Module 3: Addressing Employment Barriers video 2: Strategies for Addressing Barriers

Module 3: Managing your career strategies for graduates with disabilities
Addressing employment barriers video 2: Strategies for addressing barriers

Welcome to module three of our career in disability series, brought to you by the UTSC AccessAbility Services and the Academic Advising and Career Centre.

In this video we will discuss the five types of barriers to employment that you may encounter in your job search and we'll talk about effective strategies in addressing them.

Architectural or physical barriers may impede a person with a disability from fully participating in employment activities. Physical barriers can 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 a building is designed may be a physical barrier for persons with disabilities. Some examples of physical barriers include a building that is entered and exited using stairs without a ramp for people using mobility devices a workstation with a desk that is too low or too high depending on a person's physical needs narrow or cluttered hallways that are a safety hazard for an individual with low vision or prevent access for an individual who uses a mobility device. Washrooms that are not accessible for people with various disabilities and poor lighting that makes it difficult for individuals with low vision concussions or who lip-read.

Another barrier may be the office layout resulting in no privacy or no place to allow you to get away to a low sensory location. There are solutions that can be put in place to respond to physical barriers. For example, if the barrier is a long walk from the parking lot you can request the employer designate parking spots near the building entrance for people with mobility needs and you can also request that benches be placed along the path of travel. If a room is poorly lit the employer can help identify strategies or methods for making appropriate lighting adjustments. If a floor is slippery or is covered with materials that are not fixed you can wear rubber soled shoes and suggest that the employer improved the flooring for the safety of all staff not just for yourself. Finally, the physical layout of your desk may be able to change providing more privacy through the use of dividers or cubicles.

Another barrier is attitudinal, **attitudinal barriers** refer to the behaviour perceptions and assumptions that someone may have about an individual with a disability. These types of barriers may take the form of misconceptions, stereotypes or labelling. Research has determined that attitudinal barriers are the common reason that people with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce. Let's take a look at some examples of attitudinal barrier. A manager may insist a task be done their way and the manager may not be willing to consider other ways that the task can be done especially ways that would allow you to complete the task. An employer may make a person feel that they're doing them a special favour by providing their accommodations or a colleague may avoid talking to you for fear that they're saying the wrong word or offending you. Attitudinal barriers often arise from a lack of understanding about disabilities or persons with disabilities and you can help change these misconceptions by providing employers and colleagues with accurate information about you and your experiences. For example, when someone uses derogatory language

you can impact attitudes by speaking up or speaking with people later about their word choices you can also role model the language that you prefer such as the use of first-person language in other words you are a person with a disability not a disabled person. Additionally, emphasize your strengths rather than your disabilities and the strengths will be what your colleagues notice.

Organizational or systemic barriers are another type of barrier people with disabilities may encounter. For example, policies and practices may be in place to support persons with disabilities but employees may not know about them. Employers should communicate the policies and practices to ensure that all employees know how to respond to a barrier or a barrier removal request. Employees with disabilities also need to know the process to bring forward any requests this includes how to request a flexible work schedule, modify duties or temporary alternative work. Another organizational barrier can arise from policies that exclude animals on the premises except where required by law.

Employers may not be informed of the right for persons with disabilities to use service animals to assist them with disability related needs under the AODA or the Ontario Human Rights Code. And as a result, they may hesitate to let the animal accompany the employee since organizational or systemic barriers are often put into place unintentionally you may have to inform the employer of your needs. If you're not comfortable speaking directly to your supervisor, you can go directly to the human resources department. If the employer has one other strategy to eliminate systemic barriers include employers ensuring all employees are felt welcomed and included in work and social events. Through the use of an accessibility and accommodation statement for people to register needs for events and clearly communicating who the contact is to implement accessibility policies and procedures, you may need to communicate your needs directly to the appointed contact or ask who the contact is if this is not clear.

The fourth type of barrier for persons with disabilities is **information or communication barriers**. These occur when sensory disabilities such as hearing seeing or learning disabilities have not been considered and when a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/or understand information that is available to others.

Some examples of information or communication barriers are websites for applying to a job that are not accessible with assistive technology.

Work-related tasks provided in print which is too small to be read by a person with low vision or a PowerPoint slide deck or video that's used in a presentation that's not accessible to employees with low vision or who have hearing loss. Brochures, guides and advertisements that are not clear or easily understood. Complicated busy or confusing signs or seating arrangements that make it difficult for people who have hearing loss to fully participate. In meetings marketing and communications materials that are not inclusive and people with disabilities not being included in visuals who are considered as a potential target audience. Some strategies for these types of barriers can be as simple as asking for work-related materials to be provided in the format accessible to you. For example, ask for it in writing or in large font or electronically or whatever might meet your needs. Materials provided to you in advance of a meeting may allow you time to review and process the material and it may help to reduce your anxiety by knowing what to expect. Another strategy could be to request

seating around the table to facilitate lip-reading or for hearing loss we're using microphones and large meeting rooms. Making a recommendation to the marketing department or person in your workplace who does marketing to include photos and testimonials to reflect diverse people with a range of abilities in marketing materials. Other strategies to reduce such barriers could be practices such as employers ensuring the closed captioning feature of videos is always turned on for presentations and providing transcripts of the videos of captions are included in using assistive listening or amplification devices during meetings.

The fifth type of barrier for persons with disabilities is **technological technology**. It can enhance the user experience and can also create unintentional barriers. For example, barriers can arise when a device or technological platform is either not accessible for its intended audience or cannot be used with an assistive device. Software technological barriers are often related to information and communication barriers. Additional examples of technological barriers are handouts that are only available in hard copy and not an electronic format or emails or other electronic communications that are not accessible to people who use screen reading software using only one method of contact in the workplace like the phone or only accepting online job applications and documents are also barriers. A solution to most of these technological barriers are having a variety of methods and formats for communication such as phone, email and accepting hard copies of applications and documents. Employers are required to make their website and email platforms accessible to people who use screen readers as well as provide descriptions using alt tags for all web graphics and charts. The impact of some disabilities are true barriers to employment and there are some occupations where the essential requirements of the job cannot be accommodated. These requirements are vital or indispensable to the job itself. For example, if an individual with disability wishes to become a firefighter the individual does have to pass a fitness test the fitness test is considered an essential job requirement and therefore, cannot be accommodated but if an individual wants to be a dispatcher for 911 many kinds of disabilities could be accommodated in that role. We'll discuss this further in module 5 on workplace accommodations.

Identifying and removing barriers in the workplace makes good business sense not only does it support workers with disabilities it supports customers with disabilities as well which types of barriers do you anticipate dealing with in your work life. We encourage you to complete our activity on identifying and dealing with barriers.

For additional information about employment barriers including organizations that can support you please review our resources section. This concludes our module on employment barriers as we move through the next module, we will provide information and strategies related to disclosure and accommodations in the workplace.

If you would like to provide feedback on these videos or if you have questions or concerns. Please contact the Academic Advising and Career Centre at aacc.utsc@utoronto.ca or the AccessAbility Services at ability.utsc@utoronto.ca