

Diversity And Disabilities

Diversity Includes Disability

Workforce diversity has become a major management strategy for many employers in the 1990's because it makes good business sense. A diverse workforce gives companies a competitive advantage by enabling them to better meet the needs of their customers, successfully compete in the global marketplace, and hire from an expanded labor pool.

Managing diversity involves the creation of an open, supportive, and responsive organization in which diversity is acknowledged and valued. Diversity is defined as all of the ways in which we differ. Some of these dimensions are race, gender, age, language, physical characteristics, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and other differences irrelevant to one's capacity to perform a job.

Why Do I Need To Know About Diversity And People With Disabilities?

According to recent studies, America's workforce is changing and rapidly growing more diverse. Over the next few decades, the largest percentage of new growth will be composed of women, ethnic minorities, and immigrants. The number of employees with disabilities will also increase. The current generation of Americans with disabilities is well prepared to be tapped for the job market and able to provide an added solution for the labor shortages facing American business.

People with disabilities are the nation's largest minority, and the only one that any person can join at any time. If you do not currently have a disability, you have about a 20% chance of becoming disabled at some point during your work life. People with disabilities cross all racial, gender, educational, socioeconomic, and organizational lines.

Companies that include people with disabilities in their diversity programs increase their competitive advantage. People with disabilities add to the variety of viewpoints needed to be successful and bring effective solutions to today's business challenges. The American economy is made stronger when all segments of the population are included in the workforce and in the customer base.

How Can My Company Support Diversity, Including Employees With Disabilities?

1. Educate Yourself

Before moving ahead, study the issue.

Learn more about people with disabilities. A good way to start is to contact disability-related organizations for information.

Contact your local Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Centers for Independent Living, State/Local Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, and organizations and agencies that serve or represent specific disabilities. Many of these organizations want to assist the business sector, and some provide free training and literature.

Talk to people with disabilities in your company and ask for their ideas and input.

2. Develop A Plan

Establish a system for educating and sensitizing all levels of your workforce on the value of hiring people with disabilities.

If you have a diversity training program, make sure that employees with disabilities are included in this effort.

3. Consider The Following Action Items:

Recruitment and Outreach

Even before positions open, seek out opportunities to develop relationships with organizations, agencies, and programs that represent or train people with disabilities.

Participate or increase participation in summer internships or similar programs to increase the flow of qualified individuals with disabilities in the "pipeline."

When a position is approved for external hire, seek out qualified professional organizations that represent and serve people with disabilities.

When contracting with a retainer or contingency search firm, develop the contract to include qualified people with disabilities in the search. The contract should outline the steps that will be implemented to locate qualified people with disabilities.

Development and Planning

When task forces or other special committees are established, they should include people with disabilities.

Monitor to ensure that internal developmental programs are available to employees with disabilities.

Provide employees with disabilities candid and prompt feedback on their performance.

When providing training or other off-site activities, make sure that they are accessible to employees with disabilities.

Compensation and Recognition

Monitor bonuses and stock awards so that consistent job-related standards are applied.

Monitor appraisal and total compensation systems so individuals with disabilities are treated without discrimination.

Where Can I Obtain Additional Information?

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
(202) 376-6200 (VOICE), (202) 376-6205 (TTY/TTD),
(202) 376-6219 (FAX)

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' Job
Accommodation Network (JAN)
(800) 526-7234 (VOICE/TTY/TTD), (304) 293-5407(FAX)
jan@jan.icdi.wvu.edu (e-mail)

Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers
(DBTACs)
(800) 949-4232 (VOICE/TTY/TTD), (703) 525-6835 (FAX)