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THE INITIATOR

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On the Job: Accommodating People with Disabilities

Making reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities is not only the law. It's also just good business sense.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 20% of Americans have a disability. As people age, the incidence of disabilities will continue to increase. And the smart employer will provide accommodations to keep people of all abilities on the job.

According to Rick Diamond of Disability Network/Lakeshore, many employers still don't understand the big picture. A study* of over 10,000 employers identified their concerns about hiring people with disabilities. But the facts tell a different story.

Fear: Drop in productivity

Fact: On-going studies by DuPont and IBM show that employees with disabilities are as or more productive than other employees. Diamond says, "In part, it's because they're grateful for the job and work hard to keep it."

Fear: Litigation

Fact: Failure to hire or make accommodations for a person with disabilities could lead to costly legal battles. "Or," says Diamond, "we could find a low-cost accommodation that gets the person back to work, helps the employer stay productive, and avoids hiring and training costs."

Fear: Cost of accommodations

Fact: 73% of employees with disabilities require no accommodations, and the cost for those who do is low. "In fact," says Diamond, "the most commonly requested accommodation is a flexible schedule, which costs exactly \$0."

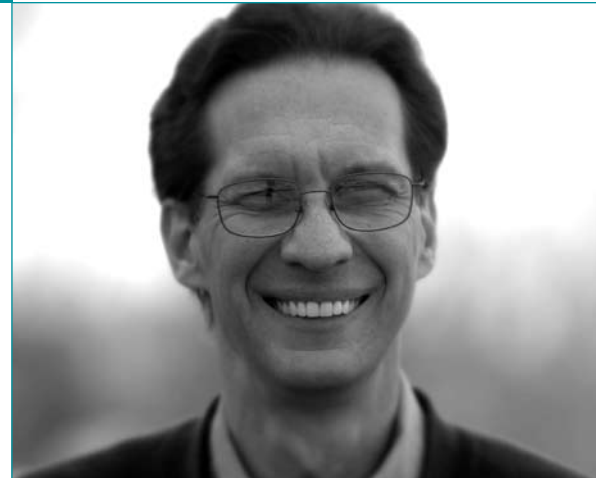
Accommodations can take many forms, from modifying environments, policies, or procedures to providing technology, interpreters, or more flexible work schedules. Diamond says, "Accommodations simply level the playing field so a person with disabilities can perform a job the same as a person without a disability."

He explains, "The solution can be high-tech or low-tech. High-cost or no cost. Say an employee uses a wheelchair, which doesn't fit under a table. You could spend a lot on a new table, or you could just get four 2x4 blocks to raise the table two inches."

Technology is another great equalizer, according to Diamond. "We have a new staff person who has muscular dystrophy," he says. "He has headphones and a microphone and does all his computer work through voice input. Some employers might shy away from hiring someone with his disability, but with a piece of hardware and software, we got a great employee."

Carl Occhipinti, Manager at Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS), says, "Most accommodations are not difficult. We analyze the job and the problems and brainstorm solutions to keep the person functioning."

Diamond concludes, "Making accommodations is not as hard or scary as you think. So let's deal with it and do what we can to help people stay productive."



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Accommodations in Real Life

MV Transportation is in the process of hiring a man who is blind as a dispatcher. General Manager Katie Driesenga says, "We're testing the screen reader software he needs to see if it's compatible with our system. If it works, the Commission for the Blind will pay for it, so it would be a low-cost solution." Driesenga says her business is pleased to offer accommodations. "We transport a lot of persons with disabilities," she explains. "That's what we're all about, and if we can help someone live a more productive life, we're all for it."

Volunteers

We rely on our wonderful volunteers for so much of what we accomplish. To find an opportunity that fits your skills, interests, and schedule, please contact:
Kim Romero
616 396 5326

Donations

As a non-profit organization, we welcome gifts of all sizes. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by calling 616 396 5326 or mailing a check (payable to Disability Network/Lakeshore) to:
Disability Network/Lakeshore
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Join Us

Your gifts of time and resources can help us change everything for the better.



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Who we are

Most people equate disability with limitations. But it's our job to change the perceptions and realities that prevent people with disabilities from sharing in the community. Every year, we provide training, mentoring, and referrals to help people with disabilities and their families live productive lives. Because disability touches so many people, we also work on a larger scale, helping governments and businesses make changes that benefit not just those with disabilities, but everyone in the community.