Managing your Career: Strategies for Students with Disabilities

<u>Module#3: Employment Barriers</u>

Slide 1: Introduction to Module Series

Welcome to Managing Your Career: Strategies for Graduates with disabilities. This presentation was developed by the Academic Advising & Career Centre in partnership with Access*Ability* Services to help students with disabilities transition from university to the world of work.

Slide 2: Introduction of Module 3

This is module 3 of 6 in the series and is called "Addressing Employment Barriers".   My name is Cheryl Lepard, and I'm a Disability Consultant in Access*Ability* Services. I'll be narrating this module.

Slide 3: Agenda of Module

Employment barriers are the topic of this module. I'll first provide you with a definition of the term employment barrier in case you're not familiar with the term. I'll then discuss the types of barriers to employment that you may encounter in your job search. Next, I'll discuss effective strategies in addressing any barriers that you may encounter. The final section of this module will list resources that you can explore to learn more about employment barriers.

Slide 4: Definition of Employment Barrier

To help you understand the term employment barrier let's first examine what the word barrier means. Since this series of modules focuses on disability related issues in the job search process, I used the definition of barrier that is used in the 2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. In this Act, the word barrier means "anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability".   Now let's take a look at the definition of employment. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the word employment means the "condition of having a paid job". Now that we know the definition of barrier and the definition of employment, we can then define the term employment barrier as "anything that impedes a person with a disability from fully participating in seeking, obtaining and maintaining paid employment".

Slide 5: Types of Employment Barriers

Employment barriers generally fall into 4 categories. Employment barriers can be categorized as physical, attitudinal, systemic and other obstacles that might prevent full participation in the workforce. It's important to note that employment barriers may be intentional or unintentional.

Slide 6: Strategies in Addressing Barriers

In this section of the presentation, I'll review general strategies you can use to address employment barriers that you may encounter in your job search. You and the employer play key roles in the accommodation process, so it's important that you understand your perspective and the employer's perspective. Employers won't know that you have a disability so it'll be up to you to initiate the discussion about your disability. Many employers are open to hiring someone with a disability, however, the employer may not understand your disability fully because laws and policies prevent them from asking specifics about your disability. To help overcome barriers, it's crucial that you come prepared with informed solutions and accurate information about your disability. To help employers better understand your disability and the accommodations you require, you can provide them with brochures or pamphlets. This will help in overcoming any stigmas or preconceived ideas that the employer has about someone with a disability.

Slide 7: Strategies for Addressing Barriers

Another strategy in addressing employment barriers is to clearly communicate to employers the strengths about your disability, your skills, the barriers you expect to face and how you intend to overcome those barriers. This will demonstrate your commitment and positive attitude. To also overcome barriers, provide evidence of past accomplishments as this will show potential employers that you have the skills and experience to perform the job. This will help the employer to focus on your skills and not on your disability. Finally, it's important that you approach employers respectfully and maintain a positive attitude to overcome any employment barriers that you may encounter.

Slide 8: Physical Barriers

Let's take a look at physical barriers that may be encountered. Physical barriers may impede a person with a disability from fully participating in seeking, obtaining and maintaining employment. Physical barriers prevent a person with a disability from moving freely within the environment. Physical barriers include objects that are added either intentionally or unintentionally to the work environment. In addition, the way in which the building is designed may be a physical barrier for a person with a disability. Examples of physical barriers include: a building that is entered and exited using stairs

and there is no ramp for people using mobility devices; a workstation that has a desk that is too low or too high for a person; narrow or cluttered hallways that prevent someone from using the hallway; and washrooms that are not accessible for individuals using mobility devices.

Slide 9: Potential Solutions to Physical Barriers

There are solutions that can be put in place to overcome physical barriers that may be encountered. Sometimes, you may have the solution to the barrier and in other instances; it may be the employer or another individual that has the solution. Please take a look at this slide to review common physical barriers and some potential solutions.

Slide 10: Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers refer to the opinions and feelings that someone may have about an individual with a disability. These types of barriers may take the form of misconceptions, stereotypes, or labeling. Unfortunately, most often the opinions and feelings tend to focus on the individual's disability and not the person's abilities or skills. Research has determined that attitudinal barriers are the common reason that people with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce.

Let's look at some examples of attitudinal barriers. An employer who believes that a person with a disability can't do the same type of work as a person without a disability. Another example would be a manager that insists a task be done their way and the manager is not willing to consider other ways the task can be done, especially ways that would make it easier for you to complete the task.

Slide 11: Potential Solutions to Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are difficult barriers to overcome because it's often difficult to change the feelings or opinions of another individual. However, one person can make a difference in changing the misconceptions of disability that another person may possess.   While you can't force someone to change their attitude or opinion, it is possible to provide them with accurate information that may help them to change their way of thinking about people with disabilities. Please take a look at this slide to learn about potential solutions to some of the most common attitudinal barriers.

Slide 12: Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers are another type of barrier that people with disabilities may encounter when trying to seek, obtain and maintain employment. Barriers in this category result from situations, policies or practices that exclude individuals with disabilities in some way. Examples of systemic barriers include a rule in place in the work environment that

doesn't allow animals on premises. There are people with disabilities that require service animals to help minimize the impact of the disability. If the employer is rigid about the rule, the employer may not interview the person or offer the personal with the service animal a job because of the rule that the employer has in place. Other examples of systemic barriers includes recruitment practices that limit the applications from individuals with disabilities and a work environment that fosters a chilly climate resulting in a person with a disability being excluded or undermined. For example, co-workers may tell inappropriate jokes involving people with disabilities or the individual's co-workers may decide to go out for lunch but pick a restaurant that isn't wheelchair accessible for their co-worker that uses a wheelchair.   Speaking up about some of the systemic barriers you encounter will be helpful to overcome these types of barriers. Often, employers aren't aware that the systemic barrier exists until it's pointed out to them.

Slide 13: Other Barriers: The Disability Itself

Another category of employment barriers is a general category. Barriers that aren't physical, attitudinal or systemic in nature fall into the general category. A person's disability may present as a barrier to employment and this is an example of a barrier that falls into the general category. As you know, just like in university, accommodations can be put in place on the job for people with disabilities to perform the essential requirements of the job. However, there are some occupations where the essential requirements of the job can't be accommodated. For example, if an individual with a disability uses a wheelchair and wishes to become a Firefighter the person has to be able to pass a fitness test. The fitness test is considered an essential job requirement and therefore cannot be accommodated.

Slide 14: Resources to Explore

It's not possible for me to cover all the information that's available about employment barriers, so this slide contains resources if you wish to learn more about employment barriers.

Slide 15: Contact Information

I'd like to thank-you for your time and wish you the best of luck in your job search.

We always appreciate feedback about how to improve the modules in this series. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback.   Our contact information is listed on this slide.

Slide 16: References

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