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Owning Your True Role in the Interactive Process: Communicator in Chief

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When it comes to managing disability accommodations, communication isn't just helpful, it's essential. And the disability compliance coordinator (DCC) is, in essence, the communicator in chief for an organization. This role may entail acting as the central educator and navigator for everyone involved in the interactive process. The DCC's ability to communicate clearly, consistently, and successfully across multiple platforms will determine whether your organization's process is legally compliant, as well as humane, effective, and trusted.

Because people respond to different communication methods, your strategy should be multifaceted. Use the full range of communication tools available, including in-person conversations, phone and video calls, email, and traditional mail. Each format has its place in ensuring transparency, accessibility, and mutual understanding. And don't underestimate the value of software tools such as task management systems, secure file-sharing platforms, and electronic signature solutions, which can help teams manage the process efficiently and keep all parties aligned.

Flexibility With Structure

The core best practice four steps of the interactive process to be in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act remain consistent. But the way you execute these steps should be tailored to your organization's culture and to specific employees. For example, initial intake might be best handled by phone or videoconference, depending on what makes an employee feel most comfortable. Regardless of the conversation venue, always follow up with written confirmation via email and/or mail to document the start of the process.

Using Communication and Tech Tools Wisely: A Step-by-Step Guide

The guidance below will help you navigate the interactive process:

- 1. Communicate with the employee to gather work restrictions and job function data:** When working with healthcare professionals, assess and use all available communication options to collect medical documentation listing functional limitations, leave needs, and duration. While many healthcare providers still rely on fax, some may be open to email. Use both channels to request medical clarification. Confirm receipt and follow up in writing to keep the process moving. Collecting data here can help you reduce known and unknown biases from your process.
- 2. Engage, interact, and explore accommodation options:** Once you receive clear medical documentation, communicate this data to the employee in writing. Don't stop here though. Schedule a conversation to explain how the information is being interpreted and to discuss next steps. Leverage online resources to research accommodation options, and invite collaborative problem-solving from everyone involved.
- 3. Schedule and conduct interactive meetings.** Ensure all necessary parties are included in discussions and decision-making. Send meeting invites by email and mail, and confirm attendance by phone. Choose in-person



or videoconferencing based on organizational norms and individual preferences. Take notes during the meeting. If you host a virtual meeting, use tools like Docusign to capture signatures digitally.

- 4. Follow through and implement plans.** After the meeting, it's go time. Execute agreed-upon actions and use task management software, such as Asana, Trello, or ClickUp, to track deliverables, assign follow-ups, and add progress notes. This step ensures that no commitment slips through the cracks.
- 5. Centralize and share information.** With so many moving parts, secure document storage and sharing platforms are essential. Tools like OneDrive, SharePoint, and Dropbox allow you to store and share key documents with stakeholders, maintain version control, and ensure that everyone has access to the most current information.

Acting as DCC is more than relaying information. It requires you to build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and guide everyone through what can often be a complex and emotional process. The more intentional and multifaceted your communication strategy, the more confidence all parties will have in the process and in you.