



Introduction to support material for employers of personal assistants

Varma wants to support you as you serve as the employer of a personal assistant.

Contents of the support material:

- We can help you by giving you tips on how to be a good employer. Our tips can help you achieve a smooth everyday life in your employment relationship with your assistant and enhance well-being for both of you.
- You will have opportunities to reflect on how you can be a successful employer and how to be a good leader to your assistant.
- This support material also offers ways to better recognise and provide help with the assistant's work ability risks.
- And finally, this material will provide you with useful tools to support you as an employer.

This material is intended as a first-hand databank in many matters related to being the employer of a personal assistant.

Being a good employer

A well-planned and implemented employer model gives you independence and supports you in being able to live the life you want.

Being an employer entails responsibilities both for taking care of matters and for your employment relationship with your assistant.

As an employer, you are also responsible for your assistant's occupational health and safety.

As the employer of a personal assistant, you are in the driver's seat.

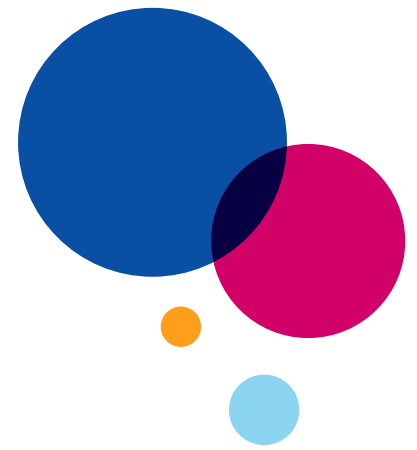
- You should have an understanding of the skills that an employer must have.
- Another foundation for a successful employment relationship is clarity about each person's role in the employer-assistant relationship.
- Moreover, it is important that you both have as clear an understanding as possible about what to do in various problem situations.

What does following the employer model entail, and what are the most important matters in terms of acting as an employer?

Explore the support material for employers more closely. You can also watch a video in which two personal assistance influencers share their thoughts on the matter. The subtitled video features Marja Pihkala, the president of Rusetti, the National Association for Women with Disabilities, and Jarmo Tiri, a working life specialist and long-time influencer in the field of personal assistance.

The video is included with this material, or you can always find it at www.varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material.
How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant? – Part 0: Introduction.
Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu



Basic pillars of being a good employer

You will succeed as an employer if you observe three basic pillars of being a good employer in your employment relationship.

You should have a positive, constructive and co-operative attitude towards your personal assistant. A smooth everyday life with an assistant is a co-operative relationship in which each party must consider the other. It is a good idea to pay attention to your own attitude: positivity helps even in difficult situations, while negativity may bring difficulties.

You should furthermore be aware of your own goals and ways of working. As an employer, you must know what you want your assistant to do, as well as how and when things should be done.

In addition, you must have a clear understanding of what kind of collaboration with your assistant will enable you to realise your own goals. You also must establish clear ways of communicating the employee's work tasks in an understandable, timely and consistent way. By speaking in a friendly manner and asking, listening, encouraging and thanking, you can improve your co-operation.

The role of employer is a complex one. However, it all starts with good self-awareness and knowing the facts.

Take a moment to reflect and write down:

- 1) What opportunities are related to acting as an employer?
- 2) What are my concerns about being an employer?
- 3) What resources do I already have?

Also think about what you can already improve now as an employer, or what matters call for further consideration and resolution.

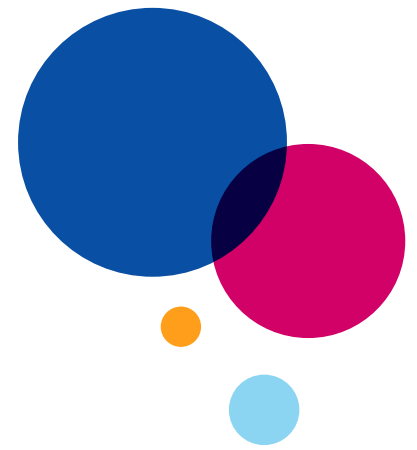
Do you have people you can lean on for help?

You can also discuss personal assistance matters with your social worker.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material.

How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant? – Part 1a: Basic pillars of being a good employer.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu



Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand

The employer model gives you good opportunities to live the kind of life you want to live. As the employer, you are in the driver's seat!

The employer's right to self-determination means that you define

- What is to be done
- How to proceed
- How to conduct oneself

However, you must be a responsible driver. Your right to self-determination is best realised when you truly want to make things go smoothly and constructively with your assistant.

The right to self-determination does not mean abusing one's power. When your life is simultaneously someone else's workplace, it also limits your right to self-determination. You must, however, bear your responsibility as an employer.

The employer's responsibilities and obligations include

- Responsible conduct and leadership
- Compliance with occupational health and safety regulations

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material.

How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant? – Part 1b: Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Everyday life of the family and couple, multiculturalism, family members as assistants



The employer model is flexible and suits many different life situations. As the director of the employment relationship, you are responsible for ensuring that the main ground rules are agreed on between all the parties.

What should be taken into account in different situations?

A personal assistant as part of a family's and couple's everyday life

Plan in advance and agree with the assistant:

- What kind of tasks are the assistant's duties?
- How is housework assigned?
- How are the work tasks assigned and who provides guidance?
- What is the assistant's role in the family's social situations: e.g. when can the assistant join you in a discussion or at the coffee table

With your family, think about:

- How actively do you seek out social situations?
- What matters do we talk about with/in the presence of the assistant?
- What are the family's private matters?
- What is our tone when we talk about things?
- Who can assign tasks, and what kind of tasks, to the assistant?

Multiculturalism in assistant relationships

Take the following into account already during the recruiting phase:

- The person's experience of Finnish work culture – guide them in and review the basic principles.
- “Personal assistance”, what is it?
- Make sure the person's work permit is in order.

Hard at work:

- Take note of possible cultural differences in ways of working.
- Encourage the assistant to approach you if they have any questions or problems.
- Go over new situations and tasks thoroughly with the assistant.

Family members as personal assistants

- Agree on common ground rules very openly and in detail.
- During working hours, the assistant assumes their job role.
- How natural is it to give a family member constructive feedback in an employment relationship?
- Is a parent's/child's presence appropriate in all situations?

Openly discussing common ground rules is crucial! When day-to-day life with your assistant goes well, you can focus on living your life. And it allows you and your assistant to focus on the tasks that you consider important, in a positive atmosphere.

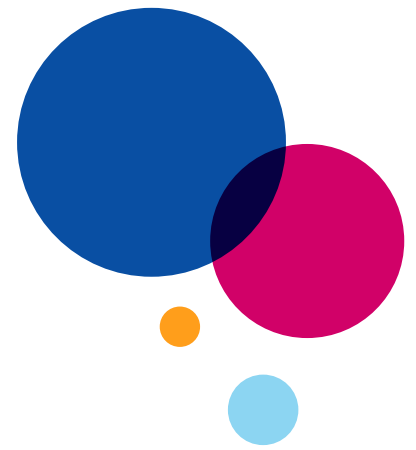
A difficult employment relationship weakens both parties' well-being. Problems cause more stress and even illness.

A good and healthy employment relationship is worth investing in. Even small changes can have major impacts.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 1c: Everyday life of the family and couple, multiculturalism, family members as assistants.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

The personal assistance playing field



As the employer of a personal assistant you operate in a field with several players, each of whom has their own role and task.

These players include, for instance, services for the disabled, payroll accounting, occupational healthcare, the pension insurance company and accident insurance company, Kela, the tax authority, the employers' union and sometimes the employees' union. For many, the relationship is administrative and tied to the payroll administration. Additional information and guidelines concerning all these players are available from services for the disabled and centres of assistance.

Take care of your statutory agreements

As an employer, it is a good idea to make sure that your statutory agreements are in order.

Make sure you have valid occupational healthcare, pension insurance and accident insurance. If you are a member of the Heta Union, you must also arrange mandatory group life insurance for your employees.

Membership in the Heta Union (i.e. Union of the Employers of Personal Assistants in Finland) brings security and support to employers. It also brings flexibility to working time rules, as well as other benefits.

The Oima service

The Oima service plays an important role in facilitating assistants' payroll administration. Payroll administration for assistants is almost always handled via the Oima service.

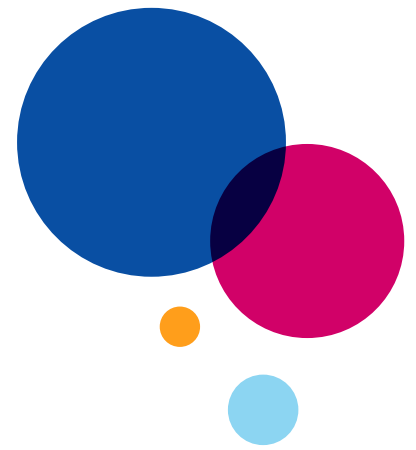
Oima automates the payment of wages and items related to the payment of wages (such as withholding tax and social security expenses) to the tax authority, as well as data and payments to the employment and accident insurance companies.

The employee's trade union membership fees and debt recovery are also managed automatically through Oima.

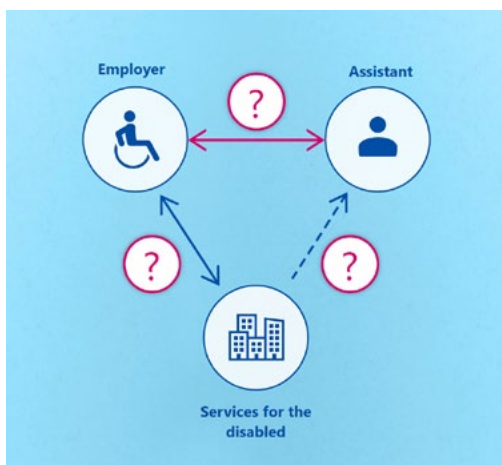
This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 2a: The personal assistance playing field .

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

The employer's most important relationships



What are the relationships between the operators in this playing field? The employer's most important relationships are those with their employee, i.e. assistant, and with services for the disabled or the centre of assistance.



Employer – Assistant

The employer-assistant relationship is an employment relationship regardless of the fact that services for the disabled pay the assistant's wages.

The employer has a so-called **general right to supervise**. It gives the employer the right to lead the work and related activities on a general level. The right to supervise is limited and governed by labour legislation, the employment contract and the collective agreement (employers organised under an employers' union).

The assistant's obligation in the employment relationship is to abide by the given instructions. Assistants are under a non-disclosure obligation when it comes to the employer's matters, and this is something that should be written into the employment contract. Personal assistants may not contact services for the disabled about matters concerning the employer without the employer's consent.

Employer – Services for the disabled

Services for the disabled are not a party to the employment relationship. Therefore, services for the disabled may not be in direct contact with or instruct personal assistants in an individual employer's matters, nor can they otherwise dictate any details of the employment relationship.

Often, however, services for the disabled will arrange for employers, e.g. payroll administration and other services to support being an employer and personal assistance.

Services for the disabled also have an advisory obligation towards employers. Personal assistance is based on the Act on Disability Services and Assistance and an individual decision on personal assistance, which define how many working hours you can use an assistant for and for what purpose. Services for the disabled also have their own administrative regulations related to personal assistance.

Assistant – Services for the disabled

Services for the disabled or the assistance centre have no legal ties to the assistant.

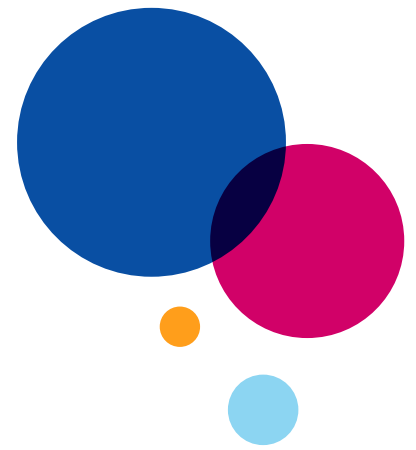
Services for the disabled have no authority over assistants, and they have no right to discuss or disclose employers' matters to them.

An assistant also does not have the right to discuss their employer's matters with services for the disabled or the assistance centre without the employer's consent.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 2b: The employer's most important relationships.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Writing up a job advertisement



As an employer, you are primarily responsible for hiring your own assistants. Finding an assistant in a challenging labour market is no easy task, which is why it is important to focus on recruitment.

A strong and appealing job advertisement is an important part of successful recruitment. Try to make the ad clear and concise. Also present matters in a positive light. Recount the particular strengths of the job you are offering.

If you are unsure where to begin, you can start by reading the job ads of other employers. Find exemplary ads and think about how you can present your workplace in an interesting way.

Focus on creating an appealing job advertisement.

Aim for a clear, concise and positive ad.

Tips for creating a good job advertisement

- Be clear about the basics (pay, duration, contents and location of the job; whether you have pets, etc.).
- Let your personality shine through in the ad in a positive but appropriate way.
- Advertise the job in as many media as possible. For example, use social media channels and employment service websites, as well as the noticeboards of educational institutions and other websites, like Duunitori.fi and Oikotie.fi.
- It is not good to go into too much detail in the job ad, or to give the impression that the employer may be frustrated. Keep the ad business-like and positive!

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 3a: Writing up a job advertisement.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

A comprehensive and honest job interview



When people start answering your ad, it is time to arrange job interviews with the most promising candidates.

Prepare and be prepared

- Schedule a meeting with the applicant. Also be sure to send the applicant confirmation via text message. Make sure the message includes the meeting date, time and address. Remember to welcome them!
- Think about questions that are important to you and make sure the questions are appropriate.
- Ask the person for their CV so you can see their employment history. Also ask to see employment and study certificates, as well as possible work permits, etc.
- Prepare an outline of the interview.
- Think about how you can explain the tasks to the applicant in concrete terms.

Describe the work honestly

- Tell the assistant about the employer model of personal assistance and the roles that the various parties play in it.
- Tell the person about your life in an appropriate way. How would the assistant fit into your life, and what would their role be?
- Explain that this is an employment relationship like any other, and that you are the employer, with all the obligations and rights that come with being an employer, despite the municipality paying their salary as a substitute payer.
- Say what the job pays and explain the salary payment process.
- State your expectations of the co-operation and provide some background into your ways of working. Also be sure to ask the applicant their thoughts.
- Make sure the interviewee understands all these points.
- Also ask the applicant about their story.

Go into the details

- Make sure the applicant has all the competence and abilities that you require of an assistant.
- Also ask the applicant about their previous experience as an assistant.
- Go over the working hours, the principles for scheduling them and possible exceptions to them.
- Explain what kind of conduct and interaction you expect in different situations, and describe your own methods of interaction.
- Discuss trust and confidentiality. Specify the matters in which you must be able to trust your assistant and the types of matters they are allowed to discuss outside the workplace. Make sure the interviewee fully understands this.
- Say when you will make your choice. You can also agree on starting an employment relationship at the end of the interview.

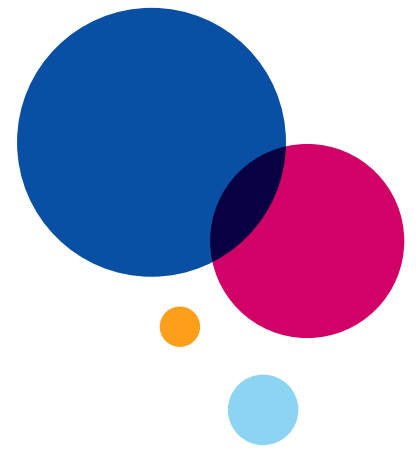
Topics that should not be asked about in a job interview

- Religious beliefs
- Marital status
- Other family relationships or plans
- Sexual orientation
- Alcohol/drug use
- Political convictions
- Anything that is not directly related to the job
- Anything that may infringe on the applicant's privacy

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 3b: A comprehensive and honest job interview.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Assistant orientation



It is also important to ensure that the relationship between you and your assistant starts off on the right foot.

Make sure that the employment contract is drawn up well and that work orientation has been properly planned.

Heta Union members can use their employment contract template, which you can find in part 7 of this course.

In the orientation, it is important to remember that this is a process in which new situations always call for a period of adaptation and introduction. Read the orientation checklist below.

You will create a great start to the employment relationship if you make sure that the employment contract and orientation are in order.

Orientation checklist

It is a good idea to devise a scheduled plan to support orientation.

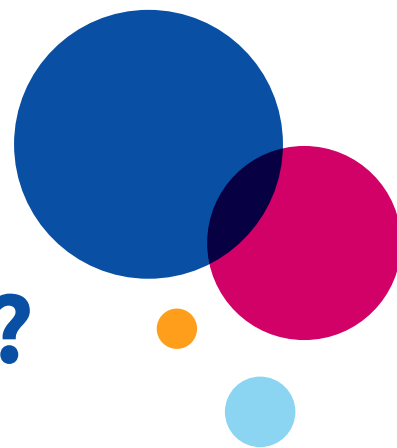
Go over at least the following:

- Expectations, ways of working and ground rules for the work:
 - What is the rhythm of each day?
 - How are e.g. transfers, hygiene, getting dressed learned?
 - How do assistive equipment and daily home appliances work and how are they used? How do things work in the house and with the car?
 - How does interaction with the family, inner circle and pets work?
- Working hours and breaks during days of different lengths (The breaks of Heta union members are stipulated in the collective agreement).
- How do you give and receive feedback?
- Use of occupational health-care operation, and a contact person (occupational health nurse).
- If necessary, include someone in the orientation who can help you lay things out in concrete terms and teach the work tasks.
- Give praise as soon as the assistant succeeds in something. Address matters that are not coming along so well yet. Encourage practicing. Guide the assistant until things go smoothly.
- Ask: What do you remember? What do you need help with? How does it feel to do this?
- Keep track of the assistant's learning progress and talk about it encouragingly!

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 3c: Assistant orientation.

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

What makes up a smooth everyday life?



You will succeed as an employer if you internalise that an employment relationship is also always a **human relationship**.

When acting as an employer, there are a lot of details that demand your attention. But you're well on your way if you keep in mind that your relationship with your assistant is also always a genuine human relationship.

When we treat one another with respect, together we can achieve even challenging goals.

Anatomy of a smooth everyday life

Besides this understanding, there are also five key areas that together help create a smooth everyday life.

You and your assistant must have a mutual understanding about the tasks and about the conduct expected at the workplace. You should also have sufficient knowledge about being an employer, and your assistant should have sufficient competence to carry out their tasks.

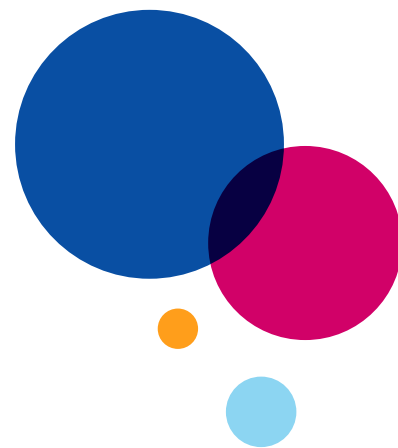
The daily interaction should be open and clear, and the parties must be able to trust one another. Moreover, both you and your assistant must be open to thinking about matters and have the ability to solve problems together.

- Common understanding of the task
- Sufficient competence
- Open and clear interaction
- Trust
- Common problem-solving ability

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 4a: What makes up a smooth everyday life?

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

‘Smooth everyday life’ discussion



Good dialogue builds trust.

The **Smooth everyday life** discussion template supports dialogue between the employer of the personal assistant and the employee.

Use the discussion template in the following situations:

- For regularly evaluating the smoothness of everyday life and co-operation
- Handling of problems

Trust does not develop or deepen by itself but instead demands concrete actions. One of the most important tools for this is good dialogue. That is why dialogue skills should be a priority.

To support dialogue, we have created a discussion template called ‘Smooth everyday life’, which you can download as a file or print up as a 2-sided sheet.

The discussion template should be used regularly in order to retain trust and an understanding of both parties’ expectations in the employment relationship. The discussion template can also be used when you face challenges in interacting with your assistant in day-to-day life.

This material is part of Varma’s work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 4b: ‘Smooth everyday life’ discussion

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Smooth everyday life discussion

Between the personal assistance employer and the employee

DISCUSSION TOOL



How you can promote smooth everyday life in personal assistance work:

1

Ensure a mutual understanding of the duties and ground rules

- Describe the tasks that are to be repeated at different times of the day, week or month already before the start of the employment relationship.
- Think ahead of time about the conduct you expect at the workplace, and share these expectations with the employee.

2

Build trust

- Give praise when the work goes smoothly. If things are not going smoothly, explain what should be done and how.
- Ask questions and encourage the employee to ask questions right away if something is on their mind.

3

Encourage problem-solving

- Agree that when problems arise, either party can bring the matter up and propose solutions.
- Initiate regular discussions on the day-to-day routines and expectations. These can take place, for instance, every six months.
- Use the 'Smooth everyday life' template to help you in the discussion. You can also give it to the employee in advance to help them prepare.

Smooth everyday life discussion

Between the personal assistance employer and the employee

DISCUSSION TOOL



What has been agreed on about the work?

- Work tasks and working hours
- The employer's other work-related expectations
- Absence due to illness: How should the employer be informed?
- Occupational healthcare: Who can the employee contact?
- *Does anything need further clarification?*
- *Where can help be found if needed?*

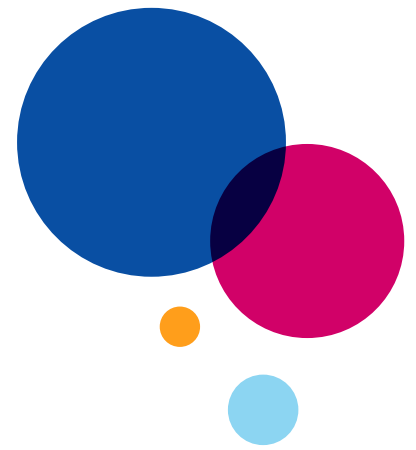
How is the work going?

- Has there been sufficient orientation?
- How have the agreed work tasks and working hours been implemented?
- Work guidance: planning the work tasks, work assignments, instructions
- *What is going well?*
- *What can be improved?*
- *Where can help be found if needed?*

How is the co-operation going?

- Our interaction:
 - What is the situation in terms of giving and receiving feedback?
 - Respect, attitude, encouragement, trust
- *What is going well?*
- *Is there a need for improvement in the interaction? In what areas?*
- *Where can help be found if needed?*

This is leadership



Now let us move on to the topic of leadership, which is an important part of being an employer. We all have some idea of what leadership is and is not.

First, let's find out what your conceptions are about leadership.

Next, we present some statements related to leadership. Think about which statements you believe are part of good leadership in an employment relationship with a personal assistant.

- Leadership is helping the assistant to perform well in their tasks
- Leadership is listening, making decisions and bearing responsibility
- Leadership includes being responsible for a good work atmosphere
- Leadership demands assertiveness
- Leadership is monitoring the assistant's actions and conduct.

Thank you for giving thought to these statements!

Actually, all of these traits are part of good leadership in a personal assistance employment relationship.

Leadership is a role you take on when you become an employer. So boldly embrace the role!

Although it may seem difficult, when it comes to leading a personal assistant, you can maximise your chances of success by assimilating a few key virtues.

Read about these virtues in more detail.

I help my assistant perform well

The goal is a smooth everyday life. That is not possible without smooth co-operation between you and your assistant.

This means not treating your assistant like a servant, but instead like a person who also wants day-to-day matters to run smoothly.

I listen, make decisions, bear responsibility

Acting as the director in the employment relationship is a perpetual duty: it is an identity, state of mind and role that you must embrace.

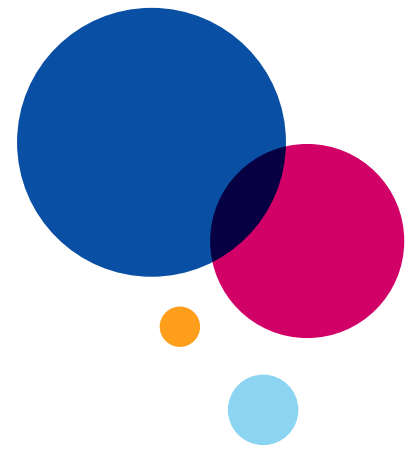
You can't have the answers to every question – nor are you even supposed to! But as a director you are in a key position to find answers.

Think about how you can guide joint activities to solve problems.

I create a good work atmosphere

As an employer, you bear responsibility for helping your assistant learn and develop – starting with their orientation!

Be sure to also take care of the working conditions and occupational safety (e.g. in terms of protective equipment and cleanliness).



I can be appropriately assertive at times

Leadership also demands assertiveness – making decisions and advancing your own goals.

In an employment relationship, you must take the other person into consideration, but you as the employer ultimately make the decisions and determine how they are to be implemented.

For instance, you can give a written warning about misconduct, but you must follow a strict procedure in order for it to be valid.

I keep track of my assistant's actions and conduct

As the employer and leader, you must know what is going smoothly and what areas might need to be addressed in a discussion.

This will only work if you keep track of your employee's actions and conduct.

Be observant, and bring up areas in need of development boldly and in a friendly manner. Try to solve problems together.

An active approach to assigning work tasks and, if necessary, in guiding the assistant in carrying out their work



Leadership means taking an active approach to assigning work tasks and, if necessary, in guiding the assistant in carrying out their work. Let's take a closer look at these matters.

Active approach

As an employer, you have plenty of opportunities to influence everyday life and smooth co-operation. Taking an active approach ensures that important matters are taken care of with certainty and on time.

As an employer, you can influence how things go on a daily basis:

- Think about what you can do to help your assistant perform well in their work.
- Show your assistant that you are proactive. This lets them know that these things are important to you, and it increases the significance of their work.
- Ask the assistant what they need further guidance in.
- Establish what is difficult and try to come up with solutions together.
- Also be proactive in creating a positive atmosphere.

Assigning tasks

Tasks should be assigned to give your assistant a clear picture of what needs to be done, in what order and on what schedule.

Being a leader does not mean that you have all the answers. You can most definitely ask your assistant for their input when it comes to carrying out tasks. Planning together makes the work more meaningful and often leads to a better outcome.

As a leader, you must, however, communicate the goals of the work tasks: what does success look like? Also make sure that the work tasks are clearly understood.

A good practical tip is to make a checklist of the agreed tasks.

Guiding work performance

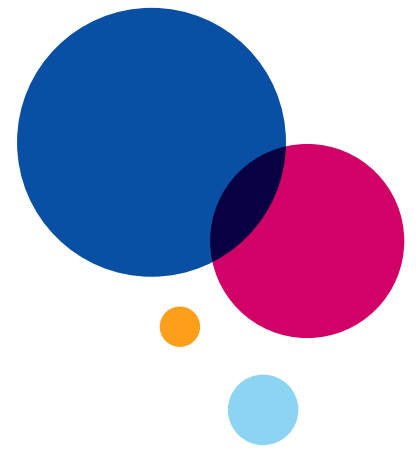
The employer is responsible for providing work guidance. Of course, not everything needs to be guided, and different people need different kinds of support. Every employer also has a different style of providing guidance. It is good to try to find **a common guidance approach** that works precisely for the two of you.

Be aware that when the employee can work independently, their well-being at work increases. On the other hand, in the area of personal assistance, it may be difficult to fulfil the employer's needs without the employer's precise guidance in the situation.

Here, too, it is good to discuss how and why guidance is given and find that common ground.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as the employer of a personal assistant? Part 4e: An active approach to assigning work tasks and, if necessary, in guiding the assistant in carrying out their work. Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

What kind of leader do I want to be?



Leadership is a skill that is learned through introspection, practice and feedback. There is more than one kind of good leadership. We can all be good leaders in our own way.

What kind of leader do you want to be? Think about and select from this list three personality traits that reflect the kind of leader or employer that you want your employee to see you as.

Choose three (3) traits that are important to you

- fair
- straightforward
- reliable
- a good listener
- positive
- responsible
- friendly
- compassionate
- approachable
- calm

Great! Now you know what to aim for.

You can use these three traits as the reference points for your leadership. This is still just the first step, however.

The next, more important, question is:

“How do these traits show in practice?”

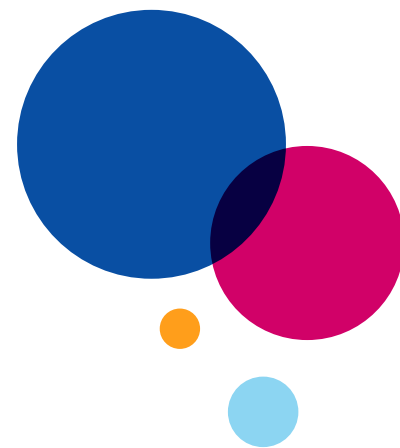
Think of as many different situations in which and how your chosen style of leadership shows in practice. You can think about how you can be, e.g. a positive leader also during everyday events.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 4f: What kind of leader do I want to be?

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Feedback and saying thank you



Feedback is an essential requirement of smooth collaboration. Feedback guides joint activities in the desired direction

Feedback is a tool that can help you:

- Reinforce desired ways of doing things
- Change harmful ways of doing things

Giving and receiving feedback is a skill you can learn!

Better dialogue with the help of feedback

Good dialogue is a requirement for building trust and a smooth everyday life.

Dialogue is built organically around giving and receiving feedback. You can get started easily by asking questions, such as: “Are we doing ok?” or “What could we do better?”

Remember to focus your feedback on your assistant’s work performance or activities at work. Do not comment on, for instance, their appearance or give other inappropriate feedback.

Positive feedback encourages and motivates

When it comes to learning, positive feedback is more effective than negative feedback. Positive feedback also builds trust and an open atmosphere and motivates assistants to be more present in their work.

Don’t hold back on giving positive feedback – give it right away when something goes well! Positive feedback can be as simple as, “That’s great!” or “This is very good, thank you!”

“Thank you” – that big little word

Among the most important feedback you can give your assistant is a simple “Thank you”. Saying thank you is powerful. It helps build appreciation and trust in the employment relationship.

You can say thank you for something small or big. For example, when you are given something, when a door is opened for you, when you have received help to get dressed or when the day ends.

Be sure to give thanks especially for being flexible and going the extra mile, for a big job or for performing the job well.

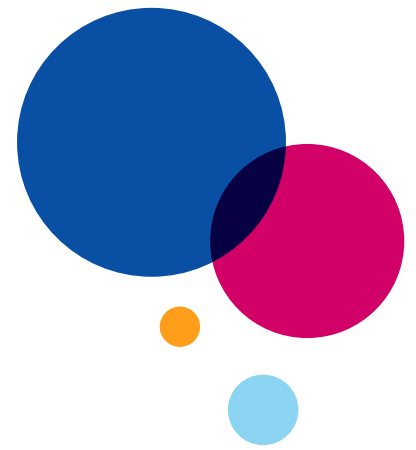
In what kinds of situations could you thank your assistant? Think about it and write down a few situations that call for giving thanks.

This material is part of Varma’s work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 4g: Feedback and giving thanks

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Take care of your own resilience and ask for help



As an employer, you are responsible for a complex area. You never really get a holiday when you are an employer, and working with an assistant may be challenging at times.

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!”

- Identify and state the things that are causing you stress right now.
- Accepting the facts reduces your load and stress and saves your energy for better things.

Ensure your good judgment in the face of difficult situations

All of us at some point face difficult situations. Adversity is a part of life, just like blessings are.

In a difficult situation, it is important to remain calm. You can try first counting to five.

When we have regained our ability to think clearly, we are more capable of fulfilling our role as an employer and will not make rash decisions in the heat of the moment.

Take good care of your own resilience! Also remember that you do not have to solve problems on your own. Support is available if you dare to ask for it.

Seek help; you don't have to solve all problems on your own:

- Services for the disabled have an advisory obligation.
- You can also turn to occupational healthcare for many issues.
- The Heta Union, the Threshold Association and other organisations can help you connect with other employers. Sharing experiences and thoughts makes things easier.
- Different actors arrange joint meetings between employers. Find a source of peer support that suits you.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 5a: Take care of your own resilience and ask for help

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Try to spot the correct warning signs



All of us have bad days sometimes. If some work task, e.g. is not going well, avoid coming up with your own interpretation of the possible reasons. Instead, politely ask about the matter. Often just bringing it up in a friendly manner is enough to change the situation.

Rather than make baseless interpretations, trust your powers of perception: try to spot the warning signs that indicate problems and boldly bring the matter up for discussion.

What signs indicate that there are work or health problems?

- **Work problems**

Work is not being performed as instructed. There are problems, for instance, in carrying out agreed tasks, in working hours and in following the ground rules.

- **Interaction problems**

Uncertainties and misunderstandings related to expectations and instructions begin to appear. There may be a lack of kindness, as well as displays of an inappropriate attitude or tone of voice.

- **Problems in emotional and physical safety**

Increase in accidents, near-miss situations and harassment situations.

- **Leadership problems**

A lack or insufficiency of feedback. A lack of trust, respect and/or clarity.

- **Increase in absences due to illness**

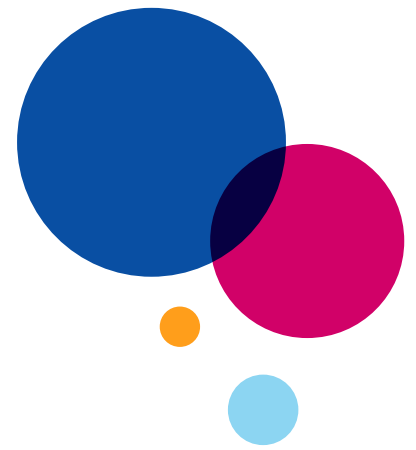
Recurring absences may be a sign of underlying problems.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 5b: Try to spot the correct warning signs

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

How can you move forward from problems?



What should you do, then, if you spot warning signs in your assistant's performance or resilience?

Work- or performance-related challenges as the underlying reason:

- Specify the expectations and work tasks.
- Clarify your needs, work goals and responsibilities.
- Clarify expectations, tasks and the daily rhythm.
- Ensure the assistant's competence, knowledge and skills to handle the tasks.
- Repeat the work orientation and instructions.
- Make sure the tools as well as the distribution and organisation of the work are in order.
- Find out about the assistant's motivation for this job.
- Agree with the assistant on what measures to take and on the future.

Interaction problems as the underlying reason:

- Develop joint ways of operating and interaction.
- Discuss how work is going and conduct at work. Draw up an action plan if necessary.
- Address inappropriate conduct right away.
- Agree on or update the ground rules. The employee and the employer are each responsible for how they conduct themselves.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and harassment.
- If necessary, seek help to address problem situations

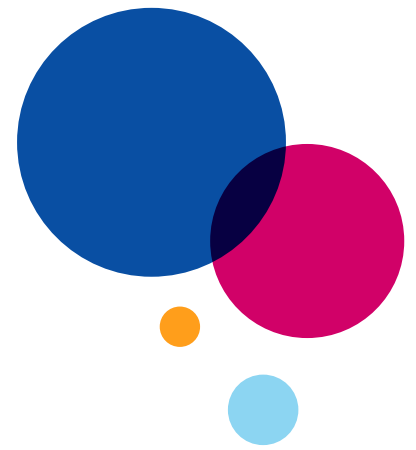
Health issues or life management challenges as the underlying reason

- Bring problems up for discussion and examine the options (use the 'Smooth everyday life' template to help you in the discussion).
- Agree on follow-up measures.
- Arrange work ability support through occupational healthcare and/or a health clinic.
- Address substance abuse issues right away.
- If necessary, contact an occupational health nurse after your discussion with your assistant.
- Guide the assistant to make an appointment with an occupational health nurse, who will help bring clarity to their thoughts and possibly refer them to basic healthcare services.
- Be sure to also take advantage of the support of an occupational health nurse for yourself, e.g. to deal with crisis situations.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 5c: How can you move forward from problems?

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Addressing problems



Although conflicts come in many forms, they can always be resolved through discussion, genuine understanding and a constructive attitude.

Create a safe space for a discussion

- Create a safe space for a discussion. In order for problems to be resolved, they must be discussed openly.
- Ensure an equal and fair discussion situation that seeks genuine understanding.
- A calm atmosphere helps keep emotions in check and the focus on solving problems.

Listen and genuinely try to understand

- Problems and conflicts can be resolved when they are well understood.
- Both parties must be able to present their views, and they have an obligation to listen to one another.
- So listen carefully when the other person is talking. When it is your turn to speak, state your views calmly.

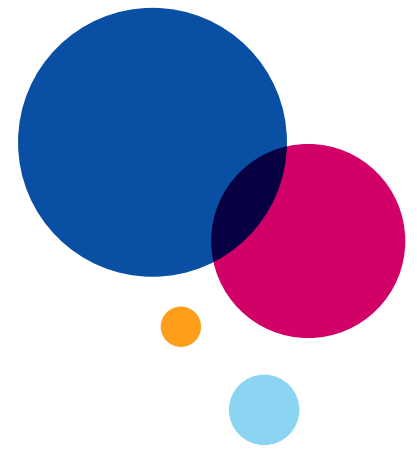
Adopt a constructive attitude

- Work with your assistant to reach a solution for the future. You cannot change the past, but you can learn from it.
- A solution imposed in a bossy way will rarely last. A solution found together creates a commitment from both parties.
- Resolving a conflict together reinforces your relationship and clarifies the co-operation!

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 5d: Addressing problems

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu



Identify work ability risks

At its best, the job of personal assistant is diverse and rewarding.

The work may also, however, involve risks that threaten the assistant's work ability. These risks may be related, for instance, to work schedules, and mental and physical overload.

As an employer, it is your duty to:

- Recognise the risk factors that threaten your assistant's work ability.
- Try to prevent these risks.
- Comply with agreements, regulations and laws related to occupational health.

How can you create a safe and healthy workplace?

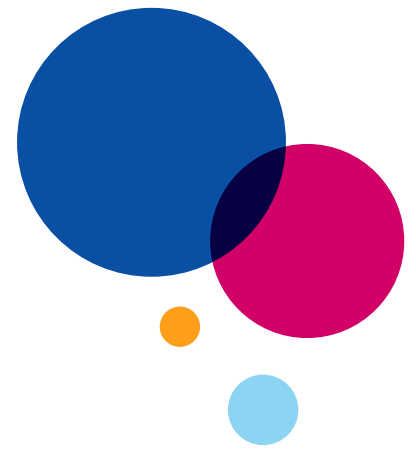
- Make sure that agreements, insurance policies and other administrative matters are in order and clear.
- Assess the risks that may be involved in the work in terms of work ability and occupational safety.
- Abide by working time regulations and make sure work shifts and holidays are duly observed.
- Observe how the work is going and discuss it regularly with your assistant.
- Ensure sufficient and continuous orientation.
- Ensure clear practices when it comes to occupational healthcare collaboration.
- Always comply with the decision of services for the disabled and personal assistance.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 6a: Ensure your good judgment in the face of problems

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Illnesses



We all get sick sometimes. That is why it is a good idea to agree on the procedure to follow in case of illness right at the start of the employment relationship.

For instance, you should agree on how the employer should be informed of an absence due to illness and when a sick note is needed.

Reporting absences due to illness, and pay during sick leave

- According to the Heta Union's guidelines, the employee should submit a sick note on their fourth sick day. The employer may, however, require proof of illness even before then, for instance, on the first day of sick leave.
- The employer must submit information about the sick leave to payroll accounting. An employee's paid sick leave consists of the first day of illness + 9 workdays if these days would have been the employee's workdays according to the shift schedule, employment contract or regular working hours. After that, the employee must determine their income on their own, for instance, with Kela.
- You can contact services for the disabled if you are in need of a substitute assistant due to your assistant's sick leave.

What if absences due to illness are recurring or prolonged?

- Discuss recurring and/or prolonged absences with your employee.
- Use the 'Smooth everyday life' discussion template in the discussion if necessary.
- If illness is negatively affecting your employee's work ability, they can make an appointment with an occupational health nurse on their own initiative or on the employer's instruction.
- The occupational health nurse will, if necessary, refer the employee to an occupational health physician, who will assess the employee's work ability and plan options for returning to work and continuing at work together with the employee.
- If necessary, an occupational health negotiation involving the employee, employer and occupational healthcare can be arranged.

You can also find up-to-date information from services for the disabled and the Heta Union's website.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 6b: Illnesses

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Occupational health and occupational safety



It is important to take good care of occupational health. The employer has a statutory obligation to arrange occupational healthcare for their employee. Occupational healthcare contributes to a smooth employment relationship, for instance, in the following ways:

- Occupational health examinations serve as security for recruiting an assistant.
- Occupational healthcare experts can also help you plan the work in a way that ensures a healthy and safe workplace for your assistant and yourself.
- Occupational healthcare can furthermore help in various challenging situations, e.g. with sickness absence obligations or if the assistant's sick leave is prolonged.

Starting up occupational health co-operation

Before occupational healthcare collaboration starts, the employer must conclude an agreement on occupational healthcare management.

Services for the disabled can help in finding a suitable service provider. The paying party cannot, however, decide with whom the agreement will be concluded.

Services for the disabled serve as the substitute payer in occupational healthcare costs, but only up until the statutory minimum.

What does occupational healthcare do?

Occupational healthcare, for instance:

- Examines and assesses the employee's state of health and work ability
- Examines and assesses the health and safety of the work and working conditions
- Offers advice and guidance
- Provides referrals for follow-up measures as required.

Don't forget that **arranging occupational healthcare is the employer's statutory obligation.**

Statutory occupational healthcare is mostly preventative advice and monitoring. It does not include medical services.

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?
Part 6c: Occupational health and occupational safety

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Example of how occupational healthcare co-operation proceeds



Below is an example of occupational healthcare co-operation and how it can proceed.

1. Becoming a customer

The first step is drawing up an occupational healthcare agreement with the service provider and becoming a customer.

2. Employer contact

The occupational health nurse contacts the employer by phone or email.

3. Workplace survey and occupational healthcare action plan

A workplace survey can be carried out as a workplace visit or phone interview. Based on the survey, an occupational healthcare action plan is drawn up.

4. Health check-up

The employee undergoes a health examination. The examination is carried out particularly in the case of an assistant who performs night work.

5. Support and advice from an occupational health nurse

The employee can contact their designated occupational health nurse if they face health challenges. Together they can take stock of the situation and find ways to move forward. The occupational health nurse can also provide support in various crisis situations.

Occupational healthcare is bound by an obligation of confidentiality. The employer may, however, receive advice and guidance if there are challenges related to sick leave or if the employer is planning to address a difficult situation.

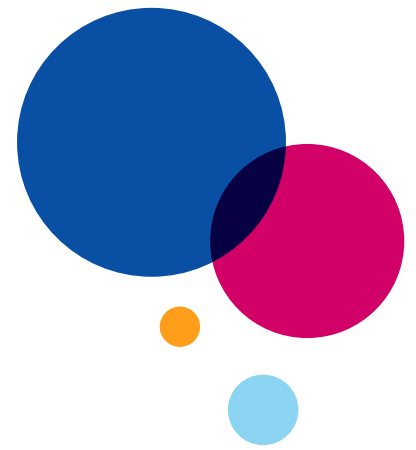
6. Assessment of work ability and referrals

Medical care is not part of occupational healthcare: instead, support for medical issues is available from, e.g. a health clinic. If illness is beginning to pose a work ability challenge, there is reason to contact the occupational health nurse.

The occupational health nurse can guide the employee to an occupational health physician for a work ability assessment. If necessary, an occupational health negotiation can be arranged between the employee, employer and occupational healthcare.

The occupational health physician may also refer the employee for rehabilitation measures.

What are my thoughts on being an employer?



Think about a few basic questions related to being an employer::

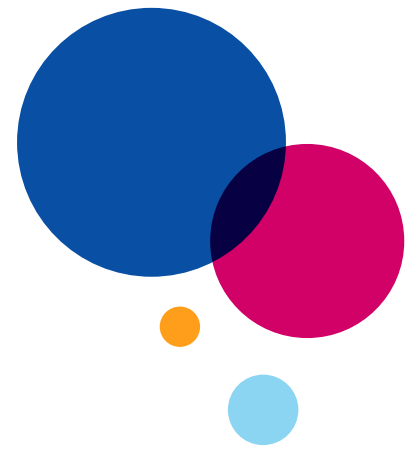
1. How and in what kind of atmosphere would I want my everyday life to go?
2. What does having an assistant make possible in my life?
3. What kind of employer could I be when I'm at my best?
4. Is being an employer the best way for me to get personal assistance?
5. What do I hope for from my assistant?
6. How can I prepare for the challenges of being an employer?

This material is part of Varma's work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 7a: What are my thoughts on being an employer?

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu

Tips and links



If you need more tips and material on the employer model of personal assistance, click the links.

‘Smooth everyday life’ discussion template

During the various stages of the employment relationship, it is wise to engage in a more detailed discussion every now and then about job expectations and how everyday life and co-operation between the parties is going. To support this, we have created the ‘Smooth everyday life’ discussion template.

You can find the ‘Smooth everyday life’ tool with this material, or always at www.varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu.

Where can I find help?

If necessary, you can also discuss personal assistance matters with your social worker.

Help is also available from the following organisations:

- Heta Union: www.heta-liitto.fi
- Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities: www.invalidiliitto.fi
- Threshold Association: www.kynnys.fi,
- See also the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare’s handbook on disability services thl.fi/fi/web/vammaispalvelujen-kasikirja.

This material is part of Varma’s work ability support material. How can I succeed as an employer of a personal assistant?

Part 7b: Tips and links

Read more: varma.fi/henkilokohtainenapu