

Barriers in Accommodation Process Among Individuals with Visual Impairments

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A quick look: ■

In 2014, approximately 17% of Americans aged 18-64 reported vision loss or impairments. The employment rate for those individuals, according to the Census Bureau, is 40.4% compared to 73.6% for people without disabilities. One contributing barrier to their employment is employers' negative attitudes and biases toward individuals with visual impairments. Workplace accommodations are typically the solution to any performance barrier that may exist for these individuals.

Most accommodations are low-cost and easy to implement. However, according to previous studies, people with visual impairments tend to be hesitant in requesting accommodations from their employer. The authors of this article sought to find out why.

Key Findings: ■

The authors conducted an online survey which was distributed to service agencies who work with people with visual impairments. One hundred sixteen participants completed the survey. Some common themes, or barriers, were discovered including:

- ▶ Employees' lack of confidence in requesting accommodations
- ▶ Fears and anxiety of seeking accommodations from employers
- ▶ Lack of knowledge of accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- ▶ Employers' attitudes and workplace culture
- ▶ Issues with requesting accommodation requesting procedures
- ▶ The need for provided strategies on requesting accommodations

Putting It into Practice: ■

In this article, the authors discussed implications and possible solutions to the issue of individuals with visual impairments requesting accommodations and feeling comfortable in doing so. They discussed different ways Vocational Rehabilitation specialists can help employers and employees bridge the knowledge gap of federal guidelines (ADA), discrimination, and accommodations that will benefit the employee and the employer in productivity. Some of those accommodations include:

- ▶ Assistive equipment
- ▶ Large-print or Braille materials
- ▶ Computer-based voice readers for printed documents
- ▶ Assistance by others and flexible work schedules
- ▶ A service dog at work

Many of these accommodations and others mentioned in the article are low-cost, and many services and accommodations are provided by VR agencies.

More about this Article (What did they say?) ■

The survey participants provided some feedback on some of the themes listed above. Here is what some had to say:

- ▶ On procedures of acquiring accommodations, one VR professional said, "There seem to be a lot of hoops to jump through in order for someone to get a needed accommodation. I can provide accommodations for my clients more easily."
- ▶ One participant discussed employer attitudes and workplace culture stating, "If an employee with a disability isn't in a supportive work environment, they may feel too intimidated to stand out by asking for an accommodation."
- ▶ When discussing fear and anxiety of requesting accommodations, one participant said, "I think many feel that if they [people with disabilities] ask for an accommodation it means they can't do the job."

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