Finding an MS-Friendly Job That Works for You

by ABIGAIL BUDD

Jobs for People With Multiple Sclerosis

This is a topic close to my heart as I was made redundant from my job a few years ago and was left isolated and frightened for my future.

I was working for a charity and couldn't prove I'd been made redundant because of my worsening disability, but had my suspicions.

My boss had been unsupportive and unwilling to help, and even suggested one time that I reduce my hours or do a more "administrative role" because I couldn't manage going to London on my own for a meeting.

This was before I accepted my need for a mobility scooter and was trying to manage with two walking sticks. I left her office in tears, fearing for my financial future.

A few weeks later she broke the news to me that my job was no longer "financially viable" and I was devastated. I was only 36 and couldn't imagine how I was going to find work in my condition.

How was I going to get to interviews without being able to walk convincingly?

What I noticed in the following months was the lack of databases or central information in the U.K. on disability-confident or disability-aware employers. It would have been so nice to know in advance whether offices were accessible, for example, or had toilets on the ground floor.

I ruled myself out of loads of jobs too if they involved traveling, for example, or visiting people at home. In the end, I started thinking about becoming self-employed as at least I'd be in charge of that — but what could I do?

I started thinking about the following things:

- What are my skills?
- What experience do I have?
- How can I sell these to other people?
- Will it be sustainable?

If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them!

I thought about myself and realized writing and training were things I enjoyed doing, so I set up a blog and started writing. I had loads of experience with multiple sclerosis (MS) so wrote about that and started exploring social media as a way of promoting my writing and making connections with the MS community.

Before this point I'd been in denial of my disability, but this setback at work helped me accept my condition and

even embrace it. I got a mobility scooter and started getting involved with other MSers in my community.

Suddenly I felt free and optimistic rather than miserable and useless.

To my delight my blog posts went down well and I started getting paid work from contacts I made through readers. I've been involved in app launches and focus groups, as well as being invited to write for various publications.

I was even asked to talk to a U.S. health care company via conference call and earned money sitting on my sofa. That was the most lucrative half an hour I've had in a while!

Finding the Right Employer

While this is all great extra money, I soon realized I couldn't pay the mortgage on this money alone, so was relieved to notice an employer I used to work for was hiring. This was a job in the U.K. criminal justice system, which I'd left to join the charity I'd been made redundant from.

I was known and respected there and my old boss was interviewing. He knew about my diagnosis and happily wheeled me to the bathroom on an office chair when the interview was over!

I am so lucky they have been so supportive. I have a designated parking space beneath the building and drive my scooter around the office. They help me by bringing service users in to see me and I've recently had a meeting regarding working from home a couple of days a week.

Making Your Job Work for You

I work four days a week from 9:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. and this suits me fine. I have a day off a week for "me" time and can be there when the children come home from school, which is important to me.

I juggle my writing and other commitments around my working hours and find I do OK financially. I realize I've been lucky, but there are other money making ideas I haven't quite gotten around to that you could explore, too:

- **Ebay** – I have piles of books, toys and clothes that could be sold online.
- **Completing surveys** – check what's going on in your area but I've heard this can be lucrative.
- **Tele-sales** – there are organizations that pay people to do market research from home.

Just because our bodies have given up and are unpredictable, I don't think this should mean we give up financially. When I was redundant and living on welfare I realized there was still so much I had to offer.

It annoyed me that I could do the job as well as anyone else as long as I had the support of my employer.