

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
Putting Ability to Work www.esbln.org
By Jackie Gast, Director

Over the past year, I have had employers or governments ask me about accommodations for employees or associates. One example is the One Stop Job Market who was in need of an accessible podium for the many meetings held there. An accessible podium looks like a regular podium but shorter and with adjustable height capability. A businessperson or individual in a wheel chair can fit comfortable behind it and so can a short person. I know someone who is 4' 9" and you can imagine it would be a little difficult for that person to speak behind a typically sized podium.

You might think my first move to find an accessible podium was to search the internet for ACCESSIBLE PODIUM. I could have done that but instead I had someone else do the work for me, JAN. JAN is Job Accommodation Network. The JAN is a free service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) of the U.S. Department of Labor and represents the most comprehensive resource for job accommodations available. Its web site is www.jan.wvu.edu hosted by West Virginia University.

Why do I use JAN? First, it is fast. I like fast because I am the type of person that tries to fit too much into a minute and I refuse to use 800 numbers that waste my time (anyone try to get personal computer help lately??). If I spend more than three minutes on the phone with JAN from start to finish, it is my fault. They do not ask who I am or why I need information. They get straight to the point. Second, they have a free 800 number, 800-526-7234. I like to save money. Third, I get a knowledgeable, real person on the phone in just one or two automated inquiries.

When I called JAN about the podium, they e-mailed a list of vendors to me within minutes. By the way, the podium can also be used for other purposes like a portable table for a one-man (woman) registration table. In addition to the podium, I also had an inquiry about a portable PA (Public Address) system for meeting participants with hearing impairments. This device can be used for our aging community as well, me included. Again, service from JAN was fast, free and knowledgeable.

A health care facility recently asked me about an accommodation for a deaf painter they just hired. They were concerned about how to evacuate this individual in case of an emergency. JAN suggested many options like blinking lights in every hallway (which would be costly as this is a large facility) as well as a vibrating pager tied into the emergency system. Not only would this pager, at a cost of about \$150, notify this individual in case of emergency but it could also be used as a regular communication device for disseminating work information, office parties and other company business.

The next time you have an accommodation question, call JAN or call the ES BLN 410-749-0144.