

Should I Reveal My Diagnosis at Work?

As a career coach, many clients come to me with concerns about losing their jobs due to ADHD characteristics that interfere with their productivity, enjoyment, or ability to do the work. They are often in a panic and steeped in feelings of overwhelm and stress. This is accompanied by self-doubt and myriad other feelings that impact their work.

When you feel the need for accommodation, having concern for disclosing your diagnosis is normal. No one wants a label at work. The question is, “Will I lose my job or might I benefit if I reveal my ADHD?”

Most career experts suggest that informing your boss of your diagnosis and need for accommodation is not a good strategy. Unfortunately, I am in agreement.

Consider the following before taking the next steps.



Will Accommodations Help If I Do Not Like My Job?

Do you need accommodations to make a job you already enjoy easier to navigate? Or are you in the wrong job, where accommodations won't help?

Answer these questions truthfully.

Pre-diagnosis, I worked as a legal secretary. I was fired from over ten jobs. Getting fired had nothing to do with my skills. In reality, there were few, if any, secretarial jobs that suited me. I loathed the work. I was not organized. I was bored and easily overwhelmed with the tasks, most of which I found onerous. I did not like taking orders from attorneys, or anyone else for that matter.



My skills got me hired, but my ADHD got me fired. This took a toll on my self-confidence. Sound familiar?

I returned to graduate school in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling, a direction that was exciting for me. That was over thirty years ago. I continued to work as a secretary throughout graduate school. But this time, I knew it was a means to an end with a light at the end of the tunnel. My attitude shifted, which made the work more tolerable.

The ADHD brain is interest-based. We really do need to enjoy what we do, or risk consequences.

Today, however, the skills I used as a secretary allow me to type with the speed of lightning and check myself grammatically. I use them on my terms. I enjoy writing and do more of it. I also get help from other professionals on the tasks I don't enjoy doing and have no desire to learn such as editing, formatting my website, and accounting. Asking for and accepting help is another a form of self-accommodation.

Once I was trained and began working in my current field, my employers tried to find ways to accommodate me! They allowed me to skip weekly reports and work from home to appease my desire for flexibility.



If you continue to work in a job or for a company you do not align with, no amount of accommodation will make it better or easier.

You are likely in the wrong job if you:

- Wake up in dread
- Are easily overwhelmed by simple tasks
- Feel your job is not what you signed up for
- Don't enjoy the people you work with
- Find the work environment unfriendly or elitist
- Get bored easily
- Don't enjoy most of your tasks
- Are exhausted or have trouble sleeping
- Constantly fear being fired
- Make small, simple, and repeated mistakes
- Know in your gut that you should be doing something else, but you don't have a plan B

Are there short-term fixes?

If several items from the above list apply to you, accommodations alone won't fix your job in the long run. For now, list exactly what you need to get the job done efficiently and start self-accommodating. At least, this can be a short term so solutiwwhile you make other plans.



Is your company accommodation-friendly?

I once spoke with a manager of a group of state engineers who was frustrated with his ADHD employee. "If only she would take the ten minutes a week to complete the report for our department!" he told me, exasperated. However, he also acknowledged that she might be the most gifted engineer in his department.

I suggested he schedule ten minutes weekly to sit down and go through the report items with her. As if a lightbulb went off in his head, he exclaimed, "Yes, I can do that!" Small accommodations like this can help both parties to succeed.

Is there a manager or employee whom you could ask for help on a task? At the very least, their answer could be telling.

If your employer has a policy of helping employees achieve their goals and making accommodations, you are in a good position to negotiate. In a state or federal position, this will likely require documentation by accredited sources such as a psychiatric report of your diagnosis. Check your employee handbook for related policies.

Certain accommodations can be short-term fixes while you explore your career options. Having a plan B can make all the difference, not only in how you experience the job but in your ability to do the actual work.



What accommodations will enhance my work and productivity if I enjoy what I do?

Do you enjoy your work and feel accommodations would enhance your day-to-day productivity?

If yes, see p.69, **Five Steps to Self-Accommodation at Work**. Answer in detail. When finished, prioritize your top accommodations to give you a a place to start.

Would headphones help?

Do you need more flexibility with when and/or where you work?

What else would help you?

Interest-based work is always best

If you don't actually like your job, you are clearly in the wrong one. Start with acceptance and decide that, if you are going to stay for a while longer, you will need some self-accommodation tweaks.

Once you determine you are in the wrong job and understand that your current situation is bound to repeat itself (and may already have), **focus on your preferences over your strengths**. You want to apply strengths that you truly enjoy using! Be honest and judgment-free about your preferences.

I've found that happy employees with ADHD tend to be confident, clear, and scrappy. They are masters of self-accommodation when motivated by a job they love.

If you like your work and just need headphones or a speech recognition program to get the job done, that is one thing. But, if you dislike your employer, coworkers, job tasks, or company, it is time for a plan B. You deserve to do work that you enjoy!



Five Steps to Self-Accommodate at Work

Before choosing to disclose your ADHD diagnosis for the purpose of receiving accommodations, take these steps to determine your needs and self-accommodate. Record your answers here or in your notebook for more space.

- 1** Clarify your accommodation needs and list them out. What do you need to do your best work? Imagine your ideal workspace and hours. Do you work best at home or elsewhere? Be honest with yourself.
- 2** Describe how each accommodation will help you accomplish your goals on the job. Will it reduce stress, allow for better focus and productivity, or something else?
- 3** Prioritize your list of accommodation needs in order of importance. Write it out in this order.
- 4** Implement your accommodations beginning at the top of your prioritized list. What do you need to do this? Are there any barriers to overcome?
- 5** Describe your goal. Is it to remain in your current job with new accommodations or is it time to explore other options? What have you learned from this exercise?