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*Some tips from a person with a disability about finding work or becoming more involved in your community*

Employment for a person with a disability is an admirable goal. Moving from a goal to an actual sustainable employment situation can be hard. Whether you're a go-getter that wants to do everything yourself or you like the idea of having a paycheck but just don't have any idea where to start. I can relate to the uncertainty and the anxiety that a job search creates when you have a disability. You will probably fail a lot and not find the right job right away. You're going to have to overcome things like transportation challenges, caregiver challenges, maybe family and friends say that you can't work or don't need to. But if you have a desire to work, I want to encourage you to try. You might be concerned about losses of benefits or reduction of benefits. And while everyone's situation is going to be different, there are programs, (such as MAPP or Trial Work Period) available that allow you to try work while minimizing the risk of losing benefits. You can also check with your Aging and Disability Resource Center about benefits counseling, if losing your benefits is concerning to you.

I'm certainly not going to judge you if you choose not to work but you probably have a contribution you can make somewhere, and somebody might be willing to pay you for it. Maybe you could volunteer at a nonprofit. The more involved in your community you are the more fulfilling your life will likely be. Think outside the box. Consider the things you're good at and how that might apply to a job. Consider the things you're bad at and how that might preclude you from doing things. For me transportation is always a huge barrier. Also right out of college I decided I was going to try to sell insurance door-to-door. I couldn't figure out why I bombed the interview until I was in the van on my way home. It was at that point that I realized the interviewer was aware that most of the homes I would visit were not wheelchair accessible. I was young and I did not consider what would not work. I just graduated from Marquette and was convinced I could do everything and anything. This is not the case. But I have always been able to find something to ensure I had something to do and had enough money to feed both me and my dog.

When looking for work it's important to consider who you know. I got my current job because my best friend from fourth grade works at a company that needed a bookkeeper that knew their way around QuickBooks. I wasn't looking for a job at the time, but I needed something to do. I was very clear with my new boss about where I needed help and where I could work independently. We had to tweak some processes in order to make things fit. I realize most of you are not going to have work fall in your lap like I did. You will probably have to try and fail many times before you successfully land an opportunity to contribute. I will leave you with these three simple tips to help you get started:

1. Be honest about what you can do and what you can't. Your disability is part of who you are. You should not hide it and the people you interact with have no reason to fear it. As a young adult I was convinced I could do just as good as people without a disability. This is obviously not true and I'm okay with it.
2. Recognize that you have a valuable contribution to make even if the job has to be modified for you to succeed. With a little bit of modification there are probably a lot of ways for you to apply your skills and talents.
3. Look for problems that other people might have that you can solve. I happened to stumble into a job where nobody knew how to use QuickBooks. I was able to quickly prove my value.