Disability: Reasonable accommodation.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell

NID Training NPC

Introduction

When businesses employ people with hearing impairment, they have a duty of care to ensure that the work environment is safe for all employees. This means that any risk that might arise should be managed. Workplaces should be as deaf-friendly as possible to ensure the success of the working environment (Lempka, 2019).

Discussion

'Deaf-friendly' refers to an environment that accommodates people with hearing impairments to ensure that they are safe and not isolated. However, accommodations should be reasonable. This means that modifications made to accommodate people should be necessary and appropriate. In addition, they should not impose a disproportionate financial burden on the business.

In other words, necessary accommodations need not be expensive. Instead of assuming which adjustments need to be made, it is best to consult colleagues with hearing impairments to find out what they consider as necessary (Svinndal, Jensen & Rise, 2020).

The most common adjustment required is good lighting. A well-lit environment enables people with hearing impairments to see the faces of other people clearly. This is necessary for them to lip read, see facial expressions and follow spoken communication. Other visual adjustments can be coloured lights that flash to alert people to announcements or danger. Visual notifications, information boards, and having writing equipment readily at hand can significantly improve opportunities for communication (Verbit, 2023).

Hearing aids do help people to hear, but they are not a blanket solution for all with hearing impairments. A quiet office or working space where there is an insignificant amount of background noise can be a great help. Background noise can be disturbing, especially for an employee who has hearing aids or is regularly required to speak on the phone (Svinndal et al. 2020).

Conclusion

Contrary to some commonly held beliefs, providing reasonable workplace accommodations for people with hearing impairments does not need to be expensive or complicated. Above all else, employers should make adjustments according to the needs of individual people.

For further information about this article contact lientjievanrensburg@nidtraining.org.za

References

Lempka, C. (2019). Employees Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Perceptions of Workplace Accommodations. Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado, 5(2). https://digscholarship.unco.edu/urj/vol5/iss2/6

Svinndal, E.V., Jensen, C. & Rise, M. (2020) Employees with hearing impairment. A qualitative study exploring managers' experiences. Disability and Rehabilitation, 42:13, 1855-1862, DOI: 10.1080/09638288.2018.1541101

Verbit Editorial (2023). Accommodating employees who are deaf https://verbit.ai/