PAS FACTS

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Finding a Workplace Personal Assistant

WHAT IS A WPA?

People with disabilities believe Personal Assistance Services (PAS) are services that are only used in the home to assist individuals to remain independent. Over the past 20 years people with severe disabilities have discovered they can use PAS services in the workplace as a reasonable job accommodation and con-sider a workplace PAS a necessary to perform the essential job functions.

It is important for employees with disabilities to understand what workplace PAS is and is not. A workplace PA does not mean that someone will be performing the job duties or that they will be expected to take care of daily personal needs, it is not the employer's responsibility to provide this type of service. A workplace PA is used only to provide assistance with the actual job tasks to increase the efficiency and productivity of employees with disabilities. Employers are responsible to provide this accommodation under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Employees need to work with their employer to find the right individual to provide this valuable on the job support.

FINDING THE RIGHT WPA

To find the right workplace personal assistant begins with understanding the job tasks and knowing how a person can best help accomplish these tasks. For example, if the job involves writing, choose a person with good word processing skills. If an employee has a visual impairment and needs assistance with reading materials, choose someone with good reading skills. If an employee with a hearing impairment needs assistance with verbal communication, choose someone with good communication skills or the ability to use sign language. These examples illustrate the importance of the employee knowing their job and being able to match these skills with a workplace personal assistant.

RECRUITING STRATEGIES

When employees with disabilities have identified the skills needed from a workplace personal assistant, the next step is to begin the recruiting process. This can begin by letting family, friends, and coworkers know what type of person is needed. This often will help the employee come up with a pool of applicants who may be potential workplace personal assistants. However, if this process does not produce results, on the following page are additional recruiting suggestions.

Options for PA Recruitment Ads

- Advertise in local newspapers.
- Tell friends you are looking.
- Check "want-ads" in local newspapers.
- Advertise in the local high schools, colleges, and universities
- Tell co-workers you are seeking a personal assistant.
- Check with local churches or community service groups

- Check with health care schools for students seeking practical experience.
- Check local colleges for business interns interested in serving as personal assistants.
- Call a local Center for Independent Living to see if they maintain a personal assistant registry

It should be noted that the above recruiting methods can be successful for some employees, but that every situation is different and creativity should be used in finding the type of person needed.

HIRING PROCESS

Once the recruiting process has identified a pool of 4 to 5 qualified applicantts, the following tips should be followed during the hiring process:

- Comply with all hiring practices of employers
- Be sure selected applicants have necessary skills
- Be sure to check references
- Check with supervisors before making the job offer
- Be sure all applicants will be appropriate for the work involved
- Be sure the applicant is compatible with the employee

Following these tips will assist the employee with a disability to make the best choice in hiring his or her workplace personal assistant.

USERS OF WPA'S SCENARIOS

The effectiveness of WPAS depends on the employees' ability to manage their WPA in the work environment. The following two scenarios are examples of one employee who is not quite sure what the purpose of a WPA is. The other example is of an employee, who is knowledgeable about successful management techniques.

Scenario 1

An employee who did not participate in the recruitment of their WPA is dissatisfied with the skill level of his/her WPA. However, even after the WPA was hired the employee still leaves all other training of the WPA up to the supervisor and HR staff. Despite the lack of participation the employee with the disability constantly complains that the WPA does not understand the support they need to complete their job efficiently. After a reasonable period, the supervisor of the employee with the disability inquires why efficiency and job production has not increased. The employee informed the supervisor that the WPA is not skilled in typing; therefore causing him/her to become behind in their work. Still leaving the problems of the WPA to be handled by the supervisor.

Scenario 2

This employee who proactively participated in the recruiting process, hiring process, and training of the WPA makes it clear from the very beginning, who is in charge. The employee also clearly explained how they want the support provided and laid the groundwork to build a successful working relationship. The employee also lets the WPA know whom he/she will be reporting to which clearly defines the lines of communication. This makes the WPA feel secure and comfortable in their position and established a long-term working relationship. After 6 months, the employee receives a merit promotion and a salary raise because his production has increased by more than 50%.

WEB RESOURCES

The websites listed below will assist employees with disabilities to learn more about workplace personal assistance and how to use it to become more efficient.

For general information about personal assistance and how to use it in the home visit:
- The National Council for Independent Living .... www.ncil.org
- Americans with Disabilities .... www.adapt.org
- The World Institute on Disability .... www.wid.org

For information specifically for the use of personal assistance in the workplace visit:
- Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation .... www.worksupport.com
  Research and Training Center on Workplace
  Supports and Job Retention
- The Job Accommodation Network .... www.jan.org
- The World Institute on Disability .... www.wid.org