

## For a successful job interview

by Mary Elizabeth McNary

A job interview can be tough on anybody. Will MS make it tougher? I asked Steve Nissen, director of Employment Programs at the National Capital Chapter in Washington, DC, and a nationally certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Here's his advice:

### "Be prepared" isn't just for scouts

The interview is your chance to present your education, experience, and skills to match what the employer seeks. Do some self-assessment by thinking about what you have to offer. Put yourself in the employer's shoes and figure out how to show that you can deliver what the job demands.

The interview is also an opportunity to learn whether you want to work for this particular employer. Imagine yourself working the job. Will you really love what you will do?

You can bring your MS into perspective by considering your symptoms. Whether the disease is a minor nuisance or a major challenge, it is never too early to think about job accommodations. Although you may never need them, the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act, a federal law) entitles you to reasonable measures to help you perform and excel on the job.

### Making the appointment

Schedule the interview when you have the most energy and can present yourself at your best. If you are most confident using a mobility aid, be matter-of-fact about it. It's better to use a cane than to "wall-walk" and fear you might fall. Make sure, in advance, that the interview site is accessible.



### What you don't need to say

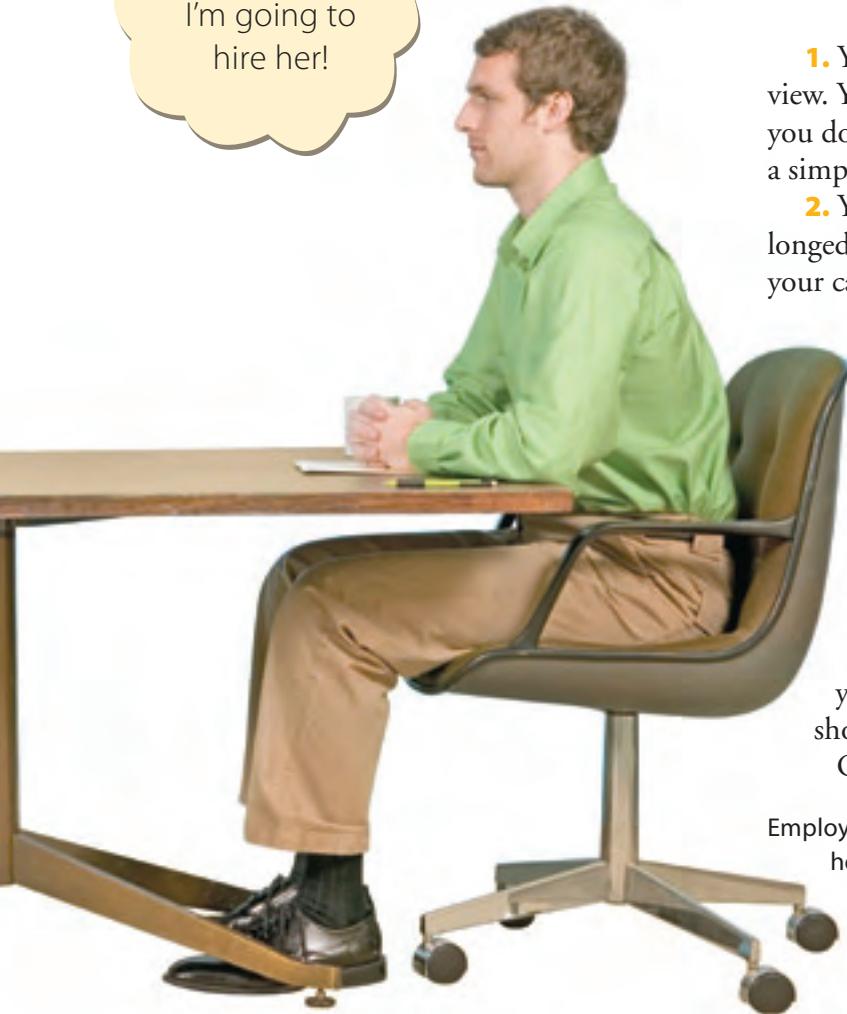
You are under no obligation to disclose your MS at this appointment! It is illegal for an interviewer to ask you. Why raise a red flag first thing? The interviewer might not even be the appropriate person to tell, ever. Should you require a reasonable accommodation at some point after you are hired, you'll identify the right person at that time.

### On the spot? Be ready with answers

I often say, "No disclosure unless absolutely necessary," but you may want to make a disclosure "script" part of your preparation. Even if you never use them, the exercise of creating answers can increase your confidence. An MS Navigator at your chapter can help.

Suppose, for example:

She's **great!**  
I'm going to  
hire her!



**1.** You require accommodations for the interview. You don't need to give your diagnosis, but you do need to say what you need. Practice giving a simple description.

**2.** You're re-entering the workforce after a prolonged absence and you're asked, "Why the gap in your career?"

**3.** Your work history prompts: "Why do you want a job for which you're over-qualified?" Or: "Why do you want part-time?"

Be ready to answer potentially uncomfortable questions. It's a good idea to practice answering tough questions with a friend or advisor beforehand. The more comfortable you feel, the more confident you'll be. Good preparation will help you show your stuff in the most positive light. Good luck!

Employment issues are close to Mary Elizabeth McNary's heart. Diagnosed more than 15 years ago, Elizabeth earned a master's in counseling and personnel services and has worked as a counselor for the Society's National Capital Chapter since 1998. She recently opened Changes Coaching, a practice dedicated to discovering strength in diversity.

## "I'm a better therapist now"

Sabrina Butts graduated from college and began working as an occupational therapist assistant in 1997. She was, she says, empathetic and sympathetic to a point, but in her heart she felt people should work through their pains and focus on becoming better. Things changed when she was diagnosed with MS in 2001.

Today, she works in a long-term care facility and believes



the MS has made her a better therapist.

"When my patients tell me 'it hurts,' I can honestly say 'I know'; when they tell me, 'I am too tired to do therapy,' I can tell them we need to keep going, and we are allowed breaks! When I share my story, the patients tend to work harder. I have also learned patience with myself and my children."