

I recently came across an article in a publication called, *Careers and the disABLED* titled, *Ernst & Young: A Blueprint For Disability Inclusion, By James Schneider*. Ernst & Young is a huge professional services firm and one of the largest auditing companies in the country. According to Fortune Magazine, they were among the 100 Best Companies to Work for in 2007. When you look at their value statement on their website, it is all about people. Paying attention to people seems to be a repeating theme among successful companies. One of the eastern shore's most successful businessmen, Mr. Dick Bernstein, stated recently at a local chamber business expo, that taking care of employees is one of his four guiding principles in business.

In the above noted article, Ernst & Young's Director of Campus and Diversity Recruiting, Allen Boston, was asked the question, "How can individuals deal with disability-related job discrimination?" Mr. Boston replied, "Discrimination against a qualified individual with a disability is illegal and should not be tolerated by any company. However, there may be legitimate concerns about whether or not a candidate can meet the requirements of the job. It is legal for an employer to focus on the job functions and ask whether the candidate can meet those requirements, even if the candidate has a disability. It is not considered discrimination if an employer asks a candidate with a known disability if he or she needs an accommodation to perform the essential functions of the job.

You can help avoid discrimination by staying focused in an interview on how you meet the job requirements. A good strategy is to anticipate any concerns a hiring manager or recruiter might have and to head them off in the way you present yourself. In addition to the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed for a given role, Ernst & Young looks for the same basic qualities in all candidates—an aptitude for learning, high energy, a drive to succeed, the ability to work well in teams, flexibility, confidence, and poise. Show your enthusiasm for taking on any challenge; that will go a long way to ease any concerns about the need to work differently or about inconveniences you or the firm might encounter. One member of our people with disabilities affinity group likes to say, 'I can do anything except hear.' That's the idea you want to communicate to everyone you meet in actions and attitude, taking the emphasis away from what you cannot do, and transferring it to all you can.

There may be times where you genuinely feel you are being discriminated against. In these instances, it's important to notify the company representatives designated to handle these complaints to ensure your concerns are addressed immediately."

Communication is so critical in heading off problems. Does your company, no matter how big or small, have an open line of communication? Do you have a diversity policy and does it include people with disabilities?