

Accommodations in the Workplace



Happy Spring from the Transitions ACR! If you're new here, I'm a research staff at the ACR and I write about my experiences working with both medical and mental health conditions. My first entry in this blog discussed how I use work as a tool for recovery, my second blog covered work/life balance, and this month (drum roll, please...) is on accommodations in the workplace. Okay, let's get started!

I used to ask myself, "do I really need an accommodation? Do I even qualify? Is it worth going through all the trouble?" For me, the answers to those questions turned out to be: YES, YES, and YES! Obtaining the proper supports has allowed me to maintain a job that brings me great purpose and meaning in my life. Accommodations are not only helpful, they're often vital components to succeeding at work. Navigating the accommodation process can seem daunting, so keep reading to help eliminate any unnecessary headaches.

My decision to disclose my medical and mental health conditions to my employer was my first step in obtaining the proper work environment and support. I made this choice for a few reasons. First, I have found that sharing has helped me feel more comfortable in the workplace, which ultimately improves my wellbeing. For example, I told my coworkers about a few of my medical devices that can be noisy at times. Another reason I've chosen to disclose is so I can maintain a healthy work/life balance. Since disclosing, my employer understands if I need to step out to call one of my healthcare providers, take my medication, attend to my infusion pump, or rearrange my schedule for an appointment. The final reason I've disclosed is to qualify for reasonable accommodations, such as assistive technology, a flexible schedule, and tasks that aren't time sensitive. Disclosing one's medical or mental health condition can be very beneficial, like it has been for myself, and I'm glad I made the decision to disclose.

Disclosing and requesting accommodations can be nerve-wracking, so I've included some tips that I've learned along the way. First, talk to a support or mentor about the concerns you may have about your illness in the workplace. I've found it helpful to talk it out or role play with a close friend or a social worker before speaking with my employer. Also, writing it out beforehand can be equally beneficial. Deciding how much to share is completely up to you. I always inform my employer about the parts that may interfere with my job performance. It's normal to be nervous, and I can assure you that it gets easier with practice! I've also found that it's immensely improved my comfort level and ability to share my struggles with family and friends, which has been a pleasant surprise! My final bit of advice is to regularly review your current accommodations. I've found it helpful to reassess them every three months, both independently and with my supervisor. It's important to do this because knowledge, availability, and access to various reasonable accommodations is constantly evolving. The impact of your medical and mental health conditions may change over time. A few years ago, I started a time intensive treatment that must be done every morning. Initially, I didn't change my work schedule, but this proved to be unsustainable. I didn't have time to sleep, do my treatment, and make it to work on time. I spoke with my employer about my predicament and we came up with an easy solution, start my workday a few hours later. By following the steps listed above, I was able to obtain the necessary supports to fully perform on the job. In the end, disclosing turned out to be one of my best workplace decisions.



Overall, I was pleasantly surprised to find that my accommodations have contributed to an increase in the quality and quantity of my work. They have allowed me to engage in meaningful and purposeful employment, while still being able to take proper care of my emotional and physical wellbeing.

Join me next time as we discuss the ever-changing world of tech and how it can be used as a valuable tool in the workplace!