



**National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society**

**MS Learn Online  
Feature Presentation  
Career Crossroads: Maximize Your Potential**

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Tom>> Welcome to MS Learn Online. I'm Tom Kimball

Tracey>> and I'm Tracey Kimball. We'll continue with Career Crossroads a program to help individuals living with MS to remain in the workforce.

Tom>> Today's topic is all about accommodations. It's important issue to understand if you have MS and want to stay employed.

Tracey>> In this episode titled Maximize Your Potential we get to see many people in the workforce who have been able to pinpoint the accommodations they need to maintain their jobs.

VANESSA

I'm so sorry I'm late! I got caught up with stuff at work, and completely lost track of time.

CLAIRE

You need one of these.

VANESSA

Girl, you know I do not do digital. As far as I'm concerned the demise of card catalogues in libraries marked the beginning of the end of Western Civilization.

CLAIRE

Oh come on! I know you go online to do research.

VANESSA

Kickin' and screamin'!

CLAIRE

We all must adapt. Which brings us to why we're here.

VANESSA

Ah yes .... Accommodations. I found some good stuff online.

CLAIRE

Kickin' and screamin'?

VANESSA

Hush! This is the stuff you're gonna need for the disclosure statement we were working on the other day.

CLAIRE

OK, so let's start with the basics. How do your experts define "accommodation?"

WENDY RICHARD

The term reasonable accommodations is kind of a mouthful. But all it really means is what do you need to be provided to you or what kind of adjustments or small types of assistance could you use to better be able to perform your job in light of some of the challenges you face with your disability.

CLAIRE

That's it? Well, that could mean almost anything.

VANESSA

Exactly. And what kinds of symptoms could you experience?

CLAIRE

Well, that's the problem with MS. It affects everyone differently and it can affect me differently at different times. I could have fatigue, balance and motor skill problems, cognitive and memory issues, problems with vision or speech, or having to go to the bathroom all the time or... who knows? And I could be having these symptoms this week, but not last week or next week.

VANESSA

Exactly!

WENDY RICHARD

So you just have to think about what are the things that I need and what things can help me? And many times those things are not large or cumbersome or even very expensive you just need a little more flexibility or a few more, small assisted devices in order to be able to continue doing the great work that you're already doing.

KRISTY STATES

Accommodations can be as simple as moving a computer monitor directly in front of you, raising or lowering or adjusting a chair can make a world of difference in how your body is aligned. Moving items that you frequently access with phones or Rolodex closer to you so you avoid over reaching.

Marion Levine

The most common accommodations for people with MS is to be placed near a bathroom, to have your office near a bathroom, to have air conditioning in your office, to have to walk less to maybe have things ergonomically situated so that there's less problem with fatigue, flexible schedules, part time work.

VANESSA

Shelia Becker develops educational programs and products for children that are sponsored by her employer, Proctor and Gamble. She found that as her MS progressed, her symptoms were having a serious impact on her ability to do her job.

Sheila Becker

I was diagnosed about 12 years ago and originally it wasn't an issue. There were a couple of little episodes with optic neuritis, and some vision things. Nothing that anyone else would be aware of. And it wasn't until probably 5 or 6 years later that I was noticing that my ability to walk long distances, to do anything with a lot of strength was starting to be impaired a little bit and one of the things that I was doing at the time was a lot of traveling.

VANESSA

For Sheila, who works at Proctor and Gamble's corporate headquarters, just walking from her car to her office became a major challenge.

Sheila Becker

Even though it was all inside the building was just becoming the biggest task that I did all day and by the time I got to my desk I . . . I was trashed.

VANESSA

So she contacted the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, and with their help, she had a scooter delivered to her within weeks. But then she was faced with another challenge.

Sheila Becker

You need to charge it up over night. So I needed a place to garage it if you will and plug it into a, it's a little battery charger. So I contacted Proctor and Gamble's workplace services group and within a week or so they were able to identify a place actually in the garage where I park my car that had a little store room that they installed an outlet for my charger. So in the morning when I get there, I walk to the little store room, I punch in my code, open the door and unplug my scooter and we're off.

Sheila Becker

I used to go to medical conventions and educational conventions and we participate in those and talk to the attendees and things like that. That's very tiring, if you've ever been to a convention center, they're huge, lots of walking. So the combination of traveling thru the airports, you know going to a convention center, it was a complete wipe out for me.

Sheila Becker

So what I've had to do was to swallow my pride and say you know what the world will go on even if you're not there. You've done a good job training your assistant managers, they can handle it.

Assistant Manager

They just need to see a story board of what the logos are gonna be ...

Sheila Becker

Proctor and Gamble has been very good to me as an employer when I was healthy and when I had MS I think that they are committed to their people and they recognize that their employees are the lifeblood of their company.

VANESSA

Kathy Campbell works for a People Working Cooperatively, a non-profit organization in Cincinnati.

Kathy Campbell

It's kind of exciting because I've been here 11 years and I've run the volunteer program for the first 10 years of that and so in growing the volunteer program I got to talk to many of the same groups to recruit their volunteers and now I get to go back and tell them about the good work we do.

Jock Pitts

Kathy Campbell brings a wonderful set of skills to People Working Cooperatively. She been here about 10 years, and from the first time we met her we found a remarkable source of energy and commitment to our mission. What I like most about her is her heart...And there's just nothing that she won't do or try or give to try to help people. And we're a social service organization and at the core of what we do it's about helping people.

Kathy Campbell

... I'll definitely give that a try.

My fatigue is not always predictable and I know that, you know at certain times every day I'm going to be tired So I keep a couch down the hall in a separate office that I can lay down when I need to take a nap during the day and then work in the evening if that's what works a little easier.

Flexible hours are very, very important to me and I am glad to say that I have never been accused of being lazy even though my energy level varies greatly I have been able to plan and get some work done at home by sending it home on the computer get all the ideas together and send it back on line and pick it up back at work.

Sarah Keitt

Let me double check on my calendar here ...

VANESSA

Sarah Keitt is a Program Associate with the American Medical Student Association, a membership organization that represents medical students across the country and internationally. Unlike Sheila and Kathy, Sarah has not been troubled with many physical disabilities.

Sarah Keitt

I noticed that I was having cognitive dysfunction, even before I was diagnosed with the MS. And, after I was diagnosed, I was still having these problems and found it very difficult for me to be doing my job. And I really couldn't put my finger on what exactly was going wrong. And after talking with my neurologist and being sent to the neuropsychologist for evaluation she was able to pin point some of the cognitive dysfunction that was going on and I was able to understand how it was impacting my ability to work. So together we came up with a plan for me to address those issues with my employer and work out a way to make sure that I could stay working.

My use of using a Palm Pilot religiously. More so than other people do. I know a lot of other people use Palm Pilots, but I rely on mine. I think I sometimes engineer situations, so they're adapted to my needs. For example, if I'm chairing a meeting, or a conference call, I will have an assistant back me up to take notes. Because it's hard for me to do two things at once. I can't listen and respond and interact and keep track of what's going on. . . you're taking notes of what's going on. So, things like that people don't notice.

And I also . . . worked to minimize certain types of interaction that were very difficult for me. Namely, having hallway meetings. People would stop you in the hallway and say, 'Well, what's the status of this project?' Or, 'What is this number that I need?' Or, 'I need a new such and such' . . . and they'd walk off. So we came to an agreement that, I would be given notice they needed information from me, or when a meeting was coming up, or it was OK for me to say, 'Let me get back to you on that.' Then I could go back and get the information and present it in a coherent way. And it was understood that I was doing this because I wanted to do an effective job. I wanted to do my job well, not because I didn't know how to do my job, or I was trying to put off meeting with somebody or cover my butt or something like that.

Stopping those hallway meetings actually helped everybody become more productive. The issues that I was facing, while they seemed really dramatic to me, a lot of other people said, 'Oh, I have that same problem.' 'I can't remember things, or . . . 'My attention gets distracted.' And, once we all sort of adopted this new policy of no hallway meetings, people were getting more work done because they had records of who's supposed to do what by when,

VANESSA

So, Claire, what are some of the things that are causing problems for you at work?

CLAIRE

I definitely have more fatigue. By mid-afternoon all I can think about is a nap.

And I do seem to be forgetting things more and more these days.

VANESSA

Well that should come in handy.

CLAIRE

Yeah. That's why I got it.

And in six weeks, I've gotta go to Vegas to supervise the set up of our client's exhibit.

Dave

... if she has to work 18 hours, we'll have this done they way you want it and it'll be done on time.

Claire

I can't even imagine how I'll survive that.

VANESSA

Don't you think they could send someone else?

CLAIRE

They probably could, but Dave's gotta know pretty soon.

VANESSA

Mm-hmmm

CLAIRE

Oh, and those stairs!

I can manage them now for now, but there's gonna come a time when I can't do them any more.

VANESSA

Well, here's the beginning of items you'll want to include in your disclosure statement. Now remember, you need to be proactive and take a positive approach.

WENDY RICHARD

Your employer and yourself are working together. There should be discussion involved. You are both trying to get to a positive outcome not only for you but for the company as a whole.

Mary Hennessey

It's not necessarily your employer's responsibility to provide those accommodations or to even come up with those accommodations for you. I think that your employer is going to be much more open and willing to assist you in the accommodation process if you take the time to think ahead – what is it that I need to do to accomplish my job responsibilities.

Joe Lovato

What we expect to have happen is that somebody talks with their boss. Which means you need to have a really good relationship with your boss. You need to not fear your boss, you need to be able to talk to them, they need to value you for your skills and capability

Jock Pitts

If an employee would need an accommodation, I would prefer they just be clear and frank about what it is that they may need because we might not understand what their life is about and what they experience on a daily basis

Kathy Campbell

Anytime I've approached any employer asking for something I've gone with a solution to the problem I've gone in and said you know these are the things I'm trying to get there or these are things that might help me to do what I need to do. And therefore to present them with a variety of solutions has made it easier for them but also they don't have to come up with the way to solve the problem. They just have to be aware of it and support me in solving it.

Sarah Keitt

They don't have to do all these things for you if you're not a good employee. They won't want to do this. They will resent you. Your co-workers will resent you. But, if you take the responsibility for doing the best possible job that you can at your job, you're gonna be somebody that they want to keep, and they want to make happy. And they will be more than willing to make accommodations that you may need.

CLAIRE

OK, I guess it's time to set up a meeting with Dave, polish up my disclosure statement and do it.

VANESSA

You got it, girl! Now how does this thing work, anyway?

Claire

You want me to show you?

Vanessa

Yeah!

Tracey>> I can certainly relate to a lot of the scenarios we've seen.

Tom>> That's for sure. And what was interesting to me is that the accommodations we saw were not huge. For example right now we're under these hot studio lights, but we have an additional cooling unit to keep Tracey comfortable.

Tracey>> and what a difference it makes! The next episode of Career Crossroads, You're Not Alone, deals with all of the support and resources that are available. Don't miss it.