CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT & DISABILITY

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Designing Competitive Employment for Non-Apparent Disabilities

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR PERFORMANCE, DISCLOSURE, AND RETENTION

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- Certified Rehabilitation Counselor
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Living with Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension (IIH)

This Is Your Room Too

Agenda

Why Non-Apparent Disabilities Matter

Intent vs. Impact

Disclosure as a Decision

Rethinking Readiness

Practical Strategies for Inclusive Employment

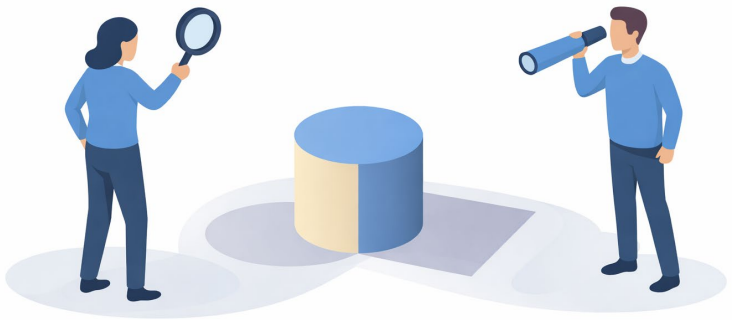
Reflection and Takeaways

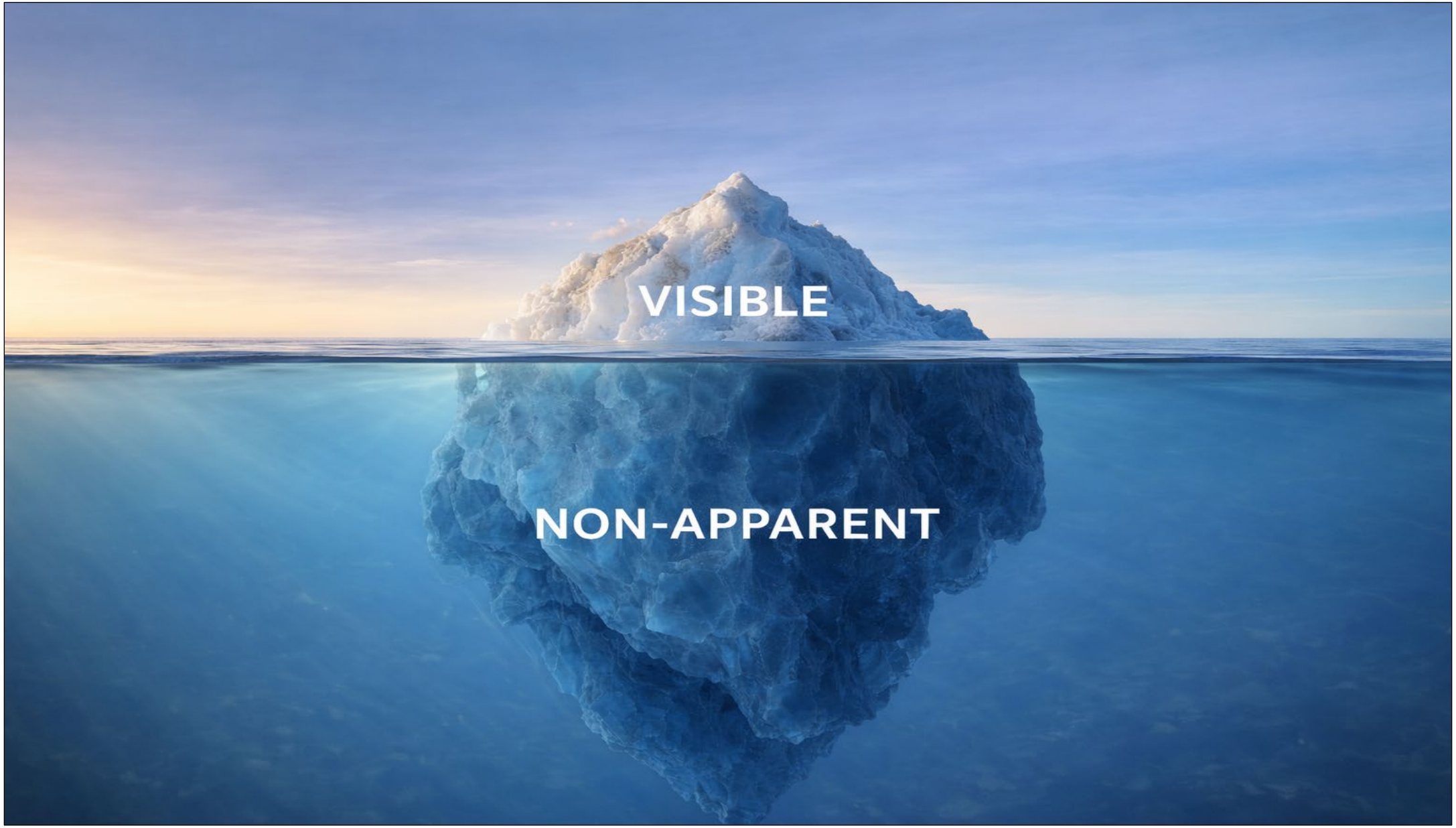
Learning Objectives

- Identify how non-apparent disabilities shape performance, disclosure, and retention
- Apply a disclosure framework that balances autonomy, culture, and expectations
- Design workplace supports using Universal Design and environmental modifications
- Reframe documentation language to reflect Employment First and reduce readiness bias

Perception vs. Reality

What do people get wrong about your role?




VISIBLE
NON-APPARENT

The Visibility Problem

Visibility becomes the metric

- Systems reward what they can measure
- Effort is judged visually
- Stamina is assumed stable
- Credibility gets questioned when performance fluctuates

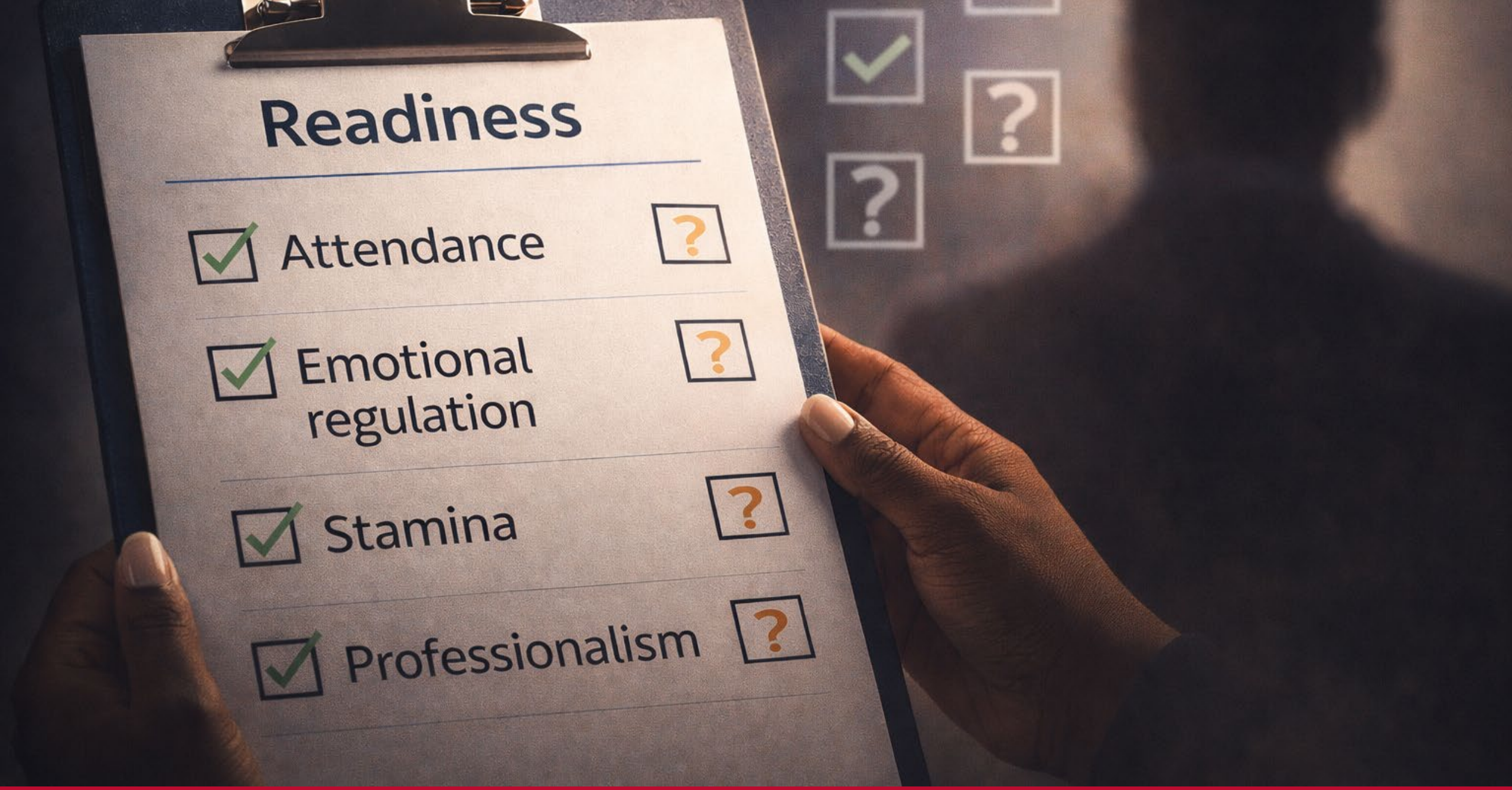
Presume Employability

- Start with capability. Not proof
- Shift from impairment to performance
- Readiness is not a prerequisite
- Competitive employment is the baseline

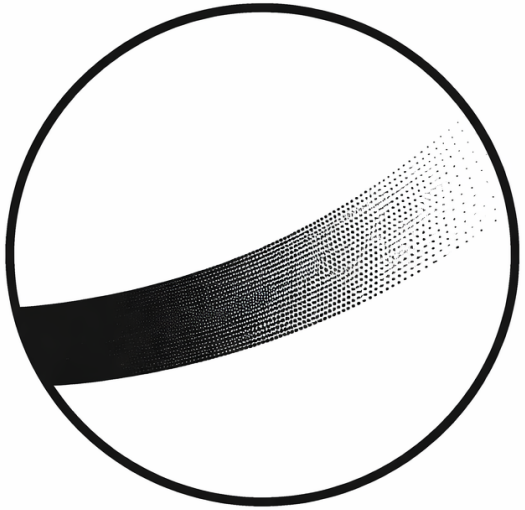
Employment is the starting point

Intent vs. Impact

- Support is offered, but not always experienced
- Assumptions can replace conversation
- Impact is defined by the employee experience


Readiness
Attendance
Emotional regulation
Stamina
Professionalism

Disclosure is Contextual



What Shapes Disclosure?

- Workplace culture
- Psychological safety
- Power dynamics
- Job security
- Performance metrics

Disclosure is Strategic

- Disclosure is a decision, not a requirement
- Timing, context, and risk shape the choice
- The goal is performance, not permission

Decision Conditions

- Risk is being assessed
- Context shapes choice
- Outcomes are anticipated

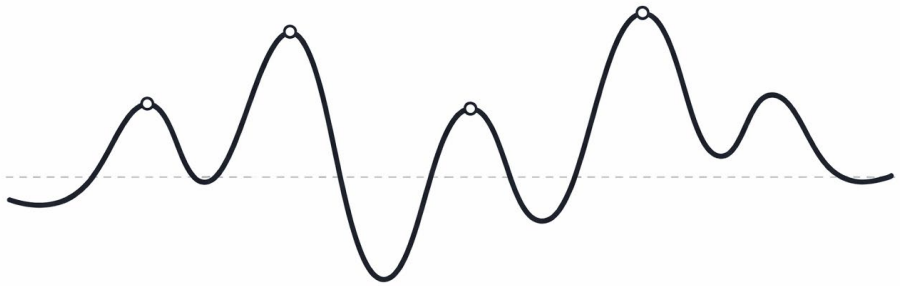
Case Scenario

An employee with episodic stamina in competitive employment

What level of disclosure protects dignity and performance?

Performance is Not Linear

- Episodic stamina
- Cognitive load
- Visual and sensory strain
- Environmental triggers



Performance fluctuates. Systems must account for it.

Design for Predictable Fluctuation

- Batch high-demand tasks intentionally
- Measure output, not time
- Build flexible structure into schedules
- Use written systems to reduce cognitive load

Structure stabilizes variable capacity

Rewrite the Schedule

How would you redesign a rigid 9–5 schedule?

Activity: You'll have 45 seconds to write, then share with a partner

Design Before Diagnosis

- Lighting control
- Reduced sensory load
- Clear written instructions
- Structured flexibility

Design is not how it looks. Design is how it works.-Steve Jobs

Documentation Shapes Outcomes

Avoid

Employee struggles with consistency

Reframe

Employee performs optimally with structured workload pacing

Your Turn, Try It!
Employee keeps missing work and doesn't finish their tasks.

One Way to Reframe It

Original: "Employee keeps missing work and doesn't finish their tasks."

Reframe: "Employee performs best with a consistent schedule, clear task instructions, and regular check-ins."

Retention is a Systems Skill

- Monitor performance patterns
- Intervene early
- Protect competitive placement
- Align with Employment First

Protecting Competitive Employment

- Stability planning
- Supervisor education
- Clear accommodation documentation
- Outcome-based performance framing

Disclosure as Strategy

Key Takeaways

- **Visibility** does not equal capacity
- **Disclosure** is a strategic continuum
- **Performance** variability is normal
- **Retention** is a systems responsibility

Questions

If you’re still thinking, consider these:

References & Resources

Field Frameworks

- APSE. (2019). *Universal Employment Competencies*. Association of People Supporting Employment First. apse.org
- ACRE. (2021). *Employment Services Competencies*. Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators. acreducators.org
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2002). *Enforcement guidance: Reasonable accommodation and undue hardship under the ADA*. eeoc.gov

Clinical Foundation

- Nilsson, C. et al. (2013). Cognitive function in idiopathic intracranial hypertension: A prospective case-control study. *BMJ Open*. Loss of income due to IIH is reported by 48% of patients. Nxcode PMC3987738
- Cleveland Clinic. *Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension*. my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21968

Practical Resources for Attendees

- Job Accommodation Network (JAN). *A to Z of disabilities and accommodations*. askjan.org
- Intracranial Hypertension Research Foundation. *Living with IH*. ihrfoundation.org
- ADA National Network. *ADA.gov*. ada.gov

A Shared Moment

Change is already in the room

Sensory Notice: The LED bracelets in your bag may flash or strobe. If you have light sensitivity, please feel free to skip the bracelet or keep it off. *Your comfort and participation are always your choice.*

Thank You

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