

**SMOOTHING OUT THE EDGES:**  
**A Manual on Attendant Management**

by Pamela Walker

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PAMELA WALKER (c) 2001

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## INTRODUCTION

If you use attendants, no one needs to tell you how important it is to have good ones -- you know 1st hand how your quality of life is affected by their productivity and efficiency. Attendant care for many people is an important part of living independently, yet often a source of continuous problems.

When you hire an attendant, you become a boss -- you enter the complex world of business management. In the business world there are basic employee management skills that apply whether the worker is a clerk in a store, a laborer in a factory, or an attendant in your home. This manual applies basic business management concepts to the attendant-employer relationship.

Whether you are new to attendant management or an old hand at it, hopefully, you will find this manual useful. It doesn't have all the answers, but perhaps you will find some helpful suggestions. Since your ability to live independently may depend on the quality and reliability of your attendants, understanding the basic skills involved in interviewing, training, and supervising your employees might help you to

- improve communications between you and your attendants,
- improve your efficiency and your attendant's efficiency,
- improve your satisfaction and that of your attendants, AND
- make your life easier (for one thing, you might have less attendant turn-over).

Each of us is different, and each attendant is different, so the ideas presented here are to be adapted to suit you and your situation.

Included here are also exercises for practicing some of the skills presented. The ones noted as BASIC are for those who are new to attendant management; the GENERAL exercises will be useful for beginners, but also good for review or skill improvement for those who have been doing attendant management for years. (Just because you've always done it one way doesn't mean it can't be done a better way.) Some of the exercises might seem simple, but they are designed to reinforce ideas and to encourage you to think and rethink about how you do things.

This manual does not solve the difficult task of finding good attendants (though it does give some ideas about how to go about it); however, once these individuals are located, it is hoped that this manual will help you to keep dependable workers and to develop healthy employer-employee relationships.

[NOTE: A few sections from the print copy of this manual have been deleted from this electronic version because of being only applicable to persons in California.]

## PHILOSOPHY OF INDEPENDENCE

Independent Living is a way of life enjoyed by many adults. It means having the RIGHT OF CHOICE. For those of us who are disabled, though, this right is not always automatic, especially if one is living in a restrictive setting. In many homes and institutions people are not even allowed to choose what to wear, what to eat or when to go to bed.

The INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT recognizes that disabled persons have a right to active, independent lives. Living independently includes having the right to choose how and where to live; it involves having the same needs and rights as non-disabled people in the areas of work, school and recreation.

Being disabled means having a particular set of limitations to deal with in life. The type and degree of a disability affects which life areas are limited and to what extent. It is in these affected areas that a disabled individual may need and/or may choose to use the assistance of an attendant.

Many disabled people who previously lived in institutions or with family are now living on their own. For many who have severe disabilities, it is the availability of good attendants that makes this possible.

Some people feel that unless a person can physically take care of his or herself, they cannot be independent. This is not true! TAKING CONTROL OF ONE'S LIFE AND MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT ONE'S OWN LIFE IS THE ROOT OF INDEPENDENCE, AND THESE THINGS CAN BE DONE REGARDLESS OF A PHYSICAL DISABILITY.

To live independently is to be responsible for the choices we make. So, for those who use attendants, a big part of being independent is being a responsible attendant manager.

BASIC EXERCISE ONE: BEING INDEPENDENT

1. Which of the following describes you best (check one):

☐ I am not very independent at all and I rarely leave my residence.

☐ I am not very independent, but I go out at least once a week.

☐ I am not very independent at home, but I go out a lot, and consider myself more independent away from home.

☐ I am much more independent than I used to be, but I still have a long ways to go.

☐ I am fairly independent, but still not as independent as I'd like to be.

☐ I am independent!

2. What does being independent mean to you?

3. In what ways would you like to be more independent?

4. What are things you could do to become more independent in the areas listed in 3 (be specific)?

5. In which of the areas listed in 3 could an attendant help towards your becoming more independent? How?

# GENERAL EXERCISE ONE: BEING MORE INDEPENDENT

1. Sally lives by herself in a small apartment. Because of her disability and because of her cramped kitchen, Sally doesn't cook. At home Sally usually eats food that doesn't need to be prepared; she eats out whenever she wants a hot meal. However, Sally is getting tired of restaurant food and yearns for home cooking. What could Sally do to be more Independent and more in charge of the flavor of her meals?
  
2. John has been living in a 3-bedroom apartment with roommates for eight months. His bedroom is the largest one in the apartment, but it's crowded. He barely has room to get around and often has to ask roommates to reach things for him. He would like to feel less awkward and more independent in his own room. How could he do that?
  
3. In the two questions above, how would hiring attendants help Sally and John?
  
4. What things would you like to do differently in your life? Would hiring an attendant be helpful for any of these?

## THE ROLE OF AN ATTENDANT

An attendant is a person who is paid to provide services of daily activity. This might involve personal care assistance or help with household chores. Attendants assist individuals in "Activities of Daily Living" which are too difficult and/or time/energy consuming for them to do on their own. The basic function of an attendant is to provide assistance that is necessary for a person to live independently; without such assistance some individuals would have to be institutionalized or remain in sheltering and stifling situations.

Attendants are not parents, servants, medical personnel, or personal friends, although the relationship between an employer and attendant may contain elements of these. For example, an attendant may prepare meals as a parent would, but it is the employer's responsibility to instruct the attendant on the preparation of his or her meals. This responsibility does not exist in a parental relationship. It is important to realize that treating an attendant as if their role was one of degraded servitude is not the idea either. Showing respect for an attendant is a major consideration in maintaining a good working relationship with him or her.

Some people (attendants, parents, disabled persons, etc.) incorrectly think of an attendant as a companion/babysitter to a disabled or elderly person. This belief stems from a desire to over-protect the person rather than to provide the necessary assistance for him or her to function independently.

Although it often happens that employers and their attendants become friends, it is important not to let the friendship aspects of the relationship interfere with or infringe upon the business aspects of the relationship. If the friendship grows to the point of dominating the relationship, the employer might seriously consider severing the working relationship and keeping the friendship. Otherwise, communicating needs for attendant services may be severely stifled. It is hard to tell a close friend that she or he should come earlier in the mornings, and it strains a friendship for a friend to continuously act as an attendant.

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to know your rights and responsibilities and those of your attendant. It is good to give a copy of these to the attendant when they are hired. All items should be clearly understood by both of you, to help avoid conflicts.

### EMPLOYER'S RIGHTS

--You have the right to hire and fire your own attendants, especially if you are the one signing the time sheets; this applies even if they are paid by outside funds.

--You have the right to be notified as soon as possible if your attendant will be late or unable to show up for work.

--You have the right to be given at least 2 weeks notice before your attendant quits, unless extraordinary circumstances prevent this.

### EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

--Make sure the attendant's responsibilities and rights are explained, and that a full job description is given to them.

--Discuss the pay and the pay schedule before work starts.

--Pay each attendant at least minimum wage.

--Notify the attendant at least two weeks in advance if you plan to replace them, except in certain cases (e.g. theft).

--Notify the attendant at least two (2) weeks in advance if you will be changing their job duties or hours.

### ATTENDANT'S RIGHTS

--Attendants have a right to know how much they will be paid and when they will be paid, before taking the job.

--Attendants have a right to know what duties they will be performing before taking the job.

--Attendants have a right to be paid a minimum of one full hour's work, even if the job takes less than one hour.

--Attendants have a right to be paid at least minimum wage.

--Attendants have a right to be given at least two (2) weeks notice if being replaced, or if job duties or hours change.

--Attendants have a right to be notified as soon as possible if attendant care funds are delayed (if paid through funds).

### ATTENDANT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

--Attendants have a responsibility to notify employers as soon as possible if they will be late or unable to show.

--Attendants have a responsibility to give at least 2 weeks notice before quitting, unless extraordinary circumstances prevent this.

--Attendants are responsible for performing all expected duties within the specified time.



## GENERAL EXERCISE TWO: EMPLOYER ROLES

As an attendant employer, you have many different roles. Not only are you the employer, you must also be the manager (planning goals, policies, and systems), the supervisor (training and making sure duties are carried out), the arbitrator (settling disputes), the fix-it person (know how to fix equipment should it fail), and friend! Is it any wonder that the job can sometimes wear you out?

Here are some examples of basic tasks of an attendant employer. Indicate which you think you are average at [OK], which you do real well at [+], and which you have trouble with [-].

- \_\_\_ Planning and scheduling attendants, equipment, materials
- \_\_\_ Organizing work to maximize use of attendants, equipment, and materials
- \_\_\_ Locating/ hiring/ supervising attendants
- \_\_\_ Training new attendants
- \_\_\_ Coaching present attendants, if necessary
- \_\_\_ Maintain routine schedules (e.g. you are at the door and ready to go by "X" o'clock)
- \_\_\_ Maintaining high morale among attendants
- \_\_\_ Coordinating work between attendants
- \_\_\_ Paying attendants
- \_\_\_ Maintaining up-to-date accurate records of attendants' hours, payments, etc.
- \_\_\_ Making rules and regulations and enforcing them
- \_\_\_ Recognizing and commenting on good work
- \_\_\_ Giving constructive criticism to poor work
- \_\_\_ Maintaining quality, safety, and housekeeping
- \_\_\_ Knowing how equipment operates and what to do in case it fails
- \_\_\_ Recognizing problems and working on solutions

## ATTENDANT'S DUTIES

Attendant's duties vary from situation to situation, depending on the disability, individual needs and lifestyle of the employer. YOUR attendant's duties will reflect YOUR needs. Define your attendant's duties clearly. Be sure your attendant knows that this is a REAL job and that responsibility and reliability are essential.

You will need to think through exactly what duties you need performed, when and how they are to be performed and express them in an organized and understandable manner. You may want to give your attendant a typed list of:

- Duties and how long you expect each to take;
- Basic instructions on how the duties are to be performed;
- Order in which duties are to be performed; and
- Emergency procedures (e.g. medical, fire, disaster).

In order to do this you will need to know and be able to relate your personal care needs, your non-personal care needs, your daily routines, other needs (non-daily schedule), and the days and times of day for all of these.

You will sometimes have options on how to meet your needs and it is up to you to decide which of those you will assign to your attendant. For example, you could go to a wheelchair repair service to have water put in your batteries or you could have your attendant do it. If you need transportation your attendant could drive you or you could take a taxi or bus. Having an attendant increases your options. And for tasks that you decide to have the attendant perform you might have a choice in some cases as to whether they provide total or partial assistance.

Disabled people and attendants, like all individuals, can have differing views and behaviors when it comes to diet, grooming, religion, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll and everything else. It is possible that you may ask your attendant for assistance that is against his or her values. For example, an attendant might be a vegetarian and be unwilling to prepare meat; it would help if you knew this in advance of hiring him or her if one of their job duties will be to cook meat. This is another reason why it will benefit you to be open and honest about your needs in the initial stages of your relationship, even during the interview. Where values differ, conflicts might arise. If discussion does not result in an acceptable solution for both of you, terminating the relationship may be in order.

## BASIC EXERCISE TWO: CLARIFYING YOUR NEEDS

1. What PERSONAL care things do you need done daily?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
2. What NON-PERSONAL care things need to be done daily?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
3. What PERSONAL care things need to be done twice a week?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
4. What NON-PERSONAL care things need to be done twice a week?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
5. What PERSONAL care things need done three times a week?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
6. What NON-PERSONAL care things need to be done 3 times a week?  
morning:  
afternoon:  
night:
7. Anything left out? How often does it need to be done?
8. What emergency things need to be done sometimes? How often?

GENERAL EXERCISE THREE: EVALUATING

1. Are there parts of your attendant use plan that consistently don't work well? (i.e. morning attendants)

What time?

What are the duties?

2. What are the usual complaints or reasons for your attendants leaving?

3. How could you make the job more attractive?

4. Are you able and willing to make changes (i.e. get up 2 1/2 hours later)? If so, what are some changes that you could make related to duties and times?

5. Do you give your attendants a written list of duties? If not, you might want to do BASIC EXERCISE TWO.

## TASK CHECKLISTS

Checklists can be very helpful for a number of reasons, such as training new attendants, evaluating old attendants and interviewing prospective attendants. Basically, a checklist is a breakdown of the tasks that you will have your attendant perform. Depending on how many attendants you have and how many different tasks, you might have more than one checklist.

For example, a person who uses only one attendant for housecleaning once a week might have only one checklist. But a person who has several attendants with varied routines might have a different checklist for each of the following:

- WEEKDAY MORNING ROUTINE
- WEEKDAY EVENING ROUTINE
- WEEKEND MORNING ROUTINE
- WEEKEND EVENING ROUTINE
- AFTERNOON ROUTINE
- HOUSECLEANING AND SHOPPING

The idea is to break the checklist groups down to whatever works best for you. The list should state the tasks briefly and in the order that the steps should be done. The tasks should state what needs to be done, not how to do it.

The question of how specific to get is debatable. You don't want the list to be cumbersome, but it needs to be detailed enough to be useful. If you are good at giving instructions and your attendant is experienced and/or a good listener, the list can relate only the basic task; this might mean the task "Irrigate Catheter" is sufficient, rather than listing each step of the process. However, some detail is good as a precaution and to keep a clear understanding of the important steps. But try not to let this become an obsession--too much detail could be an insult to your attendants' intelligence. (No need to tell them to plug in the vacuum before using it!)

[A guidebook with lists as the main concept in attendant management is "A Step-by-Step Guide to Training and Managing Personal Attendants": Volume 1, "Consumer Guide." I don't know if it's still available, but it used to be obtained from: Attendant Services Project, Research and Training Center on IL, 3111 Haworth Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045 (913) 842-7694(voice/TDD).]

## EXAMPLE CHECKLIST

### MORNING ROUTINE

1. Bedbath
  - A. Get things ready for bedbath
  - B. Wash, rinse, and dry body
2. Catheter Care
  - A. Clean catheter area with peroxide
  - B. Put Ted hose on
  - C. Strap on clean legbag and attach to catheter hose
  - D. Empty and rinse nightbag and hang it up to dry
3. Corset
  - A. Position, adjust, and hook corset
  - B. Put on pants
  - C. Check the legbag and hose for crimps
4. Transfer to Chair
  - A. Disconnect battery charger and move chair to bedside;  
lock brakes and lift footrests
  - B. Transfer as instructed
  - C. Check the legbag and hose again for crimps
5. Dressing
  - A. Put shoes on
  - B. Clean face, back, and neck with alcohol
  - C. Put deodorant on
  - D. Put shirt and cleaned glasses on
  - E. Fasten seatbelt
  - F. Release brakes
6. Grooming
  - A. Comb hair
  - B. Put toothpaste on toothbrush and put in holder
  - C. Clean bathroom
7. Breakfast
  - A. Make coffee and breakfast
  - B. Give medication with juice
  - C. Put fork in holder and serve breakfast
  - D. Set out lunch items
  - E. Wash dishes and clean off counters
8. Clean up and general
  - A. Clean bedroom area as instructed
  - B. Feed Cat

## ADVERTISING FOR ATTENDANTS

BE ALERTED that attendants obtained through referral resources are not necessarily screened. When you hire from the newspaper, or other "unscreened" sources, be sure to get their ID number and references. And then, CHECK THE REFERENCES!

Recruiting new attendants needs to be a creative endeavor. Chances are you will be doing it over and over again, and good attendants are hard to find. Many people blame the attendant shortage on low pay, but that is not the whole picture--even people who pay well have difficulty finding and keeping attendants. So, selling yourself is an important part of attendant recruitment. You want prospective attendants to want to work for YOU.

Some people use creative, funny advertising as a way of standing out as an interesting person. Others will volunteer to speak to college classes about disability awareness and make a plug for attendants while they have the floor. This method works especially well in classes in the health fields, because working for you will help pad a resume and give them firsthand experience. (And think of the difference it can make in the attitudes and awareness of future doctors and nurses!)

Advertisements, whether in newspapers or posted on bulletin boards can be done with pizzazz and show your personality; however, it's still important to be businesslike. Remember, your advertisement will be the first impression that a prospective attendant gets of you. It will set the stage for the kind of relationship you'll have down the road. So make it professional, honest and attractive.

Many INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS (ILCs) have Attendant Referral Services that provide referrals (names and numbers) of potential personal care attendants. Most times these referrals will already be somewhat screened by the ILC and they might also be experienced attendants. However, you should still screen and train your own attendants.

It is important, however, not to depend totally on ILCs for obtaining attendants. Many of these programs are under funded and understaffed; clients who are new at employing attendants or those who have an unusually difficult time managing and obtaining attendants need the services of the ILCs more than those who are aware of and able to use other resources also. A good recruitment plan combines a variety of resources.

BASIC EXERCISE THREE: RECRUITMENT

1. Below is an example of a posting for a bulletin board. Circle the following important items: days, times, pay, job description, phone number, rate of pay

**ATTENDANT WANTED**

Either male or female

Monday through Friday  
7:00am - 10:00am

Personal Care assistance to help a disabled person get up in the morning; need to be able to lift 150 lbs. Simple cooking required.

\$5/hour

Call 555-8463 evenings for more information  
(near bus lines)

2. Make a posting for one of your positions.
3. Write a list of questions or points that you would want to cover in the phone screening.
4. Placing ads in the classified section of local newspapers is one of the most common ways to find attendants. In some papers, these ads are free. Study the 2 examples below and then write an ad for each attendant you have. Be sure to include: your first name, days and times of job, and your phone number. Whether or not to include pay is debatable.

ADD EXAMPLE ONE:

FEMALE ATTENDANT wanted 10 hours per week. \$5 per hour plus gas. Shopping, cooking, light house-keeping. Should be independent, reliable, friendly. Need references, Mary 555-1010.

ADD EXAMPLE TWO:

DISABLED MAN with dog needs attendants 9-11 am, 10-11 pm, weekends. \$6 hourly; social security number needed. Personal care work. For information: Ted 555-2324.



#### GENERAL EXERCISE FOUR: RECRUITMENT

Below are listed several resources for finding prospective attendants. Check off those you have used when needing to obtain new workers

- Newspaper Ads (local papers, advertisers, college papers)
- Social Service Agencies (e.g. referrals of people in work incentive programs)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Public Assistance Agencies
- Senior Citizens Groups and Centers
- Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Departments at Universities and/or hospitals
- State Employment Offices
- County programs for providing attendant/choreworkers)
- Catholic Charities/Churches
- Jewish Vocational Services
- Bulletin Boards at Schools, Colleges, Churches, Hospitals, Apartments, and Grocery Stores
- Mental Health and Disability Organizations
- Salvation Army
- Employment Agencies or Job Services
- Friends and family
- College and Junior College Career Placement Centers, Dormitory Bulletin Boards and Financial Aids Office
- Centers for Independent Living
- Health Care Agencies
- Convalescent Homes
- Word of Mouth: talk with other disabled people
- Local Newsletters (e.g. community groups, special interest groups, church groups)
- "Work wanted" ads
- Human service agencies
- Hospital Volunteers
- Public Health schools or related classes at community colleges
- Organizations helping emigrants relocate and find work
- High school vocational programs and career/job placement services

If you're having trouble with recruitment, it could be that you are putting all eggs in one or two baskets. Try also recruiting from some of the places above that you haven't thought of before.

What other places could you add to this list? -- BE CREATIVE!

## TELEPHONE SCREENING

Usually your first contact with a prospective attendant will be by telephone--either they'll call you in response to your ad or you'll call them after getting their name as a person who is looking for attendant work. You will want to set up a time together so that you can interview them for the job; however, it will be to your advantage to do a screening or "mini-interview" on the telephone prior to making arrangements for a longer, face-to-face interview. In the telephone discussion, you may determine that a person is not appropriate for your job and you can avoid unnecessary interview time for both of you. For example, you might find out in the phone conversation that your ideas and/or expectations don't coincide. Things that might be important to include in the phone interviews are:

- whether the job will be personal care or non-personal care and a general idea about the main duties of the job
- the days and times that you will need someone
- a general idea of what the pay arrangements will be
- anything that you will absolutely need (for example, if you need someone who can lift you, or who has a car, etc.)

Below is an example of how that interview might go:

Disabled Person: Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I got your name from the Attendant Referral Registry at CIL. I'm looking for an attendant to do personal care for me on Saturday and Sunday mornings from 9AM to 11AM. Are you available at that time?

Potential Attendant: Yes, I could start next week.

Disabled Person: Good. I'll tell you a little more about the job. I need help dressing, and I need someone that can help me get in and out of the bathtub. I weigh 100 pounds. Do you think you would be able to lift me?

Potential Attendant: Probably. I'd have to try to be sure, depending on how tall you are and how the bathroom is set up. But, I'm pretty strong.

Disabled Person: It sounds like it might be workable. Are you interested?

Potential Attendant: Maybe. How much is the pay?

Disabled Person: Well, we can talk more about that in the interview, but if I decide to hire you for the job, it'll be between \$5 and \$6, depending on your experience and how fast you work. Can we make an interview appointment?

Potential Attendant: Sure. When and where?

## TELEPHONE SCREENING--continued

Obviously, if they want more pay than you are offering, or if they can't work the hours you need, you don't have to interview them. Other things you might want to ask are:

- Do you have back problems? (If you need lifting.)
- Do you drive? [If you need someone who can drive.]
- What is your mode of transportation? Is it reliable? [Can you depend on someone using public transportation to be on time every day?]
- Do you have children? How are they taken care of? What arrangements do you have if the child is sick?
- Do you smoke? (OR, if you, the employer, smoke: Do you mind being around a smoker?)
- Do you have any problems with any of the job duties? (briefly list)

If he or she still seems to be a prospective candidate, arrange a place and time for a formal, in person interview. Be sure to exchange phone numbers in case one of you has to cancel. Tell them that the purpose of the interview will be to learn about each other so that both of you have enough information to make a good decision regarding the position.

BE SURE THAT THEY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE NOT YET DECIDED TO HIRE THEM, BUT THAT YOU ARE CONSIDERING THEM.

NOTE: Some people interview in their homes; others prefer to interview elsewhere (for example: in a restaurant) so that the person does not know where they live in case they don't hire them.

## THE INTERVIEW

1. PREPARATION BEFORE INTERVIEWEE ARRIVES
  - a. Decide BEFOREHAND what information you want to obtain.
  - b. Make a list of questions you want to ask.
  - c. List questions in order of importance.
  - d. Clear thinking is a must--choose a time of the day that you are at your best and don't drink alcohol or do anything that might reduce your ability to evaluate clearly. Know your weaknesses (i.e. don't interview or make calls when hungry).
2. ESTABLISHING RAPPORT WITH THE INTERVIEWEE
  - a. Be yourself; if you hire them it is important that they know what you are like.
  - b. Make the interviewee feel comfortable so that she or he will answer your questions as openly as possible.
  - c. Small talk helps break the ice, but if it lasts too long or gets too casual, you'll lose the business atmosphere.

## THE INTERVIEW--continued

### 3. SEEKING INFORMATION

- a. Keep an open mind and listen carefully.
- b. Don't make assumptions--if you are not sure what was meant, ask them to repeat or rephrase the idea.
- c. Besides your prepared questions, ask other questions that occur to you at the time of the interview; if something causes you concern, ask them about it. (However, avoid getting too far off the track of your main purpose.)
- d. Watch the reactions to your questions and statements.

### 4. GIVING INFORMATION

- a. Sell yourself. If this is a good candidate, make them want to work for you. Give favorable information.
- b. Give clear explanation of all duties and responsibilities that are expected of your attendant(s), but not so much that you overwhelm them with elaborate details. Don't leave out unfavorable things--it's better to have them not take the job than for them to quit shortly after starting because the job turns out to involve things they don't want to do.

### 5. CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

- a. The interviewer should be in control, not the interviewee.
- b. Find an interviewing style that feels comfortable to you, but also allows you to gain sufficient information. An interview style can be direct, indirect, or a combination. In direct interviewing the interviewer asks a limited number of specific questions; in an indirect interview the interviewer asks open-ended questions and lets the interviewee do most of the talking (e.g. "Tell me about yourself.")
- c. Have the interviewee complete an application form so that you will have a written record of his or her basic information. This application should serve only as a supplement to the interview. It might work best to have them complete the application before the interview so that you can refer to the information for possible questions during the interview.

### 6. CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

- End on a positive note.
- Ask the interviewee if she or he has any questions.
- Tell them you'll get in touch with them one way or the other within so many days. (Be sure you really do.)
- Do not hire them on the spot; take the time to consider their qualifications, reflect on peculiar mannerisms, and check their references.

## GENERAL EXERCISE FIVE: INTERVIEW PREPARATION

1. Do you prefer to ask direct questions or indirect questions in an interview? Why?
2. People's needs and values are different, what things are most important for you to find out in an interview? (List at least four.)
3. List ten questions that you would ask in an interview.
4. Even when all "seems" well in an interview, gut instinct can warn us of possible problems. Can you think of at least one experience when your gut warned you but you hired the person anyway and later found that your gut was right?

## BASIC EXERCISE FOUR: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please write a question for each of the following:

1. Ask about the applicant's personality.

EXAMPLE: Tell me about yourself -- your hobbies and interests?

2. Ask about the applicant's work experience.

EXAMPLE: Have you worked with disabled people before?

3. Ask applicant why she or he is seeking this job.

EXAMPLE: What interests you about being an attendant?

4. Ask applicant if she or he has habits or values that might interfere with his/her ability to do the job.

EXAMPLE: Are you opposed to cooking meat?

5. Ask applicant if she or he has health problems that may interfere with your job.

EXAMPLE: Do you think you'll be able to lift me?

6. Ask about commitments that may interfere with the job.

EXAMPLE: What other commitments do you have?

7. Ask about the applicant's mode of transportation.

EXAMPLE: If I hire you, how will you get to work each day?

8. Ask about the applicant's preferred working schedule.

EXAMPLE: What days and times could you work for me?

9. Ask something to learn of their attitude about attendant work.

EXAMPLE: What are your strengths and weaknesses in this work?

## REFERENCE CHECKING

Check references before you hire anyone as an attendant. Be sure "references" are people who supervised the applicant in a work situation, preferably within the last 2 years. If they don't have work references, they should provide you with the names of people who can attest to their dependability, etc. If they are just out of high school, a teacher or principal might provide reference. References from friends and family members may not be objective.

It's best if references are local so that you can call them. If there is a strong reference (e.g. someone they worked with for a long time), but it would be long distance to call, decide whether the expense is worth it. Sometimes references look great on paper and turn out to be totally bogus. Some applicants are willing to pay the expense of the call if your job sounds good to them.

Use your discretion when an applicant supplies letters of reference. They can be helpful, but they can also be fake. Some letters only verify dates of employment and say nothing about what kind of worker the person was--they tell you nothing other than that the applicant worked there and for how long.

One option is for you to develop a form and send it to the individual reference--ask those questions which are most important for you in an "easy-to-answer" way. You might want to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. You will need the consent of a prospective attendant before you do this, so you might also want to have a consent form for them to sign--a copy of the signed form can be sent with the reference request.

The written option takes more time than a phone call, is more bothersome, might not provide as much information, and might not even be returned; however, sometimes it might be the only option. If an attendant candidate has really impressed you, but all they can provide are written references, use your own judgment.

Sometimes a person who the prospective attendant worked for is no longer available. If it was a business, perhaps you can contact someone that worked there at the same time. If it was work for an individual who has died or is not capable of giving a reference, perhaps you can make contact with a family member, a conservator, or another person who worked for the individual.

Whether checking references verbally or in writing, be sure the person you are talking to understands the nature of personal care attendant work and that the individual will be working in your home. This will let the reference know the level of trust you'll be needing to put in the attendant should you hire him or her.

Next, verify the length of employment for the applicant. Then ask any questions that you feel are important.

SAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK FORM

Date:

Reference for:

Name and phone number of reference:

Relationship to applicant:

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible.  
5=Exceptional, 4=Good, 3=Average, 2=Poor, 1=Very Poor

- \_\_1. How competent is his/her work?
- \_\_2. How appropriate is his or her attitude for attendant work?
- \_\_3. How good is he/she at following directions and listening?
- \_\_4. How well is he/she at getting along with others?
- \_\_5. How well is he/she at working independently?
- \_\_6. How well is he/she at completing assigned work?
- \_\_7. How well is he/she at adapting to changes?
- \_\_8. How is his/her disposition and moods?
- \_\_9. How well is he/she at working under pressure?
- \_\_10. How well is he/she at making quick, sensible decisions?
- \_\_11. How well is he/she at accepting criticism?
- \_\_12. How was his/her attendance/promptness?
- \_\_13. How dependable and honest is he/she?
- \_\_14. Was he/she ever caught drinking or using drugs?
- \_\_15. How much pride does he/she take in his/her work?
- 16. Why did he/she leave your employ?
- 17. Would you hire this person again? Why or why not?
- 18. Is there any reason they might not be suited for this work?
- 19. Do you have any other comments you feel are important?



SAMPLE ATTENDANT APPLICATION FORM

(NOTE: Please feel free to use the back for more room to answer.)

Date:

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Alternate phone number:

Social Security Number:

Person to notify in case of emergency \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Day) \_\_\_\_\_ (Night)

Do you have a Driver's License? # \_\_\_\_\_ A car? \_\_no \_\_yes

What days and times are you available for work?

How many hours per week do you want to work? \_\_minimum \_\_maximum

Are you willing and able to do emergency attendant work? \_\_\_\_\_

List any health problems that might interfere with your work:

Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes please explain:

Are you currently employed? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, full time or part time?

Employer's Name and phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY: List two former employers, preferably positions related to providing personal care attendant services).

1. Employer and Phone Number:

Address:

Your Position:

Dates employed:

Duties and Responsibilities:

Reason for leaving:

2. Employer and Phone Number:

Address:

Your Position:

Dates employed:

Duties and Responsibilities:

Reason for leaving:

I understand that those listed above may be contacted for references. The above information is true to the best of my knowledge.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

FOR EMPLOYER'S USE: Date hired: \_\_\_\_\_ Starting Pay: \_\_\_\_\_

## EVALUATING THE APPLICANT

Careful screening of prospective attendants can help you avoid bad experiences. It's worth the extra time and effort to do thorough interviews and careful reference checking in order to get good, stable attendants. Hiring conscientious, competent employees may help you to avoid bad experiences like being stranded when an attendant doesn't show up or having accidents occur (e.g. falling during transfer, bladder infections).

### A. What do you appraise?

1. What are you looking for?
2. What are the duties involved and how well will this person perform them?
3. What is most important to you?  
SKILL? (Can and will he or she do the job?)  
PERSONALITY? (How do you think you'll get along with her or him?)  
DEPENDABILITY? (Do you think you can trust her or him?)  
OTHER? (Is he or she what you're looking for?)
4. What are your needs?
5. If you don't have any good candidates, what minimum requirements are you willing to settle for? Would this person work temporarily while you continue to search for a more suitable, long-term attendant?

### B. Check references for:

1. Dependability
2. Responsibility
3. Honesty
4. Trustworthiness
5. Verification

NOTE: If you find an individual with bad references or if you have employed an individual who you would not recommend, be sure to inform the source (if appropriate) where you found out about the person (i.e. referring agency) so that this person will not be referred to others.

### C. Once you have completed the selection process and decide to hire an individual, stop and consider the following:

1. Reassess the person to be sure they are responsible, reliable, and trustworthy--that you are not hiring them out of desperation.
2. Be sure he or she does not have back problems or other problems which may interfere with his or her working for you.
3. Consider any annoying habits (i.e. smoking, nail biting, etc.) that you may have noticed during the interview and decide if these would bother you if the person would be around you for extended periods.
4. Are there any other obligations, personal and/or professional, that may interfere with the persons' job responsibilities (i.e. small children, other part-time jobs)?

## EVALUATING THE APPLICANT--continued

5. Does the applicant seem to have a lot of personal problems? (Since you are often a "captive audience," you could become a "shrink" for your attendant; are you willing to add this role to your many others?)

6. You need to be able to reach this person by telephone. If she or he does not have a phone, is there a number where you can count on for contacting them?

D. When you have made your selection:

1. Notify them as soon as possible and see if they are still available.

2. Inform them of their rights and responsibilities as your attendant.

3. Clearly define all duties. Be explicit. State exactly what the job involves and what it does not involve.

4. Discuss wages and payment schedule.

5. Set work schedule.

6. Notify them that there will be a trial period (usually 2 wks.)

7. Set up a personal folder for him or her for record keeping.

## OTHER NOTES ON THE PROCESS OF GETTING A NEW ATTENDANT:

1. It is important that you do a thorough, but quick selection. Good attendants are in high demand and will get scooped up by someone else if you wait too long to decide. If you are really impressed at the interview, you might tell them so, but tell them you still need to interview a few more candidates; ask them, how soon they need to know. Try to find out if they are interviewing for other jobs.

2. After your new attendant has accepted the position, be sure to tell other applicants that the position has been filled. If there are other potentially good candidates, inform them that you will keep their names on file and contact them the next time you have an opening.

3. A trial period is very important because it allows either party to easily exit the relationship in an early stage, should personality and/or expectations prove to be incompatible.

4. Practice interviews with someone else before you start with the real candidates. This is especially important for those who are new to the process, but might also be helpful if it has been awhile since you've done an interview.

#### TIPS ON SETTING UP A WORK SCHEDULE

A. A regular schedule works best for some people, but a flexible one works best for others. The most important thing is that the method be ideal for both parties and that the flexibility works both ways. Most people find that the consistency of a steady schedule works best most of the time (e.g. every day from 9:00 PM - 11:00 PM,) but that they like the freedom of occasionally being able to call their night attendant and say, "I'm going to a party tomorrow night. Would you mind coming to work a couple of hours later than usual?" A little flexibility is always good, but to what degree the schedule is flexible needs to be negotiated and needs to be even and respectful for both parties.

B. An attendant should be paid for at least as many hours as she or he is scheduled to work.

C. You, as the employer, have the final say about when your attendant will work; however, when it is possible, giving your attendant some say in the work schedule might increase the likelihood that she or he will be prompt and reliable.

#### TIPS ON CONTRACTS

A. A contract is a written agreement between the employer and the employee about the job. Having things in writing helps to insure that everyone understands the terms of the work agreement. Difficulties can sometimes be resolved much easier when there has been a written contract at the beginning of the relationship.

B. A contract can be simple, but should include the following:

Employer/Employee names, addresses, phone numbers

Employee social security number

beginning and ending dates of agreement

job duties

number of hours to be worked

rate of pay

dates of payment

employer and employee signatures

C. Give a copy of the contract to your attendant and keep one for yourself.

D. A sample contract follows.

SAMPLE CONTRACT

EMPLOYER'S NAME:

ATTENDANT'S NAME:

ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

PHONE:

SS#:

This contract begins \_\_\_\_\_ (date) and is in effect until written notice ends the agreement. The attendant will be paid \_\_\_\_ per hour for \_\_\_\_ hours of service per week. Payment will be made on the 2nd and 4th Friday of every month. Services provided will involve the days, times, and duties listed below:

TIMES DAYS

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
[example]							

7-9AM	get up	get up	get up	get up	get up		
-------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--	--

1-3PM						laundry	
-------	--	--	--	--	--	---------	--

5-6PM	dinner			dinner		dinner	
-------	--------	--	--	--------	--	--------	--

We agree to the terms of this contract:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Employer signature) date

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Attendant signature) date

## TRAINING NEW ATTENDANTS

The training period for a new attendant is an important time in establishing the working style and relationship between you and your employee. A two week trial period is suggested for the training time, since it will be a time that you are each finding out how compatible you are and whether things will work out between you. The attendant should be paid for the training period, but you might start at a slightly lower pay rate and then raise it after the trial period. If you are paying a double salary for part of the training period (while your old attendant shows the new one the job), you may want to pay the new attendant for the training period on the condition that he or she stays for the entire two weeks. If you choose to do this, be sure that the new attendant is aware of this before he or she starts training.

Three techniques be used in training new attendants are:

- (1) Giving verbal directions
- (2) Having the new attendant observe the old attendant
- (3) Using a task checklist

Simple tasks may be conveyed sufficiently by using only one technique, but a combination is best if you have a hard time explaining things or if procedures are complicated. Whichever method is used, good communications are vital, and it is important that you are patient; try to be aware of the new attendant's feelings and that they will probably not get everything right the first or second time.

### (1) GIVING VERBAL DIRECTIONS:

Begin by explaining your disability, especially if the attendant will be providing personal care. Explain technical words or jargon that you will use; if the attendant has not worked with someone having your type of disability before, be descriptive. Emphasize things related to safety or emergencies.

It will be easier to give verbal training if you are consistent in explaining procedures step-by-step and if you develop the most efficient methods possible. Especially for procedures like transferring, explain why it's important to you to do each step a certain way. It will make learning easier if your attendant understands why you do things the way you do. Ask for feedback and questions to be sure that your meaning is understood and to be sure the attendant realizes that you don't expect him or her to get it all right immediately. For complicated tasks, ask him or her to repeat the directions back to you in order to reinforce the learning.

### (2) OBSERVING THE OLD ATTENDANT

Training a new attendant is much easier if she or he can observe your routine demonstrated by an experienced person. If you have several attendants you might have the new attendant watch more than one person perform the same duties as each will have their own way of doing tasks.

## TRAINING NEW ATTENDANTS—continued

### (3) USING A TASK CHECKLIST

Research studies have shown that using a checklist system works well in situations where people manage people. A checklist can be used to train, supervise, and evaluate an attendant. Checklists can show what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and in what order. Checklists allow for both positive and corrective feedback, rather than focusing only on problem areas. Checklists let the attendant know exactly what she or he is expected to do. (In this way, checklists can also be used as part of the contract and as a way of letting potential attendants know what the job involves.)

You can use the checklist along with giving verbal directions or having the new attendant observe the old attendant. Give a copy of the checklist to the new attendant to follow along on while each item is described or demonstrated in order. Especially for tasks like housecleaning, where you may not always be watching and giving instructions, you may want to post checklists. They may be posted inconspicuously on the back of closet and cabinet doors or attached to poster board and hung on wall hooks while the routine is performed. Once the attendant has been trained satisfactorily, the posted checklists can be put away until it's time to train a new attendant or time to evaluate a continuing one.

A few more thoughts on training: Have your attendant learn your basic routine first; once he or she has learned it, changes or modifications may be made to make it easier on both of you. Know what you want, and don't let the attendant talk you into doing things his or her way.

## IS IT WORTH IT?

Leslie has developed a system that works well for getting good attendants that stay for a long time. It's not luck -- Leslie takes the time and extra effort to do a thorough job when seeking new attendants. To begin with, Leslie establishes a relationship of mutual respect with each attendant hired. If Leslie needs to change schedules or plans to leave town for a vacation, the attendant is always told at least two weeks in advance. The attendants appreciate this and usually reciprocate by giving Leslie advance notices of any changes in their schedule. Because of this, Leslie almost always has at least a two-week notice when an attendant is leaving -- most of them give at least a month's notice, and this allows Leslie sufficient time to find and hire an adequate replacement.

Lee, on the other hand, often makes sudden changes, expecting attendants to adjust accordingly. For example, Lee might decide on Wednesday to go visit family out of town and tells the weekend attendants they won't be needed -- wages that were counted on don't come then. Lee is often left in a jam when attendants quit with only one or two days notice.

When an attendant gives notice of quitting, Leslie sets aside a full day as soon as possible, to start working on getting a new attendant. On that day, Leslie contacts the Attendant Referral Department at the Independent Living Center to put in a job announcement and to get a current list of attendants looking for work. Then Leslie writes out an ad and calls a newspaper to place it for three days. Leslie takes a couple of copies of a flyer made for recruiting attendants and has the "errand" attendant place them on bulletin boards that usually get good results. Leslie also keeps a file of past attendants and people who were interviewed. Leslie goes through these files and chooses which ones to check out for their current availability. Leslie then begins to prepare interview questions and plans to set aside one day per week to work on getting a new attendant.

Lee also calls the Attendant Referral Department at the ILC, only Lee's need is more urgent and so is often a frantic type of request. Lee does not have time to place a newspaper ad -- Lee needs someone now. Because of this, Lee may wind up hiring someone too hastily and may have to pay more for an emergency fill-in until replacing the old attendant. But even if there is a few weeks to find a new attendant, Lee feels it's a waste of time to do two or three interviews and check all of the references. Lee interviews only enough to find someone who seems adequate and often has a few concerns about the new workers, but figures it might work out anyway.

Leslie is much more thorough initially, which does take more time, but, in the long run, Leslie has less attendant turn-over than Lee which means less over-all time searching for new attendants, less running of advertisements, less interviewing, less training of new attendants, and less extra headaches and worries. What do you think--is it worth it?



## COMMUNICATIONS

Whether you choose to relate to your attendant in a formal, business-like manner or as a friend/companion, probably the most important element in good attendant management is communication. Below are guidelines for clear communications with your attendant, especially regarding directions:

1. Have a clear idea of what you want your attendant to understand.
2. Think about your attitude and your attendant's attitude towards both the topic and each other.
3. Evaluate your own communication skills and those of your attendant.
4. Try to put yourself in your attendant's place. Think about how you like people to talk to you.
5. Be realistic about your expectations -- something that may seem simple to you might take more than one explanation for your attendant understand.
6. Try to make the message understandable to your attendant by using his or her language and terms.
7. State ideas in the simplest way possible.
8. Talk about one idea at a time, taking one step at a time.
9. Repeat ideas if needed; rephrase things if not understood the 1<sup>st</sup> time.
10. When explaining new ideas, give examples using familiar terms.
11. Know what ideas need special emphasis.
12. Pace information-giving according to the information-processing capabilities of your attendant. Don't overwhelm a new attendant, but on the other hand, don't talk down to them or let important issues go unsaid.
13. Build on previously learned skills and ideas.
14. Don't go so fast (in an attempt to get through a lot of information) that the attendant can't keep up.
15. Provide the attendant with both positive and corrective feedback. (Try not to be too critical, but if a problem exists, it is easier to correct it early in the learning process than after habits develop.)
16. Always remember that positive feedback is very important, especially when learning new things. It's a good practice to mention something that was done well before criticizing what was done incorrectly.
17. Keep communication pathways open. If you sense misunderstandings, try to discuss them soon; avoid blow-ups--try not to keep bad feelings inside.
18. Show your appreciation by thanking your attendant and not taking them for granted.
19. Even in an employer-employee relationship, it is important to, be kind and courteous when you are asking someone to do something for you; you don't need to be a wimp, but you also don't need to be demanding.
20. Remember that someone else might not do the job as well as you could and try to be patient with them.
21. Establish your position as an employer early so that things will be done your way; you know best what your needs are and how you want them met.
22. Try not to demand too much from a new attendant; increase the responsibilities gradually if the attendant seems to be working out well.

## EXPRESSING FEELINGS, RESOLVING CONFLICTS

If a conflict should arise, talk about the problem as soon as possible in a tactful, non-accusing manner. Try to define the problem and work out your differences. Most differences are about money or personality conflicts. If these differences cannot be worked out, you might seek the help of a mediator, someone outside of the relationship who can look at both sides of the problem objectively to help form a solution.

Neither being aggressive (shouting, blaming) nor being passive (silent, avoiding, keeping things inside) leads to a good relationship. Assertiveness, on the other hand, involves expressing your feelings and working for more open communications. Some of the important points emphasized in assertiveness training include:

1. Take responsibility for your message (e.g. using phrases such as "I feel...", "I like...", "I disagree...") instead of putting the blame on the other person (e.g. "You did...", "You didn't..."). Starting messages with "I" rather than "You" makes the other person less defensive and they will then be less resistant to further communication.
2. Be direct and clear about your message. Don't beat around the bush.
3. Express your feelings/anger as soon as possible. Don't let it build up inside you until you explode; say how you feel or what is bothering you before it becomes a big problem.
4. Be honest with yourself and with others.
5. Be open. Don't send messages through others.

There is a delicate balance between being the employer in charge and being too critical or demanding. Don't let an attendant try to order you around or take advantage of you. Be firm, but don't be a slave driver. Don't be too picky or dwell over issues that are not important.

Another thing to think about is that some of us are morning people (work better in the early hours of the day) and others work much better late at night. You may not be at your best at a certain time of day when working with your attendant. For example, you may not talk much when you first wake up, but be extremely friendly during the rest of the day; tell this to your morning attendant so that he or she does not think it is something personally wrong with him or her.

## PAYING YOUR ATTENDANT

Payment arrangements should be negotiated before the attendant starts work. There can be much variability in how to arrange payment times, rates, forms of payment and income sources. It is important to reach an agreement that works for both you and your attendant.

Differences should be worked out and compromises made that benefit both parties. Payments are commonly made on a weekly, monthly or twice a month schedule, although some people prefer to pay daily as a way of preventing later disputes over hours worked.

It's best to make payment by check so that you will have written proof that your attendant has been paid. (If you receive any kind of benefits, another good reason for making payments by check is so that you have records of these expenses.) If your attendant wants cash, explain to her or him why it is your policy to pay in check -- it helps in keeping good records and it's more business-like. If for some reason your attendant feels a cash payment is still necessary, and you're willing to make that compromise, have the attendant give you a signed, written receipt.

For your own protection do not pay in advance and do not loan money to attendants.

If you will be unable to pay your attendant on the scheduled payday, be sure to tell him or her as soon as possible. Late payments should be avoided if at all possible and should not happen often.

## RECORD KEEPING

Good record keeping is an important part of management. Poor records can lead to or aggravate disputes over the number of hours worked and payment or lack of payment. Good records can enable you to find substitute attendants quickly. Here are some ideas of records to check or keep:

### 1. ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is one of the things you should be careful to record; this should include information on lateness and absenteeism.

You need to analyze what is necessary and workable for you, your other obligations and your lifestyle; set clear guidelines accordingly and enforce them. Be sure your attendant knows the guidelines and understands what happens if these are not met. Your attendant's being prompt and dependable makes YOU prompt and dependable. You may not mind if your attendant is late one day, but if it happens more often, you will have a record of how late and how often it occurs.

There are many possible ways to keep track of attendant hours and payment. The important thing to remember is for you AND your attendants to keep separate records of the time worked and compare these figures at the end of each pay period to avoid conflicts.

Many people prefer using a big calendar on the wall for scheduling and posting hours worked. Beside his or her name, each attendant could write in the number of hours worked. If you have more than one attendant, you can use different colored pens for each attendant. Be sure to check your figures with your attendants'.

### 2. SUBSTITUTES, EXTRAS:

Keep a list of people who may be able and willing to fill-in as an attendant should you need them. This may include past attendants who might be willing to substitute occasionally, present attendants working at other times, friends and family. (Friends and family should be used as a last resort; don't strain the relationship this way if you can avoid it.) Keep an up-to-date list of these people, including names, phone numbers, and, if possible, days available to fill-in. The longer the list, the better your chances are of finding a substitute quickly when you are in a bind.

When interviewing, sometimes you might have more possible attendants than you need at the time; keep their applications on file to call the next time you need someone!

If they're willing, you may have your main back-up attendants come sometime to observe and become familiar with your routine, especially if they haven't worked for you in the past.

## RECORD KEEPING—continued

### 3. NOTEBOOK:

If you have several attendants, you may want to have a notebook so that you and your attendants will all know what is going on. This may be something they write into after each time they work, or they may simply check it at the beginning of each shift for any messages. They can write down ideas in it, notes on health or certain problems (e.g. bedsores) and communications with each other. This notebook might also contain copies of the attendant's rights and responsibilities, checklists of duties, and instructions for what to do in case of problems or emergencies.

### 4. PERSONNEL FILES:

Personnel files should be kept on each attendant. This could be as simple as folders kept in a box or an elaborate filing system. Contents may include:

- Application form (address, phone number, emergency contact)
- References
- Starting day and starting pay
- Time sheets/attendance record
- Evaluations
- Receipts
- Copies of letters of recommendation sent/received
- Other important documents or keepsakes

(Some people prefer keeping a quick-reference recipe box file in addition to the detailed files; the cards in the recipe box mainly give information for calling to line up substitute and emergency attendants.)

### 5. CHECKBOOKS, BILLS, ETC:

If your attendant writes your checks for you or has access to your checkbook, be sure that you check your monthly statements and cancelled checks. If you need assistance, your bank is there to help you.

If you will be having your attendant shop for you, be sure to get cash in advance. It's not a good idea give your attendant your code number if you have an automatic teller.

If your attendant buys your groceries or other things for you, find out what the bill was and inquire about any sudden increases or drastic differences.

## EVALUATING YOUR ATTENDANT

People usually do better when they know exactly what they are supposed to do, what standards they will be measured by, how they are doing, that their employer is interested in them, and that their work is important.

Continuous feedback should be given to the attendant whenever it is needed. However, a prescheduled periodic evaluation might provide a time for both of you to:

1. Talk about any problems or dissatisfactions.
2. Make suggestions for improving techniques, relationship and/or conditions.
3. Give praise, boost self-esteem and motivate.
4. Make a record of capacities and accomplishments (Useful in writing letters of recommendation, and determining pay raises.)

If you decide to have evaluation sessions, inform your attendant about them. Tell her or him when and how often you will evaluate, what you will be evaluating, and what criteria you will use. If you have used a checklist in training your attendant, the same checklist can be used to evaluate, adding any new tasks and responsibilities since the training.

Make sure there is a purpose for each item you evaluate and use good communication skills in your evaluation. Be as honest, fair, and open as possible. Be sure to include some positive feedback as well as corrective feedback. And don't forget to ask the attendant to give feedback on you!

## TIPS ON MAINTAINING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ATTENDANT

- A. Remember that your relationship with your attendant is first and foremost a business one, not a social one.
- B. Strive for good communication. Give compliments when your attendant is doing good work and give corrective feedback when she or he is doing something wrong. Take time to listen to what your attendant tells you.
- C. Verbally acknowledge your feelings in awkward situation, like the first time a new attendant provides personal care. Let your attendant know that you realize things may be uncomfortable or strained at times and encourage her or him to verbalize when those times happen. Even though these times can't always be prevented, discussing them shows respect for each other's feelings.
- D. Notify your attendant of any changed, which affects him or her.
- E. Recognize that the job is low paying. Incentives might reduce the high turnover of attendants. Can you offer anything -- Praise? Interesting conversation? Small snacks? Vacation pay when you are away? Tickets to concerts with you? Bus passes when with you?
- F. Be aware that due to the close contact between you and your attendant, you may want to become friends (or more intimate) with him or her. If this happens, you and your attendant may make a choice whether you would like to continue both the social relationship and the business relationship, or if you want to end one relationship. Frequently, it is more difficult to terminate a friendship than an employer/employee contract, and to continue both usually doesn't work well.

## JOE INCENTIVES

How do you keep a good attendant? Many incentives have some monetary connection, which may be difficult when funds are limited, but a smile and a good word doesn't strain the pocketbook. Your personality and the relationship which develops between you and your attendant is a large factor towards your attendant's job satisfaction. It also helps if you are well organized and a good attendant manager. These things make the job a pleasant one. Some ideas for job incentives include:

1. Flexibility: As long as it doesn't infringe on your needs, allow your attendant choice and flexibility in scheduling.
2. Staff parties: These help to build morale and also give the attendants the chance to meet each other.
3. Responsibility: Give your attendant increasing responsibility and allow him or her to make some of the decisions (without taking away your rights as an employer) to increase job satisfaction and motivation.
4. Pay raise: Give regular pay raises to good attendants
5. Vacation pay: If possible, you may want to give your attendant some paid time off after they have been working for you for one year, or maybe you can pay your employees when you are away and they're not working.
6. Travel: You can offer to take your attendant along with you on vacations. (Of course, they'll be providing services for you for which you should still pay an hourly wage in addition to their expenses.)
7. Fringe benefits: Treat your attendant to a movie, play, concert, etc. when he or she goes with you as your attendant.
8. Insurance: You might be able to purchase some type of group insurance package to offer your attendants, especially if you have several people working for you.
9. Meals: Perhaps you can offer meals or excess from your garden to your attendants when they are working for you.
10. Referrals: If they are looking for more work, you can refer them to friends.

Even doing all this, attendants will still leave; try not to get discouraged. Because of the nature of the job, the low pay, and the individuals who do it, turnover is very high; an attendant's leaving is not necessarily a reflection of your management skills.



## CLIENT/ATTENDANT ABUSE

Abuse in the client/attendant relationship is all too common. This abuse can take many forms, from mild to severe, and may not even be recognized as such. Abuse can be asking or using more of the other person than has been agreed to. Some examples of abuse between clients and attendants are listed below.

Clients can abuse attendants by:

- asking attendants to do more than is on the job description
- asking the attendant for favors (without pay)
- habitually asking attendants to work 10 extra minutes
- frequently changing the attendant's schedule
- habitually paying late
- physical harm
- sexual harassment

Attendants can abuse clients by:

- not performing the whole job as agreed upon
- using client's food and/or equipment without permission
- habitually coming to work ten minutes late
- physical harm
- sexual harassment

Since abuse is not always intentional, communicating that one feels taken advantage of may be a simple way of stopping such treatment. For example, a disabled person might deal with annoyance at the attendant's eating his or her food by saying so in a direct, non-threatening way. If abuse persists and/or is too severe, terminating the relationship may be the only acceptable option. It is important for disabled employers to remember that, although they need the services of attendants, they don't need to tolerate being taken advantage of, nor do they have the right to abuse their employees.

Although flexibility is necessary, in order to maintain a good working relationship, it is important that neither one of you takes advantage of the other. You, the employer, should not be constantly asking your attendant to do you extra favors beyond the specified duties. On the other hand, the attendant should not always be late just because you don't seem to mind. Respect for one another is the key!

## GENERAL EXERCISE SIX: ABUSE CHECKLIST

The following questions are meant to help you think about how your attendant is treating you. While you may not be bothered by some of these things, it is important to know that if you choose not to, you don't have to tolerate being treated in these ways.

1. Does your attendant come early or late sometimes? How often?
2. Does your attendant call when she or he is going to be late or absent?
3. How often is your attendant absent? (i.e., how many times in a month?)
4. Does your attendant ask to be paid early?
5. Does your attendant eat your food, watch your T.V., or use your property without your permission?
6. Does your attendant try to delay doing things that she or he was hired to do?
7. Does your attendant assist you in doing things the way you want, or does she or he try to tell you what you ought to do and how you ought to do it?
8. Does your attendant ever touch you when it is not necessary?
9. Does your attendant talk too much when she or he is supposed to be working?
10. Think about any ways (similar to those listed above) that you might be mistreating your attendant(s).

## TIPS ON ATTENDANT TERMINATION

1. Remember that you have a right to terminate any attendant if you are dissatisfied or if your schedule changes so that you can no longer work with him or her.
2. Remember that your attendant has a right to quit working with you if she or he is dissatisfied with the job or if his or her schedule makes working with you no longer possible.
3. Except in extreme cases, you and your attendant should give one another two weeks notice of the desire to terminate your relationship. (Some extreme cases include theft, severe abuse, frequent attendant absences and writing unauthorized checks.) Although dishonesty is probably the most frequent cause for immediate termination, other factors such as family emergencies or hospitalization might also come up.
4. If the severance is not a friendly one, don't be intimidated by your attendant. If you think there might be problems, have an able-bodied friend around when you fire the attendant. In the case of a live-in attendant, you can have a "stand-by" police officer come to your home while the attendant moves out. However you handle it, try not to anger the attendant so that your own safety and welfare is not threatened.
5. Deal with emotional aspects of termination. You may feel guilty for letting your attendant go. Your attendant may be angry with you. You may miss one another.
6. Use your own judgment as to whether you need a back-up, emergency attendant during the time between when you give termination notice and the date of termination. It is possible that your attendant will not come to work for you once you give him or her notice.
7. Be sure to get keys and other belongings back from your attendant before she or he stops working for you. If an ex-attendant still has keys to your home, you may want to consider changing the locks.
8. If appropriate, notify people or agencies who provide your attendant monies that your attendant is no longer working with you.
9. Firing is a difficult task for anyone to do and there are no sure ways to make it easy. The best advice is to carefully select your attendants to decrease the chances of the need to fire someone.

## TIPS ON WORKING WITH LIVE-IN ATTENDANTS

Working with live-in attendants may be more difficult than working with part-time attendants. Difficulties may arise from (1) living with another person and (2) living with your employee. Here are a few suggestions that might help reduce these difficulties.

A. Maintain good communications. This helps avoid the build-up of hidden tensions, which may lead to emotional explosions and end the relationship.

B. Consider your compatibility with a perspective live-in attendant. How similar are your lifestyles? Will you always be on each other's nerves? A one-month trial period might be a wise idea.

C. Develop an agreement before the relationship begins as to how much the attendant will pay for room and board. Decide whether you and your attendant will jointly buy food or buy it separately. If attendant services are exchanged for room and board, it should be specified in the agreement. Stick to this agreement unless it is otherwise discussed and negotiated. You may want to keep a written record of this agreement.

D. Schedule time when your attendant is working with you, or on call, and times when she or he is not working with you; unless absolutely necessary, do not ask for assistance from your attendant during her or his "off" hours -- even if it's just a little thing, they need to be able to enjoy time in their home without continuously feeling responsible. Following this type of schedule might help prevent resentments and burn-out and helps to keep expectations clearly defined.

E. Respect one another's need for privacy. It is best if you and your attendant have spaces in your living quarters which you each can consider "your own space."

## TIPS ON ATTENDANT MONIES (BENEFITS)

A. In some states there is a division of a State Department (i.e. Social Services) that will give attendant care monies to qualifying individuals, to enable them to live safely in their homes rather than in an institution. For example, in California, In Home Support Services (I.H.S.S.) pays attendants minimum wage to assist disabled and elderly people in their homes.

B. Applications for attendant care monies is usually administered through the counties. In these cases, if one moves to a different county, they must re-apply in that county. Reapplications may cause a one-to-three month delay in receiving monies to pay attendants.

C. An attendant's job is often demanding and requires a lot of responsibility; minimum wage is often not enough to get the better attendants. If it is possible to find ways to increase the hourly rate, you will not only get better attendants, but they will stay longer. (Perhaps you can add to the amount received from the state, in order to bring it up a little; or perhaps you can pay by the job rather than by the hour.)

D. Be aware that if you live with your family and/or spouse, attendant services monies might be reduced. However, if they are unable to provide your care (i.e. they work a full time job, or they have back trouble), then your attendant monies might not be affected.

E. Try to be patient with all the questions and paperwork; doing your end of the paperwork quickly will help speed things up.

F. Many Independent Living Centers have handbooks with pointers on applying for attendant monies. Also, some have a Benefits Counselor on staff that can answer many questions about these benefits.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY OF YOU AND YOUR ATTENDANT

Preventing accidents and infections is much easier than treating problems after they occur. Probably the biggest problem for attendants is back injury. You can help your attendant to care for his or her back if you:

1. Learn about body mechanics. Using good body mechanics is correctly using and positioning your body to avoid back injury.
2. Know how to teach your attendant to apply good body mechanic principles.
3. Encourage your attendant in the use of good body mechanics.
4. Point out when you see your attendant using poor body mechanics.
5. Encourage your attendant to seek more instruction/information on body mechanics. (Check with your physical therapist about local resources for your attendants.)
6. Encourage your attendant to go to a doctor if back pain and difficulties develop.

Remember, an attendant with an injured back will probably have to take off from work or possibly even quit. So, it helps you to help your attendant take care of his or her back!

Other types of accidents can be minimized by making your home a safe place to work. Common causes of accidents include:

- Hazardous arrangements (piled, cluttered, crowded storage and work space; hard to reach areas)
- Unsafe material and/or equipment (rough and sharp edged materials; slippery surfaces; poorly designed and constructed equipment; weak or frayed material; parts weakened by rust, corrosion and decay; exposed wire and worn out plugs)
- Insufficient lighting
- Hazardous and/or heavy machinery

Infections can also be a big problem, but they can often be avoided:

1. Insist on correct washing prior to and during any personal care or cooking.
2. See that dishes are properly washed and garbage disposed of after every meal.
3. Have trash taken out regularly and the trashcan rinsed out.
4. Model and encourage cleanliness, especially in the bathroom and kitchen.
5. Be sure attendants notify you when there are problems (e.g. bugs, backed up sink, etc.) or when supplies run low, so that you can have these things taken care of as soon as possible.

## UNDERSTANDING ATTENDANTS

In order to be good attendant managers, it is not only necessary that we understand the nature of the work, but also that we try to understand the person who chooses to do attendant work, whether they are in it temporarily or permanently. Ask your attendants why they do attendant work. What was their initial reason for getting into this field? If they've been at it for some time, has their motivation changed? What do they get out of it besides pay? Why attendant work?

By asking attendants these kinds of questions, we gain insight into the kinds of things that might encourage a person to remain with an attendant job for some time. Below are some of the ways attendants have answered the question, "Why do you do attendant work?" (NOTE: Studying the answers, how long do you think each person would stay on a job with you?)

--It's meaningful, challenging work.

--It's work where I am able to be real and vulnerable--not like computer work.

--I'm a caretaker type of person.

--I figure it'll get me Brownie Points in heaven.

--I like work where there's social action like with a disabled rights advocate.

--I think most disabled people really care about their attendants as people and treat them well.

--It's work that's really appreciated.

--It's work that makes a difference.

--I like to be part of the process of people becoming liberated.

--I've been oppressed and can relate to being in an oppressive situation.

--It's related to my vocation (i.e. health care).

--I really like the person I'm working for.

--It's personal work.

--It's a good way to supplement other work.

--I'm only doing it until something better comes along.

## CONCLUSION

If you've read this far, your head is likely swimming with information! Take what's helpful and remember that these are only suggestions -- you are the expert on what will work best for you.

This workbook can be used by individuals or as a text in a class. Hopefully, it will help you to increase your attendant management skills. Unfortunately, nothing can prevent attendant turn-over permanently because of the realities of the work. Even excellent attendant managers cannot always keep attendants, and it is sometimes hard not to take it personally when you know that you've done everything you can to be a good employer. This is just one reason I encourage people to form or join support groups around issues of attendant management.

The average time a personal care attendant will stay on a job is a couple of months. Low wages, no benefits, and (especially for those who are paid through a public benefits system) an intimidating system of payment delays are just a few of the disincentives to doing attendant work. Not only do people leave attendant work after a short time in the field, but there are also less entering it than there used to be. Yet, the number of people needing attendants has greatly increased.

### SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

(1) Be the best attendant manager you can be so that attendants will want to work for you. Review this workbook every now and then, especially during times of attendant turn-over. If an attendant has positive working relations, they are likely to continue doing attendant work for you and others for a long time.

(2) Obtain a copy of "A Generic Orientation To Doing Attendant Work" - hopefully available from the same source you found this. This is a short guidebook with helpful information for attendants. You might want to give a copy of it to your attendants, especially those new to this type of work. (The pages on Back Care, lifts and transfers are especially helpful.) Attendants who receive more training and/or information tend to feel more comfortable doing personal care and stay in the field longer.

In general, remember that you and your needs will change over time. Being a good attendant manager means constantly reevaluating your system. When something isn't working smoothly, try a different approach if possible. Adaptability is one of the greatest assets for a disabled person to have and this is certainly true in the area of attendant management.