

Disability Scenarios

Kelsey has broken her leg in a skiing accident, and returns to work with a doctor's note in which the doctor requests the following accommodations for Kelsey: change in her assigned workspace to a ground floor room in a different building, permission for Kelsey to be late to work, and an assigned "helper" to carry her belongings in from the parking lot. She also asks for a "handicap" parking place in the employee parking lot. The supervisor calls you at HR complaining, and asking if she really has the right to demand all of these accommodations. What is your advice?

A faculty member is recovering from heart surgery and has used sick leave for three weeks in the middle of the semester. She wants to return to teaching her regular classes but asks to be relieved from any committee work, advising, grading or anything other than delivering her lectures. She states that it will take all of her energy to get to campus for the lectures and she will not have the stamina to do more. The department head is unsure what to do. How would you advise?

Kevin presents a doctor's letter informing the university that he has a congenital heart defect which poses no immediate threat to his life, but which is expected to progress gradually to a point where he will need surgery (perhaps as much as 20 years away) to repair the condition. The letter indicates that Kevin should not engage in strenuous physical activity, because of an increased risk of heart attack. Kevin is assigned to work in the warehouse and is required to load and unload heavy boxes and equipment, and he wants to continue with his regular work duties, despite his doctor's advice. The supervisor is worried about liability, and isn't sure he wants Kevin on the dock, now that he knows about the problem. Kevin isn't really qualified for a desk job, although on occasion others have been temporarily put on a "light duty" assignment. What do you tell the supervisor?

Lindsey comes to her supervisor after six months on the job asking for permission to be excused from budgetary assignments because of a learning disability. Her job includes preparing budgetary spreadsheets for the department. She presents to the supervisor assessments performed when she was in 6th grade that indicate a difficulty with math concepts. She has nothing more recent, but says that the public schools in her home town gave her

additional test time for all of her classes and excused her from math classes all through middle and high school, and she expects similar accommodations in the workplace. The supervisor tells you that budget responsibilities are a major component of Lindsey's job, but the description of the job as advertised does not mention this aspect of the work. What is your advice to the supervisor?

Jack has been diagnosed with dyslexia, and has presented documentation of his condition to the HR department. He has a bachelor's and a master's degree in theater, and he has been in a doctoral program part-time at the university for the past two years. His job is to draft and edit content for weekly university electronic newsletters. He is asking for additional time to complete his assignments, and has suggested that a bi-weekly newsletter would fit much better with his needs. What suggestions do you give his supervisor?

Ginny has asked for a change in assignments from her regular secretarial duties, which include filing paperwork in large, vertical file cabinets and shelving returned books in the office library in floor-to-ceiling bookcases. She has presented documentation of degenerative arthritis in her back, and has a doctor's letter indicating that she should not be required to lift anything over chest level. There is no other secretary in the department, but there is a part-time worker who generally runs errands and delivers mail within the office. Do you advise the supervisor to assign the tasks Ginny cannot perform to the part-time worker?

Bill comes to the Human Resources department to complain that the office where he is assigned to work is causing his allergies to act up, and the supervisor refuses to change the office assignment. Bill tells the HR representative that he went to the doctor three times the preceding year, and he is sure it is because of "bad air" in the room. He wants HR to step in and force the supervisor to reassign him to another office within the department. What do you say?