

Tapping New Talent for Business Success

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Employing People with Disabilities

Workplace Accommodations: Inexpensive & Effective

Highlights from the VCU-RRTC's Charter Business Roundtable's National Study of Employers' Experiences with Workers with Disabilities reveal:

- Overall, employers view employees with disabilities as capable and productive.
- Human Resource professionals don't view the cost of accommodations, training, or additional supervision for employees with disabilities as a barrier to employment.
- Employers believe they are most effective in retaining existing workers who acquire disabilities and arranging accommodations as opposed to hiring new workers with disabilities.
- Employers rely on internal organizational resources that are available to assist in accommodating workers with disabilities.
- Supervisors express confidence in their ability to identify and develop accommodations.

Despite the misconception that the cost of job accommodation is high, the facts indicate the opposite: The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), an informational service sponsored by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, reported that the cost of accommodations is typically very low, approximately \$200.00 per employee with a disability. A recent Annenberg study of job accommodations made national by Sears, Roebuck and Company found an even lower typical cost of less than \$50.00.

IBM CONTINUES ITS LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

At IBM, people are hired based on their abilities. IBM employees represent a talented and diverse workforce, and achieving the full potential of this diverse workforce is a fundamental corporate priority. Millie DesBiens, IBM Program Manager for Workforce Diversity Initiatives, explains that in 1985, IBM initiated a strategic objective to become the high-tech company recognized for its leadership in developing products for people with disabilities. "We made significant progress since then in hiring people with disabilities and putting into place accommodations to support them."

This article provides examples of the proactive approach developed by IBM to workplace accommodations for people with disabilities in areas such as:

- Work Experience and Leadership Programs for Youth with Disabilities;
- Active Recruitment;
- Creating a Barrier Free Work Environment;
- A Corporate Focal Point for Disability Related Issues; and
- Accommodations for Individual Workers.

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This newsletter is a joint publication of Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education, Dept. of Physical Medicine, Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Workplace Supports



BANK OF AMERICA AND THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Bank of America is a company dedicated and committed to hiring, valuing, and promoting individuals from all walks of life. A key part of the commitment is supporting the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and honoring its goals and objectives. Since the ADA's inception, Bank of America has been recog-

nized as a leader in providing equal opportunity to all individuals, regardless of their disability status. "We are proud of this legacy and will continue our practices of promoting and advocating equal access and opportunity for everyone including people with disabilities" says Kate Moore, Coordinator of the Accommodations Unit.

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IBM's accomplishments in accommodating workers with a disability have been recognized by *We Magazine* and the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor.

In 1999, IBM took an important step towards fully integrating people with disabilities into its workforce by expanding its policy of reasonable accommodations worldwide. All buildings leased or owned by IBM must be accessible to people with disabilities. By making this policy global, IBM literally opened the door to the integration of people with disabilities in its workforce.

In its corporate program, Ms. DesBiens serves as the contact person for all issues related to people with disabilities. The corporate program includes an information-rich intranet site that contains data on IBM's disability related programs, accommodations and resources, as well as an extensive listing of external resources. Ms. DesBiens also manages a corporate account used to fund accommodations for workers with disabilities throughout the company. She explains, "We want to make sure that budget concerns do not get in the way of hiring and supporting the needs of our employees with disabilities."

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Youth Programs and Recruitment

To attract people with disabilities to the corporation, IBM runs a number of programs. A sample look at two such programs is presented below.

ENTRY POINT

Entry Point was developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, IBM, and NASA. The program's mission is to place youth with disabilities in business and industry and prepare them for corporate and community leadership.

Entry Point college and summer interns combine two to five years of work experience at a client organization like IBM with year-round academic instruction and training. Students must have technical majors and maintain a grade point average of 3.0.

Ms. DesBiens states, "We provide a meaningful summer or up to six-month assignment, ensure skill building in the technical field, provide necessary job-related reasonable accommodations, and assign a mentor to work with the student. The program is designed as a pipeline to part-time or full-time employment and we've found it a very effective way to recruit talented, technical college graduates."

See the story on the following page on Tim Scamporinno, an Entry Point graduate.

PROJECT ABLE

Project Able was developed by IBM's staffing and global workforce diversity organization with the aim of increasing the number of employees with disabilities at IBM. The program's goals include increased hiring, establishing a network to identify top quality persons with disabilities, and the establishment of a network of line champions throughout the organization.

DesBiens explains, "Our managers are very receptive to the idea of hiring people with disabilities. Most of them, however have no direct experience. So we use this program as a way to educate them and assist them every step of the way. She also states, "We have experienced managers in every organization that can answer any question and provide support. Project Able has been an effective program for us and has done much to educate our workforce."

TIM SCAMPORINNO ENTRY POINT PROGRAM

Tim Scamporinno has excelled at IBM in his brief 18 month tenure with the company. Scamporinno, despite impressive academic credentials, was frustrated with his search for meaningful summer employment. Scamporinno's faculty advisor at Sonoma State was constantly fielding requests from area businesses for a chance to interview top computer science majors. "I went on a number of interviews, but once they saw me and my disability, that was it." An accident 15 years ago left Tim a quadriplegic in a wheelchair with limited use of his hands. The Entry Point Program at IBM proved to be just the opportunity for him. After interviewing at the company, he was offered a number of positions. He began as a summer intern in May, 1998, and three months into his assignment was offered a full-time job. Being a new employee at IBM Tim was assigned a mentor in his department who coached him on job skills, answered questions, and introduced him to various teams.

As far as his disability, Tim says the attitude at IBM from day one was a willingness to do whatever needed to ensure that he could do the job. "It hasn't been an issue because many of the things that can be obstacles were already taken care of," says Tim. As far as work-related aids, he uses a hand tool to help him type. With a recent promotion and the additional demands of 20 or so folks reporting to him he is looking into dictating software to help him to be more productive.

JAMES FARRUGGELLA CHAMPIONS PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AT IBM

Jamie Farruggella, Professional Development Manager, IBM Global Services, feels his role is to support his people and help them succeed. When he accepted a management position in 1997 his first question to his staff was "how can I help you be more productive?" For Dave Schoentag and Tim Mackey, that question had special meaning, both employees are disabled.

"I had no direct experience working with people with disabilities," says Farruggella. "I felt strongly, though, that IBM had a genuine commitment to its people and that meant full support of its workers." As far as Dave and Tim went, Farruggella says he didn't think of supporting their productivity any differently.

Most of the accommodations for Tim and Dave were already in place. For Dave, who is blind, screen readers and a Braille display device helped him to do his job and for Tim, who is deaf, an interpreter was needed in certain situations. Farruggella states that, "for both Tim and Dave, the accommodations weren't difficult. IBM is committed to making accommodations to ensure employees with disabilities are able to do their jobs and fully participate in work life. This is underscored by the fact that accommodations are funded through a corporate account."

Beyond accommodations, Farruggella felt his team needed to be informed about how best to work with Tim and Dave, so both employees gave presentations to the group to clear up any issues they may have. With his interest aroused, Farruggella began a personal journey on the issue of disability. "I wanted to stay up to date on what was available, I researched a number of resources that helped me learn more and, I think, helped me become a better manager."

As a line champion, Jamie Farruggella continues to put forward the issues of people with disabilities, "we have to increase awareness, sensitivity, and do more to tap this resource of talented individuals."

Thanks to his efforts, IBM continues to make progress in making sure its disabled employees reach their full potential, as well as attracting people with disabilities to the corporation.

Bank of America

Bank of America understands that creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities is more than a value, it means more than just bringing people to the door. The company's success in providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities is derived from a long-standing pledge to provide comprehensive programs that anticipate and respond to the needs of future and current associates with disabilities. To ensure an integrated approach to meeting the employment needs of people with disabilities, Bank of America has established several programs over the years. A sample of these resources and programs are presented below.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

- Outreach and Recruitment Activities: The bank's staffing department works closely with both national agencies and local community based organizations to provide people with disabilities equal access to the company's many employment opportunities.
- Disability Resources Intranet Site: This web-based service is designed to serve as a corporate resource and clearinghouse for associates and/or managers with disabilities with a web site that is designed to connect associates with tools, resources, and programs that support employees throughout their career at the bank.
- Abilities Scholarship Program: The bank promotes greater educational access for people with disabilities through this scholarship program by earmarking up to \$200,000 to provide students with disabilities educational opportunities that will prepare them to become a successful part of the workforce.
- Alternative Formats Program: Once a need for an alternative format is identified, applicants and associates automatically receive communications in their preferred format to include: braille, large print, or electronic media. Most documents are stored in alternative formats to ensure immediate access to information.
- Disability Accommodation Fund: Despite the fact that many accommodations cost little or nothing this program was designed to ensure that hiring decisions are solely focused on the competencies of the applicant with all reasonable accommodations provided through the fund.

The following section provides detailed information on how Bank of America utilizes an accommodation case manager to ensure equal access to employment and career advancement for their associates and managers.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Bank of America is more interested in what people can do than what they can't do. That's why they base all of their employment decisions on capabilities rather than disabilities. The Bank recognizes that people with disabilities may require reasonable accommodations to have access to employment opportunities, to be successful in performing their jobs, and to be able to fully participate in bank activities and programs.

To assist recruiters and managers to stay focused on the capabilities of individuals and to ensure those who need accommodations receive them, they have established a first-class accommodations program. By calling a single telephone number an individual can request comprehensive disability case management, including accommodations consultation, identification, and implementation, from an accommodations specialist.

THE BASICS

Reasonable accommodations are modifications to the work environment that remove job-related barriers, create a level playing field, and foster equal access and opportunity for people with disabilities. The need for a reasonable accommodation can occur in any stage of employment; from an accommodation for an applicant in the hiring process, to an accommodation for an existing associate who becomes disabled. The ADA requires reasonable accommodations in order to:

1. ensure equal access in the application/selection process;
2. enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential job functions; and
3. enable a person with a disability to enjoy the same benefits and privileges of employment as others enjoy (training, social events, benefits, etc.)

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS

An appropriate accommodation will depend on the situation and will need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Not all accommodations will be appropriate or effective for all types of jobs within the bank. An Accommodation Case Manager will help identify an effective solution that does not put undue hardship on the company. The ADA does not require employers to lower quality or quantity standards as an accommodation. The basic accommodation categories are:

- Restructuring Jobs
- Removing Barriers
- Modifying Work Schedules
- Acquiring Assistive Equipment or Devices
- Providing Alternative Formats of Communications
- Reassignment to a Vacant Position

REQUESTING AN ACCOMMODATION

It is up to the applicant or the associate with the disability to request an accommodation if needed. There is no obligation of the employer to provide an accommodation if the person chooses to conceal their disability. Managers should not speculate whether or not an individual has a disability or requires an accommodation. They should create an atmosphere where associates are comfortable making such requests if the accommodation would assist them in performing the essential job functions.

Accommodation Case Managers, on staff at the bank, are available to work with the individual from the beginning of the reasonable accommodation process to the end. They also ensure that the company meets its obligations under the ADA and other state disability laws. Accommodation Case Managers will work with the individual to:

1. determine if a physical or mental impairment is covered under the ADA or state disability law;
2. facilitate the interactive process;
3. attempt to identify a cost effective reasonable accommodation for the individual with the disability;
4. procure the necessary equipment or services;
5. provide the necessary funding for the accommodation; and
6. implement the identified accommodation.

PROFILE: LINDA SCHAEDEL'S RETURN TO WORK AT BANK OF AMERICA

"Bank of America is remarkable, and I'm honored to be part of the team. It is a place where we are valued for our talents and abilities and the unique qualities that we all bring to the team."

Linda Schaedle, an employee of Bank of America, has Guillain-Barre Syndrome. Guillain-Barre is similar to Multiple Sclerosis in that the conductive portion (myelin) of the peripheral nerves is attacked by the body's own immune function. While a student at UCLA, Linda had her first attack which resulted in complete

paralysis. This happened many years ago when there was no therapy available. Curbs, automatic doors, ADA, or reasonable accommodations were also not available. Currently, Linda uses a power wheel chair and specialized tools for functioning due to muscle weakness and endurance issues.

A recent exacerbation of Linda's Guillain-Barre Syndrome left her with compounded nerve damage. When she was ready to return to work, a consultant performed an ergonomic evaluation and the accommodation process began. Through the efforts of her case manager, supervisor, and therapists, she was able to return to work at Bank of America. Some of the accommodations that were made to assist Linda in her return to work included: voice activated software, an ergonomic chair, keyboard, trackball mouse, and a front door entry with an extended security window for badge entrance, allowing wheel chair passage, before locking again.

While accommodations were being made for Linda to return to her former writing position, her department was eliminated through restructuring. Bank of America's management offered her the opportunity to move into a Case Management position. Linda says she is "thrilled to be here and to work with such a remarkable team where possibilities become realities. You just never know when you could end up on the other end of the telephone, as I did. If that happened, what would you do?"

Manager's Corner....Ask the Expert

If a manager has never hired or worked with a person with a disability, questions may come to mind. These unanswered questions can create hesitation in hiring applicants with disabilities. This column is a regular feature in this newsletter and is intended to answer questions, present facts, and share strategies for recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities. Frequently asked questions about people with disabilities and reasonable accommodations are presented below.

Question & Answers

Q

QUESTION #1

Are accommodations expensive?

A

For most situations job accommodations are not expensive. However, there may be situations in which the type of job accommodation may require high technology and can be costly. According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) based out of West Virginia University, the accommodation cost reported by businesses show 20% of accommodations cost nothing at all. JAN also reports that 50% of the accommodations cost less than \$500 and more than 80% cost less than \$1,000. Accommodations are specific to the needs of each individual and the job requirement, but JAN reported that only 9% of the accommodation cost between \$2,000 and \$5,000 with only 3% costing more than \$5,000.

Q

QUESTION #2

What should an employer do following a request for an accommodation?

A

The first step is to identify the specific disability. It will be important to conduct a needs assessment to identify accommodations appropriate for the each individual request. Once you have determined there is a disability then you should review the job description to identify the essential functions of the job and which functions require accommodations. Once you have an understanding of the accommodations needed, you can begin to explore a variety of accommodations that reduce or remove the barriers and assist the individual to meet the requirements of the job. After the specific accommodation(s) has been identified, the next step is to determine cost effectiveness of each accommodation required by the employee. Lastly, you will need to implement the most appropriate accommodation with the least economic hardship for the business.

Q

QUESTION #3

As an employer do I have to make an accommodation if it is requested?

A

Yes, unless an employer can prove undue hardship usually the accommodation will have to be made if the person has a disability. An accommodation may be considered an undue hardship if it exceeds the bounds of practicality. That is, an employer would not be required to provide an accommodation if it cost more than alternatives that are equally effective, requires extensive and disruptive renovations, or negatively affects other employees or customers. Undue hardships are determined on a case-by-case basis using the following criteria:

- ◆ the cost and nature of the accommodation;
- ◆ the overall financial resources of the organization;
- ◆ the overall financial resources of the employer; and
- ◆ the type of business of the covered employer.

Q

QUESTION #4

What are some examples of typical job accommodations for someone with a psychiatric disability?

A

Every situation is different and must be considered on an individual basis to determine the best accommodation that will not pose an undue hardship and allow the worker to be productive at the workplace. However, if a person has problems maintaining stamina during the workday, the possible accommodation might be :

- ◆ provide flexible scheduling or
- ◆ allow job sharing or redistribution of work.

If the person has difficulty concentrating you may consider:

- ◆ reducing distractions in the work area,
- ◆ dividing large assignments into smaller tasks, or
- ◆ providing space enclosures.

There are other simple accommodations that can be used, such as making "to do" lists, giving written job instructions, writing clear expectations or responsibilities and consequences for not meeting the expectations, providing directions in a consistent manner, and using one-to-one supervision.

Q**QUESTION #5**

Is employing someone with a disability who needs an accommodation a “big deal”?

A

Managers and supervisors fear that providing accommodations to workers with disabilities may break the budget and this fear has kept a lot of employers from hiring people with disabilities. However, employers who have experience in hiring and accommodating individuals with disabilities have reported that it is not a “big deal”. Most of the time employers report that hiring and making accommodations has been easy and very simple. The more information and resources an employer can provide to it’s managers and hiring supervisors, the greater the opportunity to reduce the fear and uncertainty they may have about providing accommodations.

Q**QUESTION #6**

Can job accommodations help me increase my pool of qualified applicants?

A

With labor shortages and fierce competition for attracting and retaining qualified workers, a knowledge of job accommodations can be key to tapping into the pool of qualified employees with disabilities. Businesses who see through disabilities and perceived obstacles will understand that people with disabilities bring skills and abilities to the workplace and will move ahead of their competitors in recruiting efforts.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) provides answers to questions such as:

- ◆ What does an employer need to know in order to recruit, retain, and advance employees with disabilities?
- ◆ How can the valuable expertise of an existing employee be retained when an employee develops a disability?

JAN consultants will provide focused, concise answers to these and other questions that confront management. This is a no cost service for employers which gives practical tools for applying accommodation information and help to clarify complex ADA questions like “reasonable accommodation.”

Contact: 1-800 526-7234

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu>

This newsletter, “Tapping New Talent for Business Success” has been bundled in groups of 25 and can be purchased for \$9.95. If you are interested in receiving additional newsletters please send your request to the editor:

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