal laws). If the company or organization is not responding as they should, point out the legal risks (that’s called “risk management”) and the value of being proactive before someone sues them. Understand that being proactive or having a plan to make things accessible is always a great legal and public relations defense. Make your presentation a business case, not just a social cause. And be prepared to enlighten or educate your company on some of the new thinking or perspectives on disability which are becoming the new reality. These relevant concepts are explained further in Lesson 3 above (Disability is Normal, Diversity Includes Disability, Having a Disability is an Asset, Accommodations or Adjustment, and Familiarity Overcomes Fear).

If you can help your fellow employees to understand and embrace these new ways of thinking, as well as offer a specific plan, the negative labels and stereotypes traditionally associated with disability won’t interfere with your efforts to successfully represent the disability demographic.

Both you and your organization are likely to profit from such an effort.

Lesson 13 — The Emotional Response — Why Choose Work?

This book was originally written for a course on job readiness for students with disabilities. The most important lesson I learned when I began teaching the course was the high level of anxiety and fear that

the subject of employment brings up for most students with disabilities, as well as persons with newly acquired disabilities.

The first time I taught this competitive job readiness course, after much of the content had already been discussed, one of my best students in the back of the room leaned back in her and flipped her pen up into the air and said to herself (I happened to be able to read her lips) “I’ll never be able to do all of this!”

“Whoa,” I thought, “were the other students in the class also feeling this frustration?”

I had to remind myself that I had a long work history and wasn’t in-tune with their fears on this subject because I both knew and was comfortable with what it takes to make the school-to-work and return-to-work transitions. I was projecting my confidence in this subject onto the students, imagining they shared it.

But, they didn’t.

Also, I began to realize that after more than a dozen of our prior classes, all the material I had shared (and is contained in this book) was piling onto their shoulders.

Pressure!

Added to all of this was the burden of breaking the chains of the old disability model around low expectations and disability employment.

More pressure!!

Let’s understand that most young nondisabled people who have never worked before will be fearful about leaving the safety of school and going on to find a good job.

Whenever you approach a new task, you always wonder if you can do it. Whether it’s to move up from grade school to high school and then to college, it’s natural to have some self-doubts about your ability to succeed in your new environment.

Your career represents one of the most important activities of your life, so why wouldn’t it produce a deep emotional response? If it doesn’t, maybe you’re not really thinking about it clearly.

This natural emotional response, however, has the potential danger of seriously delaying and deterring you from taking any needed actions.

Let’s start by understanding that an employment quest is going to produce a level of anxiety, whether we have a disability or not. The trick to this unavoidable fear is to recognize it and learn to how to manage it.

So, let’s start by saying that it’s normal and to be expected to be afraid of it all. And, therefore, these fears need to be respected and dealt with or else they may shut us down.

Another example of how this core fear played out when I offered this course to our students was the course registration process. During each semester, while the course was open for registration, I began wondering why students weren't signing up for it. They should be signing up, I thought. After all, they needed it and it will totally help them.

The core emotional fears showed themselves during the course registration process as "avoidance behaviors." In other words, they didn't sign up for the course as they should.

Once I began to understand what was happening, I had to personally encourage them to register for the class. During my sales pitch it was clear that it was needed in order to over-ride the effects of their basic emotional fears and the resulting avoidance behavior. So, it takes more than a great course of study or program to make it work. We must find ways to help our students to confront and manage these fears.

One of the most predictable emotional responses I got from students with disabilities when the subject of their career arose was these basic fears and even tears. Often the students began to cry when we discussed this subject.

I kept a box of tissues on my desk.

When this happened, the most comforting thing I could say was, "It's okay to cry." I told my students. Sometimes you need to cry so as to get those fears out of you. It's an important step in the right direction.

One more thing to realize about the emotional response is that these fears are really anchored in the fear of failure. What if no one likes me? What if I don't graduate? What if I can't get a job?

When failure is possible, the mind and body ready themselves for action. In a state of fear of failure, our body releases adrenaline into the blood stream and our instincts give us two primal choices.

These are: "fight or flight".

Do we run from the thing that is scaring us (flight) or do we stand up to it and fight it? If we run, we reason that we'll get away from what is frightening us and it will go away. While this might be true if we were facing a bear in the woods or a lion in the jungle, it's not the better choice when it's the subject of this book.

Yes, we need to pick the "fight" option when we find ourselves afraid and avoiding the subject of our work futures. And, in this case, "fight" means to fight this fear head-on and take positive steps or actions to meet the challenge. If you've read this book to this point, you should be very proud of yourself for choosing the better option.

So, emotions aren't bad, nor are they to be denied. They are to be expected and embraced. Use your emotional energies in a constructive way. They can help to motivate you, drive you to action and encourage you along the way.

Another point as we consider the emotional response around work is the all-important question, “Why choose work?” Or, “Why is work important to me?”

It would seem like, given all the negativity that exists around disability and employment, you have a good excuse not to seek a job and career. Maybe, nobody is pushing you. In fact, some people in your life might be signaling or even suggesting that it’s not possible for you.

Let’s start by outlining the value and importance of working.

- Working can bring greater meaning and purpose to your life. This is especially true if you have a cause or passion that can be best followed by having a job or career.
- Working is more likely to give you a greater sense of accomplishment, even if it’s just a daily feeling of accomplishment and a job well done.
- Working gives you extra money to buy things you want, maybe even own a home and support a family.
- Working can make you a proud and contributing member of society.
- Working can expand your circle of friends and improve your social life.
- Working demonstrates to family, friends, and even the general public, both your abilities as well as the abilities of other people with disabilities.
- Working can make you feel better about yourself.
- Working often leads to a healthier lifestyle than not working.
- Working can give you better control over your economic security than being on public support programs.
- Working is the fullest expression of disability equity, inclusion, independent living and empowerment.

Certainly, working is work – so, it’s likely to be harder than not working. But, then again, physical fitness or wellness requires exercise and a good diet -- and that also takes work. So, in the short run, not working (or not exercising and not eating well) may seem easier, but it may not be easier over time.

Working or not working will always be your decision to make. And, at times, working may not be possible. Your health and personal circumstances may prevent you from working. If that’s the case, always be thinking about and looking for a chance to reconsider the working question should things change or improve.

Hopefully, these thoughts about the value of working are things to think about as you manage your emotional response to this important question, “To work or not to work”.

Lesson 14 — Voices of Experience

It’s one thing for teachers, counselors, parents and even this book to tell you what you should be doing in order to better prepare yourself for a job and career. It’s another thing to hear from people just like you – former students with disabilities who have made it work.

So, let's end "Part I" of the book by considering some advice from former students with disabilities who have already successfully made their transitions from school to work.

At the end of our semester long "Professional Development and Disability" class, we ask former students, who are now working successfully, to come back and tell us their advice as we prepare for our transition to employment. We ask them to tell us what they recommend we think about or prepare for as we begin our employment journey.

This book splits their comments or advice into two sections. Below is the first part of their advice. These bits of advice focus on items related to the "disability" side of the subject. Remember, this course covers two key elements. These are: 1) "The Disability Factor"; and, 2) "Professional Development Skills". At the end of Part II you'll read the rest of their advice on professional skills.

Here's their advice to you on the disability factor.

"I should have better prepared myself emotionally, physically and mentally for working."

These former students with disabilities tell us that they would have better focused themselves on what they offer an employer, as an individual, rather than getting too distracted with their disability side. They told us that their life experience in education had centered so much on the disability factor, that when they left education, they weren't as well prepared as they should have been to demonstrate their potential and capabilities as individuals. Sure, the disability is a relevant factor in their lives, but it shouldn't become the leading factor. That's because that is not what employers want to talk with you about during a job interview. Employers are looking for people who know themselves as complete persons: people who know exactly what they can do for them. Employers are looking for people who can describe their knowledge, skills and abilities with self-confidence. Thus, the former students' advice to you is that you develop a better understanding of your capabilities, and how to describe them clearly to employers. Don't be meek. Don't get overly distracted by the disability experience and the negativity that it sometimes creates. Be strong, self-assured and project your personal power.

"I wish I had been more self-confident about myself."

Now that these former students with disabilities are working successfully, they have come to realize that they had the potential to make it all along. Looking back, they now know that their lack of self-confidence was a mistake about themselves. They can't even believe that they had such serious doubts about themselves.

They also re-assured us that self-doubts always arise whenever you go from what is familiar to a new situation. For example, when you were leaving middle school or grade school, you probably had self-doubts about your ability to be successfully in high school. And, the same may have happened when you moved up from high school to post-secondary education. If your family moved from one city to another, you may have had self-doubts that you would make new friends; or, you may have had other related doubts when you started a new sport, hobby or even class. Self-doubts, self-doubts, and yet more self-doubts are often a matter of routine in life.

So, don't be afraid. Think about how you have already made successful steps in new schools, sports, subjects, or with friends – how you pushed forward, even if you had some self-doubts. So, why not into employment?

The former students also warned us that when you let any naturally-occurring lack of self-confidence show, others see it clearly and, in turn, cannot easily develop confidence in you. It's like a contagious disease. If you show a lack of self-confidence, others catch it from you – about you.

So, be alert and manage your lack of self-confidence when you head to the world of work.

How do you manage it if it's "just not there"? When asked this question, our experienced former students, now working, said, "well, it's simple, just fake it!" Yes, they told us to fake it. Pretend you have self-confidence. Show it even when it's missing. That will do several things: first, it will become contagious with others (employers will be more likely develop confidence in you) and the act of faking it will hasten its arrival!

"I needed people to talk with who held an expectation for me to go to work after school."

Negativity is a real drag. If all you are hearing from those around you is "we don't expect you to go to work", then you'll start believing that about yourself. Find people who see a potential in you to become employed and draw your energy from their encouragement. When we asked these former students with disabilities who are now working what was the single most important influence in their success, they told us it was when a family member, friend, teacher or other significant person told them they expected them to go work. When they heard that from someone they trusted, they began to really believe it about themselves. When they heard it from multiple people, it was even better. So, don't let the negativity stop you. If that's what is coming your way, keep looking for someone to tell you that they believe you can – and should – go to work.

"I needed to better understand how to translate my education accommodations to the workplace."

Our returning working students admitted that when they left school, some of the accommodations they had for the classroom did not work in the workplace. For example, some of the former students talked about their classroom note-taking accommodations (others took notes of class lectures for them because they couldn't). When these former students arrived at the workplace, they knew they dare not ask their new supervisor to take notes for them in staff meetings. That would have been a disaster! So, they had to develop a new workplace-appropriate accommodation strategy. Many found various technology devices which worked perfectly and gave them an accommodation that nobody noticed.

So, plan ahead. Study your current classroom accommodations and think about how practical they might be in the workplace. If you're not sure, talk to a counselor or assistive technology expert for advice. Or, call the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) for free advice (1-800-JAN-7234 or <http://askjan.org/>).

“I wish I had found someone to talk with about the many questions I had about work, as they arose.”

As you can tell from the size of this book, this subject has much to be considered. This book gives you a great start: it’s a road map to find your way forward. However, each situation will have complexities that even this long book may have not explained. So, the advice that these former students had on this reality was to find an experienced worker, in your field, who you can call to ask about the questions and concerns that will arise. It might be a bonus to find a person who also has a disability, but if you can’t, any quality seasoned worker will be good. This type of support person is often called a “mentor.” Their role is to be ready to talk with you and give you some good advice on how to handle a new situation that seems difficult or awkward.

“I wish I had prepared and practiced my disability capabilities and accommodations speeches before I went to talk with employers.”

Discussing key disability-and-employment subjects – like describing how you, as a person with a disability, can add the disability perspective to an organization, or exploring your accommodation needs – is tricky. Our working former students cautioned us to actually write down our “talking points” on both subjects and ask others to listen to our presentations – just to be sure the message is precise and easy to understand. If you’re not well prepared on both subjects, you can do far more damage to your job candidacy than help. NEVER, think, “oh, I can talk about it effectively when it’s time.” Because, when it’s time, you’ll be under pressure and nervous – and, if not well rehearsed, you’ll flop. Be prepared!

This is the end of Part I.

The next section (Part II) will cover what you need to know and practice in order to become both a successful competitive job applicant and employee. Everyone heading for the world of work can benefit from these tips for success, including people with disabilities. As you learn them, your self-confidence will continue to grow – and you will be getting ahead of your competition for jobs and careers.

END OF PART I



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www.wid.org

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