Interviewing Candidates with Disabilities

When Interviewing a Candidate with Any Disability

First, ensure that interviews, presentations, lodging, and dining arrangements are mobility accessible. Use the term “accessible parking” rather than “handicapped parking.”

Before an offer of employment is made, do not ask a candidate questions regarding:

- The existence of a disability
- The nature of a disability
- The severity of a disability
- The condition causing the disability
- Any prognosis or expectation regarding the condition or disability
- Whether the individual will need treatment or special leave because of the disability

When Interacting with a Candidate with a Disability

- Offer to shake hands when introduced. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands and offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.
- Do not refer to an individual by his or her disability, i.e. that deaf guy” or “the one legged woman.” A person is not a condition. Instead, you may want to say “he has a hearing impairment,” or “he is deaf,” or “she has a mobility impairment.”
- Do not emphasize disability over other characteristics when describing a person with a disability. It is okay to say that a person uses a wheelchair. Especially when dealing with questions of parking and making accommodations. Don’t make it the major emphasis of what the person has to offer when dealing with people individually.
- Be considerate of the extra time that it may take a person with a disability to perform a major life activity.
- Listen actively when talking with a people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish.
- Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
- Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. If you make a mistake and offend someone, apologize.
- Relax. People with disabilities are people first.

When Interviewing a Candidate Who Uses a Wheelchair

- Do not lean on the wheelchair.
- Do not be embarrassed to use such phrases as “Let’s walk over to the auditorium.”
- Do not push the wheelchair unless asked to do so.
- Make sure you get on the same eye level with the candidate if the conversation lasts more than a couple of minutes.
- Keep accessibility in mind.

When Interviewing a Candidate Who Has a Visual Impairment
- Do not be embarrassed to use such phrases as “Do you see what I mean?”
- Do not shout.
- Do not touch a candidate’s cane. Do not touch a guide dog when it is in harness. In fact, resist the temptation to pet a guide dog.
- Identify yourself and others present immediately; cue a handshake verbally or physically.
- Keep in mind a candidate may also rely somewhat on facial expressions or other body language to help in understanding.
- When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- Use verbal cues; be descriptive in giving directions. (“The table is about five steps to your left.”)
- Verbalize chair location or place the person’s hand on the back of the chair, but do not place the person in the chair.
- Keep doors either open or closed; a half-opened door is a serious hazard.
- Offer assistance in travel; let the candidate grasp your left arm, usually just above the elbow.

When Interviewing a Candidate Who is Hearing Impaired
- Do not shout.
- In order to get the attention of a person with a hearing impairment, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- Enunciate clearly. If the candidate is lip reading, keep your mouth clear of obstructions and place yourself where there is ample lighting. Keep in mind that an accomplished lip reader will be able to clearly understand 30 to 35 percent of what you are saying.
- Keep in mind a candidate may also rely somewhat on facial expressions or other body language to help in understanding.
- If you do not understand what the candidate is telling you, do not pretend you did. Ask the candidate to repeat the sentence(s).
- Consider using written notes if you are having difficulty communicating.
- If requested, use a sign language interpreter. Keep in mind that the interpreter’s job is to translate, not to get involved in the interview in any other way. Therefore, always speak directly to the candidate.

Plan well in advance, beginning when the candidate’s campus visit is confirmed, for an interpreter or real-time captioner.