

The REAL WORLD FRUSTATIONS FOR YOU AND SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION by Anthony Reeves

I've represented clients before the Social Security Administration for over 8 years. During that time, I've had a chance to worked with, talked to, or interacted with some great people who are truly trying to do the right thing. What is the right thing? Processing a person's claim when they apply for Social Security Disability benefits. I'm a firm believer that you "Catch more flies with honey than with vinegar". For those of you who don't know what that phrase means, I am a firm believer that you can get more useful information from SSA by just asking questions and (more importantly) listening when the people who do this EVERY DAY have some thing to say.

I am not going to sit here and say I speak for the Social Security Administration (because I don't) nor am I going to defend them or slam them. However, after spending so many years talking to some great people in the agency, here's a few things I've found to be relatively consistent:

1) They are trying to move your case as fast as they can

I know you don't want to hear this but do you REALIZE how many cases come through SSA every day?? Imagine if 100 people file a new claim every day in one office. That's about 500 people a week FOR ONE OFFICE. So what makes you think your case is special?? I hate to be nasty but you have to keep in mind that when you apply, your case is one of ALOT of cases that are coming through the pipeline so you have to keep that in mind. Another thing you need to realize is that SSA has the burden of processing your case as fast as possible. It serves no purpose for them to sit on your case. They want to get you in and out.

2) If you don't give them everything they need, they can't help you

SSA relies on information that you give them. Listen to me when I say this. They rely on information that YOU give them. So if you decide to NOT tell them about a doctor because YOU decided that it wasn't important and they discover that you went to that doctor, NOW, you have to wait while they get those records. Remember, don't pick and choose what you THINK is important. Provide them with everything they need so they can make an informed decision.

3) Cussing them out, Calling them out, Telling them off, or Blowing up their phones DOES NOT HELP!

I've said this a million times. How would YOU respond if someone called you "cussing you out" or "telling you off" or "calling every 5 to 10 minutes"? Come on now. Think about all of those telemarketers or bill collectors. You will unplug your phone or put the phone on silent. If you answer the phone, the first nasty word you hear, you hang up the phone. Now, SSA doesn't unplug their phones or put their phones on silent. However, what makes you think they are going to be responsive to you 'going off on them on the phone'? I know you're frustrated but you have to keep things in their proper perspective. These people are PEOPLE, too.

4) Contrary to popular belief, ALOT of people are in the same position as you.

Here's where it really gets tough. When most people apply for Disability, they aren't able to work. When you're not able to work, the wheels fall off the car. What I mean is that you aren't

able to pay your bills, buy your food, or pay for your medicines. You aren't able to sustain yourself. Unfortunately, a lot of people are in the exact same situation. I represented a guy who applied while he lived under the Interstate overpass. I'm not saying that your situation isn't important. I'm just saying that, unfortunately, a lot of people are in the same position as you.

5) If you don't tell them something has changed, how will they know

Remember, remember, remember, you must inform SSA of your changes in circumstances. If you have a new doctor, you gotta tell them. If you move, you gotta tell them. If you go back to work, you gotta tell them. You can't trust that SSA will figure it out on their own. If they do, they have to investigate. Remember, that takes time to investigate which adds time to your case.

6) If you are a TERI case, they will move your case but it still takes time.

For those of you who don't know, TERI stands for Terminally Ill. These cases are tricky because when SSA gets these cases, they move on them fast. However, they still need a little time to get the necessary paperwork to process the case. SSA takes these cases very seriously but they still take a little time to process.

7) It is a PROCESS and there is no going around it

I've said this a million times but it still is tough to appreciate sometimes. Remember, when you are applying for Social Security Disability, you must go through the Social Security Disability PROCESS. You can't skip any steps. You must go through the process in order to ensure that you meet the requirements. There are no short cuts.

😊 If you make it up, bring it up, add something new, or make them look for it, it adds time to the process

The SSA has a duty to investigate anything that is relevant to your case. So its important that you keep them informed early and often about anything that is relevant to your case. Sometimes, when you are listening to others who have had success getting disability benefits, you may add a few things that you think will help you. Remember, SSA has to look at everything that may impact your case so be upfront and honest.

9) There is no single one piece of MAGICAL evidence. They have to look at it all.

SSA has a responsibility to look at the weight of the evidence. In other words, SSA has a burden to look at all of the evidence to determine if leans in your favor or against you. The reason this is important is because sometimes people think that one letter from their doctor will guarantee a favorable outcome. Remember, SSA has to review everything before they can make a decision. The letter from your doctor may help but it's not a slam dunk.

10) If you keep starting over, so will SSA

I've had a few people mention to me that they wanted to know if it was ok to reapply after an initial denial. Remember, every time you start your case over again, they start your case from scratch. Now, they will usually re-open your prior application (depending on how long you waited to file again) but they are going to start from scratch with your new application. More importantly, your case won't move faster just because you are starting over again.

11) If they ask for it, give them what they need

When you file for disability, get ready. They are going to send you a BOAT load of paperwork. This paperwork is designed to assist them with processing your case. The longer you wait to give it to them, the slower your case will be processed.

12) Sometimes, it's JUST NOT THEIR FAULT!

Recognize this, if they are waiting for something and it hasn't come their to them, what do you expect them to do? If you tell them that your doctor says you're disabled but your doctor won't release your medical records, what do you expect them to do? If you tell them that your friend can answer questions about you but your friend won't call them back, what do you expect them to do? If they schedule you for an appointment but you keep missing the appointment, what do you expect them to do? If they contact your child's school and the school refuses to cooperate, what do you expect them to do? Most people don't realize that the SSA process is a two way street. If they aren't getting what they need because of someone else, you can't get mad or frustrated because they aren't making a decision fast enough.

Contrary to popular belief, SSA is frustrated as well. They have to handle a large case load and they have to make sure the cases are handled as fast as possible. Your case is important to them but they can only work with what they have.