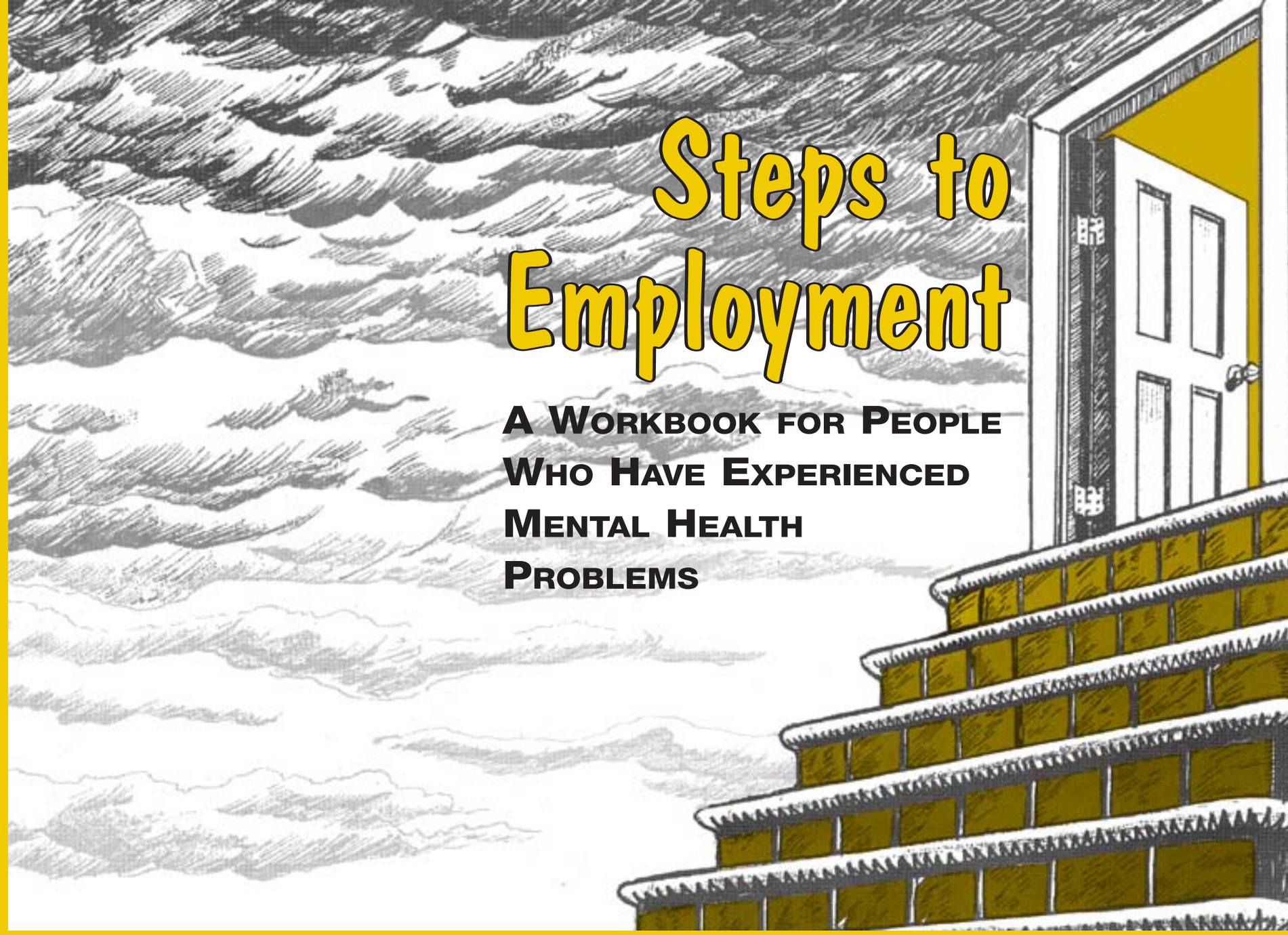

Steps to Employment

A Workbook for People Who Have Experienced Mental Health Problems

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Steps to Employment is the culmination of years of effort by many people. At the Canadian Mental Health Association, National Office, we have had the issue of employment on our agenda for a long time.

An earlier initiative was to try to change the way workplaces relate to employees. After consulting with employers, we produced an employers' guidebook (Diversity Works) on how to accommodate people with mental illness in the workplace. Next we worked with CMHA branches in four different provinces to generate mainstream, permanent employment for people with mental health problems. In this project, called "Access to Real Work", the sites demonstrated a number of different ways to create employment, and taught us a great deal about the many facets of "real work".

The "Access to Real Work" project resulted in two documents which both fed directly into this workbook, and which were both written by people who had experienced the mental health system. Heather McKee wrote *Strategies For Success: A Consumer's Guide To The Workplace*, and Marjorie Edwards expanded on Heather's work with the Let's Work Handbook. We are very grateful to Heather and Marjorie for their excellent ideas, insights, and writing. This book would not have been possible, and perhaps not even imaginable, if it had not been for their groundwork.

There is another element which has been essential to the production of this workbook, and that has been the opportunity to consult with consumer/survivors across Canada. All four of the "Access to Real Work" project sites: Alberta South Region; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Metro Toronto; and Fredericton/Oromocto Region, participated in the development of this book. In each site a consumer and CMHA staff person brought together new or existing groups of consumer/survivors to give us input.

These groups reviewed drafts of the workbook and provided continuous feedback on everything from Table of Contents, to usefulness and appropriateness of the content, to relevant case examples. The various groups helped to keep the workbook focused on people with mental health problems – their particular needs, issues, and concerns. The result is a product we think is unique and relevant, for it reflects the ideas and experiences of the people who have been through the mental health system themselves. Some quotes from consumers we've consulted can be found throughout the workbook. We're most grateful for all the time and effort expended by the groups and by the site leaders who organized them: Bonnie Thiessen and Luke Sander in Alberta South, Bev Goodwin and Brenda Atwood in Thunder Bay, Andrew Brown and Paullette Marshall in Metro Toronto, and Marjorie Edwards and Wendy Kent in Fredericton.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the ongoing support for this and our other employment projects from Human Resources Development Canada, and particularly Claudette Perron. Throughout the years of our working in this area, we have been grateful to HRDC for financial, practical, and even emotional support for our efforts. That support has made all the difference.

Many thanks also to:

- The consumer focus groups that went through the chapters as they were being developed, generously providing extensive feedback and personal references. Their contributions helped us keep the content realistic and meaningful.
  - Fredericton Vocational Support Group, New Brunswick
  - Members of the Networking Group at Job Quest, Toronto, Ontario
  - New Foundations Clubhouse Focus Group, Thunder Bay, Ontario
  - Focus groups organized by CMHA, Alberta South region
- Ed Pomeroy, the volunteer on the CMHA National Mental Health Services Work Group, who has provided invaluable help and leadership to all our recent projects on employment
- Joanne Lindsay, who coped cheerfully with impossible deadlines, kept everything organized and on schedule, and skillfully wrote (and re-wrote…) the text
- Andrew Brown, who not only helped organize the Metro Toronto focus groups, but consulted with us on production and created all the wonderful illustrations which have brought this workbook to life
- The CMHA National Consumer Advisory Council which reviewed the content and met for a consultation on dissemination and applications of the workbook, and especially the chairperson, Julie Flatt, for her useful suggestions about all aspects of the project
- Heather McKee from Job Quest in Toronto who helped to plan this book and generously assisted with getting us feedback through a Job Quest group
- Glen Dewar, of the CMHA National Mental Health Services Work Group and National Board, for his helpful comments and suggestions
- Sandra Sarner for design of the workbook, her excellent desktop publishing skills and her sense of what we were trying to achieve

Bonnie Pape
Director of Programs and Research
CMHA National

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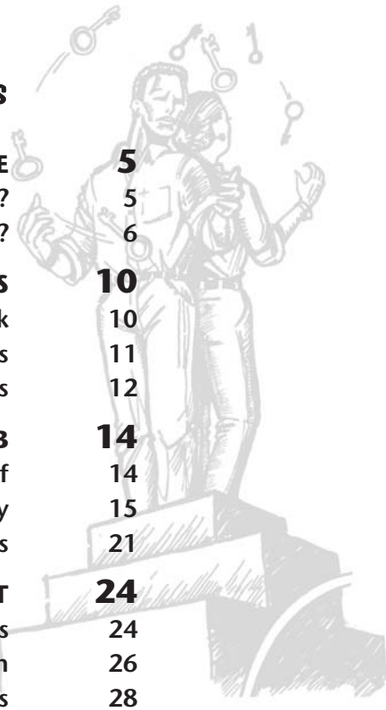

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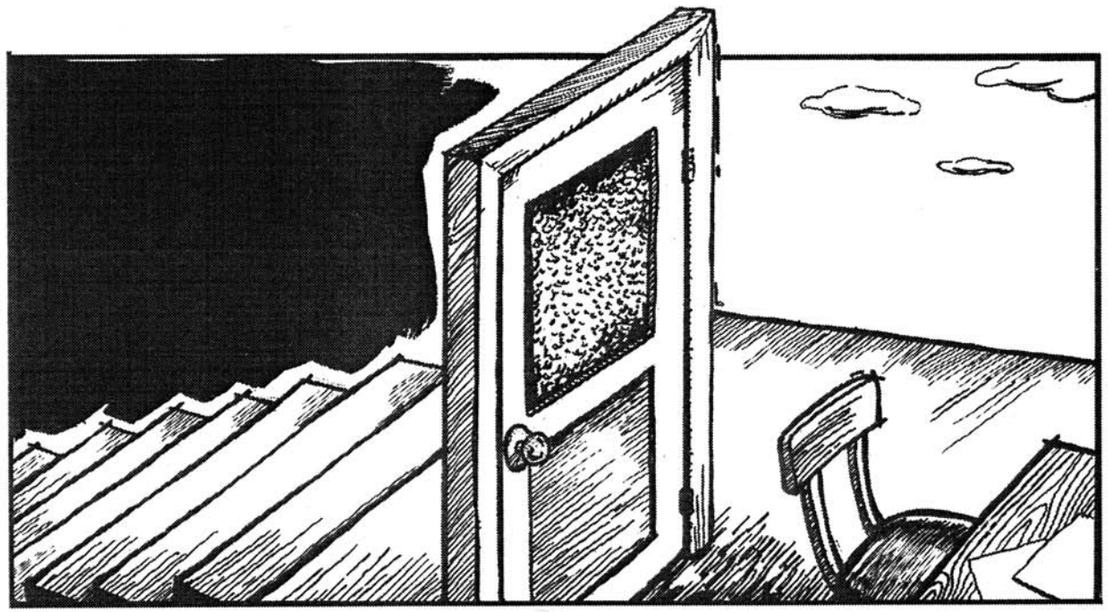
Setting THE Scene 1

Is work important?

Being able to work is important to many people, although this might be for a variety of reasons. The right to meaningful employment is a fundamental component of life in a healthy and democratic community. Working for a living can bring a sense of dignity and self-worth. Having a job provides a feeling of contributing to, and belonging to, the community. When we go to work, we have opportunities to meet and socialize with others, such as co-workers, those we share transportation with, those we meet while having a lunch or coffee break. By understanding your own motivation for work, you can identify some of the benefits you expect work to provide. When starting a job searching process, it helps to begin by discovering what would make work a valuable experience for you personally.

Working can make it easier to have a comfortable life. When we work, we earn money that pays for the things we need for living day-to-day. While a regular pay check does not always mean financial independence, it does help to develop the self-esteem that



comes from knowing you have some control over your lifestyle. Working also provides opportunities to grow, to learn and to try out new skills and abilities. Altogether, work can make community life a more satisfying experience. In some cases, work can make living with a mental health problem easier to handle. It can even become part of a healing process.

At the same time, work can be stressful, can leave you with little time for other activities or outside interests and can lead to aggravation of other problems you may have. This calls for careful stress management. This workbook will provide some strategies for handling the difficulties, as well as tips on making your entry into the workforce a smooth one.

What does it mean to work?

While going through this workbook, you will find ideas and exercises that will help you to think about, plan and develop your working future. It is meant to be a support for you, on a personal level. Let's start by looking at some of the benefits that work might lead you to. To help you think about these, work on the activity on the facing page, which provides a list of potential benefits.

"Work helps me to feel good about myself."

The purpose of this exercise is to help you to understand why work might be important to you. By clarifying the benefits you expect to come from a job, you are beginning to look at what motivates you to pursue your job search. When it comes time to choose the type of jobs you may wish to search for, you can assess how that job will allow you to achieve the benefits that are most important to you.

For example, if you find through this exercise that social interaction is an important benefit you hope to achieve through working, you will know that a factory job would probably not be as satisfying for you as a receptionist position. In a factory you would expect to interact more with machines and materials than with people, while in an office, you will be greeting and welcoming people as part of your job.

Is this workbook for you?

A successful job search requires a lot of positive thinking, about yourself, about your skills and about your possibilities. This workbook is meant to help you to build your self-confidence and a positive attitude about yourself, giving you ideas on how to find

Activity: Understanding the Benefits

Instructions:

1 Place a check mark ✔ beside the items that you think would be a benefit you would get by working. While you might find some of these benefits overlap, it helps to break them down into individual ideas, as a way of clarifying for yourself what is more important to you. If you think of some benefits not listed below, write them I the spaces provided at the end of the list.

2 It is useful to see which benefits are more important and which are less important. To show this, put a number next to each check mark indicating how important this benefits is to you, with "1" being the most important, "2" the next most important and so on. You might decide that some of these benefits are equally important to you. If so, you can give them the same number, i.e. there can be more than one "2".

Example: ___✔ 2___ sense of belonging

_____ income	_____ time structure
_____ basic necessities	_____ achievement
_____ benefits plan	_____ learning opportunities
_____ sense of purpose	_____ sense of belonging
_____ status	_____ identity
_____ social interaction	_____ self-esteem
_____ personal growth	_____ adventure
_____ challenge	_____ being a part of the community
_____ contributing to society	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

a job. As you work on the exercises in this manual, you will get to know yourself through identifying your strengths, while also understanding your expectations about work and how work might fit into your life. Some of the information and exercises are meant for you to read, think about and complete on your own. You may find you get more out of some of the exercises if you are part of a group, like a support group for people who have had mental health problems who have come together to learn about job searching. If you aren't already part of a support group, you will get some ideas on how to find a group in your community.

Successful employment depends on a number of things. One of these is a close match between the individual worker and the job being done by that worker. This match depends on the worker's knowledge, skills, abilities, interests and needs. If the worker can do the job, and all the tasks that come as part of the job, then there is a good chance of success at the job. This workbook is meant to help you think about why you would like to work, and to decide what kind of job you might like to do. Once you have made these decisions, the workbook will then give you some ideas on how to go about finding a job that meets your needs, and some more ideas on how to keep that job and make it a successful experience for you.

"Work will help me to stretch ... to get out of my comfort zone."

Working through the activities in this workbook will take some effort on your part. In order to make it worthwhile for you, you need to be committed to following through with your job search, to develop your working life.

For all job-seekers the future seems very uncertain. For people who have experienced a mental illness, the job searching process can be even more anxiety producing. This workbook will help you to understand all parts of the process, and may help to reduce some of the anxieties you may have about your future work. At the very least, the workbook should help you prepare for all parts of the job search, so as to ensure it is a manageable and successful process for you.

The workbook divides the job search into six sections with a final chapter on preparing for a new job:

- **Chapter 2** helps you to understand barriers to work and to consider how a job may affect the income you currently receive.
- **Chapter 3** helps you to start building the resources you need to get through a job search. Through a variety of exercises, you will identify your own inventory of skills and use this inventory to develop a work objective that will guide you through the next steps.

- **Chapter 4** gives you some ideas on how to find out about job vacancies and how to build up your own support network so that news of job vacancies can quickly get to you.
- **Chapter 5** asks you to go back to the skill inventories you developed earlier, and shows you how to build on these in order to develop the written resources that will help your job search: applications, cover letters and resumes.
- **Chapter 6** provides guidelines and tips about interviews and how to make them work for you.
- **Chapter 7** reviews some of the things you should think about before disclosing your mental health problems to a potential employer or to co-workers.
- **Chapter 8** gives you ideas about preparing for a new job, managing the first few days on the job, coping with some of the day-to-day stresses of working and, finally, some of the things you might want to consider about your working future, including continuing education.

In developing this workbook, we have tried to focus on the realities of job searching, while at the same time helping you to realize that while your task may at times seem like a very difficult one, work can be found and might, in the long run, even be an enriching experience! The workbook includes some of the basic tools used by all who are looking for work. If they seem like a lot of work, keep in mind that finding work can be a full time job, one that involves hours and hours of facing challenges, learning more about yourself and about the working world. You should also keep in mind that over time your job searching strategies improve, with certain things getting easier with practice.

If you find this process a little overwhelming, or it makes you think you need help and support, then you should start by trying to find that help and support. Talk to your friends and family members about your need for help with your job search. Talk to the CMHA support workers in your area, find out if there is a support group of other job seekers that you can join. This workbook is designed for you to use on your own, by going through the exercises and following through on the job search ideas. But you might find it a lot easier to get through if you have a support group, or a personal friend with whom you can talk about your experience of going through the workbook and about your challenges with your own job search process.

Looking for work is never easy. But it is a manageable process, and learning to manage it is a useful skill. Find out how you can make it easier for yourself. Good luck!

2 Working BARRIERS AND FEARS

While the first chapter got you to look at why you want to work, this chapter will help you to make those first decisions:

Do I want to work at this point in my life?

Am I able to work right now?

If I am not ready to work right now, are there things I can do now that will make it easier to look for work later on?

Barriers to work

Barriers are obstacles that restrict or block opportunities for people with mental health problems who want to work. Barriers are those things that get in the way of working. Some barriers are imposed on us and some can be created by ourselves. While we might be able to find a way around the imposed ones, although this can be very difficult, those we create for ourselves need to be removed, or somehow dissolved. By understanding the barriers you face, you will be able to start the process of getting through them. Some barriers affect some people more severely than others. For example, transportation may be only a financial consideration for those who live in large cities that are well served by transit systems, while those living in rural communities may find the availability of transportation a major hurdle to overcome.

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Barriers to work include all those things that make working difficult. Financial barriers are those ways that lack of money limits options, including the ways that income assistance programs make it hard to risk entering the workforce. One financial barrier for many people who have had mental health problems is their existing medical plan, including long term disability (LTD). If you are on such a plan, and you start working, you might find it difficult to get back on. For some people, giving up an LTD plan to take a job seems foolhardy. Since private insurance providers do not cover a "pre-existing condition", your chance of getting similar insurance coverage from a new employer might be very low. And, by starting a new job, you might not be able to go back to the LTD that you were on before working.

In some provinces, your access to income assistance through welfare programs depends on your "employability." If you go off such a plan to go back to work, and you become ill again, your recent job might lead to you being classified as "employable", which in some provinces or territories can result in a reduced amount of income assistance. If this were to happen, you were better off, financially, before you went back to work.

For those on the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), there is an even more significant barrier: that of getting cut off from income assistance altogether if your case is reviewed and you are no longer assessed as "disabled". This has been known to happen when someone has entered a training program, even one that did not lead directly to a job. In some cases, volunteering has been interpreted by CPP as an indication that the volunteer is employable.

If you get income assistance through any of these plans, it may be worth your effort to check into the regulations for your plan and find out ahead of time about any consequences you might have to face. By establishing a good relationship with your benefits officer, you might find these kinds of issues can be handled with a more flexible interpretation and minimal stress.

Without an insurance plan that pays for medication, it is entirely possible that by earning money through a job, a person with a disability is left with less money at the end of the month than they had when they were not working. The following story illustrates some of these financial barriers.

Story of a Financial Barrier to Work

Natalie worked in a major provincial hospital as a lab technician for 12 years before getting sick. After three years of a mixture of hospital visits and at-home recovery time, she felt she was ready to manage working again. She was getting 80% of her previous take-home pay from her long-term disability plan at her previous work-place. This gave her approximately $1,400 per month. She also could claim all medical expenses, such as drugs and dental services, on the health plan. For Natalie this was worth an extra $175 per month.

Due to the nature of her illness, Natalie was not able to go back to her former job. Nor was there another job at the hospital that she could move into. Going back to work would require a different job and a different employer. But, in order to maintain her income level, Natalie would have to find a job that paid her as much as she would earn on her long-term disability, which was almost $18,900 per year. She didn't feel she could live comfortably on less money. Since Natalie wasn't sure she could manage working full time to start with, she knew there was little chance of her finding a part-time job that paid her this amount.

Natalie decided that she would start her route back to work by developing her new interests in working with people who have had mental health problems. She decided to volunteer with a local agency that ran community support programs. She found her medical and technical knowledge allowed her to make a unique contribution to the groups she worked with. This gave her a sense of contribution to her own community, while learning new skills in group facilitation and community development. Maybe she will be able to develop a new career for herself over time.

Attitudinal barriers: external and internal fears

Often barriers to work are social in origin, such as ignorance, fear, anxiety, prejudice and discrimination from a wider community that could include potential employers and co-workers. But barriers might also be internal ones, a lack of self-confidence or worrying over whether a job may be too stressful. People who have had mental health problems often have barriers related to anxiety and fear. Such things may lead one to sabotage one's own job search.

Included in this self-sabotage is a fear of losing sympathy and support from those close to you by moving out into a world of co-workers and a boss who will treat you

like any other person. Another fear is related to the way that information about ourselves may be used against us, as might have happened during an application process for disability benefits. Unfortunately, this fear may lead to a refusal to volunteer personal information. In a job interview, if you appear to hold back information you may be regarded as withholding or hiding something, leaving the impression that you are not trustworthy.

For those who have never had a job before, these internal fears might also include anxiety about the unknown world of work, where people have social or work behaviours that will seem unfamiliar if not completely strange. Going to work can mean big changes to your daily routine. Among the questions you need to ask yourself when you think about going to work include:

- Am I able to get up early in the morning to go to work?
- Am I able to ride public transit during rush hour, when it is crowded?
- What is the maximum amount of travel time I am willing and able to spend in order to get to work every day?

Answering these questions will help you decide if you are ready to work or not.

Another related fear is the fear of failure, based on uncertainty about whether or not your work performance will be satisfactory. By testing yourself at a job, you may also find you face your own limitations in a very public way. Learning to manage these fears may require you to do a lot of work, but the fears can all be overcome. By knowing yourself, your limitations and what might bring you to the edge of those limitations, you develop an understanding of your own coping strategies. Fears can be overcome through practice as well. Bolles suggests that you take "one situation a day where your normal behavior is avoidance, based on fear, and you take a risk that day, by acting differently than you normally would. One risk a day. With daily practice, you will get stronger and stronger. It's just like exercising your muscles."

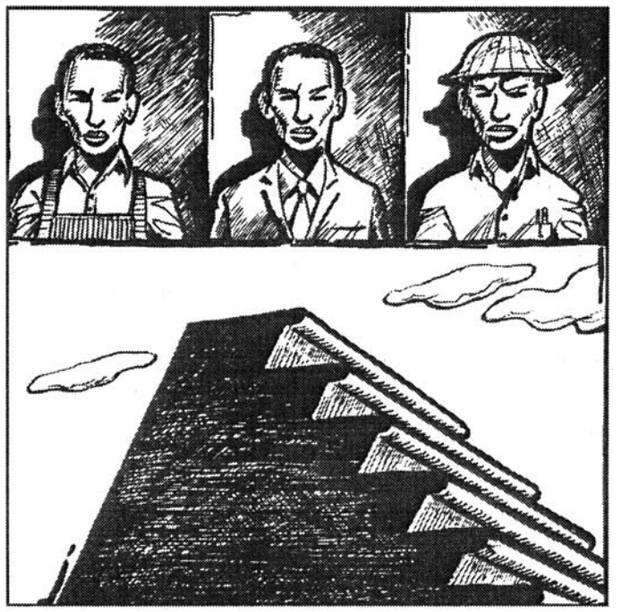
In order to pursue a successful job search, you need to identify those barriers you as an individual looking for work will face and how you can work around the obstacles. This can be done on your own, but you may find a group setting more useful for developing creative means of overcoming barriers and managing fears.

3 Preparing FOR A Job

Getting to know yourself

An effective and successful job search starts with knowing what you are looking for, including what kind of job, what kind of working conditions, what kind of pay and benefits. This chapter will help you to decide what you are looking for in a job. We will start out with some self-assessment and self-discovery exercises, sort of like taking a "picture" of yourself right now, today. These exercises will help you to focus on this picture, so that you can be clearer about your expectations of a job. By taking the time to complete the exercises carefully, you will begin to get some ideas about what type of work you should be looking for and what type of employer you would target in your job search. Once you have determined a work objective, you will be able to target your search at jobs closely aligned with your personal goals.

Since these exercises are about you, you should keep in mind that you are the expert. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Of all the people you might talk to about your job search, you are the only one who has all the relevant information about yourself. Keep this in mind as you work through these exercises. Think about what you know about yourself, what you can do, what you like to do and what you would like to be able to do.



If you find that your analysis and assessment of yourself is not very positive, you might want to get some help with the exercises in this chapter. Talk to other people who know you well, who have worked with you recently through a community support program or other voluntary work you have done. They may be able to identify work skills you have that you might

have forgotten about, or never considered to be skills useful in a work place. If you have a support group helping you with your job search, you might want to share your inventories with others in the group. Input from others may bring a sharper focus to your snapshot of yourself.

Self-analysis: a skills inventory

Skills fall into three categories: technical skills, transferable skills and personal skills.

Technical Skills

These are specialized skills and knowledge that you have learned in a formal or informal educational setting, like a high school, a college or in your community. You might have learned them while working at a previous job, by volunteering at a community agency or by helping someone in your family do some work around the house.

Transferable Skills

These are functional skills that allow you to carry out a variety of tasks. You have been developing transferable skills all your life, even if you haven't been aware of it! You will use these skills in almost any work setting, so they can be "transferred" from one job to another. You will have learned some of these skills in your home, in a school or training program, or in your community.

Personal Skills

These are self-management skills that you use to communicate your attitudes and your motivations. These skills reflect your personality and your work habits, as well as skills developed through coping with mental illness and the mental health system.

Over the next few pages, you will develop an inventory of your skills. Use this inventory to help you develop a clear idea of what kind of work you are looking for. You will also find that the skill inventories you put together in this chapter will be helpful in Chapter 5, when you will pull together all your skills, experience and education to develop your resume. The final exercise in this chapter will help you to develop your work objective, leading you to an exercise through which you imagine a typical work day.

Technical Skills

Use this page to make a list of all the technical skills you have learned throughout your life. Remember, you might have learned these skills in school, in a previous job, as a volunteer or through your family or community life. Some of these skills might have developed through your experience with the mental health system. These technical skills are ones you might use in a job, such as:

- operate a cash register while working part-time at a local store, gas station or coffee shop;
- operate a vehicle, machine or other equipment;
- use a computer to do word or data processing. Note the type of software and hardware you know how to use;
- care for someone who is ill or needs medical or nursing support;
- prepare a budget and keep financial records, such as those records needed to fill out income tax forms;
- adjust a carburetor or tune up a car;
- cut and style hair;
- transplant seedlings and care for a garden or operate a farm.

There are, of course, many more different technical skills. Don't let yourself be limited by the examples above! Identify your technical skills by completing the following sentence in as many ways as possible:

I have learned how to ...

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Transferable Skills

Use the next few pages to make an inventory of your transferable skills. These are skills that you might take for granted, but are also skills that would be useful in many workplaces. You may have learned them in your day-to-day life, by working at home with a family member or at a community agency, and you may have used them in other jobs you have had. Again, maybe you learned these skills through your experiences with the mental health system.

You might want to go through this list more than once, as each time you think about these types of skills, you may think of more to add to the list. Once you have developed your personal Inventory of Transferable Skills, keep it with you as you go through the rest of this workbook. You will want to refer back to it as you develop your job search plans and tools, including a resume.

Instructions:

1 Start by thinking about whether or not you can do these things and put a check mark ✔ in the space provided. You might find it useful to have a dictionary close by. If you have skills that are not included in the lists below, feel free to add to the lists in the spaces provided.

2 After you have gone through the whole list, look again at those you have checked and put a second check mark ✔✔ next to those you can do really well.

3 On a third and final review of the list, put a (circle) around those skills that you really like using. Since you enjoy using these skills the most, you would probably find a job that requires the circled skills to also be enjoyable. That might help when it comes time to identify potential jobs you should look for.

Once you have gone through the lists three times, take a separate piece of paper and make your personal Inventory of Transferable Skills by writing down all the skills you have checked, starting with the circled ones, followed by those with two check marks and ending with those with one check mark. In this way, you will easily see those skills you most enjoy using, as they are at the top of your list.

This exercise begins on the next page.

Transferable Skills page 2

◆ ◆ ◆

Working with People Skills

_____ assisting
_____ caring for
_____ conflict resolution
_____ consulting
_____ co-operating
_____

_____ counseling
_____ demonstrating
_____ helping
_____ instructing
_____ listening
_____
_____

_____ problem solving
_____ serving
_____ teaching
_____ training
_____
_____

◆ ◆ ◆

Communication Skills

_____ advising
_____ interpreting
_____ making presentations
_____ negotiating
_____

_____ persuading
_____ promoting
_____ reading
_____ speaking
_____
_____

_____ summarizing
_____ talking
_____ translating
_____ writing
_____
_____

◆ ◆ ◆

Working with Information and Number Skills

_____ analyzing
_____ budgeting
_____ calculating
_____ checking
_____ evaluating
_____

_____ inspecting
_____ memorizing
_____ ordering
_____ organizing
_____ researching
_____

_____ reviewing
_____ scheduling
_____ selecting
_____ verifying
_____
_____

Transferable Skills page 3

◆ ◆ ◆

Creative Skills

_____ arranging	_____ designing	_____ inventing
_____ building	_____ developing	_____ originating
_____ cooking	_____ devising	_____ performing
_____ creating	_____ generating	_____ producing
_____ demonstrating	_____ improvising	_____ predicting
_____	_____	_____

◆ ◆ ◆

Leadership Skills

_____ administering	_____ directing	_____ motivating
_____ coaching	_____ facilitating	_____ negotiating
_____ conducting	_____ influencing	_____ planning
_____ consensus building	_____ initiating (starting)	_____ recognizing
_____ controlling	_____ inspiring	_____ reinforcing
_____ co-ordinating	_____ leading	_____ rewarding
_____ deciding	_____ managing	_____ supervising
_____	_____	_____
		_____

◆ ◆ ◆

Manual and Mechanical Skills

_____ adjusting	_____ operating	_____ repairing
_____ constructing	_____ painting	_____ servicing
_____ installing	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Personal Skills

Review the following list and check off those words that describe your self-management skills, those skills that help to define your attitudes and motivations. The next step is outlined at the end of the list.

_____ accepting	_____ efficient	_____ organized
_____ adaptable	_____ encouraging	_____ patient
_____ active	_____ energetic	_____ persevering
_____ capable	_____ expressive	_____ quick learner
_____ cheerful	_____ friendly	_____ sincere
_____ committed	_____ helpful	_____ thrifty
_____ competent	_____ intuitive	_____ trustworthy
_____ creative	_____ mature	_____ unpretentious
_____ dependable	_____ open-minded	_____ warm
_____ discreet	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Once you have done this, the next step is to write, on a separate piece of paper, the situations where you used these skills and the results you have achieved. Use action words, such as those below, to describe how you used the skill and the rest of your work. These descriptions will be useful to you when you are writing your resume and when you are being interviewed for a job. By writing these descriptions now, you will be well prepared for the following chapters of this workbook and for a successful job search.

The following list of action words may help you to describe how you used your skills and the results you achieved:

achieved	implemented	realized	sold	trouble-shot
adapted	improved	recommended	solved	uncovered
completed	increased	reduced	stimulated	unified
contributed	introduced	revamped	streamlined	upgraded
decreased	maintained	reviewed	strengthened	widened
doubled	managed	revitalized	structured	won
eliminated	opened	risked	succeeded	
established	proposed	saved	supported	
expanded	provided	simplified	transferred	

Describing Your Work Objective

By now you have accumulated a lot of inventory lists and a few descriptions of your skills, personal style and results. The last step before The Job Hunt is to use these materials to clarify the kind of work you will be looking for. You should answer the following questions in your description of your work objective:

◆ ***What are your most important considerations?***

Think about which of the following are most important to you: the money you would earn? the hours of work? the people you would work with? the stress level of the job? the health benefits? other benefits work might give you? other considerations?

◆ ***What skills would you like to use and develop?***
◆ ***What type of employer or workplace do you think would best suit you?***

On this point, you should think about all types of workplaces, including private or public companies, government, community agencies or businesses, or self-employment.

In the space below, write a short description of your ideal job, one that answers these questions.

My work objective: _____

Imagining a Typical Work Day

This final step in the process of getting ready to look for work will probably be a lot more fun than any of the inventory exercises you have just completed. This is the time to begin imagining the future, by imagining your ideal work day at your new job. Answer the questions below and on the next page as though you were currently working at your ideal job.

What time do you wake up in the morning in order to get to work on time? _____

What clothes do you wear to work? _____

How do you get to work? (Do you walk, take a bus, ride a bicycle or drive a car?)

How long does it take you to get to work? _____

Where do you go to work? (Think about the setting: rural, small town, suburb or city centre? What type of building do you work in? Where in the building do you work?)

What time does your work day start? _____

What are the tools you work with? (Pens and paper? Computer and telephone? Drills and hammer? Cash register and coffee machines?)

Who do you work for (an agency, the government, a large corporation, a small business, yourself?)

_____

Do you have a boss? Are you the boss? How is your work linked to others who work in the same place? How do you get along with your co-workers?

_____

_____

What do you spend most of your time doing? (In meetings? Alone? On the telephone? Answering questions from the public? Providing services to the public?)

_____

_____

_____

What part of your work do you enjoy the most? _____

_____

_____

Where do you have lunch? Are other people with you for lunch? _____

_____

What time does your work day end? _____

Do you take any of your work home with you? If yes, what kind of work do you do at home?

_____

Is every day the same? Or do your daily work activities change a lot?

_____

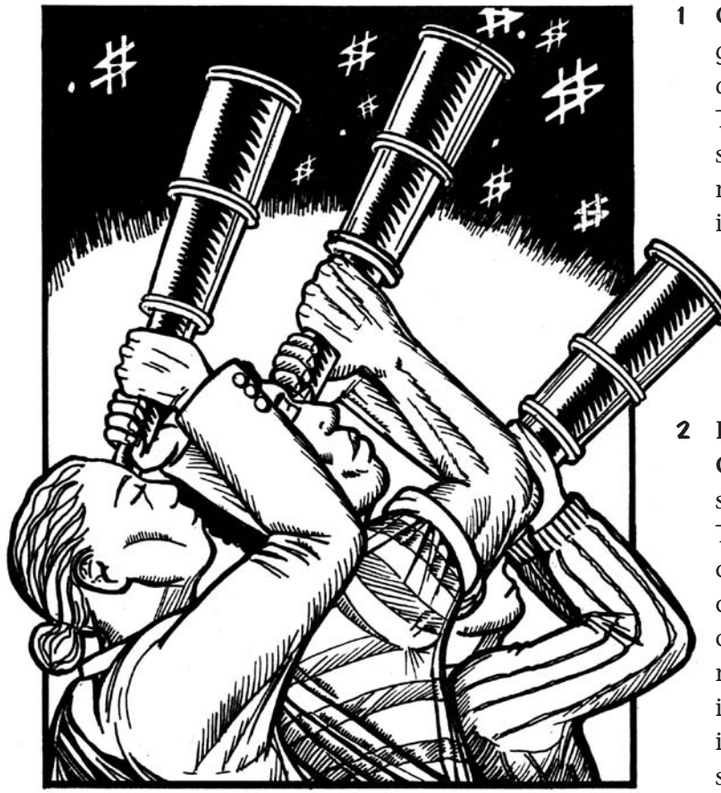
How much money do you earn through your work? _____

4 THE Job Hunt

Successful job hunting has many parts which fit together, each of which complements the others in a way that will give you a more complete view of the labour market. In this chapter we review a variety of activities that will help lead you to fulfilling your work objective.

Where to get information about job opportunities

The following are some sources of information about the labour market and potential job opportunities available in most communities:



1 **Classified ads** in newspapers: a good source of daily information about job leads available locally. This should not be your only source of information, but by reading these sections daily, your information about the types of jobs that are available, which employers are hiring, and often the rate of pay for these jobs, will always be current.

2 **Human Resources Canada Centres** (HRCCs) provide extensive support services to job seekers. They have fax machines, photocopiers, work space, Internet and computer access, a great variety of written, video and computer resource materials. You can find information about opportunities in certain industries and job search techniques. If you are part

of a group, have the leader or facilitator arrange for a guided tour of the facilities.

3 You can also get access to information on job opportunities through the **Internet**. Try to get access to the Internet through an HRCC, local public library, community or career counselling centre. Human Resources Development Canada's web site provides up-to-date labour market information, including a lot of job-finding ideas. It is available at http://www.worksearch.gc.ca

Another useful Internet site is Industry Canada (http://strategis.ic.gc.ca) where you will find information about new industry locations and economic trends that could lead to job opportunities. Additional job search information can be obtained through the many links from these sites to other web pages.

There are lots of job searching resources available through the Internet, such as newsgroups and mailing lists. If you are inclined, use key words through search engines as a tool to find information and opportunities.

4 **Yellow pages and other directories**: you can get a good idea of potential employers in your community by reviewing the yellow pages. A local map will help you to know where individual companies are in relation to transportation routes you may be using. Other directories for your community might list voluntary and non-profits agencies where community work or training opportunities might be available. Find these at the public library.

5 **Reference sections in public libraries**: the reference librarian will be able to lead you to information about specific companies, community agencies and levels of government. Let the librarian know you are looking for information to help you find work, and ask for trade publications, directories of community services, government information sources, etc.

6 **Personnel agencies**: these may have jobs available on a temporary or permanent basis. They will often start with some form of testing your skill level or other screening method to assess the type of job that would match your skills. These agencies usually get paid by employers when they find people that the employer needs, most often on the basis of a percentage of the salary to be paid to the employee. For example, the employer might pay an agency $15 per hour for a worker provided by an agency. Out of the $15, the agency might pay the worker $12 while keeping $3 to cover the cost of finding the worker.

Some agencies charge for helping you find work: be very clear about what you will

get from them before agreeing to pay anything.

7 **News stories**: daily news on the radio or TV, or in the newspapers will keep you up-to-date on what is happening in your community that might lead to changes in the labour market and job opportunities. For example, you may read in the newspaper about an agreement between a company and a local government, where the government agrees to charge a lower property tax rate in exchange for the company agreeing to move into the community, bringing with it 800 new jobs. You can expect that this company will soon be recruiting new workers to fill those jobs. Keeping informed through these information sources will help you learn to identity potential opportunities as they develop.

8 **Vocational Programs**: find out whether there are community agencies or a local board of education where you can take training courses, including job finding clubs. Many community-based training programs offer a work placement, where you work with an employer, usually as a volunteer, for two or three weeks at a time. Sometimes these voluntary positions can turn into jobs. If this doesn't happen, at least you have some recent work experience to put on your resume.

While the federal government provides for some training programs, most of these are only available to those currently collecting Employment Insurance (EI). Information about these programs is available at the HRCCs. Some provinces and territories offer additional training opportunities. Check local agencies to find out what is available in your community.

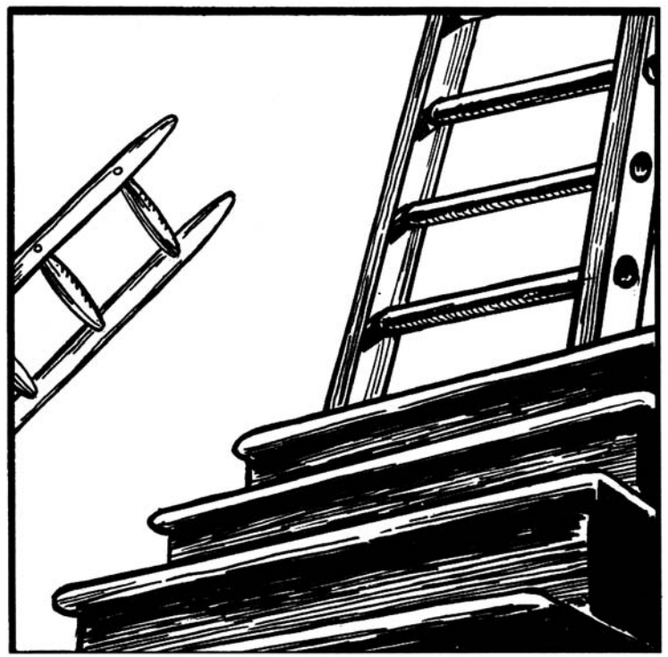
9 **Consumer/survivor organizations**. Some of these groups produce newsletters, such as information bulletins, while others may have self-help groups for people seeking employment. You might be able to find other newsletters published on a regular basis by Information Centres or other community agencies that provide support programs.

Networking: building your own support system

"It's not what you know, it's who you know."

You might have heard someone mention "the hidden job market", a term that refers to the fact that less than 20% of jobs available at any given time are ever advertised or posted in any public way. This doesn't mean that you will never get a job unless someone you know gives it to you. It does mean that you need to find ways to get information that might not be right there, in front of you. Networking is one way to get "below the

surface" of information available to the public.



When you are looking for work, one of your most valuable resources will be those people who already know you and something about your skills and your attitude towards work. You should let these people know when you are looking for work. They might have some ideas about jobs that you can follow-up on right away. Or they might remember you when they hear of opportunities, and give you a call to pass on the information. Don't be afraid to ask for help, such as ideas for your job search, leads or even referrals to potential jobs. Be sure you also show them you appreciate the help they are able to give you. In this way, you are letting them know they are important to you, that you value their contribution to your job search.

Members of your support network can help you in a variety of ways. They can:

- provide encouragement
- offer suggestions
- share relevant personal experiences
- offer resources, such as the use of a computer or Internet access
- direct you to resources or services you are not aware of
- listen
- teach you new skills
- give feedback on your plans, goals
- provide assistance or expertise
- provide distraction and laughter

Start building your support network through your family and friends. Talk to those people you have met through other support services you have used in the mental health system. Ask all of these people to refer you to others who may be able to help you, including others who may be, as you are, searching for a job.

If someone in your support network is doing a job that is close to your own work objective, you might want to consider asking them if they will agree to job shadowing. Job shadowing means that you would spend time with that person while they are doing the job, on a daily basis for a week or so. You would watch what they do and find out how they handle any stress that might be part of the job. This experience allows you to feel what it would be like to do the job, and whether or not you want to keep that job as a work objective. The person you are "shadowing" would have to speak to their own employer about your idea, and you would need to agree not to interfere with the work that is being done so that the employer can be assured that no time will be lost.

You might find it useful to develop a "map" of your support network. Make a list of everyone you think would be able to help and support you through your job search. Identify the kind of help they can provide for you, and verify this by asking them if they are willing and able to follow through with you. Each time you speak to that person, keep notes of any suggestions they give you. Next time you speak to them you can let them know how you used their idea. Think of people who fit into the following categories when you are developing the "map" of your support network, and add others that you think of:

- Family members
- Self-help networks
- Mental health service providers
- Co-volunteers
- Religious organizations
- Shopkeepers
- Friends
- Mental health professionals
- Neighbours
- Consumer/survivor groups
- Landlords
- Community workers

Informational interviews

This is a technique for building a support network for yourself by meeting with people you don't know but who would have information that would be useful to your job search. You would have found out about this person, and about how they might be able to help you, through someone in your support network. To use this technique successfully, you need to be assertive, expressing yourself in a straightforward way. The best approach is by telephone. Your goal will be to set up a short meeting with the person.

1 Introduce yourself: "Hello, my name is … "

2 Explain who referred you and why you are calling. Remember, you are looking for information, not asking for a job:

"_____ suggested that I call you to get some information about work in (for example) hospitality business (hotels and restaurants). I am thinking about working in this field and would like some further information before I decide."

3 Ask for a short meeting of between 15 to 20 minutes, at a time and place that is convenient for them.

You might find that the person you speak to can answer your questions right then, over the phone. If so, follow the guidelines for questions provided below. If they are not able to meet with you, but are interested in what you want to know from them, briefly describe your own background and work objective, asking if they know any employers looking for someone like you. Offer to send them a copy of your resume. Informational interviews are not the time to ask a potential employer for work. However, if they do have openings, and they have found your phone manner to be positive, they might tell you they would be interested in interviewing you. Or, they could give you the name of another employer who might have job opportunities.

If they do agree to meet with you for an informational interview, you should prepare to get the most out of the session. Make a list of the questions you want to ask. Plan to meet for about 15 to 20 minutes only. Be at the meeting place 5 minutes ahead of your scheduled time. Start with the most important questions. For example:

1 Ask how the person you are interviewing got a job in their field of work, and if their experience is typical for others in that field.

2 Ask about current issues and challenges within that field of work. For example, if it is the hospitality industry, are there types of jobs that are more available than others, or do they expect new growth in certain parts of the industry. Show that you understand the industry, that you have a basic understanding of the field, and that this interview is part of your on-going research in support of your work objective.

3 Ask for advice on where a person with your background and skills might fit into that particular industry. Give them a copy of your resume to show your background. If they mention certain types of jobs, ask more questions on how to get information on vacancies in those areas.

4 Ask for information on how new employees are recruited and how information about job opportunities is spread. For example, do they advertise in newspapers? Do they recruit through agencies? Is hiring done through networking and word of mouth?

5 Ask if there are other people they would recommend you talk to. Be sure to write down any names and telephone numbers they give you.

Your first informational interview may be a very stressful experience. But keep in mind that each time you do this, the next one will be that much easier for you. Keep in mind, too, that each informational interview will help you get better prepared for job interviews. More on these in a later chapter!

In order to keep track of the information you get through informational interviews, take some time soon after saying goodbye to the person to write down as much information as you can about your conversation. Include in your notes all of the things you learned about the industry that will help you with your ongoing job search. Remember to send a note to the person who met with you, thanking them for the time they spent with you and for the information they provided. Attach a resume if you didn't have a copy for them when you met. Your thank you note should go in the mail within two or three days of the interview. Keep in touch with that person as your job search progress. They might have job leads to pass on to you in a subsequent conversation.

Tips from Consumers for Handling the Stress of Job Searching or Stress on the Job

- eat well
- get enough rest, recreation and relaxation
- be kind to yourself and don't expect the impossible
- surround yourself with positive images and people
- set limits
- build on your strengths and accept your weaknesses
- establish a support network
- use relaxation techniques or try listening to relaxation tapes
- keep a journal, and list 5 positive things that have happened each day
- prepare your own crisis plan, naming the people who should be contacted in case of a crisis
- go slow
- practice your route to an interview or (to a new job!) before going there for the first time
- write down any questions you have about job searching or about work, and learn who can answer them for you: your colleagues or members of your support network, your co-workers or supervisor

Getting to the Interview 5

Applying for a job: steps and tools

In this chapter, we will review the steps you will go through, and the tools you will develop, to put together an application for a job. The most important thing to keep in mind while going through this chapter is that the main purpose of an application is **to get an employer to invite you to come in for an interview**. We will look at three parts of an application for a job: the application form, the resume and cover letters.

When you are following up on your job leads, you will find that some employers give you an application form, to be filled out and handed in. It may be that they find this the easiest way to compare different applicants; it may be that they want to see if your handwriting is neat and readable. Other employers will expect you to apply for a job by sending them a resume, along with a cover letter. Even if you aren't asked to provide a resume, having one available gives the impression that you are serious about finding a job. A resume also makes it easier and less stressful to fill out an application form, because a lot of the information required in the form will be in your resume.

Cover letters are used when you send a resume in response to an advertisement, or if you are following up on a referral from someone in your support network. You might also use a cover letter if you are returning an application form by mail. Each of the three job searching tools, the application form, the resume and cover letters have a similar purpose: **to get an employer to invite you in for an interview**.

Tips on completing application forms

1 **Ask for two copies of the application form.** The best way to complete the form is to take it home with you, even if it means bringing it back the same day. The first copy can be used as a rough draft, where you can use a pencil and erase any mistakes. Once you are happy with your answers to all the questions, use a pen to fill out the second copy, which you then hand in to the employer. Your writing should be as neat as possible.

   Sometimes employers require you to fill out application forms when you go in, not allowing you to take the forms home. They might do this to check on your ability to read and write without assistance. If this is the case, take the time to fill out the form completely and neatly. It may help if you bring along a pen that has an eraser, or have some blank paper with you so that you can write out your answers before filling in the form.

2 **Read the whole form, including all of the instructions, before you begin to fill out the form.** If a question does not apply to you, you can write "N/A" for "not applicable". Once you have filled it out, read it over before handing it back to the receptionist. Fix any mistakes as best as you can.

3 **Be specific about the type of job or the position you are applying for.** If you are unsure about what is available, ask the receptionist for the names, or "position titles" of the jobs that are available.

4 **Be positive, and be honest.** If you think any of your answers might be used as a reason not to interview you, try to add a positive element to the answer, or you can write: "Will explain in the interview". Examples of positive statements include: "Quick learner, " "Attention to details" or "Hard worker."

5 **When filling out the work experience section, start with your most recent job.** You will probably also be asked for your start and finish dates of previous jobs, along with names of companies, job titles, duties and reason for leaving the job. Having all this information with you, in a list or as part of a resume, helps make application forms easier and quicker to fill out.

   For "reasons for leaving," keep your answers positive. "Moved on to new challenges" is an example of a positive reason for leaving a job. Don't write "personal reasons", or say anything negative about a previous employer, as this may give the impression that you have a bad attitude or are unreliable.

6 **In the education and training section, list dates, names of schools and any certificates, diplomas or degrees you earned.** Don't leave any information out. If you have taken any specific training that relates directly to the type of job you are applying for, make sure to start with this information.

7 **If there is an "Additional Information" section, make sure you use it to say why you are the right person for the job.** Highlight those parts of your experience that will help you to be successful in fulfilling the requirements of the job. Ask the receptionist if a job description is available.

8 If there is a question asking for your expected salary, write in "Open to negotiation" unless you are very sure of the standard salary range for this type of work.

9 If there is a question that asks: "Do you have any physical limitations that would make it difficult for you to perform any of the duties related to this position?", you should answer "No" unless you are very sure there is something you will not be able to do. Having a disability, such as a mental illness, doesn't mean you are not able to perform the responsibilities of a job. It may mean there are certain things that might be harder for you to do, or that might take you longer to do, in which case you may write "will discuss" on the application form.

   You will then leave open the possibility of disclosing your problem in an interview, where you will have a better opportunity to understand the expectations of the job, enabling you to explain how your disability might affect job performance. Further issues related to disclosure will be reviewed in Chapter 7. The main rule to keep in mind is that disclosure of your disability should be done when and how you choose, and your choice should best support your objective of being hired.

Questions that are *Not* Allowed

In all parts of Canada, there are certain things that employers are not allowed to ask you, things that can be used to discriminate against you. This applies to application

forms and to interviews. Employers are allowed to ask you questions related to the requirements of the job, such as your availability for shift work or your ability to do technical things related to the job, such as using certain kinds of equipment. Each province and territory has specific regulations on this, but in general you are not required to answer questions that ask you for:

- your gender
- your age or date of birth
- current or previous health problems
- your marital status
- your "Christian" name or any reference to the origin or your name
- citizenship information other than Canadian
- your height or weight
- a photograph
- languages not required for the position
- your maiden name
- your place of birth or racial origin

When you are asked such questions, you have a few options. The easiest is to give as much of an answer as you feel comfortable with. In an application form, you can leave the space blank. In an interview, you need to be ready for other options.

If you find the question intrusive or overly personal, or you feel your answer might be used as an excuse to discriminate against you, think of a way to ask "How does (the subject of this question) relate to the requirements of this position?" Where there isn't a direct relationship between the question and the specifics of the position, you might ask why the question is being asked. If you are not satisfied with the response you get, find a way to politely, but assertively, change the topic while avoiding a direct answer. Take this opportunity to ask direct questions about the job itself.

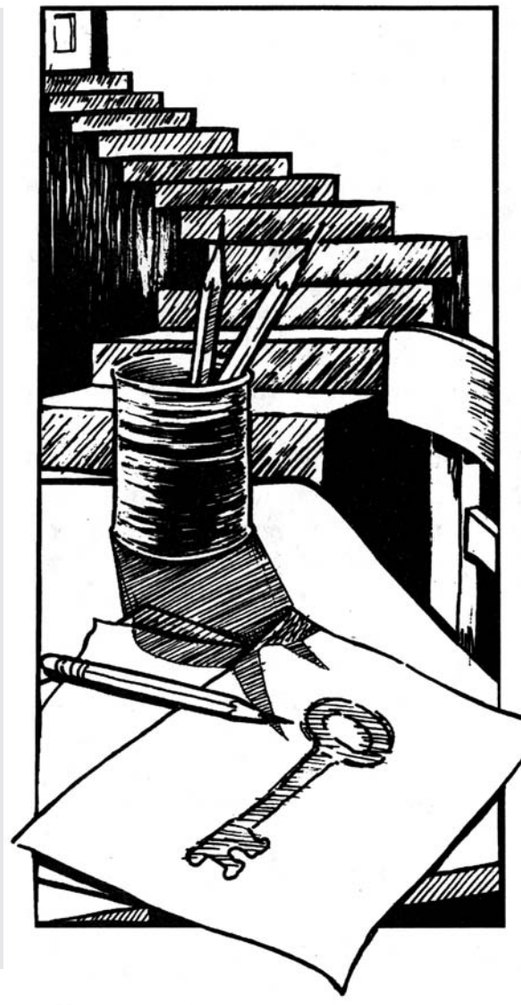
Further information on how your province or territory regulates such requests for information, as well as complaints about workplace discrimination and harassment, can be obtained from the Human Rights Commission in your province. Check your local phone book for a telephone number and call them if you have specific questions.

Resumes

Resumes are used in job searching for all types of positions, from entry-level to chief executive officer. Employers use them as a basic screening tool. If you don't have one, you may not even be considered for an interview, let alone for a job. It may seem like a lot of work to put one together, but once you have it prepared, you will have a job searching tool that you can use over and over again.

THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF A RESUME ARE:

- **Name, address, telephone number**
- **Work objective** (optional)
  Should be a short statement, no more than one sentence, relating directly to the position you are applying for.
- **Education**
  List dates, with name of institutions and any certificates, diplomas or degrees that you have earned. Mention any special awards you have won.
- **Work experience**
  List dates, position titles, name of employer and describe your major responsibilities, using action words (see p.20 for sample words). Be direct, assertive and honest, while making note of any special achievements
- **Community or volunteer experience**
  Indicate any experience you have had as a volunteer with community agencies, noting any special accomplishments.
- **References**
  It is usually enough to use this statement: **References will be provided upon request.**



A resume should be no longer than two typed pages. Use the skill inventories you developed in Chapter 3 to help you put together the information for the sections on your education, work experience and community or voluntary experience. Use action words that give life and a sense of energy to your experiences. Don't be modest when you outline your accomplishments. This is your chance to tell potential employers about all the good things they should know about you. Use your resume to convince people they just have to invite you to an interview!

If you follow the outline above, you can put your work experience before your education qualifications, depending on which of the two sections is strongest: if your work experience is closely related to your work objective, start with work experience, putting education

afterwards. If your educational qualifications are recent, and more related to your work objective than your work experience is, you should start with the education section.

There are three basic resume styles, each having certain advantages and disadvantages, as outlined below. Samples for each style follow, over the next three pages:

1 **Chronological resumes** list your work experience in the order that you got that experience, starting with the most recent and working backwards. Each job listing includes dates, main duties and responsibilities, noting any special achievements. This is the most widely used resume style, one that has a logical flow, making it easy to read and easier to prepare than other styles.

   Its drawbacks include bringing attention to any gaps in employment, as well as frequent job changes or a lack of career progress. By focusing on employment, it doesn't give you much ability to focus on skills you have that you have not used in a job. It presents particular problems for those who have not yet had a formal job.

2 **Functional resumes** group together your skills into functional categories that tell an employer what you can do for an organization, highlighting achievements while leaving out details such as dates, employer names, job titles, etc. It helps to highlight transferable skills, and allows you to mention technical skills you learned at home or as a volunteer. This style is especially useful for people who have little or no paid work experience in the area they are seeking employment.

   Drawbacks include giving the reader the impression you are leaving out information that may be relevant to understanding your work history. Without having dates for reference, it is also not easy for someone to assess the level at which you have succeeded in the skills you list.

3 **Combination resumes** combine the best features of the other two styles. This allows you to highlight skills and accomplishments, while also providing background information on specific work experiences. The main drawback is that it requires extra care in planning and layout, meaning it may take extra time to put together.

The best way to finalize your resume is to show it to friends, family members, people who know you through support groups you have been a part of, people in your own support network who are helping you with your job search. Ask them to review your resume and give you constructive criticism, including ideas on how you might improve it. Consider your resume as a living document, one that you will keep current as an

Chronological Resume

Ann Castor
6838 Manning Avenue
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S5S 6T6
tel: 616-677-7620

Objective: Seeking a cashier position

Work Experience:

Since 1992 (part-time)
Child care worker
Lampton Community Daycare Centre, Saskatoon
Responsible for greeting children and parents as they arrive, supervising snack and morning activity, including clean-up.
Active member of team responsible for 38 children aged from birth to 4 years.

1987 - 1991 (part-time)
Waitress
Garden Cafe, Hampton Hotel, Saskatoon
Responsible for all aspects of customer service, including greeting customers at main entrance, showing them to tables, presenting menus and specials for the day, assisting customers in selection of menu items, placing orders with the kitchen. Served up to 12 tables at a time. Prepared itemized bills, handled cash and change.

1982 - 1985
Dietary Aide
Harmony Retirement Home, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Responsible for assembly and delivery of patient food trays, assisting some patients with eating, operating dishwasher, cleaning food preparation areas.

Summers, 1980 - 1982
Waitress
Jolly Ice Fast Food, Gimli, Manitoba
Entered customer food orders on computerized cash register, assembled food orders, handled cash and change.

Education: High School Graduation, Coronation High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1981. Courses included Senior Levels of English, Math, Typing, Home Economics and Business.

Personal: Conscientious worker, paying attention to details.
Available to work flexible hours.
Active member of South Riverside Community Centre, including volunteer recreation program worker.

References: Available upon request.

SAMPLE

Functional Resume

Ann Castor
6838 Manning Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S5S 6T6
tel: 616-677-7620

Objective: Seeking a cashier position

Highlights of Qualifications

- Excellent customer service skills, including experience in a variety of settings and with all age groups from children to retired people.
- Efficient with handling cash and experienced with computerized systems.
- Excellent attention to detail and experienced with preparing itemized bills, tabulating money, making change, explaining charges to customers.
- Eight years of experience serving food and beverages in a busy restaurant
- Five years of experience supervising children in a busy child care setting, responding to parental concerns.
- High school graduate, with relevant business skills.
- Typing speed of 80 wpm.
- Volunteer experience with delivery of recreation programs

Work History

Waitress:
- Customer service responsibilities, including greeting customers at main entrance, showing them to tables, presenting menus and specials for the day, assisting customers in selection of items, placing orders in kitchen.
- Entered customer food orders on computerized cash register, assembled food orders, handled cash and change.
- Served up to 12 tables at a time. Prepared itemized bills, handled cash and change.

Child care worker:
- Greeting children and parents as they arrive, supervising snack and morning activity, including clean-up.
- Active team member, sharing responsibility for 38 children aged from birth to 4 years.

Dietary Aide:
- Assembly and delivery of patient food trays, assisting some patients with eating.
- Operating equipment, including dishwasher; Cleaning food preparation areas.

References: Available upon request.

SAMPLE

Combination Resume

Ann Castor
6838 Manning Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S5S 6T6
tel: 616-677-7620

Objective: Seeking a cashier position

Highlights of Qualifications

- Excellent customer service skills, including experience with all age groups from children to retired people.
- Eight years of experience serving food and beverages in a busy restaurant
- Five years of experience supervising children in a busy child care setting, responding to parental concerns.
- High school graduate, with relevant business skills
- Volunteer experience with delivery of recreation programs

Work History

Child care worker, Lampton Community Daycare Centre, Saskatoon.
Since 1992, part-time
- Greeting children and parents as they arrive, supervising snack and morning activity, including clean-up.
- Active team member, sharing responsibility for 38 children aged from birth to 4 years.

Waitress, Garden Cafe, Hampton Hotel, Saskatoon.
1987 - 1991, part-time
- Customer service responsibilities, including greeting customers at main entrance, showing them to tables, presenting menus and specials for the day, assisting customers in selection of menu items, placing orders with the kitchen.
- Served up to 12 tables at a time. Prepared itemized bills, handled cash and change.

Dietary Aide, Harmony Retirement Home, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1982 - 1985
- Assembly and delivery of patient food trays, assisting some patients with eating.
- Operating equipment, including dishwasher; Cleaning food preparation areas.

Waitress, Jolly Ice Fast Food, Gimli, Manitoba, summers 1980 - 1982
- Entered customer food orders on computerized cash register, assembled food orders, handled cash and change.

References: Available upon request.

SAMPLE

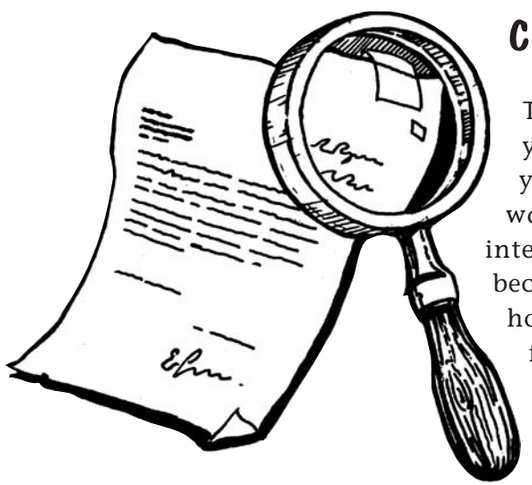
inventory of your skills and experience. Even after you start working you may find better opportunities to apply for. Having a current resume makes it easy to respond quickly to job postings.

You can find many resource materials, books and other documents about resumes at libraries and career centres. Some books include sample resumes for people who have never worked, as well as samples for people with many years of experience. If putting together a resume is particularly stressful for you, seek out some of these additional resource materials, as you will find many ideas on how to handle all possible situations. Learning how to write an effective resume is a basic job searching tool, and one you will probably use many times throughout your working life.

Handling Chronological Gaps in your Resume

People who have experienced a mental illness will often have periods of time, such as months or sometimes years, when they have not been able to work because of the illness. This can lead to chronological gaps in a resume. Functional resumes allow some flexibility in handling this, by either leaving out dates altogether or by dating your experiences by year rather than by month. A combination resume might be the best solution, as you can also generalize months into years. An employer reviewing a resume with obvious gaps may still want to interview you, provided you have the skills required for the job. Be prepared for this question in an interview. Some people state "medical reasons" in their answer.

The basic rule for handling gaps is to be as general as possible in how you present your experience, without being untruthful.



Cover letters

The cover letter is used as an introduction to your resume, and to you. Use a cover letter when you apply for a specific job opening and as a way of letting an employer know you would be interested in working for them should a vacancy become available. A cover letter shows an employer how your qualifications make you a good match for the job they have available.

Cover Letter

Jane Brown
1134 Main Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
M4B 2S9

September 18, 1998

Richard Higgins, Manager
Performance Theatre Company
639 Judd Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
M6G 3F6

Dear Mr. Higgins,

Your ad in the weekend newspaper seeking a set designer greatly interests me. Over the past three years, I have pursued design opportunities with local theatre companies and have worked on eight productions, as outlined in the attached resume.

You will also see from my resume that I have developed building and carpentry skills over a two year period, while working with a building contractor. My experience ranges from frame construction to dry walling, along with cabinet making, laying floors and painting. I have worked on new buildings as well as renovations.

While I have enjoyed the work I did in the construction trade, I would like to be able to also pursue my interests in art and theatre. Over the past six years I have taken many art courses, including sculpture, painting and drawing. I continue to have a strong interest in theatre and drama, and am a regular member of theatre audiences. This position with the Performance Theatre Company would allow me to bring together my technical and artistic skills. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss further my skills and how they fit the requirements of the set designer position. Please call me at 666-9291.

Thank you for considering this application.

Sincerely,

Jane Brown

encl.

SAMPLE

THE LETTER (SEE SAMPLE) SHOULD FOLLOW THE FORMAT OF A STANDARD BUSINESS LETTER, WITH THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS:

- **Your name, address and the date**
- **The employer's name, address, with a salutation** such as
  Dear Sir/Madam or Dear Mr./Ms. _____
- **First paragraph**
  Explain the reason for the letter, what you want and how you came to contact the person or the organization. For example, the letter could be a response to an advertisement or at the suggestion of a person from your support network who thought there might be positions open. Use language that gives the impression you are enthusiastic about making contact.
- **Second paragraph**
  Highlight a few of your accomplishments or skills that match the vacant position or what you know are the needs of the organization. This is the part where you stress how you could make a positive contribution to fulfilling the employer's needs.
- **Third paragraph**
  Indicate your resume is attached and request an interview. If your letter comes from a referral, say you will call in a few days. Specify the date you will call, giving time for the letter to be received by mail. Close with a sentence expressing thanks for the employer's consideration of your interest in their organization.

A cover letter should be no longer than one page. Each letter you send should be an original – don't use a duplicated or photocopied letter with an employer's name and address written into a typed letter! The letter should be typewritten on good quality paper and mailed in a business envelope. If you have access to a computer, letters can be saved and modified for each use. Keep writing simple and use direct language, with action words. Check the letter carefully for spelling, punctuation, grammar or typing errors. Correct all errors before sending, even if this means you have to retype it! Ask a friend or family member to read it as well.

The work you do in filling out your application forms, putting together your resume and writing your cover letters is an investment in your working future. Paying extra attention to these tools for your job search will certainly pay off over time.

THE Interview 6

An opportunity to show you are best for the job

When you get invited to come into an interview, you know the employer has found something interesting in your application, resume or cover letter, something that shows you might be able to do the job. The interview provides you with an opportunity to convince the employer that you are the **best** person for the job. You have to work hard to do this convincing. Give yourself plenty of time to prepare, including time for gathering information, doing your research, preparing your script. You will also need time for practising. If your preparation is well done, any anxiety you have about the interview process should be manageable.

There are many written resources available to help you better understand the interview process. Check for these materials in your public library or job search resource centre. You will find that with more research, your confidence increases. As your confidence increases, so will your performance in job interviews.

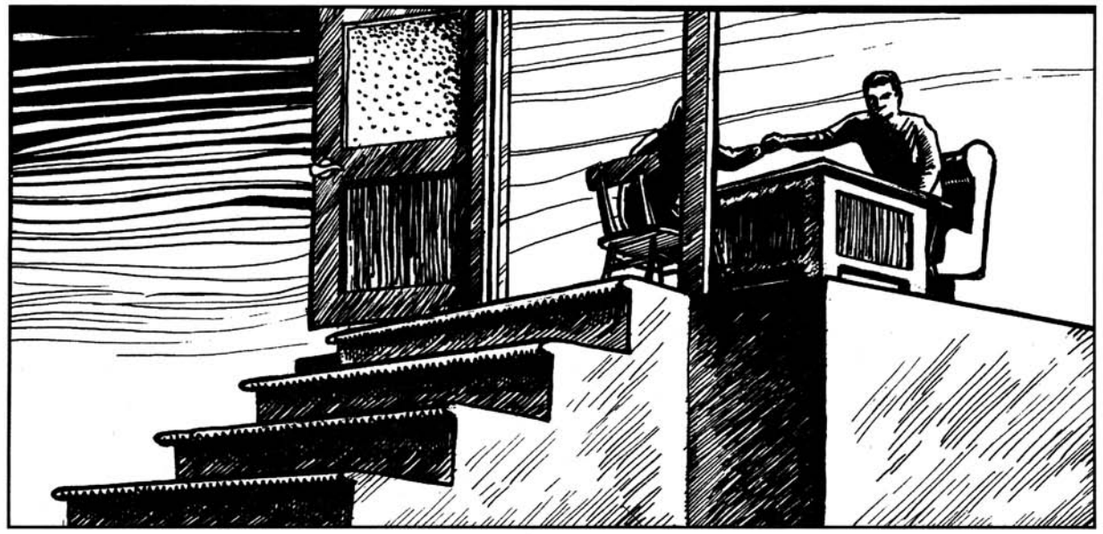
Interviews get easier each time you go through one. Think of each interview as part of your learning process. Your interview skills will improve with experience. You can get that experience through interviews for real jobs, and you can also get your experience through rehearsal interviews. Family or friends can help you prepare for an interview by playing the part of the interviewer, pretending to be an employer with a job vacancy to fill. In this way, you get to practice your responses to questions you think will be asked of you during a real interview.

This chapter will outline some of the basics for handling interviews.

Before you start: preparing for the interview

When you get called in for an interview, ask the person calling for some preliminary information, including:

- date, time and place
- name(s) and position(s) of the interviewer(s)
- directions on how to get to the place, whether you are travelling by car or by public transit.



You might also want to find out the **type** of interview: Will this be a screening interview, where the purpose is to screen out unqualified applicants or will it be a selection interview, where the purpose is to select the best candidate for the job? In a screening interview, your task will be to show you can do the job well. In a selection interview, you should focus on showing the interviewer you are the best possible candidate for the job. Preparation for either style of interview will be almost the same. The main difference will be how you present yourself. In a screening interview, you should focus on how your skills match the needs of the job. In a selection interview, in addition to presenting your skills, you should also display how your personality will contribute to your job performance.

If the company is still interested in you after the screening interview, you will be called back for a selection interview. The selection process may take more than one interview. Don't be surprised if you are called in for a second **selection** interview. Employers sometimes take a long time to make a final decision, as a hiring mistake can be costly for them. They might also decide to have different people interview you at different times. Make sure you understand the process they are putting you through, so that you can be ready to handle each situation.

Research will help you prepare for the interview. Start with research on the company or organization, to find out whatever you can about the place. You need to know if this is where you would like to work, and how to convince them that your skills fit their needs. Talk to other people you know who work there, or who have worked there in the past. Or, find out how the company is handling their business:

- How many people work there?
- What are the main activities or products?
- Is the business growing?
- Is the company adding new jobs or transferring jobs to a different community?
- Are there opportunities to learn new skills?
- What are the salary ranges for different positions?
- What kind of benefits plan is offered to employees?

This information might not be easy to find if you don't know someone who already works there. You might start by asking the company itself: call the receptionist and ask if an Annual Report or other publications are available to the public. Offer to come and pick it up if there is not enough time to have it mailed to you. If the person who will interview you discovers you are doing this research, you shouldn't worry about it harming your chance to get the job. If there is nothing available from the company, a librarian at your local public library may have some helpful ideas on how to do this research.

The next part of your research should focus on the job itself. Review the job description to find clues about what the interviewer might be looking for in a candidate. If you haven't been able to get a copy of the job description from the company, review the job ad or posting that you responded to when applying for the job. If you know someone who works at the company, or at a similar job in a different company, you may be able to get some ideas from them on the main job functions.

"Let employers feel they will be lucky to have you working for them"

While you are researching the job, you need to also review your resume and skill inventories to find the things you have done that show you have the skills needed for the job. You may find it useful to write out your ideas on the match you find between the needs of the job and your own skills. These will help when you prepare answers to potential interview questions.

Potential interview questions

Certain questions can be expected to be asked in most interviews. If you prepare answers to these questions in advance, and rehearse your delivery of the answers; you may find interviews less stressful. Ask a friend or support person to help you out by playing the role of the interviewer while you practice your answers. Here are samples of the most frequently asked interview questions:

Tell me about yourself. Give a one-minute background statement about yourself, showing how you have reached a point in your working life where the job you are interviewing for is the next logical step. This is your chance to talk about how you would fit into the workplace.

Why do you want to work here? Talk about how your skills fit the needs of the job. This is also a chance for you to show you know something about the company or organization, because you have done some research. Let them know you are aware of the good products produced by the company or the good work done by the organization. Let them know you would be proud to be able to contribute to their success.

What are your greatest strengths? Look back at your skill inventories and pick out three of your greatest achievements. Relate them to the needs of the position you are interviewing for.

What are your greatest weaknesses? Avoid any weakness that may be a major part of the job. Try to pick a "strength-in-disguise", such as "I become impatient when the work of other people has to be fixed so that I can get my work done." Be ready to also state how you are trying to overcome any weakness you mention. This is not the time to talk about your mental illness.

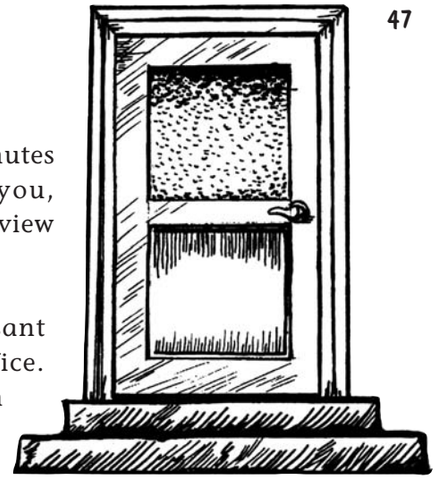
Is there anything that would prevent you from doing any of the job duties? Your answer should be: "No, not as I understand the duties of the position." See the next chapter on Disclosure for ideas on when to talk about accommodations in relation to your mental health problems.

Why should we hire you instead of other equally qualified candidates? Talk about each part of the job, giving examples of the skills you have that will lead you to be the best candidate for the position. Close your answer with a comment about how you would be a team player with the company or organization and the importance you give to contributing positively to their goals.

The interview: things you should do

- Do check your appearance. Are your clothes clean and neat? Hair combed? Well groomed? Not too much makeup?

- Do make a trial run to the interview place, on a different day but around the same time as your interview will be held.



- Do arrive early, but no more than five or ten minutes early. If your friends and family accompany you, they should not enter the building where the interview will be.

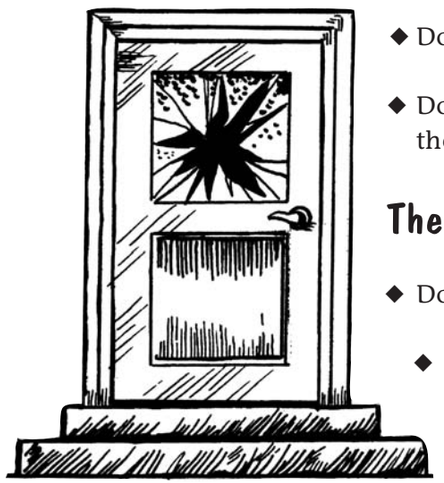
- Do smile and try to appear confident. Be pleasant and honest with everyone you meet in the office. You never know who may be part of the decision making process.

- Do make eye contact with the interviewer, including each member of the group if more than one person is involved. Shake hands firmly as you are introduced, or as you introduce yourself: "Hello, I am [your name]. It is a pleasure meeting you."

- Do stand until you are invited to sit. Show you have a good energy level by not slouching.

- Do keep a positive attitude, remembering that by hiring you the employer will benefit from your contribution to their productivity.

- Do bring a copy of all the materials you sent when applying for the job, and any letter or other materials you may have received from the employer. You should also bring in a list of your references on a separate sheet of paper, including their names, addresses and phone numbers.



- Do find positive things to say about previous employers.

- Do thank them for meeting with you, as you are leaving the interview.

The interview: things you should not do

- Don't chew gum or smoke.

- Don't wear strong perfumes or colognes. There may be people in the interview who are allergic to such things.

- Don't argue. If discriminatory or illegal questions are asked, be diplomatic, polite and tactful.
- Don't fidget, play with your hair, a pen, or other object, as such nervous habits distract interviewers.
- Don't apologize for any lack of skills or experience. Stress your positive qualities.
- Don't tell the interviewer how many jobs you have applied for or give any information that will make it seem that no one wants to hire you.
- Don't talk about how much you need a job. You will get hired on the basis of your skills not on the basis of your needs.
- Don't lie. Interviews are stressful enough without adding to your stress by worrying about having a potential employer find out you have given them false information.
- Don't say anything negative about a previous employer. If you left a previous job for negative reasons, present something positive, like you left to pursue new opportunities or challenges. And be prepared to elaborate!

After the interview

As soon as you leave the interview, find a place to sit comfortably and review your performance. Write down any information you found out that might help you if they call you back for another interview. For example, if they mentioned that a previous employee had problems on the job because of poor performance in a certain area, you know this part of the job is important and, if you get asked for another interview, you should make a point of explaining how good you are with that type of task. Also, write down any information you got about the salary range. If you are offered the job, you will want to know where the salary you are offered fits into any scale they may have for this.

Make notes on what parts of the interview worked particularly well and those parts that didn't go so well. Be honest with yourself. In this way, you will learn from each interview experience, by identifying areas where you need more practice or need to be more creative with your response to questions. If you do this review after each interview, you will learn how to better manage your next interview, improving your skills and making it easier for yourself next time.

Writing a "thank-you" note to the interviewer can reinforce the message of your interest in the job you have interviewed for. Use the business letter format that you used in a cover letter. Make sure you include some mention of how you would be good for the job, for example:

> "I am very interested in the receptionist position we discussed today. I am sure that my skills would make a strong contribution to the work of (the name of the company or organization). I look forward to hearing from you later this week. Thank you for considering my application and interest in the position. I enjoyed meeting with you today."

Keep track of any dates they may have given you, such as the date they expect to have made a decision. If you haven't heard from the employer by then, you should call to ask if they have made any decisions about the position. In the meantime, keep up with your job search, a process that shouldn't end until your first day on the job.

Handling rejection

Everyone gets rejected sometime. Knowing that rejections and other disappointments happen in all job searches doesn't always help with the initial letdown when you hear you didn't get a job even after going through an interview. Give yourself time to handle a rejection. Remember that it is never an easy thing to do. And then, start the process of learning from your experience. A positive attitude will remain very important to your mental health as well as your ongoing job search. Try hard to keep negative feelings from affecting your motivation to find a job. Focus on what you can control, not on things that are beyond your control.

You might consider asking the person who interviewed you for some feedback on your performance during the interview itself. Sometimes you hear that the job has been offered to someone else when the person who interviewed you phones. This would be a good time to ask for such feedback. It is more difficult when you have to call yourself, but often employers are willing to help you learn from the experience by giving you their assessment of your interview. This may increase your self-confidence during your next interview and is certainly worth a try.

If you are feeling very discouraged, talk to people in your support network, letting them know of your disappointment. Continue to get information from them on opportunities you can pursue, keeping in mind that your skills with interviews will improve with experience.

7 Disclosure of your Disability

Why disclose?

At some point in your interaction with an employer, either before or after a selection process, or once you have begun work, you may find it necessary to reveal some information about your mental health problem. Perhaps you have regular medical appointments that conflict with your work schedule. Maybe you find that full time work leads to an unacceptable level of anxiety, and you want to ask for part time work. Or, it could be that after a few hours at a new job, you discover that the physical setting for your work has distractions that interfere with your concentration, opening up the possibility for increased stress, perhaps to the point of your work performance suffering.

No matter what the reason is for you to consider disclosure, you should be aware of the possible consequences, both in terms of outcome of a job search as well as your own job satisfaction once employed. The two basic rules for you to follow when considering disclosure are:

1 **Disclosure of a disability should only be done if it supports your objective:**

   In a job search, the objective is to get hired.

   While in a job, the objective is to ensure the work can be managed without undue stress.

2 **Assess the potential reaction of an employer to your disclosure, and plan your disclosure for the appropriate time.**

   If you feel the reaction will be positive, you should disclose as soon as possible. Find a way to disclose during the selection process so this factor can be taken into account before a hiring decision is made.

   If you feel the reaction might be negative, choose your timing for disclosure very carefully.

Employers who might react positively to your disclosure include those with active employment equity policies, where a disability will give you an edge over other candidates with similar qualifications as yours. Organizations providing services and programs to people who have experienced mental health problems, or who have other disabilities, may also actively recruit those with similar life experiences. While you are job searching, your research may give you clues to the potential reaction of an employer. Once employed, you can assess the potential reaction to disclosure through a review of personnel policies or other internal documentation.

When you think there may be a negative reaction to your disclosure, review the following considerations, which will vary according to the stage of your relationship with the employer.

Disclosure prior to or during an interview

Remember that the main purpose of an application form, a resume and a cover letter is to get an interview. With this in mind, there are two possible reasons for considering disclosure prior to an interview:

1 **Your mental health problem comes with a visible disability or is potentially detectable in a face-to-face meeting.** This could be for a variety of reasons. It could be a side effect of medication. Or, it could be that when under stress, you have difficulties expressing yourself clearly and calmly. This can happen even if you are well prepared and have practised or rehearsed your answers to potential interview questions.

   If either of these situations apply to you, you might choose to disclose prior to actually meeting a potential employer in an interview. You could also consider having a support person explain your disability to a potential employer on your behalf. If you are thinking of this approach, speak to those in your personal support network. Let them help you make your decision on how to proceed with disclosure.

2 **You know for sure that your mental health problem will mean you are unable to fulfill all the tasks that are part of the job or that you require some accommodation** (see end of chapter for an explanation of accommodation) **in order to do so.**

   If you do not know for sure, before the interview is not the time to disclose. But, make sure you find out enough about the job functions during the interview, so that you can assess your own need for accommodation. You will need this information in order to assess a job offer.

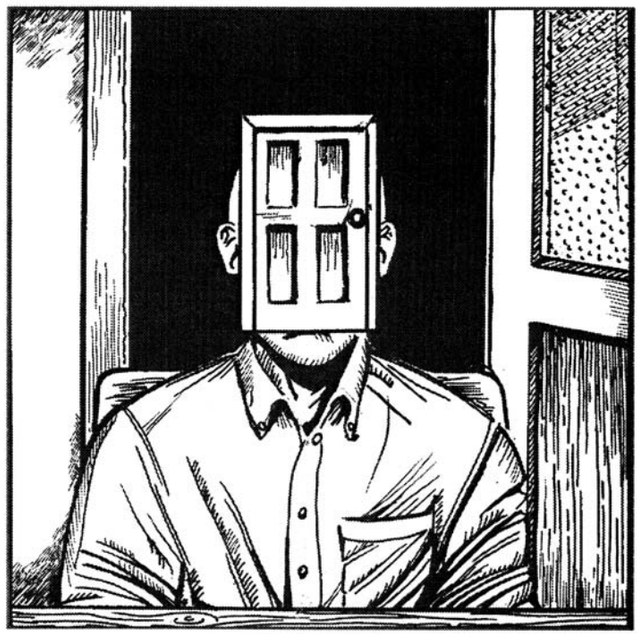
"My confidence is affected by my illness and that creates problems in an interview."

If you choose to disclose prior to an interview, consider doing it through a telephone call to the person who will interview you. Don't give the message to a receptionist and expect that person to pass it on in a manner that matches your style or level of detail. Don't expect an employer to meet with you in person prior to an interview, as this is likely not to be an option.

When you are speaking directly to the employer, start by saying you don't expect they like to be surprised, so you wanted to talk prior to meeting about something that might affect their assessment of your ability to do the job. At the same time, explain that you believe you are the right person for the job, especially if certain accommodations were provided. Give concrete examples of an accommodation that would allow you to fulfill the requirements of the job, such as flexible work hours or a split shift. If you believe that accommodations are not required, say so.

If you find out during an interview that the job would require accommodation in order for you to fulfill the requirements, you may choose to disclose during the interview in order to determine whether or not the accommodation you need is possible. For example, you may be told during the interview that the job requires working within a small but very busy space, where there is lots of activity unrelated to the job to be performed. If you know that such distractions will prevent you from concentrating on your work, leading to delays in getting work done, along with a level of anxiety that you would find difficult, you might ask during the interview if a more secluded work space can be made available.

If, during the interview, you are unsure of the accommodation you would need, concentrate on getting enough information about the job and leave the issue of disclosure until you have identified what is needed in order for you to do the work.



Disclosure following a job offer

Once you are offered a job, and you haven't made any disclosure, you might want to disclose in order to ease any anxiety you may have about your employer finding out from another source before you start work. If there are no accommodation considerations, you might give that information to the employer, letting them know that while your illness will have no effect on your ability to do the job, as a courtesy you wanted them to be aware of your experience with a mental health problem. Briefly describe the experience and your recovery, avoiding a long history. State again that you are certain there will be no affect on your job performance. Close the discussion with a review of how your skills and experience are a good fit with the requirements of the job. Try to find out how your employer feels about knowing. Be prepared to acknowledge concerns.

To make disclosure easier, you might want to practise with a friend, family member of someone in your support network. Your own comfort level with presenting the information will be a key factor in any disclosure.

Disclosure after starting work

Once you have started work, you might find that the work is affecting your mental health and that, with certain adjustments, the negative effects will be minimized. Some possible adjustments, known as "accommodation," are outlined below. These accommodation needs may require negotiation. In order to prepare yourself for this discussion, or negotiation, consider other factors that might have an impact on how your disclosure is received.

Employers will always be concerned about the viability of their company or organization. They might respond to your disclosure with questions about how a certain accommodation will affect your productivity in your job. They will want to know how much an accommodation will cost, or if it means you won't be able to work for as many hours as they want you to. They will want to know if there are any union rules or contract provisions from a collective agreement that will affect their ability to make an accommodation.

Employers will also be concerned about fairness and equitable treatment of all workers. For example, think about how such an accommodation will be perceived by your co-workers. Will co-workers think that you are getting an additional benefit that is denied to them? Will they begin to treat you differently? Will there be other

consequences, such as negative stereotyping or other stigma that lead to additional problems for you?

You might want to discuss your ideas and plans for disclosure with people who understand your history with mental illness prior to acting on your plans. You need to be prepared for all possible reactions to your disclosure, in order to ensure success with securing the accommodation you need. Also, be clear about how the accommodation you are proposing will be sufficient to meet your needs.

Choosing not to disclose

Unfortunately, negative stereotypes can lead to discrimination against people who have experienced mental health problems. One example from our focus groups was of a supervisor who was quite unsympathetic after someone disclosed to her, responding in a derogatory tone of voice, with:

"What are you going to do if you get sick again?"

You can expect that this supervisor might not be very willing to do much to make work easier for you to manage. Such reactions can be hurtful, even to the point of leading to additional anxiety for you. You might even find that people who know of your experience with a mental health problem use that knowledge against you whenever an opportunity arises. For example, if you are not performing as well in one area of your job as you are in other areas, this difference might be associated with your history rather than with a need for you to be given learning opportunities to raise your performance level in that area. For these and other reasons, some people choose not to disclose their mental illness.

"The only accommodation I want is to be treated like everyone else."

You may be managing your mental health problem, perhaps with the help of medication, social support, or a combination of factors. If this is the case, and you feel you do not need any accommodation, you may choose not to disclose before or after starting work. In this way, starting to work at a new job will be a normal process, no different for you than any other new worker. This option should prevent any stigma or discrimination on the part of the employer as well as co-workers.

If you are considering the choice of not disclosing, review the possible risks of this decision. Ask yourself:

- Will co-workers or an employer know how to handle a crisis should one arise?
- Will I be able to handle the stress of not disclosing, such as the stress found of knowing that I am keeping private something that has been, and continues to be, significant in my life?
- Will it be that much harder to ask for accommodation if I should need it later on, after I have been working for some time?

"I have found disclosure good for me, but realize it is not for everyone."

Keep in mind the basic rules for disclosure from the beginning of chapter:

1 **Disclosure of a disability should only be done if it supports your objective of getting a job or performing well at your job.**

2 **Assess the potential reaction of an employer to your disclosure.**

While looking for work, your goal is to get the interview and then the job offer. Don't lose sight of these goals in your consideration of "if, when and how" to disclose. Whatever your decision, **you will be the one to choose the route which is most comfortable to you.**

'Accommodation:' What does this mean?

When using this word in the context of work, we are not referring to housing. "Accommodation" is the term used to refer to modifications or adjustments to a job or work environment making it possible for a person with special needs to perform the essential functions of the job. An accommodation alters an existing practice in the workplace so that the disadvantage due to a worker's disability or special need is overcome. Here are three examples:

1 If medication makes it hard to get up in the morning in order to get to work for a starting time of 9 AM, an accommodation might be to change the work hours to 10 AM to 6 PM.

2 If a worker's disability means that concentration on the job requires working in a quiet space with minimal activity around, an accommodation would require modifying the work environment in order to provide the kind of work space needed.

3 If a worker has an anxiety disorder, making crowds difficult to tolerate, an accommodation would be to adjust her work schedule so that she starts work 30 minutes later than most other workers. This way, she can avoid a crowded transit system.

To help identify what accommodations would be right for you, go back to the exercise in Chapter 3 (p. 22) where you described your ideal job. Your responses to that exercise may suggest areas where accommodation is needed.

These accommodations can often be incorporated into a workplace without much fuss or fanfare. Many employers are becoming aware of how important it is to welcome diversity into their workplaces, a strategy that is ultimately good for business. People who have experienced mental health problems are not the only ones who require accommodations.

Those with physical disabilities continue to face accommodation needs, which are increasingly being met by employers. Parents with young children also need accommodations, to allow them to attend to sick children and to sometimes restricting daycare schedules. As awareness builds on the diversity of special needs through-out all communities, so will employers' willingness to provide accommodations for those workers who need them.

Workers have a right to accommodation, a right that is reinforced through laws such as provincial and federal human rights legislation, as well as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You might find it helpful to know about the legal provisions in your province. Check your local phone book for the government offices where this will be available.

8 Keeping THE Job AND YOUR Working Future

Preparing for the new job

Once you have accepted a job offer and are waiting to begin work, you can start to plan and prepare for the first few days on the job. If the work schedule is much different than your daily schedule has been during your job searching, you need to give yourself time to make the necessary adjustments. Start waking up at the time you would need to once the job begins. This will help in adjusting your "internal clock" to your work schedule. Don't forget to leave enough time for your regular morning routine, such as a shower and a nourishing breakfast. If you will be travelling to work by transit, make a trial run so that you know how long it will take for you to get there. Make sure your trial happens at the same time of day as your commute, so that you can be sure how long it will take to get to work when you will be expected to be there. Rush hour tends to mean traffic jams, while off hours might mean buses do not come very frequently.

Getting ready to work can sometimes be stressful. To keep it manageable, spend a few days anticipating your needs. This could mean putting together some of the things you will need or want for work. You might need to wear different clothes than you have been wearing during your job search. Have them ready for when you will need them. You might need to

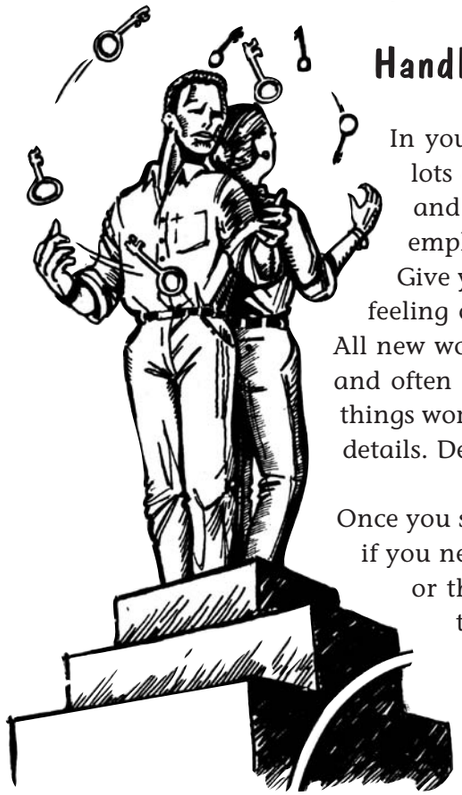
Preparing For A New Job: The Checklist

- _____ Adjust your "Internal Clock"
- _____ Make a trial run to test travel timing
- _____ Have your clothes, footwear and any accessories ready
- _____ Make a lunch
- _____ Have any medication you might need ready
- _____ Make arrangements for meeting other obligations:
  - _____ childcare
  - _____ eldercare
  - _____
- _____ Practice work skills
- _____
- _____

make lunch for yourself the night before. Get all the ingredients together, including any containers or packages you might need. Don't forget that eating properly is essential for your well-being.

You might need to make special arrangements for those things you have been doing while looking for work that will still need to be done after your work begins. For example, you might need to make alternate arrangements for children who come home from school before you get home from work. By anticipating your needs, and making arrangements for handling them, you should be able to reduce some of the stresses of starting a new job.

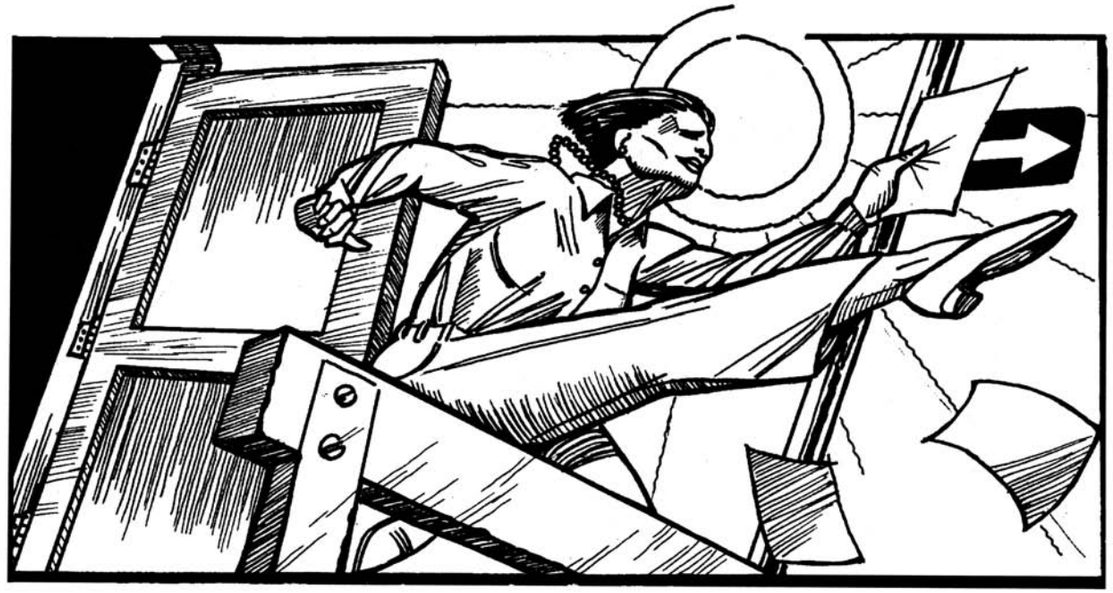
You might want to practice some of the skills you will use at work. For example, if you will be typing and don't use a computer very often, try to find a way to build up your skills so that your first days go as smoothly as possible. Spend some time, if you have a few days before work begins, to go through the daily routine so that you are sure to have everything ready for the first day at work. These preparations will help you to manage the stresses brought on by a new job. Use the checklist on the previous page, and add to it any others preparations you think you need.



Handling a new job

In your first few days in your new job, you will be learning lots about the place you are working in, the daily routines and work habits of other workers, the expectations the employer has of you and the nature of your specific job. Give yourself time to absorb all the new information without feeling overloaded by it. Ask questions if things are not clear. All new workers can be expected to find the first week confusing, and often co-workers are the best source of information on how things work. Sometimes it takes even longer to get to know all the details. Develop coping strategies that fit your needs.

Once you start work, you will be in a better position to determine if you need any accommodation, any adjustments to the work or the work environment that will make it easier for you to be successful in your job. Make sure you know how your work performance will be evaluated so that you can be prepared when the person supervising your work gives you feedback.



Looking to the future

Chances are good that you will go through a job search process many more times during your working life. Make the next job search easier by keeping your resume up-to-date. Every time your job changes, keep copies of your job description as a reminder of the experience you have and the skills you develop. If you have received written evaluations of your job performance, keep these as a record of your challenges and accomplishments. Take advantage of any learning opportunities that arise, and keep records of new skills to add to your inventory. Stay in touch with those who have supported you through your job search, keeping them informed of your progress at work and your interests in building on your skills or progressing in your career path. Expand your support network by including those people who help make your work successful.

Planning ahead for job changes will help you to develop a sense of confidence about the future. Take advantage of opportunities for continuing your education, building on your skills and experiences. With corporate and government downsizing, job security for many workers has dissolved. By taking charge of your working future, you will find reasons for optimism.

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