



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

**MS Learn Online
Feature Presentation
Career Crossroads: You're Not Alone**

Tracey>> Hello, I'm Tracey Kimball

Tom>> and I'm Tom Kimball. Welcome to MS Learn Online where today we continue to hear how individuals living with MS can remain in the workforce.

Tracey>> Yes, and that can be almost daunting at times, and it can make us feel very alone.

Tom>> But you're not! There are many resources out there to help people with MS deal with employment issues. Let's watch.

CLAIRE

Man Vanessa! When I asked you help get some resources together, I didn't think you were going to bring the whole library!

VANESSA

Let me tell you ... there are a lot of resources out there.
But before we get to that, tell me how your meeting went with your boss.

CLAIRE

I think it went as well as could be expected. Needless to say Dave was very surprised. He was very concerned for me and my health ... which was great.

Dave

Claire, I'm so sorry to hear this. This is not good news. It would explain a few things that have been going on recently ...

Claire

Then when we got to talking about the accommodations that I mentioned, that's when he started asking the hard questions.

Dave

Well, it's a big question for me, too. The added cost of bringing another employee to Las Vegas, how the client's gonna feel about it. I'm also thinking about the stairs, and talking about the elevator. How the employees are going to feel about you moving into another office. There are operational costs that have to be considered.

Claire

He knows nothing about MS, and I've got a lot to learn.

So that's when I called you and asked you to help me out with resources you could come up with. But before we go there, I just want to tell you, Vanessa, how much I appreciate you're being here for me. This has been a really tough time for me, and I don't know what I would have done without you.

Mary Hennessey

It's good to just have somebody else listen to what you're saying and to maybe bring you back to reality because sometimes some of the things that you feel that are happening to you, you may feel that's it's very overwhelming and severe and if you have somebody to bounce your ideas off of they can bring it back to "well let's look at this realistically and let's see what are some of the things that you can do and maybe it's not as bad as you think it is."

VANESSA

Hey, you've been there for me in the past. Now it's my turn to do it for you. But keep in mind, I'm good for moral support and helping out here and there, but I'm no expert. That's where all these organizations and professionals come in. I think the place where you need to start is with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Steve Nissen

We at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society have a variety of different publications and brochures that deal with practical ways to accommodate MS symptoms in the work place. We have publications that deal with the ADA, that deal with disclosing MS to employers. We also have referrals to

community based resources and organizations that may also be able to provide assistance in terms of gathering that type of information.

Phillip Rumrill

Some chapters have formal employment job development career counseling programs that are available to people with MS

Joel Kahn

The primary support from the Multiple Sclerosis chapter was early in my diagnosis. I think the most helpful was the information and seminars that they provided on MS, what is the probable cause, the course it was going to take and so it was education, physical therapy it was extremely beneficial to both myself and my family in the early years after diagnosis.

Sheila Becker

One of the things that they offer is a newly diagnosed program or a program for people who have recently been diagnosed in the last year or 2. Way back when I was diagnosed I remember attending that and that was really helpful. In addition to providing with a boat load of printed information, they also give counsel and first of all help you understand you're not the only facing this, they help to validate your feelings – it's ok to be really honked about this.

CLAIRE

Here's something about the state vocational rehabilitation office.

Steve Nissen

Within each state there's a vocational rehabilitation agency who's goal it is, is to assist people with disabilities and gaining and maintaining employment.

Marion Levine –

Vocational rehabilitation provides information for people to perform jobs once they have a disability to explore what the persons residual strengths are what their skills are, what their interests are. Assign them various assessment tools to figure out what they can do and what they do well and then to explore career change or keeping the job that they have with the accommodations that will utilize their strengths.

Kristy States

Mary, why don't you show me a little of what you do in your work day.

Mary

Well usually, I'm on the phone ...

Steve Nissen

Someone from the state VR agency can actually go to your work site and look at your job and look at your job functions

Mary

... and then I have to reach over here and write notes down ...

KRISTY STATES

I think every job site analysis is different. Every individual is different, every body size and shape is different

Kristy (to Mary)

It looks like you're having difficulty rolling here and trying to get up close to your desk ...

Kristy

And so it's very individualized on what your job tasks are, where you work.

Kristy (to Mary)

Your monitor ... does it feel like it's too close or too far?

Mary

I have a hard time seeing because the font's too small and it bounces back and forth and it gives me vertigo.

Kristy

So whether it's in an office or in a warehouse or working in a truck we look at how we can adapt and make it the safest for you.

Kristy (to Mary)

So Mary, how's your new set-up working?

Mary

It is working great! I don't have that spasm in my neck any more. And I notice that my wrists are a lot more flexible, and I can reach everything when I'm on the phone. I can be on the phone without having to squish my head and be at the computer at the same time.

Kristy

The headset is probably one of the biggest changes that you've made, so you won't have to cradle that phone. That's one of the hardest things you can do on your body. But I like the way instead of adjusting the computer over at your old desk, they were able to bring in this adjustable computer table for you.

VANESSA

Now here's something that's really cool ... the Job Accommodation Network.

Steve Nissen

And what they do is they provide free telephone consultations to individuals with a variety of different types of disabilities and you can speak to one of the consultants and you can explain your job, explain your job duties, explain your symptoms and they can help you to brainstorm some practical ways to accommodate those symptoms.

CLAIRE

Now I don't think this will happen, but what if my boss isn't very cooperative?

VANESSA

You'll want to educate him. In fact, all these organizations we've talked about have information and special programs specially designed for employers.

CLAIRE

And if that doesn't work?

Charles Goldman

In our litigious society people are always prone to pick up the phone and call my lawyer and sue them for a million dollars. And maybe it's a million dollar case, most likely it's not. And maybe it's discrimination and maybe it's not. We don't know but the first step is to figure out what happened.

Steve Nissen

I think it would be important to really look at the structure of your own company. Is there any sort of support that would be available from the employer in terms of HR or the personnel department?

Charles Goldman

So my reaction is don't go running to the court house right away because sometimes the chapter, our chapter here with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society can intervene and educate an employer and say and educate the employee as to what is and is not copasetic in the work place. And sometimes a lawyer can help smooth it over and not everything has to wind up in a lawsuit.

Steve Nissen

Know that there are resources out there within the community where you might be able to, or you may be able to get connected to an attorney who specializes in this type of law.

Charles Goldman

The other thing I would do is calm down, catch your breath, don't react in anger and then say did this really happen and if it did let's develop an action plan. Because if it happened and it's real its gonna happen again.

Steve Nissen

And then ultimately really if the environment becomes so difficult to you to be the one to make the decision to leave that job and find something else.

VANESSA

Karen Jackson is an office manager for an orthopedic surgeon in Virginia. Over the years, MS has forced her to make some dramatic decisions and changes in her life.

Karen Jackson

I'm an athletic trainer by trade. And I've worked in athletics all my life. And I've played basketball. I've played softball. I played LaCrosse growing up.

Dr. Branche

Karen brings a lot of talents to our office. Her academic degree is in athletic training. So she has a wonderful background in sports injuries and dealing with athletes.

Karen Jackson

And so I've been able to transition because I've worked in orthopedic surgery for 20 years, to go from being an on-the-field athletic trainer into an administrative practice of orthopedic surgery.

VANESSA

From the moment Karen learned that she had MS, her first source of support and guidance came from her husband George.

Karen Jackson

I'll never forget -- we were standing in our bedroom -- and I looked at him and I said, 'Well, it is official.' And he looked at me and he said, 'Well, I'm not going anywhere but I will not feel sorry for you.' And that's really the basis of everything. Because, yes, I have MS, but no, it doesn't stop us.

VANESSA

When MS forced Karen to reconsider her career options, she turned to an employment counselor to help with her transition.

Karen Jackson

He has tweaked my resume, he has made the job bank available. There's a program called Operation Job Match . And when I was in transition of a job, and not sure that I wanted to stay in the medical field, I went and looked at their Bank for hours. And he just has immense resources that he makes available to us.

Karen Jackson

People that have a disability of any kind are probably the most employable. Because we know how to multitask. We've put in . . . in the time it takes us to get to work, probably what it takes for most people to be at work. In 8 hours we've already put in 3 to get there. So, I think that were are probably the best at making adjustments. Making changes. And so we're probably better to employ than most. Because we don't use it as an excuse. We have to overcome that.

Dr. Branche

And so I think if you're willing to look beyond the disability and see what these people can do, then it's well worth it. And ... it's unfortunate because a lot of people when they're in a job scenario, that's the first thing they see. And being a minority I'm used to that, because that's the first thing people see with me -- a lot of times. And so, you know, I try to be particularly sensitive about that -- look at the positives and look at what people CAN do.

Karen Jackson

I used to be 24/7. And not being an athletic trainer on the field, being more an administrative position allows me to not put in those hours anymore. And you have to just sit back and say, 'There's more to life.' And MS has made me re-focus and say that I can't just work all the time.

VANESSA

And her husband George continues to give her support ... and perspective.

George Jackson

It's been a challenge for both of us. We both work a lot, just because of the nature of our jobs. But I've always said that I wanted her not to work as much. And so when I see her slipping back in her old routines, I try to remind her that there is more to life than working behind a computer or on the telephone.

VANESSA

I mean, yeah, you gotta work, but you gotta keep a balance between work and life. You gotta take of yourself ... and Jenny.

CLAIRE

Oh my gosh ... Jenny! I gotta get home! OK ... you know what Vanessa ... thank you so much for all your work and I know this is going to be a lot of homework. But it definitely will come in handy when I get together with Dave again and discuss the accommodations I asked for.

Tom>> There really are a lot of resources available to help people with MS to stay in the workforce.

Tracey>> And I'm so thankful for that. To find out what resources might be most useful for you, contact your local chapter of the National MS Society.

Tom>> Thanks for joining us.