

## Video Review

### ***Understanding Employees and Job Applicants with Psychiatric Disabilities.***

People With Disabilities Foundation. (2008).

San Francisco

28.8% of working age individuals has a mental impairment. Many of these people work without coworkers or others knowing of their conditions, while other people work with others who know about their psychiatric condition. Psychiatric issues are referred to as "invisible disabilities," because there often is nothing unusual in appearance for people with psychiatric disabilities. Indeed, many of the psychiatric impairments can be controlled by medication and/or therapy.

It is important to realize that while many people with psychiatric impairments are working, many more want to work. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that accommodations be considered in a good faith interactive process by human resource workers and supervisors. This video addresses medical and vocational aspects associated with psychiatric disabilities in the workplace.

Four scenarios are presented. The first is about an Office Supply Sales Associate at Staples. He has paranoid schizophrenia. A Job Coach is utilized to improve performance at work, and the results are demonstrated for both employee and employer. The critical interaction of the employer, clinical psychologist (therapist), psychiatrist, and client are explored. The positive discussion of symptoms, as well as the critical importance of a job coach or coworker, equal reasonable accommodation in this case.

Scenario number two is about a Registered Nurse with a Masters degree in nursing who had been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms included depression, anxiety, panic attacks, hyper-startle response, and nightmares. His disorder goes back to military service in 1970s, but had recently become more severe. Medication and other issues are identified and potential employer responses are reviewed. Initially he returned to work as a Telephone Advice Nurse, but his employer critical of length of telephone contacts. A psychologist interviewed and tested the clients and reported that it would take him approximately 50% longer than other people for the client to perform the tasks of that job. Resolution was not achieved.

The next case is that of an Analyst at an investment bank who had been diagnosed as having obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). She has a MBA with concentration statistics. This case simulated mediation by EEOC. The employer considered the employee's request for accommodation and deemed it not reasonable. A negotiated settlement resulted in the assistance of an administrative assistant for two hours per day, rather than eight which was requested. Symptoms for this diagnosis are twofold: obsessive thoughts (e.g., over-emphasis on neatness, loss of focus), and compulsion, (e.g., to do certain things repetitively).

The last scenario refers to a Librarian with a Masters degree in library science who has bipolar disorder (altered between depression and mania, varying severity) for the past six or seven years. She had been a computer programmer previously, but realized that kind of work resulted in too many work-related problems. In the job of Librarian, she answers students' questions, reviews potential software with them, maintains website, and provides general support for people using computers in the library.

Conclusions drawn include: (1) accommodations not usually very complex; (2) clients tend to stay longer due to accommodations; and (3) if people are flexible, ready to communicate, and willing to work together, most problems can be resolved.

The biggest mistake that employers and their representatives can make is to assume that they know what work-related accommodations are necessary for an individual without an assessment of the employee's capacities. This is a two-way process. It requires an analysis of the essential functions of the job, as well as the determination of what, if any, accommodations might be required.

This video has various audiences. It can be used as an introduction to the ADA in general, as well as specific to psychiatric issues. It can be used to teach the general public, as well as people working in the field of mental health services. Finally, it would be a good tool in serving individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Also note a discount for purchasing this video and the video *Accommodating Employees and Job Applicants with Psychiatric Disabilities in the Workplace* (2006): [\$209.95]

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