Q: At what time should an applicant disclose a disability?

A: This is a question that many job hunters are concerned about, and it does not have a single answer that would fit all situations. If disclosed too soon, a disability might put an applicant out of the running (illegal, but it does happen, unfortunately). If it is revealed later on, the employer might feel that the applicant (who could be an employee by then) was deceptive earlier. It is a call that only the job hunter can make, depending on the situation and his/her judgment.

First, if you can perform all the required duties of a job, then you are qualified for that job, and that’s what you should focus on in your resume and cover letter and interview(s). Just as any other applicant would, you need to convince the employer that you are a strong candidate for that position.

Some things to consider in deciding when to inform the employer:

- The nature of the disability: Is it “visible”? Would accommodations be required for an interview? If accommodations would be needed for the interview then you’d have to disclose it when contacted to set up an interview.

- If it would not affect your ability to perform the job, then it is probably not necessary to reveal it prior to being hired, and maybe not even later on.

- In what way(s) would it be likely to affect job performance? What accommodations would be needed? Would accommodations be required daily, or occasionally, or rarely? In general, the greater the need for accommodation(s), the earlier in the hiring process you’d want to disclose it.

- For some positions it is possible that having a disability could increase your chances of getting the job, for example, if the job involved educating others about disabilities or demonstrating assistive technology. If that is the case, then reveal it on your resume or in your cover letter.

The more you know about the position and the employer, the better, both in terms of deciding when to reveal a disability and in general for you as an applicant.

As an applicant with a disability you also want to find out from the employer how much flexibility there is in that position, and at that workplace. For example, you might ask if working from home is possible or if there is flexibility as to work hours. This can make the difference between a comfortable work situation that works for both you and your employer and one that is a bad fit.
Thank you and good luck!

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