

CAREER PREPARATION SYMPOSIUM: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Transition to Work Program | Humber College | March 12 & 13, 2024



KEYNOTE SPEECH

Tim Rose, CIBC

- Don't be afraid of career struggles or setbacks. Look at struggles as accelerations to help you move forward in a new direction.
- Consider what advantages your disability gives you. For Tim Rose that meant developing strong speaking skills and the ability to do math in his head. Consider how to use these advantages in the workplace.
- Celebrate don't accommodate. Remember you are an asset to your organization.
- Know that your disability gives you a lens on the world few people have. Use that advantage.
- In and outside of school, join groups or associations to find people you can connect with who will remind you how great you are. Connect with someone every day who helps you stay positive.
- Learn to advocate for yourself. It can be challenging and tiring but start small and protect your mental health.
- When you are struggling with an employer or colleague's response to your disability, stay calm and try to find common ground and/or lighten the mood. Consider what you can do to feel empowered in that situation.
- Learn practical advocacy skills like how to write a letter to request changes when your rights and accommodation needs are not being met.

- The [AODA](#) (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) is a piece of legislation with a lot of issues. The rules in it are difficult to enforce but as an employee you should be aware of it.
- Technology is a great equalizer and enabler for people with disabilities but don't forget the human element of your job. Take opportunities to regularly connect with your colleagues, preferably in person. You may feel you are more productive when you work remotely but make time to meet in person if possible. You'll gain insights, information and a sense of connection that's difficult to do online.
- Disclosing a disability in the workplace is a personal choice.
- When you are ready to disclose, frame it as a positive and don't apologize for your identity. Focus on your strengths.
- Remember when you're having these discussions it is okay to say, *"I'm not comfortable answering that question"* if the conversation gets too personal.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Aaron Incencio, Sophie Lemieux, Shaun Ghulam, Cindy Zarnett

- Top tips:
 - It's never too early to create a LinkedIn profile
 - Identify the top skills you have that can help employers
 - Network, look for voices and views that interest you; reach out and ask for a virtual coffee chat
 - Be eager; go to job fairs, reach out on social media and connect with people
- Where to start?
 - Check out the incredible resources at your school that support career preparation
 - Look for feedback on your resume or portfolio
 - Don't be afraid of networking. Use LinkedIn, job fairs, events to connect with more people.

- When and how should I disclose my disability to an employer?
 - Answer: it depends and it's a personal decision
 - If your research on the company indicates it has a diverse and inclusive culture you may want to disclose early. Check out Glassdoor and Indeed to read company reviews, read the company's website and find places that value diversity.
 - If you aren't sure about the company culture and don't need an accommodation for the interview you might want to wait.
 - If your accommodation needs affect your performance in a job, raise it with your employer early. Find the right tools together to avoid any performance issues.
 - Keep in mind that it's not just new employees who may need accommodations. Anyone could acquire a need while they are doing a job.

- What if I can only do a job or interview remotely due to my disability?
 - On job search sites, filter your search to look for remote jobs.
 - When you're offered a job, or earlier, discuss with the employer what work environment is needed to perform the job. Are there any barriers to you working remotely?
 - Consider whether you have any flexibility to attend in-person weekly or monthly if that helps the employer.
 - Remember employers are expected to accommodate employees' disabilities unless it causes "undue hardship".

NOTES FROM PANELISTS

- One of the top tips I can give before preparing for your career is to become more self-aware about your strengths and needs, and anticipate and know how certain situations in the workplace (i.e. social gatherings or after-work hangouts, high-sensory environment or places, workspace arrangements, etc.) might affect you.
- This sense of self-awareness could be instrumental on key communication points, such as asking the interviewer about the culture and what it's like day-to-

day, finding the right time to disclose certain accommodations, talking to a trusted person that's willing to make time and listen to you patiently, empathetically and in tune with your needs (being your ally to summarize it), and what your skillsets can do to improve their existing processes and make a positive, great impact on the overall operations (culture, efficiency, collaboration tools, etc).

Sophie Lemieux

- School is achievement focused. Work environments are different. You will fail and be rejected but it's not a reflection of your value —it means you're trying.
- Self-Advocacy in Job Searches: Confidently articulate your unique strengths and needs during the job search.
- Effective Resume and Cover Letter Crafting: Showcase your abilities and present your disabilities as assets on resumes and cover letters.
- Navigating Job Interviews: Develop strategies to handle interviews with authenticity and confidence, including addressing potential concerns of employers.
- Workplace Accommodations: Understanding the types of reasonable accommodations you can request and how to navigate these discussions with potential employers.
- Disability Visibility in the Workplace: Become aware of the challenges and strategies for increasing visibility and recognition of disabilities within diverse workplace categories.
- Inclusive Company Identification: Look for flexibility and transparency to help identify and align with companies that prioritize inclusivity.
- Job Description Analysis: Critically analyze job descriptions for essential qualifications and inclusive language, avoiding ambiguous or potentially discriminatory terms.
- Inclusive Interview Techniques: Prepare for various interview formats and advocate for necessary accommodations to ensure an equitable interview process.

- **Disclosure Strategies:** There are many strategic considerations around disclosing disabilities to potential employers. Consider the balance of personal comfort and legal protections.
- **Aligning Personal Values with Inclusive Employers:** Match your personal and professional values with those of prospective employers, enhancing cultural fit and job satisfaction.

Shaun Ghulam

- Advocate for yourself and speak up when you have to. Don't put up with bullying in the workplace. Staying quiet isn't a good option because it will build up inside.
- Believe in yourself and knowing you can do it. Your self-confidence will speak volumes when working with an employer and being in a team environment.
- Being prepared for when your time comes, staying current in your industry and always keep your skills up to par with new technology.
- Be open to discuss your disability, and have an open discussion about what accommodations you may need. This will help you become comfortable in the workplace and allow you to do the best job you can do.

Cindy Zarnett

Start Building Your Professional Image and Personal Brand

- Create, update and optimize your [LinkedIn](#) profile with your latest achievements, skills, experiences, and a current/professional picture.
- Create a professional email address for job applications and networking.
- Ensure that your social media presence is work/employer-friendly.

Generative AI Tools

- AI is an excellent tool for exploring careers and learning about job requirements.
- It can be used to prepare for interviews, customize resumes and cover letters - highlighting the skills and experiences relevant to the position.
- When using Gen AI sites, never include private, personal or confidential information such as your name, address, or previous employers, as the data can be used for training purposes.
- [How AI is impacting the future of disability accommodations | Employee Benefit News](#)

Free Generative AI Accounts – registration is required

- [Microsoft Copilot](#)
- [CHATGPT](#)
- [Google Gemini](#)

AccessForward – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

- Free eLearning training on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Ontario Human Rights Code can help you understand Ontario's Accessibility and Human Rights legislation and your rights as an employee.
- The purpose of AODA is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to employment, goods, services, facilities, accommodation, buildings, structures and premises.

[AccessForward](#)

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