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On the Job With a Hearing Loss

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People with hearing loss face barriers to employment that others do not. There are countless employment handbooks that will help you write a résumé, answer interview questions, adjust to a new job, and even be a leader on the job. But most of those resources have no sage advice when it comes to navigating the workplace with a hearing loss. Whether you are a college grad just starting out in your career or a long-time employee who is ready for the next promotion, you need to know your own hearing loss well, understand what accommodations you may need to be successful in the workplace, and find the right way to get those accommodations. What follows are some tips to help you navigate a few workplace situations.

Know Your Rights!

First and foremost, you must know how to best accommodate your hearing loss. It's essential to know what works. Chances are, no one else will. So do your homework and be ready when it's time for that first interview.

Second, know your rights. Your civil rights as a person with a disability are established under federal law through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and depending where you live may be augmented by local law. The ADA is a sweeping civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in state and local government services, public places, transportation and telecommunications. In employment situations, the ADA is intended to provide equal access for people with disabilities from the first interview right through the retirement party.

For some people, the answer to the question of how to survive the interview is to bring one's own personal assistive listening device (ALD). Others are fine with speechreading and/or their cochlear implant or hearing aid. In either case, you do not need to reveal your hearing loss at this or any other stage of your employment if you provide your own accommodations. But if you want or need the employer to provide the accommodation, such as CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) or a sign language interpreter, you must reveal your hearing loss to the employer or prospective employer when making the request for the accommodation.

Don't be shy about using your own ALD or requesting the accommodation you need. If you are forthright and matter-of-fact about your disability, and use it to show how creative you can be in problem solving, it can show that you will also be a problem solver on the job. Use your time to show what you can do for your employer, not worrying about whether you are missing what the interviewer is asking.

Keep That Job

Once you land the job, you will want to show your boss he or she made the right choice. If that requires an accommodation you need the employer to provide, ask for it. Even if you did not request an accommodation at the interview, you are entitled to make a request at any time. If you need an amplified or captioned telephone to fully participate in staff meetings and conference calls, make that request. When you ask for the accommodation, you must tell the employer you need it because you have a hearing loss. You don't need any special words. You simply need to state the fact that you have a hearing loss and that the accommodation will allow you to be the best employee you can be.

The employer does have the last word on which accommodation is purchased. For example, if you request a listening system in the meeting room and the employer chooses a type of system you have not used before, it's all that is needed as long as it provides you with access to the meetings. It's the employer's prerogative to find a less expensive system. The key is, does the accommodation succeed in providing effective communication?

What can you ask for? CART, assistive listening devices and systems and sign language interpreters all qualify as accommodations. Captioned phones, amplified phones or videophones also qualify. Even requesting a notetaker during meetings or an agenda in advance of a meeting are considered accommodations. As long as it does not create a significant difficulty or a financial burden for your employer, you should be able to get the accommodations you need.

How to File a Complaint

HAAA has worked with employees who know their rights, what accommodations work for them, and who have made all the proper requests. But in some cases, that still doesn't work. We have learned that even some federal agencies that should be following the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act (which prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability

by federal agencies and programs), do not always do so. In some cases, they demand that the person with a hearing loss be tested for hearing loss without the use of their hearing aid or cochlear implant. We have even heard of some private companies that have fired people who simply made a request for accommodation.

The ADA is enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and state and local civil rights enforcement agencies that work with the Commission. The law applies only to companies with 15 or more employees. If all your best efforts to work with your employer do not result in getting the accommodations you need, you are entitled to file a claim in court or a complaint with the EEOC on their website, eoc.gov, which contains a vast amount of information and resources.

HAAA's website has more information on employment issues. One valuable resource that we offer is an Employment Toolkit. The Toolkit focuses on issues that employees with hearing loss face, provides resources to help overcome obstacles, and offers tips to help make your life a little easier in the workplace. You can find the Toolkit and other helpful information at hearingloss.org>Advocacy>Employment. **HLM**

Save the Date!

HAAA2017 Convention
June 22-25

Salt Lake City, Utah
The Little America Hotel and
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The Call for Papers form can be
found on the Convention page
on hearingloss.org.

Deadline for proposals is
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