

# Starkloff Disability Institute

The workforce, workplace disability advisor.

Proud partner of



Greater St. Louis



# DISCUSSING DISABILITY WITH AN EMPLOYER

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*STARKLOFF DISABILITY INSTITUTE*

# WHO WE ARE

- Founded in 2003 by Max and Colleen Starkloff, and David Newburger
- Known as the Workforce, Workplace Disability Advisor
- Our work is by and for people with disabilities
- We promote economic independence by addressing barriers to employment facing disabled people



# Presentation Agenda

- What we mean when we say “disability”
- ADA Pop Quiz
- Risks and benefits of disclosure
- How to talk about disability as a strength
- Disability Success Story
- Q&A

# WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

- An impairment that impacts one or more “major life activities”
  - Americans with Disabilities Act
- Disabilities can be:
  - Temporary or permanent
  - Apparent or nonapparent
  - Congenital (20%) or acquired (80%)

Amputation or Missing Limb	Hearing
Anxiety Disorder	Diabetes
Arthritis	Down Syndrome
Alzheimer’s Disease	Dwarfism
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Dyslexia
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Food or Animal Allergies
Blindness or Low Vision	Heart Disease
Cancer	Major Depressive Disorder
Cerebral Palsy	Paralysis
Craniofacial Anomalies	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Sickle Cell Disease	Stroke
Deaf or Hard of	Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



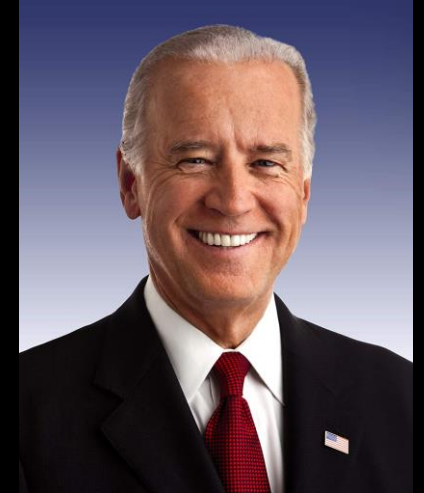
# AN INCREDIBLY DIVERSE POPULATION

- 27% of the U.S. population
  - Centers for Disease Control
- Half are over the age of 65
  - U.S. Census Bureau
- Many don't realize they're disabled

Tammy Duckworth



Joe Biden

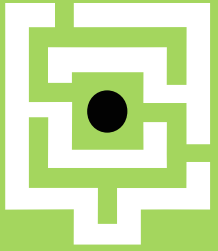


Oprah Winfrey



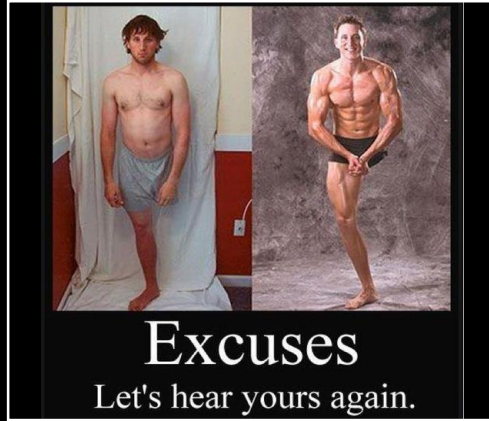
Simone Biles





# THREE MODELS OF DISABILITY

## Moral Model



People struggle because they aren't trying hard enough.

## Medical Model



People struggle because they are sick and need to be treated.

## Social Model



People struggle because they are denied access by their environment.



# SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

## Preferred by disability community

- Disability is the loss of opportunities to participate in society due to social and environmental barriers
- Views physical, intellectual, sensory, or psychological variations as neutral, natural, normal
- Accessibility is the remedy of disability, and it's society's duty to become more accessible.





# MEDICAL VS SOCIAL MODEL

Her **impairment** is the problem!  
They should cure her or give her prosthetics.

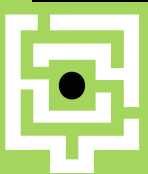
The *medical model* of disability



The **stairs** are the problem!  
They should build a ramp.

The *social model* of disability

Image by UAA: <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/accessibility/topic/architecture.cfm>



# ADA POP QUIZ

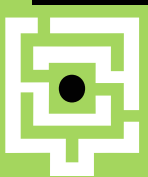
# TRUE OR FALSE

- The ADA protects currently disabled people, formerly disabled people, those who are perceived as disabled, and close family members.
- An employer cannot ask you about your disability or medical history.
- An employer cannot ask you to demonstrate how you'll perform a job.



*An employer can ask you to demonstrate how you'll do the job if:*

- *They ask everyone,*
- *If you disclose your disability,*  
*OR*
- *If your disability is obvious*



# TRUE OR FALSE

- An employer cannot ask for a medical exam.

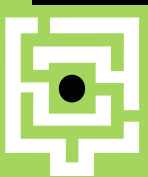


*An employer can ask for a medical exam only after they've made a job offer and only if they ask everyone*

- The employer has the right to negotiate a reasonable accommodation.



- An employer can request proof that you need an accommodation.



# TRUE OR FALSE

- Only those working for an employer can request accommodations.



*Anyone working for or applying to a company can request accommodations.*

- Accommodations can be altered if they are not helpful.

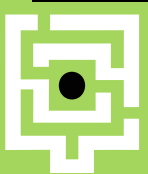


- An employee can be terminated if they cannot perform the essential functions of the job or if continuing their job poses a safety threat.



# WHERE WE ARE TODAY

- ADA Protections
- Rehab Act of 1973 Section 503
- New initiatives in diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Assistive technology means more of us can participate in the workforce
- Many recruiters lack experience with disability
- 2014 British study showed that  $\frac{2}{3}$  of respondents felt uncomfortable talking to a person with a disability
- 2017 study by CareerBuilder found that only 16% of hiring managers are trained interviewers, meaning they may not understand the ADA or their unconscious biases
- Interviews still used as the ultimate tool to measure work-readiness



# Discussing Disability



*Discussing disability with an employer is a personal choice and it looks different for every person.*

## Benefits

- Obtain accommodations
- Protection under the ADA
- Disability as an asset (workplace diversity, problem solving, adaptability, etc.)
- Set the narrative about your disability
- Have an edge over other non-disabled applicants
- Safety

## Risks:

- Discrimination — even with the ADA and anti-discrimination laws, people with disabilities can be discriminated in workplaces.
- Your employer or coworkers may have pre- or misconceptions about disability and people with disabilities.
- Not obtaining the job



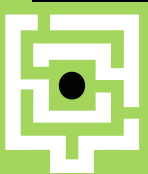
# HOW SHOULD I TALK ABOUT MY DISABILITY WITH AN EMPLOYER?

- Always speak positively or neutrally about your disability
- Discuss your disability as a unique strength
- Be prepared to discuss assistive tech and helpful accommodations
- Don't give diagnosis or medical info; focus on what's relevant and what they need to know



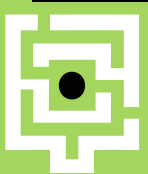
# WHAT TO CONSIDER:

1. Will you need accommodations for the interview?
2. How obvious is your disability?
3. What does the employer **need to know**?



# THE SPECTRUM OF DISABILITY VISIBILITY

Visible Disabilities	Semi-visible Disabilities	Invisible Disabilities
Appear as “disabled”	Appear as “atypical”	Appear as “able-bodied”
Easily noticed and remembered as disabled	Noticed, but not associated with a disability	Not noticed and hard to remember
CP, blindness, deafness, paralysis, amputation	ASD, learning, behavioral, hearing loss, legal blindness, chronic illness	MS, diabetes, celiac disease, depression, cancer, bipolar disorder, OCD



# How and When to Disclose

Do you need an accommodation for the interview?

**YES**

Disclose when setting up the interview to give employer ample time to meet accommodation needs.

**NO**

There is no need to disclose yet.

# How and When to Disclose

Do you have an apparent or visible disability?

YES

Disclose prior to the interview to ensure the employer is prepared.

NO

There is no need to disclose yet.

# How and When to Disclose

**Do you have a semi-visible disability and anticipate needing accommodations in the workplace?**

**YES**

It may be best to disclose so you can control the narrative. Brief disclosure during the interview is often recommended in these circumstances.

**NO**

There is no need to disclose yet.

# How and When to Disclose

## Invisible Disabilities

**Wait to  
disclose until  
after receiving  
a job offer.**

## Exceptions to the Rule

- Is disability relevant to the job?
- Is the employer a government contractor?



# YOUR DISABILITY SUCCESS STORY



*This activity is designed to elicit feelings of pride and give you a better sense of how to discuss your disability.*

- What are your impairments?
- What accommodations do you use?
- What unique skills, abilities, outlooks, assets do you have because you use these accommodations?



## DISABILITY SUCCESS STORY EXAMPLE

“I have a spinal cord injury, which means my brain doesn’t talk to my arms and legs. To adapt, I use a power wheelchair to get around, and I use a specialized software to work on a computer. Because of the nature of the software, I pay much closer attention to detail.”

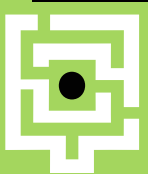


# REAL LIFE EXAMPLES OF DISCUSSING DISABILITY

A blind woman with a BSW applies for an entry level social work job at a local nonprofit.

**“How are you with time management?”**

“Time management is something I pride myself on. I have ocular albinism, meaning that the retinas in my eyes never formed. Because of this, I am unable to drive. I instead use public transportation to get everywhere I go in a timely manner. My use of public transportation means that I have become extremely well organized, I have great time management skills, and that I strongly value punctuality.”



# REAL LIFE EXAMPLES OF DISCUSSING DISABILITY

A graduating business student who is a wheelchair user applies for an managerial role.

**“Do you have any management experience?”**

“Although it may seem informal, I have a lot of management experience. Because of my disability, I often need assistance with certain daily physical tasks. I’ve been hiring my own personal care attendants since I was 18 years old, which means that I’ve had to recruit, train, schedule, and fire attendants during this time. I need dependable staff, so often I have more than nine different people working for me in any given week. I also do payroll for my staff and have to keep track of hours worked. While this can sometimes be challenging, the experience of having to manage my own personal staff of attendants has really provided me with insight on how to effectively train individuals, how to manage budgets and payroll, how to hire the best talent, and the importance of effective communication...”



# REAL LIFE EXAMPLES OF DISCUSSING DISABILITY

An autistic student applies for a Computer Science internship at a local technology company.

**“What is your biggest strength?”**

“My biggest strength is probably my attentiveness to detail. As an autistic individual, sometimes noticing social cues can be a challenge, so I've spent much of my life observing my surroundings to better gauge a situation or environment. Being so skilled at observation has allowed me to catch small details many others might not readily notice, like detecting bugs in my peers' codes.”



# REQUESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

The Job Accommodation Network (*AskJAN.org*) recommends several key principles:

- **Keep it simple**
- **Put in in writing**
- **Talk to the right people**

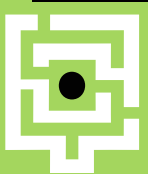
**What else you might prepare for your request:**

- Documentation from a medical professional
- List of your strengths + how you've found success in your roles before now
- Explain the current challenge and examples of accommodations that might benefit you
- Explanation of why the accommodation is being requested/how it will help

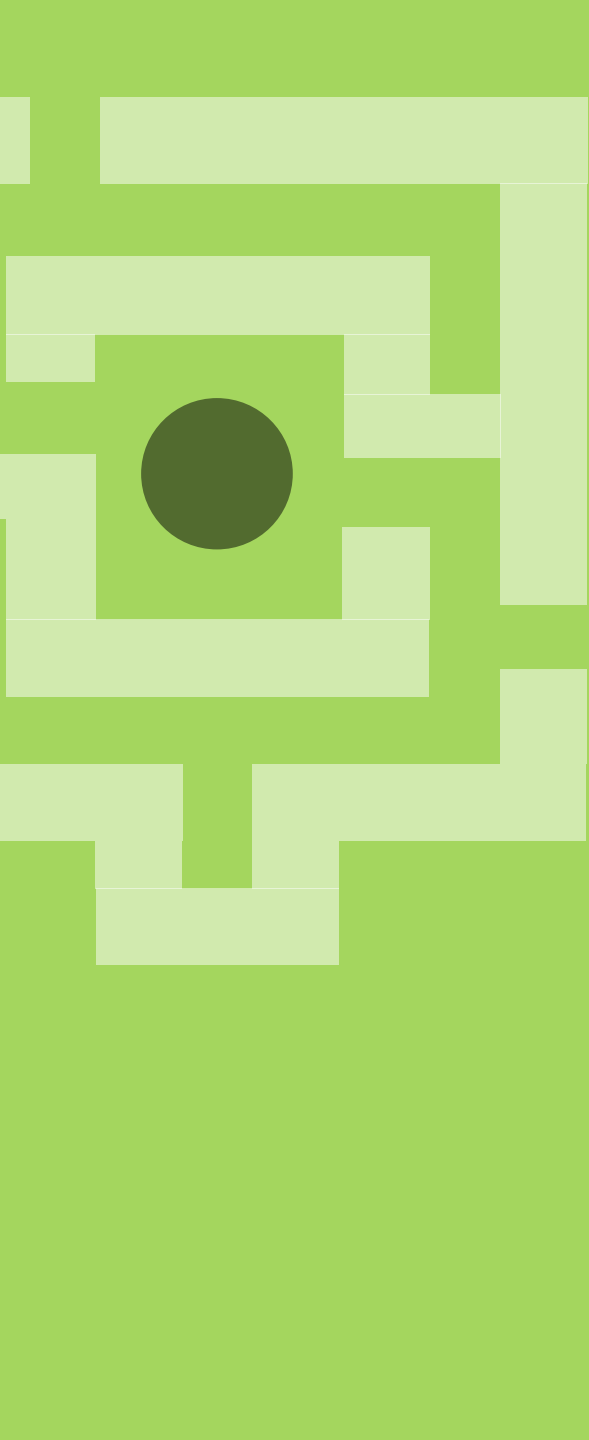


# ***WHAT CAN MODERN DISABLED JOB SEEKERS DO TO FIND EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS?***

- Own who you are and never treat your disability as something to be ashamed of
- Treat your disability as a unique strength
- Learn how to talk about your disability with confidence
- Determine early which accommodations, if any, are most useful to you
- Prepare thoroughly before any job interview
- Network with disabled professionals
- Understand the law and protect your rights (documentation is vital)







**THANK YOU**

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