

Wherever a door is closed to anyone because of a disability, we must work to open it. Wherever any job or home or means of transportation is unfairly denied because of a disability, we must work to change it. Wherever any barrier stands between you and the full rights and dignity of citizenship, we must work to remove it, in the name of simple decency and simple justice.

President George W. Bush

February 1, 2001

New Freedom Initiative Announcement Speech

The White House, Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Employers face workforce challenges daily, and the forecast of labor market shortages is not getting any brighter. A 2003 survey report *Rising to the Challenge* conducted by the Center for Workforce Preparation (CWP), a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, reveals that workforce development and a shortage of workers at all skill levels are the major issues facing small and large businesses today (2003). Moreover, a recent Aspen Institute report (August 2002) projects a critical shortage of workers over the next 20 years, particularly in jobs requiring higher education and training. The report confirms what chambers of commerce and their business members already know — there are too few sources of qualified workers to meet projected needs.

However, there is good news. Employers now can meet their workforce shortages by tapping into non-traditional sources of labor. Imagine finding workers who are self-motivated, have solid critical thinking skills and solve problems every day. Now, imagine that these workers, who have achieved competitive employment, have consistently proven to have nearly 85 percent one-year employment retention rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). As an employer, you need to know that people with disabilities are eager and ready to join your workforce.

Filling the Worker Shortage

Greater demand for skilled labor has increased awareness that many employable people are seeking employment who traditionally have not been considered as potential sources of skilled labor. People with disabilities represent the single largest minority group seeking employment in today's market. Both large and small companies have benefited by recruiting people with disabilities for many years. Many leading companies attribute much of their success to employing a diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities.

Quick Facts

- ✓ A March 2003 survey of employers found that the cost of accommodations was only \$500 or less (Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003).
- ✓ Seventy-three percent of employers report that their employees with disabilities did not require accommodations at all (Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003).
- ✓ Companies report that employees with disabilities have better retention rates, reducing the high cost of turnover (Unger, 2002).

The 21st Century Workforce

Companies that are strategic in their recruiting efforts understand that they can no longer meet staffing needs through traditional means. Contacts with rehabilitation agencies, welfare offices and other social programs are designed to assist companies in identifying new sources of qualified workers and an array of workplace supports. For example, companies can benefit financially by recruiting through government and nonprofit sources. Business for Social Responsibility (2001) reported that American Airlines calculated savings of 20 percent in recruiting costs by using nonprofit partners to help in its recruitment efforts. Resources are available to help your business achieve its competitive advantage by supplying a steady pipeline of qualified workers.

Business Incentives

There are compelling reasons to hire people with disabilities.

- ✓ People with disabilities possess valuable problem-solving skills because they are experts in finding creative ways to perform tasks others may take for granted.
- ✓ Employees with disabilities have proved to be dependable, dedicated, hardworking and productive employees.
- ✓ Many businesses report that the experience of working with people with disabilities increases every employee's morale and productivity.
- ✓ After acquiring a disability, employees who return to work after being rehabilitated help reduce a company's training and hiring costs and lower insurance premiums. Employers who have return-to-work programs establish a culture that regards employees as valuable — not disposable.
- ✓ Employees with disabilities reflect the customer base and can help craft effective marketing strategies to reach this lucrative market for companies that hire them.

People with disabilities make up part of the diverse workforce necessary for your business to succeed.

By raising awareness that your company is a disability-friendly business, you will attract job candidates and new customers. Marketing studies of the Atlanta Paralympics reveal that even households with no disability connection felt goodwill towards companies that included people with disabilities in advertising and were more likely to buy their products (Solutions Marketing Group, 2003).

Your business has an important partner in the effort to enhance its success through diversity. President George W. Bush pledged to improve employment for people with disabilities in his landmark New Freedom Initiative — a comprehensive, innovative plan to promote full participation of people with disabilities in all parts of American society. OSERS and CWP have an important role in working to achieve the president's objective by helping your business identify strategies to recruit, hire and retain people with disabilities. By releasing this initiative in his first two weeks of office, President Bush signaled his commitment to improving the quality of life for Americans with disabilities. For more information, visit www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/newfreedom.

To help you prepare to employ people with disabilities, OSERS and CWP have designed this employment planning guide.

What This Employment Planning Guide Offers

- ✓ Lessons and strategies to help you continue to plan and design a program for employing people with disabilities:
 - Lesson One** — Finding Qualified Workers
 - Lesson Two** — Cultivating the Next Generation of Qualified Workers
 - Lesson Three** — Learning from Other Businesses
 - Lesson Four** — Putting Research into Practice in the Workplace

- ✓ Contact information for programs and resources in your state or locality dedicated to helping you in your effort to recruit and hire people with disabilities.

- ✓ Fact sheets and a checklist.

