

# **PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANCE**

## **FINDING A GOOD ATTENDANT**

By Don Berry

Berkeley Center for Independent Living

An attendant is a person who helps you do things you are physically unable to do yourself. Often these attendants are hard to find. If you live in an area where there is no organization that provides attendant referral, then the following sources should be utilized in your search:

- College bulletin boards and placement boards
- Friends who use attendants
- Local and college newspapers.
- Employment offices
- Public Health Department
- Hospital bulletin boards
- Local Personal Care Agency

After ads have been placed, people will call for information. Explain your general situation and arrange to meet the person. Do not hire a person sight unseen. The purpose of the interview is to inform the person exactly what the job involves. This includes wages, hours to work, problems that may arise and responsibilities.

You may need to employ more than one person, especially if you require an attendant for different times throughout the day. This also eliminates the problem of one person working seven days a week and needing coverage for vacation, illnesses, etc.

Some helpful hints in finding and keeping good attendants:

- Attendants should be paid for the entire time spent on the job. They should also be paid for time spent waiting for the employer.
- Minimum wage (at least) should be paid for every hour worked.
- Time and a half after midnight plus transportation cost should be paid in compensation for the late hour and risk involved in travel unless you are providing room and board as part of the payment.
- Pay on time.
- Hire only people you feel are qualified to do the job.
- Don't hire a person if you foresee personality or employment conflicts.
- Often people looking for attendant work have no experience. Don't be afraid to explain to the person how you need the job done. You know your needs best.

Finally, pool your attendant information with other disabled people you know. The more

contacts you have the better the chances of finding qualified attendants.

## **SOME THOUGHTS ON ATTITUDES TO LOOK FOR AND MAINTAINING YOUR PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANT**

By Paul Kahn

What are the attitudes that you, as a physically handicapped person, should look for and seek to maintain in your personal care attendant? Stated simply you should want him or her to have a happy, satisfied attitude toward his or her job. An attendant with good morale will do better work for you and will be pleasant to have in your home. And, having your physical needs taken care of with good grace will leave your mind free for more rewarding concerns. A person happy at his or her work will be inclined to stay with you longer, allowing you to save the money, time, effort and anxiety you would have to expend looking for another new attendant.

How happy your attendant is in his or her work will be partly a matter of how suited he is in character and temperament to the duties required of him or her and to his or her role, in general. He or she should be somebody who can cope with responsibility, who is patient with routine and can accept your physical differences and the less aesthetic aspects of personal care. He or she, also, must be able to accept the fact that, although you are physically dependent, you are completely in charge of your own life, and, therefore, you, not he or she, make all decisions regarding your care.

Ascertaining whether or not an applicant has these qualities is difficult. It will help if you give him or her an accurate and complete description of the job, so he or she can decide for him or herself if he or she are suited to it. Also, ask for and carefully check employment references. Beyond that, judging applicants is a matter of insight and intuition, both of which you will probably find improve with experience.

Another factor that will have a bearing on your attendant's morale is the material rewards of the job. Always look for someone who needs and appreciates the salary (plus food and shelter in the case of a live-in attendant) that you are offering. Be very wary of the self-styled altruists who claim he or she only wants the job because he or she so much likes to help people. Such a person is trying to fool you and probably him or herself, too. If you hire him or her, chances are that in a short time he or she will decide that, since he or she are only helping you out as a favor, he or she has no real obligation and can begin to neglect his responsibilities. In his or her own mind he or she will have taken away your authority as his or her employer and made his or hers supposed altruistic conscience his or hers only boss. In short, he or she will be unreliable and unmanageable. Someone who is open about his or her interest in personal gain will probably make a much more steady, lasting worker. This is not suggested that you look for someone completely mercenary, only that you avoid hypocrites.

Yet another factor that will have a bearing on your attendant's attitude toward his or her job is how appreciated he or she feels. Never take dependability, competence or consideration for granted: they are not that abundant in the world. The attendant who has them deserves your outspoken praise. And you showing him or her regards will definitely rebound to your benefit by

building his or her morale and stimulating him or her to continue his or her work. Compensation is also an expression of your appreciation. Your budget will probably impose strict limits on the actual amount you can pay your attendant, but you can enhance its value in appreciation by paying it ungrudgingly and on time. Most important, be absolutely fair; never try to get your attendant to put extra work without your adding commensurately to his or her compensation. Your fairness will show that you value and respect him or her.

One more requisite for feeling happy in one's work is the conviction that one is doing something worthwhile and important. This may be difficult for your attendant because his or her duties will be non-professional, repetitious and mundane. The one worthwhile thing he or she will be able to believe he or she is doing is providing indispensable, life-sustaining help to a worthwhile person, namely you. Thus, the degree to which he or she likes and respects you will have a profound effect on his or her job satisfaction. You will be able to establish and maintain his respect in several ways: by functioning as independently as your handicap allows; by being mature and knowledgeable about your own care; by being a good household manager; by being engaged in some meaningful, socially useful activity such as the pursuit of an education, vocation or avocation; and, finally, by treating your attendant as you want and expect to be treated by him or her- with honesty, fairness, kindness, patience and respect.

However, sometimes it may happen that, despite your care in choosing and your efforts to maintain good rapport and good morale, the attendant you hire will prove irresponsible and uncaring. In that case, you will have to make your dissatisfaction plain and be firm in your right to expect better service. But, if lasting improvement is not quickly forthcoming, you should move quickly to find a more satisfactory replacement, because relying on someone who is unreliable is not healthy for either mind or body. You must regain and control over how your own basic needs are to be met in order to meet your goal of independent living.

## **INTERVIEWING AND SELECTING P.C.A.'S**

By David Young

### **I. What should happen over the telephone-in order of occurrence?**

- Say hello in a friendly manner-first impressions are important.
- Where do they live and what is their means of transportation? Even the most dedicated of P.C.A.'s will soon grow tired of three bus transfers and a half mile walk just to work two or three hours.
- What kind of hours and pay are they interested in? Many people are looking for hours than you need or higher pay than you can afford. This information, and the above, can often "weed out" many callers right from the start and save you from wasting your time engaging in fruitless conversations.
- After the initial screening. It is good practice to give them a brief rundown on who you are, where you live, and what Mass transit you are near, what your "typical" daily routine is, what the pay is, and what times you need someone. This should be concise and to the point. It should be made clear the nature of the work is at this point.

- If the person remains interested, then you can begin to elaborate upon the topics in the above, or ask them if they've had any experience in this kind of work or in other words strike up an informal but productive conversation. Find out if their schedule coincides with you and how flexible they can be. Ask them if they go to school and, if so, what their major is, "Have you ever been in Trenton and wasn't it a terrible place?" This puts them at ease and might even make them like you.
- Set up an interview. Interviews are not essential and it is sometimes appropriate to start someone working before actually meeting them. This is usually undesirable, however, as a person can seem dependable over the phone and then not show up to work. On the other hand, a person that shows up for an interview shows that they are interested and reliable enough to come to the interview.

## **II. The Formal Interview**

- One of the main purposes of setting up a formal interview is simply to see if the person shows up. If they do not show up, inquire why.
- These are the finalists, the people that aren't eliminated over the phone and do show up for the interview. These are the people with whom you should sit down and discuss in detail the routine, the exact hours and pay, and what expectations you have of each other.
- The topic of commitment should be approached here, letting your prospective P.C.A. know how important he/she can be (be careful, though, so as not to let it get to their head). Once again check on how they will get to work, as occasionally a genuinely interested and caring person will agree to accept the job and its condition, but after a few weeks decide that the two hour bus ride is prohibitive.
- The most important thing to do during an interview is to evaluate the person. Will the two of you be compatible? Remember the job is one-on-one. Does this person seem reliable and competent? Do they have a good attitude? You might want to test them on these things by asking them to empty your leg bag or put air in your tires or some such trivial act. Also, show them around their working environment.
- Make decisions on the spot if possible-people feel better leaving an interview knowing where they stand. A good idea is to hire more than you need. Have two people split up the weekday mornings rather one person working all the hours. This leaves you with a failsafe and a choice. If you can decide on the spot, then set up schedules and a time for the person to start working also on the spot. This tends to yield better results than getting back to someone on the phone.

### **III. Live-in P.C.A.'s**

- The same procedure as above should be followed, with the obvious exclusion of things as, “Where do you live?”, and, “How will get to work?”, and the obvious inclusion of such matters as weeding out details of the living arrangements. Here, the initial weeding out can be done by factors such as where your apartment is located and what the nature (on a superficial level) of the job/living arrangement is. This should be done in a more careful manner as you will be living with this person, and personality differences will (and should) play a much larger role in your decision. This approach however, can also help you afford a P.C.A. and get assistance when you need it.

### **PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANCE IN CONNECTICUT**

The State of Connecticut through the Department of Social Services (DSS) currently has personal care assistance programs for people with disabilities. For information on the Personal Care Assistance programs contact:

Department of Social Services  
25 Sigourney Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5033  
(860) 424-4908

Or

Adult Support and Disability Services  
(860) 424-5373

Connecticut currently has five independent living centers (ILC) that may be of assistance in locating and training attendants, and provide other independent living services. See Page 96 for a listing of centers in Connecticut.

If you have any concerns regarding the availability of P.C.A. funding, please contact the Office of Protection and Advocacy, at 1-800-842-7303 or (860) 297-4300.