

# Confidential Disability Accommodation Causing Friction with other Employees



## **Question:**

I have an employee who requires accommodated with a flexible work schedule due to a mental health issue. I can make this accommodation without any undue hardship for one employee but not for others. I have now had a request from another employee for a flexible work schedule. I have told her no and now she wants to know why the other employee has been given the option and she is not. The employee I have previously accommodated can sometimes be difficult to work with and I believe there is personal resentment involved in this situation. How do I explain the different decision without disclosing confidential information about the other employee?

## **Response:**

### **Privacy and Openness**

The ability to accommodate the needs of one employee can often lead to frustration and resentment from others. When employees choose to share information about their disability you may be better able to demonstrate the reasons for accommodation. However, it is not incumbent on any individual to disclose and you should never ask. Disclosure is a very personal choice

### **Know The Reasons for your Decision**

In making your decision to turn down this new request you should have well-considered reasons.

- If you have a relevant policy on flex time you should reference the policy. If you do not have a work hours/schedule or flex-time policy create one.
- If you have one a policy but it does not reference personal/or disability accommodation then add this to your policy
- Explain how the nature of this 2<sup>nd</sup> individual's job combined with the philosophy of the organization does not offer job flexibility at this time
- Identify other options that are acceptable to you such as job sharing or part-time work or other jobs in the organization that could allow the flexibility
- When asked why you accommodated the other individual simply say that decisions regarding other employees are confidential.

Tip: Do not immediately offer workplace training about working with a co-worker with a mental health disability, but do consider it in the future.

## **Protecting the Worker with a Disability**

Since you mentioned personal friction you may need to take steps to ensure your workplace is free of harassment. Observe the workplace and identify any troubling dynamics.

## **Helping your Employee with Disclosure if she Chooses**

Ask your employee with the disability if she is interested in obtaining assistance in disclosing information about her situation. Options can include identifying her challenges as 'stress' or 'anxiety' or simply as a medical condition. This would then allow her to mention that she has a flexible work schedule to accommodate her needs if the question is posed to her. She may also choose to indicate that she does make up lost time or that she uses sick or vacation time. It is her decision to reveal this information and you should not take these steps on her behalf however it may help improve her co-worker relationships.

Sometimes when you are not in a position to offer details saying nothing is your best strategy but take a look at the entire situation and understand all the dynamics in play.

## **Todays Expert**

[Tara Orchard](#) is a consultant, strategist, coach, trainer and writer. She combines psychology, personal development, social/emotional intelligence, learning strategies and technology trends with a capacity to deliver information and coach others successful.