



Adaptive Needs in the Workplace for Visually Impaired Employees

Employers with at least 15 employees must adhere to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal law that prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The ADA includes visual impairment, if the individual is limited in regular living activities as according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. To comply with ADA, employers may need to make adaptations to accommodate an employee with a visual impairment.

- **Accessible Technology:** Modern accessible technology has hugely impacted the lives of those with visual impairments. Employing technology can help employees accomplish their duties whether they are working from home, in a meeting at the office or on the go. Computers are now an essential tool for many jobs, but an employee with a visual impairment will need special software to effectively use a computer. Screen reader software reads the information on the screen, so the employee can make effective communications easier. Other programs also allow the user to speak into a microphone or headset to type or control the computer. This technology makes typing easier and eliminates the need for a mouse, which is quite challenging or impossible to use for someone with a severe vision impairment.
 - **Microsoft's Windows 10 and Office 365**
 - **Windows Hello** is a biometric sign-in system for Windows 10 that uses a near infrared (IR) imaging camera or fingerprint reader instead of a password to identify the user.
 - **Magnifier** makes things on the screen much easier to see.
 - **Narrator** can be used to read aloud what is displayed on the screen and Scan Mode helps users move through the text even faster.
 - **Color filters** can be used to boost contrast or remove color from the display completely. This can help those with color blindness, light sensitivity, or a simple personal preference.
 - **Request accessible content** Office 365 addresses this by notifying employees of another's preference for accessible content, and by providing tools in Office to check the accessibility of a document before it is sent.
 - **Other Types of Assistive Technology**
 - **Dedicated screen reader software**
 - **OCR**
 - **Braille displays**
 - **Video and portable magnifiers**
 - **Accessible softphones**
 - **Artificial Intelligence** has ushered in another new wave of technologies that help the visually impaired.

- **Microsoft's Seeing AI:**
 - **Google's Lookout:**
- **Voice-Assisted Technologies** enable a user to search the Internet and perform a wide variety of tasks using only their voice, from start to finish.
 - **Amazon Echo**
 - **Google Home**
 - **Apple's Siri**
 - **Microsoft's Cortana**
- **Alternative Formats for Paper Documents:** To read documents in written form, whether paperwork, manuals or any other written information, alternative formatting becomes necessary so the vision-impaired employee can access the information on their own. For an employee who is not completely blind, a large print version or magnifying machine may be options. Others may require a version of the documents in Braille, auto recorded or on the computer where they can use the screen reading program.
- **Environmental Modifications:** Small modifications to the environment increase the ability of a visually impaired employee to maneuver the building. Contrasting colors allows a person with limited sight to identify different surfaces. A colored strip along the edge of each stair helps the employee more easily find and navigate the stairs with a reduced risk of falling. Door frames in a color that contrasts with the walls also helps an individual with some vision to enter and exit more easily. Plenty of lighting in the work area aids in work tasks. Adding Braille lettering to signs and office equipment allows the employee to be self-sufficient for daily work tasks.
- **Policy Flexibility:** Most companies establish policies for all employees. A visually impaired employee may need some flexibility in those policies through a reasonable request to perform their job. Examples include allowing a service animal and adjusting their work schedule due to the availability and timing of transportation to work may be needed.