

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

You may not get the job(s) that you apply for, but

- ▶ Keep plugging away and try not to get discouraged.
- ▶ Try to get feedback from employers as to why you weren't selected for the position.

WHEN THE OFFER FINALLY COMES, SHOULD YOU ACCEPT?

Evaluate all aspects of the job

- ▶ Pay.
- ▶ Benefits.
- ▶ Hours.
- ▶ Cost of Transportation.
- ▶ Quality of Life.
- ▶ Other prospects or job offers.
- ▶ Effect on your Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) income.



Ask yourself:

"If I take this job, will I be better off than I am now?"

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Reasonable accommodations are supports you need to complete your essential job functions. They are provided for under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are paid for by the employer. It is best to wait until the job is offered and/or accepted before requesting accommodations.

REMEMBER:

It's your responsibility to request reasonable accommodations!
An employer has no responsibility to offer an un-requested accommodation.



Accommodations may include:

- ▶ Making the facilities used by employees structurally accessible to, and usable by, people with disabilities.
- ▶ Restructuring jobs.
- ▶ Modifying work schedules.
- ▶ Reassigning a person with a disability to an equivalent job when one becomes available.
- ▶ Buying or modifying equipment or devices so that they can be used by people with disabilities.
- ▶ Providing appropriate adjustment or modification of exams, training materials or policies.
- ▶ Providing readers for the blind or interpreters for the deaf.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about successful interviewing skills or reasonable accommodations visit Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Support's website at:
www.worksupport.com

or contact
Ed Turner
(804) 828-8567
eturner@saturn.vcu.edu

You can also visit the Job Accommodation Network at <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>.

Spinal Cord Injury MODEL SYSTEM

Virginia Commonwealth University Health System
Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
Richmond, VA 23298-0677

Restoring **QUALITY OF LIFE**
FUNCTION **HOPE**
Voice: (804) 828-0861
Fax: (804) 828-5074
E-mail: mameade@vcu.edu
URL: <http://www.sci.pmr.vcu.edu>

Layout and design — Debbie West

© 2004 Not to be reproduced by any means without the authors' permission

051104

This publication was developed through the Virginia SCI Model System, a program funded by grant #H133N000015 from the National Institute for Rehabilitation and Research.

Job Interviews After a Spinal Cord Injury



BY SHAWN FLOYD &
MICHELLE MEADE

GUIDE # 7
IN A SERIES PROMOTING
HEALTH AND SELF-HELP
THROUGH EDUCATION

Spinal Cord Injury MODEL SYSTEM

RETURNING TO WORK

The thought of returning to work after a spinal cord injury (SCI) can be a frightening and overwhelming ordeal. There have been so many changes in your life. You now have so many things to think about that you never had to before.

But returning to work, whether to the same job or different, can also be a rewarding, fulfilling experience. It can increase your self-esteem, your ability to meet new people and overall quality of life. Not to mention the paycheck!

Many books and classes are available to help people with writing resumes and cover letters and general interviewing skills. However, interviewing with a SCI, or any visible disability, can be a little different. While potential employers may not be legally allowed to discriminate because of disability, the reality is that many people have misinformation and incorrect assumptions about people with disabilities. As you prepare to look for a job, you have to be ready to manage an interviewer's impression of you both as a potential employee and a person with a disability.

While this brochure does not address general job-search information, it does provide suggestions and recommendations specific for you, as a person with a SCI that can help you on your path back to the workplace.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

An interview is your opportunity to sell yourself. It is during this time that you can showcase your talents, abilities and knowledge. Be confident in yourself and in your ability to do the job you are applying for. The potential employer has selected you for an interview because there is something in your application or resume that he/she likes. It is now up to you to convince them that you are the best person for the job. If you have not already disclosed that you have a disability, you should do so before the interview. You want your meeting to be focused around you and your abilities, not the shock that the person before them uses a wheelchair, crutches, etc.

THINGS TO DO TO PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW:

- ▶ Find out as much as possible about the company and job you are applying for.
- ▶ Practice answering potential questions with friends/family.
- ▶ Decide what you are going to wear and ask the opinion of others.
- ▶ Check the accessibility of the interview site (if possible)

INTERVIEW DAY TIPS

- ▶ Get up early, to make sure that you have plenty of time for any unexpected complications.
- ▶ Arrive early to the interview site in case you have to deal with any unpredicted barriers.
- ▶ Take care of any personal needs before the interview.
- ▶ Think about how you may handle any uncomfortable or awkward moments. Whatever may happen, it's only a big deal if you make it one!

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ▶ Be confident.
- ▶ Be enthusiastic.
- ▶ Use professional /business language (no slang)
- ▶ Remember that your body language and eye contact can mean as much as what you say.
- ▶ Respond directly to the interview questions and stay on topic.
- ▶ Ask any questions about the company and job that you had while preparing for the interview.
- ▶ Be prepared to discuss why you consider yourself the best applicant for the job.

ADDRESSING YOUR SPINAL CORD INJURY

- ▶ Acknowledge differences.
- ▶ Emphasize your strengths.
- ▶ Talk about how you have learned from the SCI. (Examples: overcoming difficulty, problem solving, talking to different sorts of people, and handling stressful situations)

AN EMPLOYER CAN ASK

- ▶ How you will complete job tasks.
- ▶ Relevant issues as to your knowledge, skills, and abilities that pertain to the job.
- ▶ If you can do the job with or without accommodations.
- ▶ Cost factors related to accommodations.

AN EMPLOYER CANNOT ASK

- ▶ Disability specific questions.
- ▶ Personal questions related to your disability.
- ▶ About family members with disabilities.

REMEMBER:

- ▶ You do not have to answer any question that you are uncomfortable with.
- ▶ No job is worth compromising your personal beliefs.

DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities. Hopefully, you will never have to deal with discrimination in an interview. But if you do, here are a few things to remember.

- ▶ Handle the situation with a positive attitude.
- ▶ Be an effective self-advocate.
- ▶ Try to record or write down as much about the situation that you can. (Company name, address and phone number, interviewer's name, date, time, and the discriminating act)

Report the information to The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). A charge may be filed in person or by mail. To be automatically connected to the nearest EEOC office, call 1-800-669-4000 (TTY: 1-800-669-6820)