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Self-Help

Learning a Living: A Guide to Planning Your Career and Finding a Job for People with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Dyslexia
Dale S. Brown
Woodbine House
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Since the recent passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, with its requirement of reasonable workplace accommodation for persons having a range of physical and psychological disabilities, the complex situation of workers with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and/or dyslexia has received increasingly frank discussion.

At the same time, modern research into these disabilities has served to make more precise and humane our understanding of the ways that persons with learning disabilities can be both assisted and made more autonomous in their lives and work. Still, the stigma attached to these disabilities by schools and employers continues in many quarters, and the need for savvy life strategies by learning disabled persons remains critical, even as formal legal recognition of their rights has been partially established.

Well-organized and clearly written much in the same way as Richard Nelson Bolles' successful What Color Is Your Parachute books, Learning A Living is a fine-tuned career guide for persons-especially those of high school and college age-who have particular challenges at a range of basic tasks that most job-seekers take for granted: organizational skills, grooming and body language, driving a car, reading and writing, social conversation and getting along in structured learning and work situations. Job searches-frustrating and time consuming even for those without disabilities-can require additional support, coaching and other resources for learning disabled persons. To this end, Brown, a leading self-help advocate for learning disabled persons and founder in 1979 of the Association of Learning Disabled Adults, follows the example set by Bolles and other recent job-search gurus in her pragmatic assertion that research, creativity, assertiveness and unapologetic self-assessment are the keys to finding meaningful work.

Brown rightfully emphasizes that learning disabled persons, far more than most others,

need to identify and nurture with great care the skills they do possess and to mitigate the negative impact of skills that they lack. Second, she places substantial emphasis on gaining public recognition for both aptitudes and disabilities; self-advocacy appears here as one of the key procedures for learning disabled persons to gain access to services and to public awareness that their circumstances can be overcome with thoughtful approaches to life and work. Most helpfully of all, she illustrates the sensitive politics of disclosing learning disabilities to others, indicating strategies for how and when to inform employers or potential employers of learning disabilities.

Legal strategies are given a clear overview and explanation in a chapter devoted to the American With Disabilities Act of 1990, in which Brown describes the correct legal steps for obtaining mandated “reasonable accommodation” in the workplace. The book concludes with a superb annotated bibliography of accessible, non-scholarly books related to learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and dyslexia.

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