



STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS: RECRUITING CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES

WANTED: QUALIFIED, DEDICATED PROBLEM SOLVERS WITH A DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO ADAPT TO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

Many individuals with disabilities possess precisely these attributes. Yet, as a whole, individuals with disabilities represent one of the largest untapped pools of skills and talent in the U.S. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, just over 60 percent of men ages 16 to 65 who have disabilities were working in 2000, compared to 80 percent of men in that age group without disabilities. For women in the same age group, the numbers were 51.4 and 67.3 percent, respectively.

Individuals with disabilities have the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to succeed in today's rapidly changing workplace. From company headquarters to the factory floor, technology continues to drastically alter the way individuals work, helping to level the playing field for individuals with disabilities and expand opportunities for employers to benefit from their capabilities.

In the 1990s, two-thirds of America's economic growth resulted from new technologies. More than half of U.S. workers now use a computer as part of their job. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that total employment will increase by 21.3 million jobs through 2012, adding 600,000 more jobs than in the previous decade. This growth is expected to be concentrated in the service sector, particularly the professional and business services, health and information technology industries. In fact, of the 20 fastest growing occupations, 15 are related to health or information technology.

Individuals with disabilities can help employers gain a strategic advantage in responding to these shifts. Now more than ever, students with disabilities pursue higher education and participate in work experience programs such as internships and mentoring. Employees with disabilities also contribute to a business's diversity and competitive edge by offering fresh perspectives and ideas on how to accomplish tasks and implement strategies. Moreover, research demonstrates that employees with disabilities consistently meet or exceed performance expectations and have a lower than average rate of turnover.

■ STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

Taking the following kinds of steps can help employers obtain these benefits and ensure that individuals with disabilities are included in their recruiting efforts:

- Including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
- Creating partnerships with disability-related advocacy organizations
- Contacting career centers at colleges and universities when vacancies arise
- Posting job announcements in disability-related publications, Web sites and job fairs
- Establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities

In addition, a number of resources are available to help employers recruit individuals with disabilities.

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Employer Assistance and Recruiting Network (EARN)

www.earnworks.com

1-866-EARN-NOW (1-866-327-6669) (V/TTY)

EARN is a free, confidential service from the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) that connects employers seeking workers with qualified candidates with disabilities. By using EARN, employers gain access to a nationwide network of employment service providers who work with people with disabilities looking to join or return to the workforce. EARN also offers technical assistance to employers on issues relating to hiring and employing individuals with disabilities.

Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)

www.dol.gov/odep/programs/workforc.htm

1-202-693-7880 (V); 1-202-693-7881 (TTY)

WRP helps employers identify qualified college students with disabilities for summer work experience and, in some cases, full-time employment. Jointly coordinated by ODEP and the U.S. Department of Defense, WRP establishes partnerships with other federal agencies that commit to provide summer jobs as well as a staff recruiter for the program. Each year, recruiters personally interview about 1,500 students and compile a database of their qualifications that is available to these agencies, as well as private employers, at no cost.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service

www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/for_employers.htm

VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service helps employers across the country fill workforce needs with trained, educated and experienced disabled veterans. It provides recruitment assistance based on employers' specific qualification requirements, and candidates are skilled, committed workers who are pre-screened for specific employment opportunities. Through the service, employers also gain access to resources to assist with recruitment, retention and succession planning strategies.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/vrpractices/busdev.html

State VR agencies help individuals with disabilities obtain and maintain employment. Thus, they also assist employers in identifying qualified, job-ready candidates with disabilities to fill their workforce needs. Each state has a designated person tasked with building and maintaining employer relationships. In addition to recruitment assistance, state VR agencies can provide services such as work evaluation and assessment for and provision of assistive technology and other workplace accommodations.

State Governors' Committees on Employment of People with Disabilities

www.dol.gov/odep/state/state.htm

Each state typically has a governor-appointed board, committee, commission or council that provides leadership to its efforts to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Employers may contact these committees for information about state-specific resources available to help them recruit and retain qualified individuals with disabilities.

Disability Employment 101

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/employmentguide/index.html

1-877-4-ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827) (V); 1-877-576-7734 (TTY)

Disability Employment 101 is a publication that addresses how to find qualified workers with disabilities and highlights what various businesses have done to successfully integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce. Jointly developed by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, it provides information about VR agencies and ADA & IT Technical Assistance Centers, as well as checklists and other resources to aid employers as they prepare to employ people with disabilities.

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