

GO CONFIDENTLY INTO HIRING:

*A Guide for those with disabilities for hiring
careworkers*

by Gemma Yates-Howorth

PREFACE

It was a real honour for me as an Independent Senator for Manitoba to invite Gemma Yates-Howorth to write this guide for people with disabilities who wish to hire their own care workers. Our role as Senators, in addition to reviewing and analyzing legislation, is to give voice to people of all backgrounds and situations in life. In 2019 Canada passed the Accessible Canada Act, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, and Bill C 22, the Canada Disability Benefit Act is currently being debated. Society must focus on the needs, rights and independence of peoples with disabilities and those who are deaf. Personal assistance for people with disabilities is one aspect of that challenge. May this Guide be useful to those who hire and live with care workers.

I have seen the diligence with which Gemma has hired her caregivers over a number of years, and how she has assessed her own needs and balanced the interests and competencies among her staff. I have witnessed the warmth with which she interacts with each of them. I have also seen those who have not had the chance to choose those who work with them. I am aware of differing qualities of life, different feelings of self-esteem, and the limited circles of engagement within their communities. When I invited Gemma to undertake this guide, I asked her to articulate not only the “how’s” of her hiring principles and practices, but also what she felt she could share of her own personal story. She has done that.

Gemma’s insights, both personal and universal, are excellent. Her own determination has enabled her many achievements despite her living with cerebral palsy her entire life. After completing her high school diploma, she graduated with a University of Manitoba degree in Community Development and Recreation Management. Since then she has volunteered at Winnipeg’s St Amant Centre, a home for people with high-needs disabilities, and has had various contracts with the Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba. Though life in a wheelchair is daunting, she has explored parts of her city few do, and she has experienced the city’s many diversities. Her creativity, and her adeptness with technology, have been evident in the programs she has developed in her volunteer work. Throughout, she acknowledges with gratitude the assistance she has had from her care givers with diverse backgrounds, professions and cultures.

It is my hope that this Guide enables others to expand their worlds of independence and to discover new places and interests.



The Hon Patricia Bovey, LLD, FRSA, FCMA
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INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities and their support workers have a lot to offer each other in regard to living a great life. The disabled have the right to have the best care they can have, but many people don't know how to hire their own support workers.

This needs to change. The Government should have a program to teach people with disabilities, and their families, how to hire helpers for everyone, no matter what their disabilities are. Everyone should be given the opportunity to participate in hiring their support workers, given the appropriate assistance and respect. Following some easy-to-understand guidelines makes the chance for success and happiness, much greater. Though hiring is never an easy task, no matter the outcome people can learn from their experience.

I have been hiring my own support caregivers for the past eighteen years, with the assistance of my mother and a trusted person. During these years I have hired some wonderful support workers, and some of the worst.

A *trusted person* is someone you care about and who cares about you and whom you trust. They have shared experiences with you for more than a year. They listen to your ideas and respect you as a human.



CHAPTER 1: POSTING AN AD AND LOOKING AT RESUMES

Sam's story

Sam walked into my life with long black hair in two braids and a nose ring. After hanging out with Sam for 18 years, she has become my most *trusted person*. At University for eight years, Sam taught me an easier way to study, and how to write papers. She always tries to put a positive outlook onto what happens in life, teaching me how to look at people without judging them. I count on her for her insights and ideas. Sometimes, I wonder how I can be so lucky to have such an amazing “older sister” like Sam. Sam is one of those lucky finds for a support worker.

COMING UP WITH THE IDEAL PERSON

No matter what kind of disability your family member or you have, you will have an idea about the kind of person with whom you want to spend time. This is where the fun comes into play. Make a list of your wishes and what you want to find in a new worker. When you are making your wish list, think about who you live with and ask them for their ideas. To be successful, we all have to work together. Getting along really helps! If you are hiring for someone else, ask them questions in the easiest way, to help you learn what they are looking for. For example, what activities would they like to do with their new worker?

BEFORE YOU WRITE YOUR AD

Before writing and posting your ad, determine when you need help and what kinds of help you need. Some people with disabilities don't need a helper with them all day every day. However, some may need help with personal tasks, like going to the bathroom and getting dressed, or help with shopping and house cleaning.

When you write the ad, include the specific areas for which you need support. People are sometimes too proud to admit that they need help. However, many of us do. Some people in wheelchairs need someone to help change a light bulb. Make it a positive part of your life. Enjoy your helper's company even while you laugh with them about being the taskmaster!

Hiring will probably take more time than you would like to devote to it, but hopefully this person is going to be around for some time. Try to schedule the interviews over a few days, giving yourself a break to think about the people whom you have just met.

WRITING THE AD

Writing an ad is like going on a first date. Go into it with an open mind but before you start, consider what details you want to put into it. Do you live with parents, roommates or a pet? Where do you live? Adding the part of the city or some landmarks in the country or town where you live helps if you are hiring someone part-time.

Try writing two different ads and ask your trusted person to tell you which ad they like the best. Are you limited by a word count? If you are writing an ad for someone who has a cognitive disability, read them what you have written and ask them, "Is this what you want me to say?" This way you are involving them right from the get-go.

An ad should include something personal, like how you love going out to different events and places. It should also include your care needs and help with any appointments out of your home, like the dentist or doctor. Will you train them? Will you pay them during training? What is the hourly pay? Do they have a car? Ask them to send a resume.

If you or your family member can't use the phone, make that point very clear in the ad. Give your email address. Whether or not you have a working dog is also critical information to make sure you don't get someone who is not okay with dogs.

An example of an ad I have used is:

I'm Gem and I have a physical disability. I'm friendly and interesting and I love to learn. I need a new worker to help me with my personal needs and to hang out at my family home at least 12 hours per week. I have a cat named Hermione. I will train you and you will be paid as you are getting trained. Every week is different; we work together to determine what days and times are best for everyone. Must be female and able to start in August. Please email me at gbs@hotmail.com with your resume and any questions.

Here's another example:

We need someone to come into our mother's house and help her with some of her daily tasks, giving her pills, showering and shopping for groceries. Housecleaning is critical. Mother loves someone reading to her. We would like someone at least two days a week. Hours are flexible. We will need a resume. We train you and you will be paid while you are getting trained. Please email or call me or my sister at: Sammy Howard, (302) 205-4314, sammyhoward@shaw.ca, or Dany Killerson, (302) 232-4578, danykillerson@gmail.com.

The ad is your calling card for people interested in the job. Have fun writing it. Take time to write the best possible one you can write and get someone you trust to read it. You don't want any spelling errors. You want to make a good impression.

If you are writing this ad for someone else, in the ad put in a line saying, "I'm writing for this person."

BEFORE YOU POST YOUR AD

Make up a list of where you can post your ad and ask your friends and local disability or seniors' organization for additional suggestions. Does this place have a fee to post? Do you need permission to post? Look at some different ads wherever you've chosen to put up your ad. You might change yours when you look at what kinds of ads are there.

Think about the person you want for a new support worker. It is tough to talk about yourself. However, the ad is your only opportunity to get people's attention.

People from small towns have a different set of challenges finding support workers. There isn't such a big pool in rural and northern areas in which to find a worker. Start by asking around locally; folks may know someone who is looking for a job. Post at:

- The high school, colleges, or universities
- Local grocery store or hospital
- Local newspaper
- Facebook
- Kijiji
- Job boards at the local coffee shop
- Online job websites
- Government job bank

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SOMEONE IS THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOU? HOW DO YOU READ A RESUME?

Trust your intuitive feelings when you go through resumes. Sometimes you feel great about a person, or sometimes you get a bad feeling about them. Look for the personality traits that you want in your career.

You need someone reliable who knows you need their help. You want someone friendly and easy to get along with, who arrives on time and learns quickly. Are they a caring person?

Ask your *trusted person* to look at people's resumes with you. That way, if they experience a negative feeling about someone, you will look a little bit harder and talk it out with them. Having a second set of eyes on people's paperwork helps. Examine the resume closely. This gets easier, the more you do it.

Reading resumes is looking at the records of this person's past work. This might sound like a no brainer. However, reading many people's resumes is both interesting and informative because it enables you to consider whether or not the applicant could fit into your lifestyle. For example, if someone applying for your job has the same hobbies as you, invite them for an interview. Pick the top three people who have applied for your ad and schedule interviews. Also choose some backup people so you don't have to start the whole process over again, when someone doesn't work out for you.

Tip 1

Be flexible. Nothing goes as expected when you post ads. Follow all the steps carefully for maximum success.

Tip 2

Invest the time and energy to find the ideal person however long it takes.

Tip 3

Enjoy the people you meet even if you don't hire them. They can give you a laugh!

Tip 4

Laughing or crying always helps when nothing is going to plan about finding a worker. Afterwards, get back to the search.

CHAPTER 2: THE INTERVIEW AND TRAINING

Amber's story

When Amber came into my family's life, she had a big smile, a good reference, and a resume. With Amber it was very easy to see she was her own person, a lover of animals and humans. Amber was one of the best cooks, always trying something new with my family and me. She is a big reader and we loved reading together. We would take her car on expeditions and always find something to laugh about. Because she loved to learn all kinds of different subjects, she and I would often be at the library. For three years, Amber also went to my volunteer job at the St. Amant Centre, a residential home for people living with developmental and physical disabilities. We created scavenger hunts and games for them. I feel so lucky to have someone like Amber in my life.

INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWS

Having an interview lets you see what kinds of persons you are interviewing and lets you feel their vibes. This personal encounter with someone allows you to learn whether or not you or your family members will get along with them.

When you are hiring for someone else, be especially aware of the integrity of the person that you are considering. For an example, when Amber came into my life, she was so honest about herself. She was caring and gentle. Ideally, "what you see is what you get." With Amber that saying was proven true.

For one mother of a young son who lives with disabilities, it is a challenge to find a worker for her son. Rachel Smith told me in an interview, "Personality is the biggest factor, that and their compatibility with Ryder."

Have fun with the interviews. Maybe today, you will meet the best worker. Don't let concerning interviews get you down. Meeting new people is always a challenge: it is often also fun and rewarding.

THE PRACTICAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR BOOKING THE INTERVIEW

Start by telling them your address or where you are going to conduct the interview if it is not at your home. Let them know if you live with your parents, roommates or with your lover and whom they are going to meet. You should let them know what they will need to bring such as references or a copy of their upcoming availability schedule.

WHERE SHOULD YOU DO AN INTERVIEW?

You will no doubt have some rooms in your house where you feel most comfortable. Make your chosen room pop. Set the room up with mood lighting and have some chairs. Help the interviewee feel comfortable. Clean the room up before you have an interview.

If you have roommates or parents, tell them that you are having an interview and suggest they be somewhere else. That way the person doesn't have to meet everyone that you live with on the first day. If it is a nice day and you have a comfortable outside space, you could have your interview outside.

Whether you choose a coffee shop or your home, make sure that you have some privacy and quiet where you can talk.

WHO SHOULD BE IN THE INTERVIEW WITH YOU?

For people who need support in hiring workers, the persons themselves should be in the interview so that they can see the person that you want to hire for them. Parents of young people with disabilities should make them a part of the interviewing stages. That way when they are older, they will have learned something about the experience and one day they can do their own interviews.

When I was a kid, my mom and I used to do the interviews together. I always played a part in finding my own workers. She wanted me to be able to one day do my own interviews. Now I do my own hiring for myself. With my one trusted worker, we interview and train the new people. I'm grateful to my mom for letting me fall down when I made a hiring misstep and then get back on to my feet. I haven't always chosen the perfect support worker, but I've learned a lot in the process. Now I'm more confident in hiring my own workers. For parents of young people with disabilities, it is a challenge to know if they are ready to be able to sit in on the interview. Ask them if they would like to be present. Judge accordingly.

For those people who live with cognitive disabilities, include them in the interview. That way the person being interviewed can see with whom they would be working for. If someone cannot come into the interview, try to think of a way of getting the two people to meet. It will help you to better know if and how they will get along with one another. Teamwork makes the dream work.

If you don't get a good feeling about the person in the interview, say something like, "We are meeting more people in the next few weeks, and we will email you once we have made our minds up about whom we are going to hire."

WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE NEEDED TO WORK WITH YOU OR YOUR FAMILY?

Every province will have different requirements to be met when you are hiring people. In Manitoba you have to get a Criminal Records check and file the Sexual Abuse Registry Check. Check out your provincial requirements before you do your interviews.

You can ask people for their references during the interview or tell them in an advance email to bring their references' contact information with them. Talking with these referees could change your initial perceptions about a person or their compatibility.

Sometimes people don't have the right documents to work with you. However, that doesn't mean that you should give them up. People who want to work with you can get the documents. Give interviewees the date you need the documents, if they don't bring them to the interview.

THE INTERVIEW

Write down the questions that you need to get answered in the interview. Ask your trusted person to read your questions or help you make up the right ones. That way you don't forget anything important.

Everyone will do an interview differently for a host of reasons. Make interviews a fun time. If you cannot get the nervousness in the pit of your stomach to go away, take some deep breaths, listen to some favorite music or talk with your trusted person about the way you feel.

Some key questions you might ask are:

- Tell me about your previous paid or volunteer work.
- What part of the city do you live in?
- What are your means of transportation: car, bus or bike?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are your hobbies?
- What do you like to do for a day off?
- Do you enjoy cooking? Is there one meal that you like to make?
- Can you see yourself working here?
- What is your schedule like?
- What time can you start if you get this job? What time can you work until each day?

DEBRIEFING POST-INTERVIEW

Debrief with your most trusted worker or family member. Assess everyone's references, their conversation with you and their resumes carefully. Consider closely whether or not this person will be a good fit for you or your family member for whom you're hiring. You also need to determine if this person will feel comfortable working with you and other family members.

Do you see any positives and negatives about hiring this person? Talk both out, especially the negatives. Maybe, you can work out a way around them. Think about whether you could see yourself enjoying this person and having them in your home.

Call or email their references. Before you contact them, prepare questions to ask them.

Look at their schedule and your schedule and see if they are compatible, making them able to work for you.

If someone is not a good fit at this time, might they have future potential? If so, find a way to not completely close the door.

No matter if you are a first-time interviewer or if you're an old hand at interviews, make it a fun time meeting new people. You never know if you will find a friend.



TRAINING YOUR NEW HIRE

Ann's story

Ann and I were in grade 12 BIO together; that was how we first met. Because Ann has an older sister with a disability, she hardly needed any training from Mom and me. However, we trained her on how to fit into my family. During the time we were together, her family became like my second family, and I used to eat dinner at their house during the summer. Ann was very down-to-earth. She showed me some of the best ways for me to be more independent. She and I used to be the biggest goofballs. Now, whenever I see her, it is like we haven't missed any time apart.

Training a new worker is a good way to test the chemistry between the two of you and to learn how you are going to work together. It's like the first time that you meet your partner for a dance. You are getting the first feelings about that person. Do they have anything in common with you?

Training has its ups and downs. Don't worry if you start wondering: "Why did I hire this person?" Just give it time. Time will help form a stronger bond with this person or help you make up your mind about their suitability for your job.

Training should be broken up into shorter shifts. You'll both need patience because everything is new.

You are training a new dance partner to fit into your family routine or into your family member's home life. It takes two to tango: training can be fast or very slow depending on many factors. One's prior experiences, whether or not in support work, will cut the training time.

Some people jump into their new job landing two feet on the ground. Some people come into this kind of job not really knowing what they should do, and they hesitate to make a move. This is where the training time is very important for everyone. Sharing your daily schedule to let a new person know when everything happens makes everyone more comfortable. I tell everyone who starts with my family a rough schedule of my daily tasks with which I need help and what everyone else in the house will be doing. This makes them feel welcome.

If you hire someone from a different country, make sure that your family is open to their ideas that may be different from your own. Support the person whom you hired.

Make training a great time for everyone involved. If at all possible, have an overlap with the old worker and the new worker. That way they can train along with your trusted person. Training always should take place at the most important times during the day when you need the most help.

Once your new worker knows your daily schedules, they will feel more comfortable. Offering a small salary increase works as an incentive to reach this point.

Scheduling someone new on a more regular schedule really helps them understand the ways that you need help and the ways in which they can help you. It helps makes training go way better.

Proper training makes working together more comfortable and makes it possible to enjoy one another.

WHAT DO YOU TRAIN YOUR NEW WORKER ON?

Train your new worker on your daily tasks. Also train them around your house's schedule. For an example, do you have to go to work before your other household members are up? Teach them how to make some of your favourite meals. Training on physical lifts and transfers is always very important. Your new worker must feel comfortable working the lift and making a transfer.

TRANSFERS

Transfers are essential for anyone with mobility issues; and require individualized training. Be sure your worker is wearing good shoes that won't slip during a transfer, something they feel comfortable wearing, and with a good grip on the ground.

When you are training someone new, it might be a good idea to write out step by step how to transfer you or your family member.

I have a four-step principle for my new workers to follow in doing a transfer:

1. Put the brakes on my chair.
2. Bend your legs and use them, not your back, for lifting.
3. Count to three, hug me, then stop and stand with me, until we are stable
4. Dance with me to wherever you will have to put me down.

Always have your trusted person with you during as much training as possible, until everyone feels secure. One goal of training is for both parties to get a better feeling about the new situation. Keep communications among the three of you—the experienced worker, you, and your new worker—open and encourage them to ask questions and/or ask for help when they need it.

Check with an occupational therapist before choosing or using any lift. If possible, ask them to teach the person who isn't familiar with the lift device. The two most common types of lifts are Hoyer Lifts and Sit-to-Stand Lifts.

HOYER LIFTS

Samantha Mitchell lives with Cerebral Palsy. She can't bear any weight on her legs so a Hoyer lift is how she gets from point A to point B. These are her steps in getting someone into their Hoyer lift.

1. Attach the sling by laying it so that the coloured tabs face the outside, furthest away from the person's body.
2. Place the cutout piece of the sling under the person's bum and pull the long straps around their legs securely, putting the long strap through the short strap.
3. Wheel the Hoyer to the front of the person's wheelchair. Widen the legs of the Hoyer around the front wheels of the wheelchair. Put the straps of the sling onto the hanger of

the machine at four points, front and back. Then use the remote to raise the person in the sling out of the wheelchair.

4. Once the person is raised out of the wheelchair and in the air securely, use the handlebars on the Hoyer to move it to its next location. Press the remote to gently drop the person into their next location, whether an armchair, toilet seat, another wheelchair or bed.
5. Remove the sling straps from the hanger of the Hoyer and pull back on the handlebars of the machine to get it out of the person's face. Then return the Hoyer to its storage location and make sure that it is plugged in so that it does not lose power.

SIT-TO-STAND LIFT

For those people who can do some weight-bearing but who can't stand up unaided, a sit-to-stand lift can be useful. They have a different set of steps and it is a good idea to check with an occupational therapist to create the steps that are right for you, no matter what kind of transfer you are using.

Tip 5

Make your interviews a positive experience and don't worry if you don't get it right the first time around. You learned a lot.

Tip 6

Check references and make sure all the necessary documents are in order.

Tip 7

Go with your feelings about training. If you don't feel that comfortable with a new worker doing something, then ask your trusted person to show them that one thing again.

Tip 8

You may need to call an occupational therapist to show you new techniques of training your new worker. Learning is an ongoing activity that provides a new understanding about your new worker, and a new way of managing what might be an old habit.

Endnotes

1. Received text message from Rachel Smith March 10, 2022.
2. Received text message from Samantha Mitchell March 10, 2022



CHAPTER 3: THE RIGHT FIT EVERY DAY

Map's story

I didn't hire Map right away because our schedules were not lining up. But we worked it out. Her flexibility gave me the first cue about how wonderful she would be. She was so strong in her body that training her was easy and she fit in really well with my family's everyday routine. She had a very cool look, and I was excited to learn more about her. Map comes from a big family and has helped her many sisters and brothers eat. When I asked her to help me, she did it so comfortably. She has taught me that coming from a big family is not always easy. It takes a give-and-take relationship, just like you need to work out with your support workers.

SCHEDULING

Scheduling is not ever easy for anyone. My Mom and I sit down with our schedules on the table at the start of the month. Mom tells me when she needs help, and I tell her what I have going on that month. That way we have support when we both need it. Think of scheduling as a big puzzle that you have to do every month and try to have fun with it.

We all have our own schedules which keep our everyday lives humming along. Many factors make each day different. Whenever you have a new worker, it can take them a little bit of time to get your schedule down. However, when they do, it makes your lives so much easier. Start your new worker off with the most important task with which you need help, like getting out of bed in the morning or showering.

Sometimes people like to have some time on their own, for downtime. When my workers are here and especially when they are doing a longer day with me, we take an hour off separately to have some of our own time. Alternatively, we just hang out together and do our own things. It all depends on the person. Schedule this out with your worker and let them know about it when you hire them.

Scheduling is very hard when one of your workers calls in sick unless you have a back-up person. During the pandemic everyone had to stay home whenever they felt sick or had a cold.

TASKS AT HOME

We all have those pesky tasks that we have to do around the house, and it helps when you have some great support doing those tasks. If you can make a day of these tasks with your worker, they will fly by. Some of my household tasks include house cleaning, washing and meal preparation. We all have paperwork to do like filling out forms. Save that task for your trusted person.

Having each one of your workers do one or two of the tasks makes your life so much easier. Getting my workers to help me accomplish my household tasks, makes living with my parents easier and allows me to be more independent. It also makes our workers feel a part of our lives, so train a new worker on your tasks around the house as part of their routine.

If a worker has not been asked to do one of your jobs, you can't be upset if they don't do it in the way you are accustomed to having it done. It's your responsibility to ask them to do something, to show them how to do it, and even to remind them. Show them two or three times and ask, "do you understand what I need you to do?"

With my new workers: I have Sam show them the tasks and then have Mom show them the same tasks. This gives them the chance to see two different ways of accomplishing them. From there, it is up to us to develop our ways of working successfully.

Having new workers see how others complete your daily tasks helps them understand what you want them to do for you. Everyone does their tasks a little bit differently.

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

Plan your outings carefully, especially regarding your transportation. It is always challenging when you are going out if you don't trust the transportation to bring you home. Ask your friends what transportation company they use. That way you know that someone you trust has used them and you can feel more confident. For people who are in a wheelchair it is even more of a challenge to identify a safe and trustworthy transport company you want to choose. Your disability association can also help with recommendations.

In almost all of Canada's big cities the bus is a good option for people using a wheelchair. In Toronto, I have been on the subways in the city. However, some of Toronto's stops aren't accessible and don't have a way for people using wheelchairs to get up to the platform and to street level. Check this before you go. Look for a Toronto Transit Association guide showing accessible stops. Some cities have accessible cabs for people with disabilities and sometimes these are the only accessible ways to get around a city. It can be very cool to rent an accessible van to travel, though options like this are expensive.

I usually try to use the bus during the summer, spring and fall, and save my cab fares for the winter. Winnipeg Transit Plus, available with different names in various cities, is like a cab. They pick you up at home and deliver you back. Remember to book ahead of time.

GETTING OUT FOR FUN AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Everyone has places to go and people to see. It shouldn't be such a challenge to go out. However, people with disabilities know all too well it is a challenge to get out in the winter if you live in a snowy city like Winnipeg. You have to be ready for any number of issues.

Some of these issues include cabs which don't show up, or your worker calls in sick, or perhaps the event is called off. Cancel your transportation immediately to avoid penalties.

Everyone needs to get out and about to stay in touch with their communities. Whether it is just wheeling around your block, or grabbing some food from the local food store, getting out gives you that needed fresh air. I always try to get out in summer almost every day, because in the winter it becomes more of a challenge. You can't always rely on the sidewalks being cleared of snow.

Even if you just walk to the local coffee shop, you can feel very proud of yourself for getting out. Some days you simply have too much energy to stay at home. When I have one of those days, I like to walk to the local mall in the summer. For me a nice long walk helps me calm down. Everyone has some places that they call their happy places. Get into the habit of going to your happy place every week or so. Try new places too.

In places like the zoo, pathways are always clean of snow and the animals are always outside, so few people go to the zoo in the winter and that's fun too.

The mall is another place you know that has no snow. You can do some of the best people-watching at the mall. Your local Art Gallery or museum are also great places to see exhibitions and walk around without difficulty.

Pick three new places to go with your workers and look around. It wakes up your mind and helps you and your worker learn more about your community. Having a group of your friends and their workers join you for some day trips will lift your spirits.



GOING TO YOUR APPOINTMENTS

Everyone has appointments at times. You can get very apprehensive when you have an appointment coming up. For an example, I hate getting any work done on my teeth. I walk there and that calms me down. When you have to go to an appointment with a worker, give your worker a play-by-play of what will happen in the appointment. That way your worker can try to calm you down if you are anxious. As well, they can feel more confident.

Whenever possible have your trusted person at appointments. But, since nothing goes to plan, train at least two people on your appointments.

MEAL PREPARATION

We all love to eat, and meal prep really helps everyone you live with. In my household my family usually sits down most Saturdays to plan meals for the next week. Include your workers in this scheduling whether they cook a meal or act as sous chefs or helpers.

Everyone will have different favourite dinners. You can help your workers by having some ideas for dinner and let them make suggestions. Making a new meal is not always easy. Try to be open to different foods so if your new worker comes from a different country, you help them feel comfortable. As well, you learn something new. Keep a binder with the best dinner recipes making them easy to find. Have fun with your meal prep.

RELATIONSHIPS

Some people are compatible with you from day one. With others, the relationship develops as you experience your day-to-day life alongside them. If you've shared some of your own likes and dislikes during your interview, you have a heads up. New workers need to be the right fit in your life or your family member's life. You develop relationships by understanding expectations.

We all like our lives to be run in a timely manner. If you need help getting up in the morning, schedule someone to come in at the time you regularly get up. Timing for some pills is very important for people. Plan accordingly.

Let your workers know quite clearly what your expectations are. When one of your workers doesn't meet your expectations, sit down with them and talk about it with your trusted person by your side. If they have done something that worries you, try to work out another way of working with them. Try to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. When something doesn't go right at first, be patient and give workers some time.

Let workers know that their support is essential, not just a luxury. Life happens and be kind and try to understand your workers. Maintain a daybook so that everybody knows the master schedule when they are booking their hours. Ask workers to check their own appointments and try not to double book themselves.

Flexibility is an important element in hiring and can help ensure a good fit between you and your family with a worker. Make it very clear with new support workers that schedules will change when your life changes. Hopefully workers are understanding when you have to change the schedule around. Seniority gives your more established workers a chance to pick their own hours before newer workers.

Consider paying your workers when you are away, especially if your absence is unexpected. Alternatively, you can have them work off the extra paid hours when you get home.

Your workers may also need to get away, so consider hiring some backup people if possible. Workers will be loyal to us, as long as we treat them with respect.

Tip 9

Don't let yesterday dampen your spirits. It is gone and you cannot redo it. Learn from it and get on with your new way of doing things.

Tip 10

Talk to your trusted person and your workers often. Open communication can help cement a good fit between you and your workers.

CHAPTER 4: WORKING THROUGH ISSUES INCLUDING THE PANDEMIC

Polly's story

When I first received Polly's resume, I didn't want to hire her. Her vibe was as a health care aide not a caring friend. Her interest in art, however, really interested me so I gave her a chance and we ended up getting along really well. She initially had a hard time with transfers, so we got an occupational therapist to come help us train her. Once we had worked out our training issues with a therapist's insight and advice, we did well. Polly and I had a lot of fun and could talk nonstop for hours. I could tell her everything. That's why I was so surprised when she demanded an immediate stress leave because of family issues. As we were trying to talk things out she got up in the middle of the conversation without saying goodbye. I never heard from her again.

Anna's Story

Anna had been working with me for almost a year. I noticed weird things, but I didn't want to tell my mum because I wanted to protect Anna. Anna didn't know how to put her foot down and say "no" to anyone and took on too much. She was getting over stressed for a few months. When I look back on Anna, I should have seen it coming. Then she texted me a very long mean text and said, I pushed her to her "breaking point". In the end I learned from Anna that I always look at anyone with an open mind, and I should ask myself, "Is this person being honest with me and admitting her limits?" Whenever I asked Anna about things and how she was getting on, she insisted everything was fine. I should have talked to someone about the issues I was having with Anna.

COOKING

Cooking is a great way to build a friendship with your new helper; showing them your kitchen, telling them where everything they might need for cooking is. Cooking is very hard for some people. If you can lay out what they are going to make you, it might mean that you get something like what you want to eat. My workers and I have made a cookbook so that if we don't know what to make for dinner on a night, we look in our own cookbook and pick something from it. Recipes are very helpful for people without cooking experience.

What if you hire a vegetarian or a vegan? Try their cooking. If you like one meal, can you substitute a vegetarian or vegan option for your favourite meal? Learning to compromise makes having new helpers easier. With your new helper, plan the meals they know how to make. They'll thank you for it.

THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS

Everyone is made differently with different bodies and strengths, and some have challenges with the physical aspects of the job, particularly lifting and transferring you. Training is the perfect space to see if you have someone who can do everything you need. Having a professional teach your new hire how to transfer or use a lift is a great way to build greater comfort between you and your new helper. The professional might even show your family member a safer way of transferring or using your lift. This might even help you and your family member work together better.

If you fall during a transfer, or for any other reason, no one should try to lift you up. Call the non-emergency help line to assist.

FREQUENT LATENESS

Everyone is late sometimes, for any number of reasons. It is very hard when they don't tell you or your family member that they are running late. Some people always run late. When you have one person who is always running late, give them an earlier time to arrive so they are there when you must have the help. Have an open communication with your workers, so they don't get worried about telling you news, good or bad. It's also important to be clear about your expectations.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUR FAMILY OR THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU LIVE

Sometimes you feel you are caught in between a rock and a hard place. Should you stand up for your worker, or should you listen to your family members? To find a compromise with the issues, you all need to listen to each other and work to facilitate change. It is your role to deal with these issues to avoid tensions in your home.

NOT WORKING OUT? HOW DO YOU FIRE SOMEONE?

Firing someone doesn't give you that warm and fuzzy feeling. But you do have to make the tough decisions and act on them when you are the manager of your own homecare workers. Telling someone that they have not met your family member's standards is never easy or fun. However, like my mom always says, "It never gets easier to fire someone, but you have to feel comfortable enough to do it when it has to be done."

Knowing when and how is the key for the firing to go as smoothly as possible. You can't fire someone without a very good reason, especially if they haven't done anything really egregious. List your issues thoroughly before making your decisions. Be prepared to be challenged. If this person wants to take you to court, this practice gives you an advantage. Make sure you are following all the appropriate steps when letting someone go. You must, legally, give written warnings and opportunities to improve, except in cases such as theft, physical or sexual abuse, harassment and lack of trust.

PEOPLE QUITTING UNEXPECTEDLY

People whom you love who work with you sometimes have to move on with their lives. You will be sad, but this is a fact when you are hiring your own workers. Some workers will give you a heads up that they are looking for another job. Whereas some workers will not give you any time to try to find a replacement worker. There are legal requirements. Know these carefully. Your provincial websites articulate these issues and processes.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020 the world changed: it might not ever go back to how we knew it. The COVID-19 pandemic made everything so much harder for everyone. Since the pandemic, I've had more staff turnover than ever before. I'll share some of the things I've learned along the way.

HAVE CLEAR POLICIES

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to write down policies for staff became very clear. Some policies include:

1. When a worker has to call in sick.
2. How long should they try to give you for notice?
3. Do they get paid if they are sick? If so, how many sick days do they get?
4. Do you offer paid breaks?
5. If they want to quit, how should they go about it, and with what warning?
6. How much will they get paid? When can they get their cheque?

There are many more areas of policy that you might want to have for your staff. Making everyone be aware that you have some policies is a good start. Have your staff read your policies to make your home a better workspace. Make sure you and your family members review the policies that you have made. One way to have you feel more comfortable about a new person in your house is to have your staff sign your policies when they get hired by you or your family member.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT SICK PAY?

HOW DO YOU HANDLE PEOPLE WHO ARE ALWAYS SICK?

Sick pay is a great way to reassure your staff that you understand life happens. Staff are humans and they have a life outside of working with you or your family members. You couldn't have anyone that was sick at the height of the pandemic times in your home. Being sick is a fact of life, but it is an issue when you have no backup people on staff to call upon when your main people get sick.

During pandemic times, in my house if someone even had a little bit of a cold they would have to stay home. My Mom and I have a principle that, if you have some wonderful staff working with your family members or you, pay them when they are sick after they have worked for you at least a month. This ensures that you keep them for a longer time. Many staff have kids at home. Having sick pay for those staff is very important for them.

HIRING DURING A PANDEMIC

During the pandemic it was a big challenge to hire homecare workers. In the homecare job market, some job seekers didn't want to come into a family home fearing it was more likely for them to get sick working so close to the people whom they are helping. Asking your staff to wear a mask or wearing one yourself makes everyone feels safer.

In the pandemic it also became more of a challenge to hire staff who knew what it meant to be reliable. In my case, Sam and I did more than four groups of interviews over the two years, interviewing almost 20 people. In each group I thought that I had found one new staff, but then when they were asked to train, they would back out. We became jaded by each person backing out. However, despite those challenges I ended up with wonderful staff that I met during the pandemic. It just took longer to make the right fit.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES IN LOCKDOWN

During the pandemic, lockdown became a part of life, particularly for those with disabilities. Lockdowns were so hard because we couldn't hang out with our friends or our family members. Lockdowns were very boring too. What to do?

In lockdown, I read a lot of books, I learned how to bake, I took long walks, and visited new parks and new parts of my city. I watched many more movies then pre pandemic. I also set up movie nights with some of my friends; we would text back and forth while watching the same movies each in our own homes. This stopped me from losing contact with my friends.

Getting out in the fresh air helps your mental health, though sometimes you don't feel like doing anything. This is the best time for your support worker to come up with a new idea or a new place to go. For an example, in lockdown I was so lucky to have K because she got me out everywhere. Some days I would be telling her I don't want to go out, but she would make me. I strongly believe she got me through the worst of the lockdowns. Her willingness to put me into her car, drive around and do some things that I never dreamt that I could do, saved me. That was why I didn't get down as so many of my friends did.

Tip 11

When you are only hiring people part time, you have to be aware that they are often working two jobs or actively seeking another fulltime job. They are under a lot of pressure, more than we know. Be kind.

Tip 12

Working through the issues in worker compatibility is never fun or easy. But if you want this person to stay, you have to work past the issues.

Tip 13

Having some backup people is vital. You never know when someone might get sick or have to leave.

Tip 14

Take everyone's thoughts and ideas into account before firing someone.

Tip 15

Look very closely at how you work with your staff; write down some notes about this. Sit down with your trusted people and write your policies. Give them out to everyone new.

CHAPTER 5: FRIENDSHIP WITH SUPPORT WORKERS

Danse's story

Danse was referred to us by her best friend's sister who had just worked with me for a year. Danse and I became so close so fast, she got me through grade eleven and twelve biology and my first-year kinesiology class. She was so awesome at teaching me the terminology. Danse came from a big family with five kids. She and I used to make dinner and she was so fun making dinner with me. Danse and her three best friends used to live in the University residences. Their positive experience showed me how fun and cool University could be. We used to watch TV in the dorms, study together in the library, and go out for dinner to celebrate good marks. She made me feel like one of her group. Danse is a big snow boarder, so we used to take a car and I would sit ski and she would snow board alongside me. Those weekends were my favourite things that she and I did together. We would rent a hotel room and enjoy the whole weekend together. She still tries to come and see me whenever she is in the city.



Holly's story

With Holly, whenever we are together, we start our friendship all over again. We talk nonstop for hours on end. Holly and I are so different about some things, but we are the same about many things as well. We both love swimming together. Holly takes me on trips every year at least once. We have been all around Manitoba and into the USA. We plan our trips to somewhere that is accessible for all disabilities and research the accessibility in our holiday destinations before booking them. That's part of the fun. We try to walk around the cities that we visit. Holly is very willing to go anywhere. We always try a new town each year.

Some former workers keep in touch with us, whereas others break the connection. Try not to take the losses personally. Appreciate the good times you've had.

BENEFITS WITH YOUR WORKER AS YOUR FRIEND

A major benefit of having workers who are also friends is that you have these friends with you during the ups and the downs of life. Our workers enjoy working with us or our family member more if they feel like friends, and not someone who just comes in and does your personal support-care tasks. You will enjoy hanging out with your workers more if you decide to build a friendship.

Making your worker your friend is not always easy or smooth and there will always be challenges along the way. As friends, we have to be great listeners for our workers. Some workers will make you challenge the idea of being their friends, but remember our workers are humans with their own feelings and ideas. Consider telling them how special they are to you.

Having a good relationship with your staff can mean that you are not always looking for new workers.



WHAT ARE THE WAYS TO BUILD A FRIENDSHIP WITH YOUR SUPPORT WORKER?

We all look for different things in our friends. Sometimes, you can tell from day one that this person is going to be your friend for a very long time. At other times, a friendship develops more slowly. Good friends are very hard to come by, so when you have friends, keep them for as long as you can.

Be open with your workers. Get to know their personal stories and tell them about you. New friendships take time to develop. Trust takes time. You have to grow with friends. Not every worker will become a friend, but this doesn't mean they aren't good workers.

There are also people who take advantage of friendships. If you are at all worried about your new workers taking advantage of you or your family member, talk with someone whom you trust to help you handle this issue right when you notice it happening. I have learned from hiring that some people will let you down, but I've found that most people I've hired have been open to friendship and very few have taken advantage of it. Most of my workers have been honest and wonderful people.

When we hire someone, we are not only getting help from them, but we are helping them as well. We can help with many things beyond financial. You can provide emotional support for each other and a listening ear for their problems. Hiring longtime can provide stability in their lives as you share advice, run errands together, expose each other to new experiences and more.

Tip 16

Making your support workers a part of your family makes them feel like they can share things with you, and you will understand. Everyone benefits.

Tip 17

Make sure that everyone in your household gets along with your support workers. That will make everything work much better.

Go confidently into hiring because you never know whom you will find.

APPENDIX: THE TIPS



Tip 1

Be flexible. Nothing goes as expected, when you post ads, follow all the steps carefully for maximum success.



Tip 2

Invest the time and energy to find the ideal person, however long it takes.



Tip 3

Enjoy the people you meet even if you don't hire them. They can give you a laugh!



Tip 4

Laughing or crying always helps when nothing is going to plan about finding a worker. Afterwards, get back to the search.



Tip 5

Make your interviews a positive experience and don't worry if you don't get it right the first time around. You learned a lot.



Tip 6

Check references and make sure all the necessary documents are in order.



Tip 7

Go with your feelings about training. If you don't feel that comfortable with a new worker doing something, then ask your trusted person to show them that one thing again.



Tip 8

You may need to call an occupational therapist to show you new techniques of training your new worker. Learning is an ongoing activity that provides a new understanding about your new worker, and a new way of managing what might be an old habit.



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