



**A Manager's Tool for Having  
Accommodation Discussions**

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## A MANAGER'S TOOL FOR HAVING ACCOMMODATION DISCUSSIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Supervisors and managers are key to actioning successful accommodations that remove workplace barriers that can reduce inclusion and hinder good job performance. This tool is designed to equip them to confidently handle conversations in which employees disclose a disability and request accommodations.

In some cases, the supervisor might have initiated the discussion. As explained in other tools such as [Supporting Disability Disclosure](#), employers have a legal Duty to Inquire if they suspect an employee has a disability or other need for accommodation. When starting a conversation about changes in a worker's job performance, absenteeism, or other characteristics, the main goal is to ask how the employer may best support the worker. The discussion should be collaborative, and it may continue over time.

**Regardless of what prompts an accommodation discussion, the following information can help:**

1. A summary of best practices that will help supervisors prepare for accommodation conversations.
2. Examples of questions and prompts that you can use when discussing accommodation requirements.
3. Helpful guidelines to follow at work and in the community when referring to persons with disabilities.

### 1 BEST PRACTICES FOR APPROACHING ACCOMMODATION DISCUSSIONS

Once an employee has disclosed that they are facing a barrier in the workplace and made their need for accommodation known, the employer initiates the next steps to find the right accommodation solution for the employee.

**The following guidelines will help managers as they prepare for and begin the accommodation process.**

### Engage with the Employee

A responsive and action-oriented style of management is the most effective during the accommodation process. Goals for an accommodation discussion may include:

- Identifying barriers that the employee is facing.
- Reviewing ideas that the employee has about what accommodations or solutions may be appropriate for them.
- Providing an overview of the accommodation process so that the employee understands the steps and what will happen next.

### Maintain Confidentiality

It is critical to respect the privacy of the employee during and after the accommodation discussion.

Additionally:

- Accommodation information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- Medical information should be kept in a file separate from the employment file.
- The way an employee completes their work may need to be modified as a result of the accommodation. Other employees may be told of the change, but not the reasons why the change was made.

### Disability Information

The employee requesting an accommodation will advise the employer that they are facing a barrier at work and the employer is required to take the request for accommodation in good faith. The employer should not ask the employee for medical information about the disability that causes these effects. As a standard of practice, employers should limit any information requests from the employee to their limitations or restrictions. This will generally be sufficient to assess needs and determine the appropriate accommodation. A helpful resource for describing some physical limitations in work-related terms is the THRC set of [Physical Demands Assessments](#).

### Treat Each Request as Unique

Every individual is unique as is the accommodation that they may require. Two people with the same condition can experience it in very different ways and what might work for one person may not work for another. In addition to any disability, other personal characteristics such as age, gender, family circumstances, cultural background and others can be protected under human rights legislation and may generate a requirement for accommodation. A combination of individual characteristics can have a significant impact on an employee's experience and perspectives. The company should start fresh with every request and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. For additional information, see the THRC Tool [\*It's not just about disability: Understanding the whole person.\*](#)

### Document Conversations

To demonstrate that the Duty to Accommodate has been fulfilled, managers should consider documenting the discussion, as well as any considerations and/or actions taken in relation to an accommodation request. Record keeping is a good practice and will serve as a reference should any questions or concerns arise during the accommodation period.

### Keep the Discussion Going

This generally isn't a one-and-done conversation. A good practice for managers is to follow up with the employee to confirm that the accommodation is still effective, as job conditions and the health of the employee can change over time. While these conversations can be uncomfortable, consider the following tips:

- Don't avoid conversations because you are worried you might say the wrong thing. It is best to engage the employee in conversations and to ask questions as issues arise.
- If you make a mistake, apologize, and ask if there is a better way to communicate or interact. Building a good and trusting work relationship with the employee will make these discussions easier over time.
- Remember that in the trucking and logistics sector, some employees (e.g. drivers) work remotely. It might take a disciplined effort to connect with workers who are not regularly in face-to-face contact with you.

**Question:** How do I handle an accommodation discussion with an employee that has been with the company for many years?

**Answer:** The guidelines for discussing accommodation requirements are generally the same for everyone, whether a new or tenured employee. However, be aware of assumptions or misperceptions you may have about the tenured employee. For example, don't assume that because you have known them for a while that they will be comfortable disclosing or discussing an accommodation requirement with you. It will also be helpful to be ready with some examples of changes you have noticed, or new work practices or helpful resources, that might be relevant to providing an accommodation. A helpful resource for describing some physical limitations in work-related terms is the THRC set of [Physical Demands Assessments](#).

## 2 HAVING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS

Discussing a disability can be uncomfortable, both for the employee and for the supervisor. It can be easier if you think of this as an opportunity to improve the workplace. The focus does not have to be on the person's disability; rather the discussion is about how to address mismatches between the workplace and the employee's abilities. Try using the THRC set of [Physical Demands Assessments](#) to describe some barriers in work-related terms. In addition, the THRC list of [Common Types of Industry Accommodations](#) can prompt good discussions about limitations and possibilities, including for disabilities that are not physical (e.g., mental health, cognitive, learning disabilities, etc.).

Remember to be supportive in your approach and focus on how to address the accommodation request. Schedule ample time so the conversation is not rushed. While not required, you may find it helpful to have an HR Representative in your organization present for the conversation.

**The following prompts may help guide appropriate, respectful, and effective accommodation conversations with employees.**

### Starting the Conversation

- What would you like me to understand before we discuss the best accommodations for you?
- I am here to support you and work with you to provide an accessible workplace that meets your needs. Can you share with me how I can best help with that?

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- What concerns or questions do you have about the accommodation process? If I don't know the exact answers, I will find them out...we are exploring this together.

### Gathering Information

- What currently prevents you from doing your work as you would like?
- What is getting in the way of your productivity?
- Is there something that would make you feel more equipped to do certain parts of your work?
- Thank you for trusting me with this information. I will keep this confidential and hope I can continue to maintain your trust by giving you the support you need. Is there anything else you would like to discuss before we continue?

### Identifying the Most Effective Accommodation

- What do you believe is the best accommodation for you?
- Help me to understand what you feel/ experience. Let's do some research and inquiry into what accommodations may fit this situation.
- Would it be helpful to brainstorm some accommodation options to consider? We might benefit from talking with someone who has training and expertise in workplace accommodations.

### Finalizing the Accommodation Plan

- Based on what you've told me it seems like option \_\_\_\_\_ may be helpful. What do you think?
- It looks like option \_\_\_\_\_ might work but you seem unsure. Why don't we try this option for a month and then review to see if that accommodation works for you. If not, we can make modifications.
- To ensure this accommodation continues to meet your needs and to keep our communication open, let's schedule some regular 1-1's. Would that be helpful and work for you?

**Avoid Asking/Saying**

- X What is your disability?
- X How did you become ill or injured?
- X Are you taking medications and what are they?
- X You don't look like you struggle with \_\_\_\_\_.
- X This will be a lot of work....

**3 GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY**

A successful conversation is not only dependent on the questions you ask and the empathetic tone you take, but also your ability to **ACTIVELY LISTEN** to the employee. It is the information they share that will help ensure an effective accommodation has been identified and implemented.

Knowing how to interact knowledgeably and respectfully with employees with disabilities will help you build a more inclusive workplace. For a quick view and a video that you can share with your team, see the THRC video, [Talking about Disabilities](#).

**Below are some tips to help guide your language.**

**DO**

- Only refer to a person's disability when it is relevant to the topic or issue being discussed.
- Use the term "accessible" as opposed to "disabled" or "handicap" when referring to places with accommodations for persons with disabilities. For example, use "accessible parking space" or "accessible bathroom stall".
- Focus on the person versus the disability. For example, rather than using terms such as disabled person, handicapped people, or a crippled person, use terms such as people/persons with disabilities, a person with a disability, or a person with a visual impairment.



**AVOID**

- Labeling persons and putting them in categories, as in “the handicapped”, “the disabled”, “the deaf” etc. This suggests that their experiences are all the same. Instead, use terminology such as: “a person who has multiple sclerosis”.
- Using terms such as “afflicted with”, “victim of”, “suffering from”. These phrases can have negative connotations, and disability should not be equated with illness or a disease.
- Portraying persons with disabilities as “brave”, “special” or “courageous”. This diminishes the strengths, skills and talents they do have.
- Referring to a person with disability as a patient unless they are under medical care.
- Calling people without disabilities “normal” or “healthy”. Use “persons without disabilities” to avoid making those with disabilities feel less than others.

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