

NATIONAL SPASMODIC DYSPHONIA ASSOCIATION

SPASMODIC DYSPHONIA AND JOB INTERVIEWS

Take a look at the job descriptions and qualifications sought by most employers today and you will see **“Excellent Written and Oral Communication Skills.”** You know you have the skill set. You know your experience and dedication will enhance the company's profits. You know you would love to be considered for the position, but...how do you convince them of your oral communication skills if your voice is not clear enough to get through the interview? Does this mean that with SD you are not the right person for the job? No. You are just as qualified as you were before SD.

Interviewing for a job with SD can pose challenges. To paraphrase William Shakespeare: To disclose or not to disclose your SD: that is the question. The answer varies by person and must take into account the severity of the SD symptoms, the centrality of SD to fulfilling one's job requirements, the necessity of a company to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) hiring and accommodations requirements, and one's own comfort level in talking about SD. There is no right or wrong answer. The experiences below shed some light on the interview process from those who have successfully navigated the job market despite their SD. These experiences have been pulled from current and archived posts on the NSDA's Spasmodic Dysphonia Bulletin Board (www.dysphonia-bb.org/forums/sd).

TIPS ON MANAGING JOB INTERVIEWS WITH SD

FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT DISCLOSE THEIR SD (with evident symptoms):

- “... I was interviewing for jobs with pretty severe AD/SD. I tried to schedule most of my interviews early in the morning as that is when I sound my best. I found that although it was extremely difficult for me to interview, the quietness of the room allowed me to speak a little softer than usual and so I didn't have to force my voice. Although I still sounded like there was something wrong with my voice, I brought cough drops with me as to make it look as if I had a cold. I was offered a few positions even though my voice was horrible. After I got my job, I explained my SD to my co-workers. My boss told me that she thought I was "ill" during the interview and had a bad cold and she said she admired the fact that I showed up to interview feeling so sick. Don't give up. These were just some of the ways I got around it, although others may not agree with my approach at all.....I managed to land the job!!”
- “I have chosen to say I was sick. Usually once your foot is in the door and your skill is appreciated - when you are comfortable you can talk about what SD is....”

FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT DISCLOSE THEIR SD (without evident symptoms):

- “I can hide the symptoms my SD with Botox injections and would not disclose it during an interview unless I felt it would benefit me in some way (i.e., a job working for a disability agency). Otherwise, it would not come up, and I don't see the need to talk about it. I'm not sure 'guess what, I have SD' would be the first thing they would be interested in, especially if I can hide it. If I thought the SD would get in the way of my ability to perform the job, I wouldn't have applied in the first place. Otherwise, it's no one else's business.”

FROM THOSE WHO DISCLOSE THEIR SD:

- “My advice is different than the advice you've received so far. Speaking from the perspective of interviewer (a role that is well known to me), I would be turned off by someone giving me written information about a medical problem they had unless I asked for it, especially if it were done at the outset of the interview.... Your objective in the interview should be to sell yourself and learn about the job. I have SD, too. It is not one of my selling points. :) I wouldn't dwell on the topic of SD in my interview unless the interviewer expressed interest in it.

I suggest that you begin your interview with a sincere smile and a simple statement such as 'Before we begin, please let me mention that I have a voice disorder that makes my voice sound a little odd sometimes. I'm fine, and I hope you won't hesitate to ask me to repeat if it is necessary.'

If the interviewer wants to know more, he or she will ask. Chances are good the person will say 'okay' or 'I understand you fine' and move on. In the meantime, the fact that you've been upfront and acted comfortable with the situation will enhance the interviewer's impression of you. This opening statement also will help keep the interviewer focused on the content of your interview rather than wondering why your voice may not sound completely normal. It may help put you at ease as well....”

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS:

Questions to Ask Yourself	Implications
Does the company have more than 15 employees?	If it has less than 15 employees, it is exempt from ADA requirements, so mentioning your disability may not serve you any legal benefit.
How severe are your symptoms?	If they are too obvious to hide, then being forthright may prevent interviewers from making incorrect assumptions.
How comfortable are you in discussing SD?	If you present it casually and positively as a medical condition, employers are less likely to worry about it than if you make a big deal of explaining your troubles.
How much will SD impact your ability to perform the functions of the position?	If the position requires little customer contact or public speaking, the relevance of SD to the position is minimal. If giving presentations is central to the position, mentioning the SD can help the employer plan for possible accommodations.
How willing are you to make excuses for the SD in the long term?	If you do not want to walk around with cough drops to convey the appearance of being ill, being honest and open may be the best policy.