

Dear Counselors, Staff etc.

First of all I would like to finally announce that I have my website up and running. The website address is [www.JeffSymonsconsulting.com](http://www.JeffSymonsconsulting.com) (I know that's not very original but I will take suggestions). Please check out the website and give me any feedback as ways to improve it. There are links to my previous newsletters so in case anyone is suffering from insomnia they can read these and this should help.

This newsletter is about what to expect from an assessment. Recently I saw several clients/employees that had equipment (chairs, voice recognition software, etc.) and asked them about how they got this equipment. I was very surprised to hear some of their answers. This is what prompted me to write this newsletter. Now this is not to say that I am perfect, I have certainly made my share of mistakes but since this is a short newsletter I will only go into a few of those.

When dealing with a vendor who is doing assessments here are some questions you should consider asking:

1. What kind of results can I expect from this assessment?
2. Are there other options or alternatives?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?
4. Do you sell these products and what kind of warranty and support is available?
5. What is their background? How long they have been doing this type of work?

**Counselors should attend any assessment-especially new counselors that I have not worked with so they can see what happens in an assessment.**

1. What kind of results can I expect from this assessment?

The person who is being assessed should be able to describe the issues and their goals. The counselor should also be able to describe their goals from the assessment (the 2 may be different). The person doing the assessment should be able to provide REALISTIC goals from what technology can provide.

For example:

Getting a new ergonomic chair will not cure someone's back problems. My goal is increase their sitting tolerance to a manageable level to get through a work/school day. I have seen a number of people who have reported after getting a proper fitting chair that many of their symptoms such as headaches and back pain were greatly reduced.

Recently, I saw several people who had expensive ergonomic chairs that did not fit them well. When I asked them how they got these chairs they told me that they were told to “go out and pick out a chair”. Unfortunately, without knowing what features to look for and how to adjust the chairs many of them picked out chairs that felt good to them but did not work for them. I bring several different chairs out for people to try and hopefully find one that works well. However, I cannot bring out all possible chairs. If a person is not very satisfied with one of the chairs that I have brought I suggest we meet at a local vendor's to try out additional chairs. I meet them at the store so I can help them adjust the chair and pick out an appropriate one. If you must to go pick out a chair at a store, make sure that there is a knowledgeable staff person available to assist you. Many vendors are quite knowledgeable about the chairs and can help you adjust and select an appropriate chair. You also must realize that most vendors get paid on a commission so the more expensive chair they sell you the more money they make. Sometimes they may try to sell you a more expensive chair than you really need.

I also have seen several people who have been using voice recognition software. As I observed them using this software I've heard many of them complain that it did not work very well. When I asked them if they had any training some reported they did not get any training. When I train people using voice recognition software I tell them that my goal is 100 words per minute with at least 98% accuracy. Sometimes the issue can be the equipment or the computer system but most often it is how the person was trained. People often get the program and start talking too fast and do not correct errors initially, corrupting their voice. Talking a little slower and enunciating words gets better accuracy and overall faster results.

When you are looking for voice recognition training ask the trainer for typical rates and accuracy levels that they have seen in other people. I tend to estimate rates and accuracy on the low side as I do not want people to get unreal expectations.

## 2. Are there other options or alternatives?

There are always other options and the person doing the assessment should let you know what these are. If an ergonomic chair helps but the person can not work all day in the chair then a sit stand work station would be another option.

## 3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?

I try to educate the counselor and client about the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

For Example: There are also limitations to voice recognition software. It works best for word-processing applications and case notes but is not always great at filling out forms and dealing with names and addresses and surfing the web.

## 4. Do you sell these products and what kind of warranty and support is available?

Many people who do these types of assessments do sell the products. Most are very good but realize that this can be a potential conflict of interest as they would benefit from selling you more expensive equipment. This is not to say that you should not use someone who sells a product as a vendor but they should at least make you aware that they do sell the product. Most products have a warranty that can vary from 30 days to 5 years.

## 5. What is their background? How long they have been doing this type of work?

People doing these assessments should have either some education in this area or some sort of certification. RESNA is an organization that provides certification in the area of assistive technology (ATP/ATS). There is also certification for ergonomic area (CPE).

What happens if there is a problem?

As I said in the opening of this newsletter no one is perfect and mistakes will be made. I have certainly made my share of mistakes over the years. I was once working with a new chair vendor and inadvertently recommended

the wrong chair models for several people. Since this was my error it was my responsibility to fix the problem at no additional cost to anyone. Vendors should stand behind their work and the equipment they recommend should be under warranty.

If you have any questions I can be reached by email at [jtsymons@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jtsymons@sbcglobal.net) or (916)933-2375 or [www.jeffsymonsconsulting.com](http://www.jeffsymonsconsulting.com) .

Thanks,

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