

CHAPTER 12

Keeping the Job

Once you have accepted a job offer, feel free to celebrate your accomplishment. Take a few moments to look back over the past several months and make mental notes of your progress. If possible, write them down. You have a lot to be proud of, because too many job seekers with disabilities quit before you did. Hopefully, what you have done will serve as an example for others.

Don't pull any muscles as you pat yourself on the back, though. You have a lot of work left to do as you shift gears and focus on keeping your job. You do not want to be content with just getting the job. Your goal now, no matter what your job is, is to be the best possible _____ in your organization and, in fact, to be the best _____ there is.

Several factors will ultimately determine the extent to which you will accomplish this goal. You will need to show the right attitude on the job. You will need to establish positive working relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates. You should learn all that you can about your position, the organization, and the industry. Also, you will need to look for projects that will give you an opportunity to show all this off.

You will also need to find ways to minimize the extent to which your disability impacts the relationships that you establish. You will need to be aware of the attitudes of others, and, when appropriate, you will need to find ways to educate those you work with about your disability. You will also need to determine what kind of accommodations—special equipment, flexible hours, and so on—your disability necessitates. Chapter 13 covers this topic in detail.

Finally, you will need to remind yourself that the days of an employee working 35 years at the plant, retiring, and receiving the gold watch are well behind us. You need to always be looking for the next appropriate opportunity. Sometimes that opportunity is with the same employer, and sometimes it may be elsewhere.

Having the Right Attitude

Just like when you were interviewing, you need to remember that first impressions are very important. The same rules should apply for your first several months on the job. For starters, practice your route to work during the morning rush hour to get a feel for what time you will need to leave in order to get to work early.

On your first day, you will want to be just a little early—10 minutes or so. But once you have gone through orientation and you have a key to get into the office, and you know where your work space is located, there is almost no such thing as “too early.” At the very least, you want to be at your work space before your supervisor gets there, and stay for at least fifteen minutes after he or she has left. This way, your boss will never know for sure that you ever go home!

This isn't just about schmoozing the boss, either. The fact is, you will find out that you can be much more productive in that hour before your colleagues get to work than you can in three hours after they are there. Between the people stopping by your work space, the phone calls, the e-mail, the voice mail, and the fax, you can quickly get caught up in a reactive mode instead of a proactive mode. Regardless of the nature of your job, just getting there early, clearing your head, and planning your day will give you a noticeable mental edge.

Another way to show that you have the right attitude is to remain eager to grow. Earlier in the book we discussed the process of identifying your weaknesses. Perhaps you will notice a few more after you begin your new job. Whatever they are, try to take a few minutes each day to focus and work on those weaknesses. If you have a half hour per day, that's great. But even if you can set aside only ten minutes a day, do it. Over time you will find that even if you don't eliminate your weakness, you will have lessened it. In the effort, you are bound to find ways to use your other skills to ameliorate your weaknesses.

You should remain eager to continue learning about your job and your company. If you are on a production line, try to see what you can learn about how the products are designed. How does the company handle quality-control issues? How do they