



Benefits to Businesses on Employing Persons with Disabilities

People with disabilities represent the single largest and most diverse minority in the United States and are a major untapped source of qualified candidates. Experts in the field of workplace disability believe that employers have not tapped into this workforce because they are unaware of the range of their skills and/or do not know how to identify the individuals as potential employees.

Employers are missing out on a golden opportunity to hire well-trained, qualified people who also bring to the job unsurpassed loyalty, dedication, and commitment. Aside from having equal or higher performance ratings compared to workers without disabilities, workers with disabilities have the lowest attrition rates of any employee group in this country. In other words, they get the job done, and they stay on the job. The best reason to hire a person with disabilities is because he or she is qualified. Employers also benefit in other ways by.¹:

- Reducing training costs.
- Increasing productivity.
- Decreasing turnover.
- 72% of working-age people with disabilities have high school diplomas or a higher education.
- Washington Mutual, a financial services company, reported an 8% percent attrition rate in 1999 among people with disabilities working at its call centers, compared to an overall rate of 45 percent. Cost to recruit, train, and develop new employees was \$15,000.

Benefits of a Diverse Workforce

People with developmental disabilities can be a vital part of a rich, vibrant, diverse workforce. Research acknowledges the benefits of a diverse work environment, which includes a larger pool of ideas, more innovation, and increased tolerance/acceptance.² A recent Gallup poll found a strong correlation between companies' diversity efforts and

the satisfaction of their employees. 61% percent of employees who ranked their employer in the upper third of all companies on diversity efforts were extremely satisfied with their companies, versus only 34% of those who ranked their employer in the middle third and 21% of those who ranked their employer in the bottom third.³ Employees with developmental disabilities have the potential to contribute to the beneficial diversity of their workplaces. This isn't just a "feel good" concept. The benefits of diversity are real:

- Ideas and Innovation

People with developmental disabilities, due to their life experiences, often see the world from a different perspective than their non disabled counterparts. Innovation, creative thinking and determination are traits people with disabilities developed in part to the many challenges and obstacles experienced in their day to day life. As employees, they add to the range of viewpoints businesses need to succeed, offering fresh ideas on how to solve problems, accomplish tasks and implement strategies.⁴

- Increased Tolerance and Acceptance

Due to a historical lack of exposure, especially in the work place, non disabled individuals may have a certain level of apprehension around people with developmental disabilities. This apprehension is not necessarily bred by innate intolerance or lack of acceptance, but more likely a byproduct of unfamiliarity with people with disabilities in the work place. Having an individual with a developmental disability as part of the workforce allows other employees the opportunity to broaden their scope of experiences and open their minds to differences. This experience can yield a more thoughtful and open minded group of workers, valued characteristics in any business environment.

Economic Benefits

When individuals with disabilities are provided the appropriate supports to earn competitive wages alongside their non disabled peers, they are given the opportunity to build wealth and assets which lead to a higher quality of life and a greater degree of independence.

The poverty rates of people with disabilities are much higher than that of the general population. One survey found that 34% of people with disabilities live on a household income of less than \$15,000 per year, compared to 12% of people without disabilities. Another survey found that, among the population aged 25 to 64 with a severe disability, 28% have incomes below the poverty level compared to only 8.3% for persons in the same age group without a disability.⁵ A survey of nearly 5,000 caregivers, reported that 80% of families surveyed said that they do not have enough money to pay for the support or care of their relative with a disability.⁶ High levels of poverty lead to people with developmental disabilities being dependent on government funded programs.

The potential economic benefits of integrated, competitive employment for people with disabilities are two-fold: 1) to broaden the tax base by putting more of the 54 million individuals with disabilities to work 2) create an environment where people with disabilities are less reliant on government funded programs such as SSI, SSDI, and Medicaid

In addition to supplementing the tax base with the salaries and wages of people with disabilities, caregivers who have reported being forced to stay home and care for their family member with a disability, will be able to be more productive in their own employment. Moreover, as both these constituencies are able to build additional wealth they will very likely become more robust consumers in the market place, thus contributing additional resources back into the economy.

Sources:

¹US Department of Labor, Employee Assistance Referral Network (EARN) Accessed 2014 www.earnworks.com

² Bright Hub, “Fostering Diversity by Recognizing All the Benefits”. Accessed: July 28, 2011. <http://www.brighthub.com/office/human-resources/articles/90910.aspx>

³Harvard Business School, “A Framework for Pursuing Diversity in the Workplace”. Accessed: August 8, 2011. <http://www.acc.com/chapters/sandiego/upload/HBS%20-%20Pursuing%20Diversity.pdf>

⁴ Office of Disability Employment Policy, “Diverse Perspectives: People with Disabilities Fulfilling Your Business Goals”. Accessed: August 3, 2011. <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/diverse.htm>

⁵ World Institute on Disability, A Perfect Fit: People with Disabilities Building Assets. Accessed: August 1, 2011. <http://wid.org/employment-and-economic-equity/access-to-assets/equity/equity-e-newsletter-october-2005/a-perfect-fit-people-with-disabilities-building-assets>

⁶ The Arc of the United States, “FINDS Study”. Accessed: July 19, 2011. <http://www.thearc.org/document.doc?id=3140>