

Jen – Using self-advocacy skills in the workplace

Jen: My name is Jen. I was officially diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum in 2011, at 37 years of age. I hold two Bachelor degrees and am an example of underemployment, i.e., working in jobs that is below my knowledge and skills sets.
I am going to talk about how I used self-advocacy skills, twice about the same thing, during my employment in a Supermarket, as a check-out operator.

Jen: For me working on the check-outs, was very unstimulating and unrewarding. As it affected my mental health, it was very important for me to have a work-life balance and work the optimum number of hours for me.
When I first started working in the supermarket, the supermarket was closed on all of the public holidays, under Western Australian regulations, which meant that I did not have to work on those days.
After a few years, the W.A. regulations changed, therefore the supermarket could open on all of the public holidays, except Good Friday, Anzac Day, and Christmas Day.

Jen: However, we could specify if we wanted to work on public holidays or not. I chose to opt for not working on public holidays, as I wanted to keep a work-life balance, as it was important for me and my mental health.
When I was asked, by my manager at the time, what my decision was, I said that I did not want to work on public holidays. That decision was respected. The self-advocacy skills that I used were (1) knowledge of my rights and (2) speaking up for myself.

Jen: However, fast forward a number of years, a new manager came along, and I had to advocate for the same thing all over again. The new manager had rostered me to work on a public holiday. I approached her and said that I do not work on public holidays. She told me that the office lady had said to her that the check-out team members alternate working on public holidays.

In the end, I went on to the supermarket's website, found where the policy was, about working on public holidays, and printed the policy documents and typed a letter to my manager, pointing out the public holiday policy.

I wrote:

1. According to the policy documents, the supermarket cannot force or require employees to work on public holidays. It is up to the individual team members to decide to work on public holidays or not. Working on public holidays is voluntary.
2. It is not stated anywhere that it is expected that team members must work some public holidays.
3. For most of my employment at the supermarket, I have chosen not to work on public holidays. I have indicated that to various customer service managers over time, and they have never rostered me to work on public holidays. I choose not to work on public holidays for the benefit of my mental health.
4. In light of the above, please respect my wishes to not work on public holidays.

Jen: I handed my manager the letter and the printed copies of the public holiday policy documents. From then on, she did not roster me to work on public holidays. Again, my wish was respected.

The self-advocacy skills that I used, in this instance were, (1) knowledge of my rights, (2) finding where the public holiday policies were on the supermarket's website, (3) letter writing, and (4) standing up for myself.