

I was talking to a business woman recently who works for Bank of America. She is a customer service auditor in their credit card division. She is the one who may listen in on your conversations when you have to call your credit card company for whatever reason. You know the drill, "This call may be monitored or recorded for customer service purposes." She actually does listen in. Anyway, as you can imagine, she's on her computer a lot. One day she was having computer problems so she called her information technology support person. He proceeded to try to fix the problem over the phone. She was frustrated, tried to answer the questions but finally said, "Look, you will just have to come over and see for yourself." Again, the IT person wanted to try to resolve the problem over the phone with a few more questions to which she responded, "I really cannot tell you anymore. Can you just come over and look at it? You really need to see what it is doing." The IT person, realizing her frustration, agreed to go to her office. After about 15 minutes or so, the IT person shows up at my acquaintance's station. He arrives using a walking stick that is used by people who are blind. Yes, the IT guy was blind. You can imagine my acquaintance's surprise and embarrassment, especially after using all those sight words. After a good laugh, I asked if he solved her problem. With a big smile, she said, "Yes, he did!"

How is it that a person who is blind can utilize a computer? Thanks to screen readers or text-to-speech voice synthesizers, software programs, screen magnifiers (there are different degrees of blindness) and internet based software, those who are blind can work using computers. Quoting WebAnywhere, it is "possible for people who are blind to access information over the Internet from almost any computer. All they have to do is visit www.webanywhere.cs.washington.edu, which provides a screen-reader interface that translates Web-based text to speech and reads the content aloud."

I was talking to a friend of mine who works for Blue Cross Blue Shield in Texas about a lawyer who I have been emailing that happens to be blind. She was very surprised that he could use a computer. This friend has been in the insurance business for about 25 years and has approximately 100 people who work for her. Although she is not in human resources (she actually is a customer service auditor, too), she was unaware a person who is blind was capable of using the computer, internet, etc. I told her about the above resources and also told her about the One-Stop Career Centers located around the country from which to recruit employees. She was not aware of them. In her area, there were at least five One-Stop Career Centers. These centers typically have access to many of the resources mentioned above.

Just think, if you became blind, you could still work!