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Fact Sheet Series

Job Accommodations for Lawyers with Disabilities

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ODEP
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JAN'S ACCOMMODATION FACT SHEET SERIES

JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LAWYERS WITH DISABILITIES

Today, more than half a million lawyers perform a variety of services (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Although lawyers typically represent clients in criminal and civil litigation and other legal proceedings, draw up legal documents, and manage or advise clients on legal transactions, they may specialize in a single area or may practice broadly in many areas of law or work service, technical, or research positions. Lawyers may be self-employed or work for firms, government, or service-based entities that are financial, insurance, or security-based.

To effectively provide the variety of services performed in the legal profession, lawyers with disabilities may need accommodations related to cognitive, motor, psychiatric, sensory, and other impairments. The following is a quick overview of some of the job accommodations that might be useful. To discuss an accommodation situation with a consultant, contact JAN directly.

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT - Cognitive impairment, as used in this publication, refers to disturbances in brain functions, such as memory loss, problems with orientation, distractibility, perception problems, and difficulty thinking logically. Cognitive impairment is a syndrome, not a diagnosis. Many conditions can cause cognitive impairment, including multiple sclerosis, depression, alcoholism, Alzheimer disease, Parkinson disease, traumatic brain injury, chronic fatigue syndrome, and stroke.

Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Allow for frequent breaks
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Memory Deficits:

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings and provide written checklists
- Provide type written minutes of each meeting
- Provide written instructions and allow additional training time

Productivity:

- Provide flexible scheduling
- Allow longer or more frequent work breaks

- Allow employee to work from home during part of the day or week
- Allow part time work schedules

MOTOR AND MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT - Motor and mobility impairment, as used in the publication, refers to limitations in motor movements such as walking, lifting, sitting, standing, typing, writing, gripping, and maintaining stamina. Many conditions cause motor or mobility impairment, including multiple sclerosis, cancer, stroke, spinal cord injury, cumulative trauma disorder, back condition, arthritis, and heart condition.

Activities of Daily Living:
- Allow use of a personal attendant at work
- Allow use of a service animal at work
- Make sure the facility is accessible
- Move workstation closer to the restroom
- Allow longer breaks
- Refer to appropriate community services

Fatigue/Weakness:
- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home
- Make sure materials and equipment are within reach range

Fine Motor:
- Provide alternative computer access
- Provide alternative telephone access
- Provide writing and grip aids
- Provide a page turner and a book holder
- Provide a note taker
- Provide forearm supports

Gross Motor:
- Provide carts (motorized and general purpose), adjustable lift tables, step stools, stair-climbing hand trucks, and tote boxes
- Provide compact lifting devices that are often light-weight and can be maneuvered in tight spaces

Work-site Access:
- Provide parking close to the work-site
- Reduce walking or provide a scooter or other mobility aid
- Provide an accessible entrance
- Install curb cuts
- Provide an elevator
- Install automatic door openers

Workstation Access:

- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Provide ergonomic chairs, forearm supports, articulating keyboard trays, telephone headsets, anti-fatigue mats
- Provide adjustable sit/stand workstations and/or accessible workstations
- Provide lateral files and lazy Susan filing carousels for frequently accessed files
- Provide an accessible route of travel to other work areas used by the employee
- Move workstation close to other work areas, office equipment, and break rooms

PSYCHIATRIC IMPAIRMENT - Psychiatric impairment, also called "mental illness," refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning (Goldman, 1999). Examples of psychiatric impairments include depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, and addiction.

Depression and Anxiety:

- Reduce distractions in work environment
- Provide to-do lists and written instructions
- Remind employee of important deadlines and meetings
- Allow time off for counseling
- Provide clear expectations of responsibilities and consequences
- Provide sensitivity training to co-workers
- Allow breaks to use stress management techniques
- Develop strategies to deal with work problems before they arise
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for support
- Provide information on counseling and employee assistance programs

Handling Changes in the Workplace:

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or in supervisors may be difficult for a person with a psychiatric impairment
- Maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor to ensure an effective transition
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings to discuss workplace issues and productions levels

Difficulty Staying Organized and Meeting Deadlines:

- Make daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines
- Use electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals

SENSORY IMPAIRMENT - Sensory impairment, as used in the publication, is any condition that affects hearing, speech, vision, or respiration.

Hearing:

- Provide amplification for meetings, telephone use, and communication in noisy environments
- Provide real-time captioning
- Use e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging when appropriate
- Provide visual indicators for alarms and emergency situations
- Reduce background noise
- Use TTYs, assistive listening devices, and interpreters when needed
- Provide clear paths of travel in busy environments

Speech:

- Provide speech amplification, speech enhancement, or other communication device
- Use written communication, such as e-mail or fax
- Hire a sign language interpreter and train on basic sign language
- Use real-time captioning, instant messaging, text messaging
- Provide an accessible, quiet room for meetings

Vision:

- Magnify written material using hand/stand/optical magnifiers
- Provide large print material or screen reading software
- Reduce glare by adding a glare screen and blinds
- Install proper office lighting
- Allow frequent rest breaks

Respiration:

- Maintain a clean and healthy work environment
- Provide air purification
- Condition, heat, dehumidify, or add moisture to the air as appropriate
- Provide additional rest breaks for the individual to step out for fresh air or take medication
- Create a smoke and fragrance-free work environment
- Consider an alternative work arrangement such as work from home
- Allow for alternative work arrangements when construction is taking place
- Use alternative pest management practices
- Implement a flexible leave policy
- Provide appropriate mask or respirator

Other - Other accommodation situations that involve lawyers may cross disability areas. These can involve emergency evacuation, learning, and travel.

Emergency Evacuation:

- For additional information on accommodations for individuals with disabilities during emergency evacuation, see: http://askjan.org/media/emergency.html.

Learning:

- For additional information on accommodations for individuals with disabilities during the learning process, see: http://askjan.org/media/lear.htm.

Travel:

- Provide extra hotel night for long travel times
- Offer Web-casting and conference call options for meetings
- Allow use of personal assistant
- Allow use of service animal

For additional information on accommodating individuals with disabilities during travel, see: http://askjan.org/corner/vol01iss15.htm.

References

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009). May 2007 national occupational employment and wage estimates, legal occupations. Retrieved April 22, 2009, from http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm

Goldman, H.H., Rye, P., & Sirovatka, P. (Eds.) (1999). Mental health: A report of the surgeon general. Retrieved April 22, 2009, from http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/home.html

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