



The FORUM

A Newsletter for Illinois Corporate Partners July 2011

Leading Practices for Disability Employment Highlighted

By Kathy Gurchiek - USBLN

Representatives from U.S. companies and the federal government extolled the business case for a more diverse workforce and its positive impact on the bottom line during the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Business Leadership Network's (USBLN) Corporate Disability Employment Summit on April 12, 2011, in Washington, D.C.

That workforce can include persons with developmental disabilities and persons with short- and long-term disabilities as well as an aging population, speakers noted.

"Too many employers still are not aware of the pool of qualified workers among the disabled population, do not know how to reach them, and are concerned about the perceived cost and challenge of providing accommodations," Chamber CEO and President Thomas J. Donohue said during opening remarks.

Lowe's Co. Inc. is among U.S. employers that have recruited persons with disabilities. Stephen Szilágyi, the company's senior vice president for distribution, told attendees success stories about employees such as Chad Guerrero, who is legally blind. Guerrero was unemployed for a decade until Lowe's hired him as part of its outreach program piloted at its Regional Distribution Center in Pittston, Pa.

Guerrero works in the shipping department, where he trains other workers. "He's exactly the kind of person you want on your team, but you can't have him. He's ours," Szilágyi said. It was a refrain he repeated as he told of other successful hires, including a man who exceeds productivity levels in his department despite having Down syndrome, and another with cerebral palsy who has limited use of his left hand.

The only real accommodation employers have to make, Szilágyi said, is the change needed in the "five inches between your ears."

"We found it wasn't enough to just open our doors wider. What's needed is to recruit and partner with an agency to find qualified job candidates," he said. "Everyone can do what we're doing. We didn't wait to implement universal design for work stations, for example. We just jumped in. We're still figuring it out."

The Lowe's program was inspired by the one that Walgreens opened in 2007 at its distribution center in Anderson, S.C., under its Initiative for Employing People with Disabilities.

"Employees with and without disabilities are held to the same standards, receive the same pay and perform the same jobs," said Deb Russell, the



"...We must build a world free of unnecessary barriers, stereotypes, and discrimination. Policies must be developed, attitudes must be shaped, and buildings and organizations must be designed to ensure that everyone has a chance to get the education they need and live independently as full citizens in their communities."

President Barack Obama

DHS/DRS Mission

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is the state's lead agency serving individuals with disabilities. DRS works in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to assist them in making informed choices to achieve full community participation through employment, education and independent living opportunities.

Illinois Corporate Partners Mission Statement

The mission of DRS' Illinois Corporate Partner initiative is to create a strong partnership between the Illinois business community and DRS to assist Illinois residents with disabilities at the local level in attaining stable employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

Illinois Corporate Partners will:

- Lead the way in providing job opportunities in the marketplace for persons with disabilities.
- Invest in the untapped and unused labor resources provided by DRS.
- Re-invest in the community by providing an opportunity for Illinois residents to become productive and responsible taxpayers.
- Receive the benefits of qualified employees while providing career opportunities to those individuals with work abilities.
- Give serious consideration to hiring qualified persons with disabilities and encourage other businesses to tap into this pool of talented employees.

company's manager of outreach and employee services. Russell, who serves as USBLN board chair, spoke at the summit.

Walgreens partnered with the Anderson County Disability and Special Needs Board. "Finding a partner with shared goals and values is important to a successful diversity and inclusion program," Russell said.

"Sometimes you find partners that say they have the same goals, then they want to make exceptions," she said. "For example, the partner might want the business to deviate from what it considers acceptable performance from an employee."

"It's important," Russell said, "that a business hold its ground on its standards, have ambassadors and champions for the program and face co-workers' fears with education."

Lori Golden, AccessAbilities Leader for Ernst & Young and a USBLN board member, shared practical tips for creating a more-inclusive work environment.

DiversityInc named Ernst & Young among the 2011 top 10 companies for people with disabilities. Its practices include captioning and/or making transcripts available for webcasts, providing automatic transcriptions of voicemail and auditing its offices for accessibility. That audit includes business processes and whether often-used supplies are stored at wheelchair level.

"Employers need to recognize," Golden said, "that integrating disabled employees into the organization is part of everything the organization does—not just training."

She said "there are four areas on which employers can focus for success:

- Recruit the best talent in whatever packaging that talent arrives.
- Enable the employee to do his or her best by providing access to tools, resources, information, equipment and career opportunities.
- Plan for career development and advancement.
- Educate everyone to build an inclusive nature—not just supervisors and recruiters."

Don't Lower Expectations

Many speakers emphasized that hiring a worker with a disability is about creating an inclusive workforce, not charity or entitlement or establishing quotas.

"There's nothing wrong with expecting people to be qualified for the jobs you want them for," said Debra Ruh, founder and CEO of TecAccess, an accessibility and risk management consulting firm and a USBLN board member. Ruh, whose daughter Sara has Down syndrome, started the company in 2001 with the goal of hiring primarily people with disabilities.

"I've hired people with disabilities and I've fired people with disabilities," said Ruh, whose company employs more than 60 employees with physical and developmental disabilities.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, noted that since the start of the recession in 2008, adults with disabilities have been leaving the labor force at more than 10 times the rate than adults without disabilities, adding to the taxpayers' burden. He called on CEOs and business owners at the summit to join him in his goal of increasing the number of American workers with disabilities from 4.9 million in 2011 to 6 million in 2015.

He sponsored the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, called a hearing in March 2011 to identify barriers to employment for people with intellectual disabilities.

"We're not asking any business to employ someone who cannot work in competitive employment," Harkin said. "However, there are millions of people out there ... who can work in competitive employment" and are promotable."

Top 10 Reasons to Hire People with Disabilities

.Northeast Human Resources Association (NEHRA) (2007)
Wellesley, Massachusetts

1. Employees with disabilities can ease concerns about labor supply.
2. People with disabilities have equal or higher job performance ratings, higher retention rates and lower absenteeism.
3. Employees with disabilities can relate better to customers with disabilities, who represent \$1 trillion in annual aggregate consumer spending.
4. Diverse work groups can create better solutions to business challenges.
5. People with disabilities are better educated than ever, and are proven to have met and/or exceeded challenges.
6. A person with a disability motivates work groups and increases productivity.
7. Companies that hire and accommodate people with disabilities in their workplaces can receive tax benefits.
8. Employing people with disabilities is good for the individual, the business, and society. This is a “win-win-win” strategy.
9. People with disabilities are motivated by the desire to give something back, and by opportunities for personal growth, job flexibility and social inclusion.
10. It's ability, not disability, that counts.

EMPLOYERS

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services is proud to announce a new web site:

“DRS Success: Making It Work Together”.

Employers can obtain current information on working with DRS regarding the employment of people with disabilities.

Visit: drs.illinois.gov/success

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Using Performance Tools to Assess Applicants With Special Needs

By Charles A. Handler, Rocket-Hire, New Orleans

Dear Workforce Newsletter:

How Do We Use Performance Tools to Assess Applicants With Special Needs?

Individuals with special needs (intellectual delays, mental health issues) constitute an ever-increasing proportion of our applicants. Which performance-assessment tools are available to help us screen these individuals in the most objective way?

—*The Fair Thing to Do, Education, Ontario, Canada*

Dear The Fair Thing:

When it comes to pre-employment testing, it is critical that the test content be directly related to the job. (Otherwise you could run into legal issues—not to mention that the test will prove an ineffective tool for good hiring decisions.)

In terms of intellectual delays and mental health issues, although a lot of tools can identify these issues, none is really suitable for employment purposes. Most employment tests are meant to examine healthy adult traits such as personality or aptitude. These tests would not really detect more specific disabilities, other than that an individual with cognitive issues may score more poorly on most tests. Most of the tests used for mental-health screenings are totally out of place in the work environment. They measure non work-related attributes and are intended for use in clinical settings.

Most employers just assume that all applicants are functioning at a level of mental health that will allow them to perform their jobs effectively. Serious mental pathologies usually preclude someone from holding a normal job.

My advice: Avoid using any test that is not directly related to an applicant's ability to perform specific job duties of the position for which you are hiring. Failure to do so will render the test ineffective and potentially place your company in legal jeopardy.

The Forum is a bi-monthly publication for the Illinois Corporate Partners. We welcome any news or suggestions for the newsletter. We also welcome photos in tif or jpg format. For more information contact Tom Lowery at: 309-798-6844 (V) 888-340-1004 (TTY) or email at tom.lowery@illinois.gov

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