



Interview Strategies

How and when to inform a prospective employer about your hearing loss is a complex issue which can have emotional components.

- **Don't insert the issue of hearing loss in your resume or letter of inquiry.** The fact is that this may discourage many prospective employers from granting you an interview at all.

Once the interview has been granted, you must determine yourself whether you should reveal your hearing loss at the interview. Some of the considerations:

- **Does the employer screen prospective employees with phone interviews?** If you have trouble hearing on the phone, and you need the assistance of IP Relay or Captioned Phone services, you may want to advise the employer so you can make the phone call to them at a designated time. You should also be prepared to advise them that any delay in response is a result of the nature of captioned phone and Relay services.
- **Do you need an accommodation at the interview?** If you need to request the employer provide an accommodation at the interview, clearly, you need to reveal your hearing loss in advance if services to be at hand at the time of the interview.
- **Do you own your own assistive listening device?** If you depend on an assistive listening device and own one, plan to bring it along with fresh batteries. This shows you take charge, problem-solving ability to manage your own hearing loss. It gives the prospective employer a chance to see you in action and to get to know you better.
- **How many people will be present at the interview?** While you may be able to handle a one-to-one interview without accommodation and without revealing your hearing loss, a large room with many people attending may put you at a disadvantage if you have not revealed your hearing loss.
- **Will you need accommodations on the job?** If you expect that you will need accommodations for meetings or other on the job situations, you may do well to provide that information at the interview, so the employer is not surprised later.
- **How comfortable are you with your hearing loss?** If you can inform your prospective employer about your hearing loss in a matter-of-fact way, it's advisable to do so right at the interview. Demonstrating a matter-of-fact, can-do and positive approach to your hearing loss will work to your advantage in the interview.

When you arrive at the interview, be prepared to make on the spot changes. You may need to ask people to change seats, face windows, pull down blinds.

Be matter of fact. Don't apologize for your hearing loss, and don't spend a long time talking about it. They want to know what you can do for them. Let them know what an asset you will be to their organization.

Psych out your interviewer(s)

Put yourself in the interviewer's shoes. They don't know you, don't know about hearing loss and want to be sure they hire the right person for the job. Put them at ease, comfortable with you as a person who has a hearing loss.

Watch for clues that they are uncomfortable. They probably won't know about hearing loss and may feel that they don't know how to behave. They might wonder if the presence of a worker with a hearing loss will affect the "chemistry" of the department. Is the worker with hearing loss going to be less efficient, slower, more dependant, more demanding, less capable? Can the individual really get the job done? How will the person with hearing loss communicate on a regular basis? Will accommodations cost a lot? Why hire you?

You must convince them that they want you! Sell your:

- Skills
- Experience
- Demonstrated competence
- Self-assurance
- Personality

Questions that the employer cannot ask

According to the EEOC NOTICE Number 915.002 of 10/10/95:

Under the law, an employer may not ask disability-related questions and may not conduct medical examinations until after it makes a conditional job offer to the applicant. This helps ensure that an applicant's possible hidden disability (including a prior history of a disability) is not considered before the employer evaluates an applicant's non-medical qualifications.

An employer may not ask disability-related questions or require a medical examination pre-offer even if it intends to look at the answers or results only at the post-offer stage.

Once a conditional job offer is made, the employer may ask disability-related questions and require medical examinations as long as this is done for all entering employees in that job category. If the employer rejects the applicant after a disability-related question or medical examination, investigators will closely scrutinize whether the rejection was based on the results of that question or examination.

If the question or examination screens out an individual because of a disability, the employer must demonstrate that the reason for the rejection is "job-related and consistent with business necessity."

In addition, if the individual is screened out for safety reasons, the employer must demonstrate that the individual poses a "direct threat." This means that the individual poses a significant risk of substantial harm to him/herself or others, and that the risk cannot be reduced below the direct threat level through reasonable accommodation.

Also, an employer may not ask a third party (such as a service that provides information about workers' compensation claims, a state agency, or an applicant's friends, family, or former employers) any questions that it could not directly ask the applicant.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/preemp.html>

In short, the prospective employer MAY NOT ask:

- Are you taking prescription drugs?
- Are you HIV positive?
- How many sick days did you take last year?
- Have you filed for worker's comp?

They MAY ask:

- Can you perform the functions of the job?
- Can you meet the attendance requirements for the job?
- Do you have the required experience?
- Are you using illegal drugs?

Getting Comfortable with the Process

Your attitude is important. Don't focus on your hearing loss. Don't bluff. If you pretend you have heard something when you have not, the interview will just think that you have poor communication skills or that you cannot answer the question appropriately.

Revealing your hearing loss is personal, but in some cases, it will help you:

I was interviewed for a job in a very old noisy office with a window air conditioner. I was interviewed by five people...and I used an FM assistive listening system for the interview. I briefly explained why I was using it and after a few seconds, I think everyone forgot it was there. I was able to position the microphone in the center of the table...so we did not have to keep passing the mike.

Control your anxiety before the interview

Job seeking is a stressful process for anyone, but doubly stressful for people with hearing loss. The very thought of the interview may be harrowing. Put your energy into good planning and identifying your skills. This will boost your confidence.

- List your strengths. Don't just think about them, actually make a list.
- Be ready with concrete examples of your accomplishments, both on the job, as a volunteer, and in other areas of your life.
- Keep your focus on why you are valuable to the organization.
- Practice stress-relieving activities such as relaxation, meditation, exercise, positive thinking – whatever you have found works for you.
- List your fears about the interview and how you would handle each one. “What’s the worst thing that could happen?”

Practice interviews

Start out applying for jobs in which you are only marginally interested. Use these interviews for practice.

Or work with a friend or agency that allows you to practice typical interview questions.

Summing up

- Learn how to write a good resume and cover letter.
- Only apply for jobs you are qualified for.
- If you need experience, volunteer.
- Focus on your skills and experience, not your hearing loss.
- Plan for your interview, including how you will hear at the interview.
- Psych out your interviewer.
- Be positive: face and control your fears.