# Disclosure

To disclose or not to disclose, that is the question. Fill a room with disabled job seekers and employment professionals and chances are you will get very differing opinions on whether to disclose your disability or not, and none of their opinions are right or wrong. It completely depends on what you, as a person are comfortable doing.

# What Is Disclosure?

Disclosure is putting your disability on a CV, job application, cover letter, or letting the employer know you have a physical or cognitive disability before or during the interview. Obviously, if you walk into the interview with a guide dog, white cane, thick glasses, or wheelchair they are going to know—probably be shocked, flustered and taken aback. If you have low vision or a hidden disability, the employer may not realize this at the interview, and it is up to you whether you disclose at that time or wait until a job is offered. You want to go in to an interview selling yourself on your personal and professional merits—educating said employer on how you as a disabled person can actually do the job will come up soon enough. Other job seekers do not have to disclose their gender, sexual orientation, or religion—an employer asking such questions would quickly get said employer in trouble. So, you do not have to disclose your disability until you feel it is the right time. However, if you are offered the job, and you did not disclose your disability during the interview, it is highly advisable to do so if you need some sort of job accommodations. It is your responsibility to work with the employer and outside sources to put these in place, so you can be successful on the job. If you are having trouble on the job due to lack of accommodations the employer never knew about and the employer lets you go, there is very little recourse you can take—as the employer never knew you had a disability that needed accommodating. Sadly, many high partials fall into this trap. They walk a fine line between blind and sighted, and worry what co-workers will think about larger monitors, screen enlargement software, or different lighting.

# When to Disclose

There are times when disclosing your disability could be to your advantage. Your disability is a part of your experience—as much a part as your knowledge of French literature, Microsoft Office or whatever skill you need to perform a job. If you are applying for a job with a blindness agency or a cross disability agency, then include this in your job application. In the section on cover letters, we discussed emphasizing all your personal and professional qualifications. Remember, you want the hiring person to know you are the best qualified for the job. Who better qualified to work with blind people than blind people—if they have the right professional qualifications of course?

Your disability is not an automatic entry card. You still need to sell yourself, but this is an example of how disclosure may be in your favour.

# Tests and other skill based testing

A challenge —especially for job seekers with a visual impairment is having to take an online assessment test or in-office skills-based assessment. Many jobs, which fall within the office administration or clerical category, may require an applicant to submit results of these tests to these prior to or during the interview process. Temporary employment agencies often do this so they can match job seekers with employers. Other jobs weed potential applicants out by requiring online personality tests. These online assessment tools may or may not be accessible with assistive technology.

These tests are often automatically timed, and an employer has no control over the test as they are outsourced to a third party. So, what to do? It depends on how much you want the job. Some job seekers will contact the company and explain they aren’t able to take the test and accommodations have been made—either through supplying a reader for a test where there are just straight forward questions or contacting the assessment company to find out if there is an accessible alternative. Other job seekers have been told there is nothing they can do for them—especially if it is some sort of skills based or typing test where having a sighted person perform the task would not demonstrate the capability of the blind job seeker. Each scenario is different and takes a lot of self-advocacy from the job seeker. Though many companies are seeing the light towards web accessibility, the area of online testing and assessment tools are still a digital divide.

# Disclosure during interviews

For those where the disability is obvious the disability is the elephant in the room. You know it is there, the interviewer knows it’s there, but chances are the employer may not ask you about it. An employer legally cannot ask you about disability, but you know it is on their mind, take the chance to educate and demonstrate how you would do the job. Bring the subject up—explain you understand they may have never met a blind, low vision, or deaf/blind person before and encourage them to ask any question they like. Tell them you want to have an upfront and honest discussion. Bring your assistive technology with you. The latter always is a hit. Explain how you would do the job and discuss any accommodations that might need to be made. If you do this, you need to be able to carry this cool tech without looking awkward and need to appear competent when demonstrating it.

NZ employers are not required by law to provide assistive technology such as magnifiers or screen readers, and they may not even know such things exist. You are the expert here, or at least, you should be. Use this as an opportunity to educate. Could they not hire you? Of course, and the sad thing is you may never know if it was your disability, or if they truly did have a better candidate. Discrimination is very hard to prove.