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A How-To Guide for Young People*

Disinhibited Thoughts #17

Continuing with “TS and Employment”, we left off last time at the initial job interview:

-Remember those preconceptions – when getting specific about what your symptoms ARE be sure to also say what your symptoms AREN'T. Swearing is so commonly believed to be part and parcel with all cases of TS, for instance; this notion would most certainly detract from your attractiveness for, say, a human service position of some sort. Nip thoughts like that in the bud!

-of course, you can say just about anything you'd like and your credibility is still going to be in question. That's because the person defending you is YOU – no one has a more vested interest in minimizing the impact that this disorder may have on your successful performance than you do. Hence if you have had successful past employment situations it is vitally important to have those employers address the TS when providing references: if you are REALLY lucky (s)he will be someone candid enough to disclose his/her own initial fears and reservations about working alongside someone with this disorder, and how (s)he found these concerns came to be resolved.

Ok, so now you're hired. Good job (pat on the back!). Is your job as self-advocate finished now? Sorry, but you're just getting started.....

-continually make very clear that YOU ARE OPEN TO DISCUSSING THE DISORDER AND ANY PROBLEMS WITH IT. You've all heard before how important first impressions are – given that these are people you will be interacting with on a regular and intense basis you should, on your first day and in your very first introduction, openly acknowledge (in an inviting, pleasant way) that you have TS and that you would hope anyone with any questions or concerns wouldn't hesitate to approach you.

To emphasize this point, I have co-workers still who I learn are not comfortable with telling me that something I was doing was distressing to them – this, after countless writings, media appearances, presentations, and web pages! My supervisor tells me that people understand the symptoms to be involuntary and so don't want to belabour something I can't control. While perhaps this is true to varying extents, I don't believe that this fact should relieve me of all responsibility for my actions and the disruption I can bring to a work environment. I make this point to my colleagues, and suggest that there are tricks which can be done regardless – for example working in the most segregated office (in a sound-proof one if available or modified by me) or ensuring that I “time” myself appropriately (ticking, for example, after the consultation meeting with family and school and not during).

-Having a sense of humour about tics and any issues they may cause, and using it to prepare a disarming, jocular approach has helped me enormously in this respect. If someone jokes with me about a symptom, I see it simply as a tribute to my efforts to put people at ease. It leaves me feeling more confident that if there ARE any problems, I will be told about them. Yesterday I got an email from an individual welcoming me back to this site (my last rotation was on a different site), telling me it was nice to have my noises back in the cafeteria. In response I wrote, “Noises? <bark> I'm sorry <yelp>, but I <snort> haven't the foggiest idea <sniff> what you are talking about.....” ☺

We'll finish up this series next time, my friends...

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