

EMPLOYMENT and Living with HIV/AIDS:

THE BUSINESS CASE

Problem solving, flexibility, resilience, strength and resolve. They're important attributes that smart employers seek in employees. Today more than ever, organizations need people with the ability to adapt to new situations and circumstances.

They're also key characteristics of many people living with HIV/AIDS. Hiring and retaining people living with HIV/AIDS can help employers expand their candidate pool and ensure their workforce has the skills—both occupational and interpersonal—necessary for success in today's dynamic economy.

The following questions and answers can help employers understand the benefits of and how to foster a work environment welcoming of the skills and talents of all individuals, including individuals living with HIV/AIDS.



1. What does having a diverse and inclusive workforce that includes people living with HIV/AIDS mean to my bottom line?

Employers benefit by hiring people for their unique talents and potential contributions, regardless of disability. In today's knowledge economy, diverse skills, opinions and insights offer a competitive edge. In addition, both consumers and job candidates consider an organization's corporate position as a member of the community when making decisions about where to spend money and put their talents to work.

Furthermore, employing people with disabilities, including people living with HIV/AIDS, benefits businesses by building brand trust and loyalty. In fact, in a national consumer survey, 87 percent of respondents said that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire individuals with disabilities.¹ The market of people living with disabilities, including people living with HIV/AIDS, is sizable; as with any customer segment, one of the best ways to tap into this market is to ensure it is represented in your workforce.²

There are also clear direct cost benefits. For instance, businesses can reduce turnover costs with a talent pool that tends to stay on the job longer,³ and because of disability statutes in the tax code, employers may qualify for tax incentives when hiring and accommodating people living with HIV/AIDS. To learn more about these tax incentives, see www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=185704,00.html and AskJAN.org/media/tax.html.

Hiring people with disabilities "helps position a company by enhancing company its reputation as an exemplary employer, exemplary neighbor and business (goodwill) and exemplary with innovative, accessible solutions. This also helps to expand the scope of talent recruitment (attract talented applicants) and build and increase the customer base."

- "Roadmaps for Enhancing Employment of Persons with Disabilities through Accessible Technology," developed by participants at the Business Dialogue on Accessible Technology and Disability Employment. Prepared by Assistive Technology Industry Association and U.S. Business Leadership Network, November 2007. www.usbln.org/pdf-docs/Roadmap_Enhancing_Employment_of_PWD_Full_Report.pdf

2. What would losing employees with disabilities, including employees living with HIV/AIDS, mean to my bottom line?

As with all employees, losing employees with disabilities who are already on the team would likely involve:

- Increased expenses due to replacement costs
- Separation costs
- Search costs
- Up-front hiring costs
- New employee services
- Lost organizational knowledge
- Lost productivity
- Lost goodwill
- Lost customer contacts

3. Are people living with HIV/AIDS ready to work?

Yes. Treatment advances have made this pool of candidates less and less distinguishable from the general workforce. For many people, HIV/AIDS has become a manageable condition. Furthermore, people living with HIV/AIDS have the requisite skills employers seek and the health and stamina to put those skills to work. In fact, many people living with HIV/AIDS have been improving their skills and preparing over many months to make their contributions as employees; others have never stopped working.

“Performance skills and fit for duty are what drives hiring and career advancement at LS&Co.—not confidential issues such as HIV status.”

Paurvi Bhatt, Senior Director, Strategic Health Initiatives, Employee HIV/AIDS Program, Total Rewards – Global H.R., Levi Strauss & Co

4. How much will it cost me if an employee needs a reasonable accommodation?

If people with disabilities, including HIV/AIDS, need accommodations, those adjustments are typically inexpensive and relatively routine. In fact, research indicates that 56 percent of all accommodations cost employers nothing. Of those that do cost, the typical one-time expenditure is \$500—an outlay that most employers report pays for itself multiple-fold in the form of reduced insurance and training costs and increased productivity.⁵

“A high percentage (56%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost only \$500.”

- *“Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact,” Job Accommodation Network, 2012*
www.AskJAN.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html

5. Are there issues that might arise if I have workers living with HIV/AIDS?

Like any employee, a person living with HIV/AIDS must be qualified for and able to perform the essential functions of the job. HIV/AIDS does not present a risk to the health or safety of co-workers or customers. To ensure and share company commitment to a workplace welcoming of the skills and talents of all individuals, including those living with HIV/AIDS, the International Labor Organization offers model policy language:⁶

“Company X does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination against employees or job applicants on any grounds, including HIV status. While Company X recognizes that there are circumstances unique to HIV infection, this policy rests on the principle that HIV infection and AIDS should be treated like any other serious condition or illness that may affect employees. It takes into account the fact that employees with HIV may live full and active lives for a

number of years. The Company's commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for all employees is based on the recognition that HIV is not transmitted by casual contact."

It is also important to note that co-workers well-informed about HIV and their company's policy typically maintain their productivity if they learn that a colleague is HIV-positive.

6. What resources are available to help employers do this well?

Help with employers' concerns about employing people living with HIV/AIDS is readily available. Resources include:

- The **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** offers free, expert and confidential technical consultation for employees and employers on job accommodations, as well as other resources, for people living with HIV/AIDS. www.askjan.org/media/aids.htm
- **U.S. Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP)** website has a variety of resources specific to the topic of employment and living with HIV/AIDS. www.dol.gov/odep/topics/HIVAIDS.htm
- **AIDS.gov**, the federal government's central source for information about HIV/AIDS policies, programs and resources, offers a wealth of information to assist employers in educating employees about HIV/AIDS issues. www.aids.gov
- **Business Responds to AIDS/Labor Responds to AIDS (BRTA/LRTA)** is a public-private partnership led by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that encourages the involvement of businesses and labor in HIV prevention, awareness and policies in the workplace to promote the development of comprehensive workplace HIV/AIDS programs. www.brta-lrta.org
- The **National Working Positive Coalition** works to share information about evidence- and experienced-based best practices in employment services for people living with HIV/AIDS. www.workingpositive.net
- The **ADA National Network** offers employers tailored information, guidance and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) via ten regional centers across the country. www.adata.org
- The **U.S. Business Leadership Network** is a membership organization of businesses dedicated to promoting workplaces, marketplaces and supply chains inclusive of people with disabilities. www.usbln.org

There are also several resources that can help you educate your workforce about working productively side-by-side with employees who are living with HIV/AIDS.

- Videos created by Levi Strauss & Co. www.hiv aids.levi.com/training
- Guidelines for talking with and about co-workers with disabilities www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/effectiveinteraction.htm

- Employment and Living with HIV/AIDS: Success Stories
www.dol.gov/odep/topics/HIVAIDS/success

When it comes to policy, your company's core values likely have the language you need to communicate with your workforce about this issue. Use the language from core documents to reinforce confidentiality and non-discrimination, for example. You may also find helpful language in your employee health and wellness policies. If you do not have the policy language you need, see the International Labor Organization's "A Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS: What It Should Cover" www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/publication/wcms_121313.pdf or the Business Responds to AIDS/Labor Responds to AIDS (BRTA/LRTA) Workplace Policy Builder with sample policies at www.brta-lrta.org/wpb/wpb.html.

Conclusion

With updated skills, job readiness and improved treatments, people living with HIV/AIDS represent a significant potential source of productivity for employers of all sizes and in all industries. What's more, employers may be eligible for tax incentives for hiring people living with HIV/AIDS. And once hired, people living with HIV/AIDS, like people with a range of disabilities, can add significant value to an organization by providing increased understanding of and insight into target markets and audiences. Fortunately, a variety of resources exist to assist employers in successfully hiring and retaining people living with HIV/AIDS; in fact, every day across the nation, many are already among the most well integrated, productive contributors in the labor force.

Endnotes:

¹ Siperstein, G. N., Romano, N., Mohler, A., & Parker, R. (2006). A national survey of consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities. *Journal Of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 24(1), 3-9.

² People with disabilities and their network, as reported by the U.S. Census, represent \$1 trillion dollars in discretionary spending. www.askearn.org/BusinessCase/marketing_index.asp

³ Lengnick-Hall, Mark. 2007. Introduction. In *Hidden Talent*, ed. M. Lengnick-Hall, 4. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

⁴ Assistive Technology Industry Association and U.S. Business Leadership Network. (2007). *Roadmaps for Enhancing Employment of Persons with Disabilities through Accessible Technology, developed by participants at the Business Dialogue on Accessible Technology and Disability Employment*.

www.usbln.org/pdf-docs/Roadmap_Enhancing_Employment_of_PWD_Full_Report.pdf

⁵ Job Accommodation Network. *Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact*. www.AskJAN.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html

⁶ International Labor Organization. *A Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS: What it Should Cover*.

www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/publication/wcms_121313.pdf