

Looking For / Finding Work

Getting a job that you enjoy and that meets your basic needs is difficult at the best of times for anyone. Doing so as a person with epilepsy may add another dimension to your quest. This is all the more reason to create a job search strategy which reflects your goals, interests and abilities, and that consists of realistic and actionable objectives, tasks and activities. With a strategy in place, you can make the best use of your time and achieve the best results.

■ Epilepsy Can be an Advantage

It can be easy to see having an epilepsy as a barrier to finding employment. However, there are times when being a person with a disability can be used as an advantage in your job search.

For example, federally regulated organizations are required by a federal law called the Legislated Employment Equity Program (LEEP) to report annually on the representation of the following four designated groups in their workplaces:

- Women
- Aboriginal peoples
- Members of visible minorities
- Persons with disabilities

The goal of LEEP is to promote, support and enhance employment equity for these four designated groups. Typically, of these four groups, employers report that they have the most difficulty finding good employees with disabilities to help them meet their targets. For this reason, disclosure early on in the

application process that you are a person with a disability **may be a good idea.**

There are approximately 12,000 employers across Canada that are federally regulated, representing 820,000 employees. These businesses and industries include:

- Banks
- Marine shipping and ferry and port services
- Airlines and airport operations
- Railways, truck transport and bus lines that cross provincial boundaries
- Canals and pipelines that cross provincial borders
- Telephone, television and internet services
- Radio and television broadcasting
- Most federal crown corporations
- Private business wishing to do significant business with the federal government

In addition, although not mandatory, many municipalities, other financial services organizations and also companies with roots in the U.S. where employment equity legislation is typically stronger due to the Americans with Disabilities Act, are worth targeting in a job search as well.

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Also, you may target companies that are actively looking to hire people with disabilities. Many good ones can be found through *Canada's Top 100 Employers* and *Canada's Best Diversity Employers*. www.canadastop100.com/about.html

Watch for any posting that states that the employer encourages persons with disabilities and those from underrepresented groups to apply. Many companies, such as some large financial institutions, have a dedicated program to support persons with disabilities through the recruitment, placement and retention phases.

Although you may not want to disclose your epilepsy in your application, it can be beneficial, under the right circumstances, to indicate that you wish to be considered as a person with a disability or a diversity candidate (as well as a person with the right blend of training and experience).

■ Why an Employer Should Target a Candidate with Epilepsy

For the employer looking for the best possible employees, hiring someone with epilepsy is not just the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do! A 2015 employer survey conducted by Epilepsy Ontario found that the majority of employers surveyed stated they don't have sufficient information on epilepsy nor do they know where to find it, which represents the biggest reason for them not hiring someone with epilepsy. Most did not know that 1 in 100 Canadians have epilepsy and that 70% have their seizures controlled with medication. They were surprised to find out that people living with epilepsy have above average education levels yet a 4X higher unemployment rate than the general population. And this should not be!

Studies have shown that the average employee with a disability like epilepsy has lower accident rates and higher productivity than employees without a disability. According to Statistics Canada, people with a disability like epilepsy have average or higher attendance rates than other employees. And with the cost of job accommodation being no cost or low cost, why wouldn't an employer recruit and retain an employee with epilepsy?

■ Searching for Work

Looking for a meaningful job takes a great deal of time and involves a lot of hard work. Treat your job search as if it were in fact a job itself.

For some people, a productive week of job searching involves either posting on-line or mailing out 40 resumes. This entails throwing your resume out there (usually the same version) and waiting to see what sticks. Generally speaking, if you don't get an interview from 1 out of 10 applications, then your strategy and resume need some reworking.

For others, sending out two resumes in a week that are each customized to an employment goal, based on thorough research and carefully crafted writing, constitutes a productive week. This often produces greater success than the former strategy.

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■ Create a Job Search Action Plan

This is a document that will keep you motivated during your job search, as well as serve as a reminder of activities completed and yet to be completed.

There is nothing worse than getting an unannounced call for a telephone screening interview and not remembering which job the interviewer is referring to, or the details of your application. Keeping this document by the phone will help you avoid such a potentially embarrassing situation.

JOB SEARCH ACTION PLAN

| Date | Company Name, Address, Contact Name | Company Phone, Web Site, Email | Job Applied For | Source of Job: Friend, Job Fair, Website etc. | Action Taken: Online Application, Email Resume etc. | Results/Next Steps/Additional Notes etc. |
|------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---|---|--|
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■ Job Search Tips

Most people will conduct a job search by reviewing postings in the classified section of newspapers or by visiting on-line Job Boards. Statistics tell us though that only about 15% of all jobs are advertised in these ways. The remaining 85% are part of a **hidden job market** that can only be accessed through more creative approaches.

NEWSPAPERS

The old standby. Lots of jobs but lots of competing job-seekers. Don't forget the community papers. Read the local news and the Business Section for news about new employers in town or those with expansion plans.

COLD CALLS

Phone and in person. Have some companies in mind. Either drop in for a personal visit or call. Prepare a "script" for getting past the receptionist to the person with the ability to hire.

JOB FAIRS

General and industry specific. Where possible, determine who will be present ahead of time so you can research and visit the booths of those employers first, while you and their recruiters are fresh. Prepare for long lineups and have your 30 second "elevator" sales pitch well rehearsed.

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NETWORK

Everyone knows at least 100 people, who in turn each know at least 100 people who in turn know.... For this reason, networking is the most effective means of finding employment. Your goal is to find contacts that will lead you to employment.

According to Prost & Redmond (Neglected or Hidden), employers prefer to fill a job vacancy by hiring someone already known to the immediate supervisor or someone known and referred by another employee within the organization.

Have an effective networking statement that is brief, simply stated, and memorable. You will present this to people (friends, family, past co-workers, social events, volunteer organizations etc.) either verbally or in a written format. It says a little bit about who you are and the skills you possess, as well as the type of employment you seek.

VOLUNTEER

What a great way to meet new people and develop your network. It is also an effective way to explore careers, learn new skills, add experience to a resume and monitor job openings. In some cases, volunteer postings do lead to paid employment.

SOCIAL MEDIA

You can use social media for a job search, and also to research companies you are interested in. Don't forget to review your own social media accounts by looking at them from the perspective of a potential employer. Many hiring managers will review a candidate's social profile before making a hiring decision. The top social sites reviewed by recruiters are LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Review your personal social media profiles, fine tune your privacy settings, and be active on platforms you have committed to.

CORPORATE WEB SITES

Watch for postings on corporate web sites that you have targeted. Where possible, set up new posting alerts. While there, research the company, pay attention to their press releases, and get a sense of their corporate and social responsibility including commitment to hiring persons with disabilities.

PLACEMENT AGENCIES

There are all kinds of placement agencies out there. Some charge the employer for their services, and others charge the job seeker. Others are not-for-profit such as some epilepsy agencies, JOIN, or KEYS. It is a good idea to work with agencies that work primarily with job seekers with disabilities or agencies that are connected to Employment Ontario or ODSP – Employment Supports.

TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

If you have a specialized background or a desire to work in a specific vocation, trade associations and unions can be a good source of job leads.

SCHOOL CAREER CENTRES

Are you a recent graduate or alumni? Often you can gain access to great job postings through the school career centres or even the Disability Services offices. Watch for their sector-specific job fairs throughout the school year.

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

Have a career in mind but not quite sure how to pursue it? Information interviews are a great way to target people in specific careers to determine if what they do would be a good fit for you. Although this shouldn't be considered a job search technique, these interviews can quickly enlarge your network and provide a pathway to current openings.

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PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS/CO-WORKERS

Most people leave employment on good terms, so why wouldn't an employer hire a past employee back, especially now that they have additional work experience, perhaps even with the competition? Stay in touch with past employers/co-workers for the sake of future references.

INTERNSHIP

An internship is a great, low-risk opportunity for an employer to “try-before-you-buy” a recent graduate or a person with a disability. For employers, an internship helps them enhance their diversity and inclusion initiatives. For the job seeker, it provides valuable experience early on in their career when jobs can be harder to obtain. Most internships are paid for six to twenty-four months and many lead to permanent employment.

Example: CareerEdge <http://www.careeredge.ca>

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A social enterprise is a business whose primary purpose is the common good. This means they sell goods or services for a social or environmental purpose, usually on a not-for-profit basis, or any profits that are made are used to further enhance their social goals. Many businesses have been created with the purpose of hiring persons with disabilities so they can gain valuable work experience while being paid competitive wages.

JOB BOARD AGGREGATORS

A job board is a single site where multiple job postings are published for job seekers. A job board aggregator pulls together jobs from different places around the web including job boards, career sites, and employer job listings. Examples include Indeed, SimplyHired, and Glassdoor.

This type of job search engine has rapidly become one of the quickest and easiest ways to match talent to job postings. Beware though of any online job posting resource, as some postings are not real and some may be scams intended to gather personal information. Others may be postings that are used by placement agencies to create a pool of resumes for future reference, rather than actual current positions.

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■ What Does an Employer Recruiter Look For in a Candidate?

Some suggestions from Sara Birch, Diversity Recruitment Consultant at Scotiabank:

- A recruiter looks for someone who has clearly read the job description and customized his or her cover letter and resume to the job.
- Is the content contained within the correspondence applicable or transferrable to the job?
- Is the resume no more than two pages? Is it in a Chronological Format? Does it include months as well as years?
- Does the resume highlight responsibilities and achievements including quantifiable ones? Does it note requirements versus assets?
- Is there emphasis on the ten core competencies that are needed for many workplaces?:
 - Customer focus
 - Strategic thinking
 - Building strategic relationships
 - Strategic influencing
 - Self-awareness and personal development
 - Development and coaching talent
 - Cross-cultural leadership
 - Communication
 - Change leadership
 - Results focused

- Use key words and phrases from the job description in correspondence and the interview
- If a person is lacking experience for a job, what are the transferable skills?

■ Some Suggestions for the Interview

- Arrive for the interview at least 15 minutes early.
- Dress at a level appropriate for the job.
- Bring extra copies of your resume as you may be interviewed by a panel.
- If you need accommodations for the interview, i.e. crib notes to assist with memory or more time to do a skills assessment, just ask.
- Be prepared. Know yourself, your resume, the job description and the company thoroughly.
- Structure answers to demonstrate you have the skills and behaviours needed for the job.
- Become skilled in answering behavioural questions using examples from previous work or life experience and the STAR approach (situation, task, action, result).
- If you become stumped by a question, ask to have it repeated in a different way or request some time to think about it or ask to come back to it later.
- Make eye contact. Sit up straight. Be aware of body language.
- Smile and be positive even when talking about past experiences in bad jobs.

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- When asked if you have any questions about the job or the company, make sure you have a few prepared.
- Thank each interviewer for their time.
- Send a brief follow-up thank-you note to the interviewer perhaps re-expressing your enthusiasm for the job or restating a couple of your key qualifications.
- When you hear back from the employer, even if you don't get the job, sending a second thank-you note might get you the job weeks later if the chosen candidate doesn't work out.
- Create and stick to a job search strategy but be open to fine tuning when certain things just aren't producing results.
- Take good care of yourself and your health. Set job search related tasks and reward yourself from time to time for achieving them i.e. today has been a productive day so I am going to reward myself with a movie tonight.
- Don't hesitate to contact your local epilepsy organization for information and support (1-866-EPILEPSY).

■ Final Notes

- Looking for a full-time job is a full-time job.
- Try to stay at it for 30 hours or so per week.
- Conduct your at-home job search activity in a distraction-free area where you can organize your notes.

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