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# Physical Restrictions as a Barrier to Work

“What if I can’t do **what** I used to do anymore?”

# Mobility:

The ability to move arms and legs, use fingers and toes.

The ability to move my body from one place to another.

The ability to stand, sit, walk, run, jump, point, lift, carry and stretch



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# Acquired Physical Impairments

Some people are born with physical impairments because of genetics or trauma during the birth process.

Some people acquire impairments from accidents, stroke, body parts that wear out or repetitive work injuries.

If those physical impairments are going to be lasting, creating functional limitations that are permanent, the impact on work has to be considered.

# Nobody Likes Change



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If you have been a brick layer for 20 years, that is what you do. You are probably very good at it.

Not being a brick layer is hard to even think about.

James is a brick layer, but now he has a back problem and his doctor says, you can't bend at the waist, you can't lift over 10 pounds and you need to alternate sitting and standing at work. These doctor statements are work restrictions.

The work James did for many years is finished.

And he still needs to earn!

# Responses to change

James, the former brick layer, could respond in several ways.

- \*He could be angry
- \*He could feel helpless, hopeless, distressed, depressed
- \*He might not have any idea on what to do next
- \*He could be unwilling to change jobs and work while in pain

Or, he could be experiencing all 4 of those responses.



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# Change comes with age

Ann has been working as a waitress, a school lunch server and an assistant to a caterer in her long work career. At age 56, she is struggling with osteoarthritis - - pain in her hips, knees and ankles. She went to physical therapy for months and takes a mild anti-inflammatory medication. Her doctor just stated she needs to think about a different line of work. Ann's work restrictions are 'no standing over 20 minutes without a sit break, no lifting over 15 pounds, no extensive walking, alternate sitting and standing, when standing use a cushioned fatigue mat and wear supportive shoes'.

Ann is not ready to retire. She loves to feed people.



# Change comes when you least expect it

Ronnie has been a proud and decorated public safety officer. Recently he fell off a ladder while responding to a fire. His shoulder was shattered. At age 40, he wants to get back to work. Ronnie's doctor gave the following restrictions: 'no lifting over 25 pounds, no climbing, no lifting the left arm above shoulder height'.

Using the skills and interests he has, Ronnie's options might include working as a Dispatch Operator, or re-training for a different type of job.



# How can we help workers respond ?

- 1) Suggest some counseling to adjust to the change
- 2) Explore possible job accommodations. (Sometimes there are none.)
- 3) Provide options – spend time exploring interests, look at jobs with similar wages, help them explore short term training for the next job
- 4) Encourage informational interviews – going to worksites and learn about other types of jobs that match the restrictions they have
- 5) Refer for vocational rehabilitation to partner in exploring options and identifying a plan to get back to work



# Possible Resolutions:

## James the brick layer

After struggling with the changes and pain of his back problems, James shadowed a job estimator at a local company who does a lot of brick work. With some short term training on using the company software, he accepted a job as an estimator. His experience and knowledge of layout was highly valued. Bonus: he no longer has extended stays overnight in bad hotel beds, but can be home most nights. The ipad and measuring tape are his primary tools; within lifting restrictions.

## Ann who loves to feed people

Ann did not want to do much job training, but did engage in some job exploration. Reading through job titles, she became intrigued with the idea of being a culinary instructor. While she didn't get certified in that field, she did find a paraprofessional position at a local tech center, where she was accommodated with a stool while training, and students are doing the big lifting. There are fatigue mats throughout the kitchen when she needs to stand. As you might guess, she has wonderful social skills and an encouraging personality the students are drawn to.

# Ronnie – restricted public safety officer

Because Ronnie was injured at work, he had some long term disability benefits that allowed him to consider a different field. Ronnie met with a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor and did some interest and aptitude testing. He did go to work as a 911 Dispatch operator, but is also pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Accounting, with a combination of financial aid from his employer and VR. He always liked numbers, the job outlook is bright and his dream job is to someday do accounting in the public safety sector.

# Resources for Exploration

O\*net

Ask Jan! Job Accommodation Network

What Color is your Parachute 2018, Richard Bolles

Do What You Are, Tieger, Barren and Tieger