Why Businesses Don't Employ People with Disabilities

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Bob Peck and Lynn Trew Kirkbride

Article Summary

The primary objective of the field of vocational rehabilitation is employment. A person with a disability is to be included in the world of work as an equal to any other citizen and to possess all the privileges that come with employment, including becoming a taxpayer. It is believed that this will greatly enhance an individual's quality of life. Despite all the efforts to increase the employment of people with disabilities in the past 15 years, the unacceptable fact is that the majority of the people with disabilities of working age are still unemployed (L. Harris & Associates, 2000). The employers' perspective as to why people with disabilities are not employed is probably quite different than rehabilitation professionals would expect. If a survey were conducted of employers across this nation it would result in a myriad of reasons as to why businesses are reluctant to hire people with disabilities. However, a review of all of these reasons would lead to a predominate theme. That theme would be "fear".

Businesses rarely admit the real reasons that keep them from hiring people with disabilities. But looking behind the excuses given, it will be evident that the primary reason is fear. This article discusses four of the fears that employers face and the approach rehabilitation professionals can take to alleviate these concerns. In this incisive paper the authors suggest strategies for improving the marketing efforts of job placement specialists.

Fear of the Cost Associated with Hiring. The first fear that limits employment opportunities of people with disabilities is the fear of potential unknown costs such as accommodations. While the American Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1995 has helped level the playing field for people with disabilities, there is still an education gap in the workplace. Many employers jump to the conclusion that they would be required to spend tens of thousands of dollars bringing their business up to ADA standards if they were to hire someone with a disability. Few businesses would be willing to invest that kind of money just to bring a new employee on board. The good news is that rarely would companies need to spend that kind of money to meet ADA requirements. In reality, a recent report from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) reveals that 20% of employer accommodations cost nothing and 80% cost less that a $500 (Job Accommodation Network, 1990; 2000).

Fear of Additional Supervision and Loss of Productivity. A second fear in Corporate America is the fear of what affect a person with a disability would have on the workplace. This is much more subtle and can be more difficult to overcome than other employment related concerns. The major components of this fear are best viewed as two-fold. First, employers are concerned about the special attention that may need to be devoted to employees with disabilities. They are concerned about the amount of time the supervisor would need to commit to a worker with a disability and subsequently keep them from their other duties. The second component is the concern regarding the productivity of the employee with a disability. The question foremost in the businessperson's minds is; "Will I need to make productivity concessions for this employee?" The employers concern is often their perceived requirements to have different productivity standards for two employees doing the same job.

The Fear of Being Stuck Forever. The third fear that most businesses experience is likely the fear that causes the most concern for employers and that is what happens if the job doesn't work out. Will the employer be stuck forever paying a substandard employee? It seems that many employers feel that people with disabilities are a protected class. There is a general feeling that if they hire someone
with a disability, it would be difficult to terminate the working relationship even if the new employee cannot perform the essential functions of the job.

Fear of Damaged Goods. Most employers take action on business proposal because it makes good business sense to do so. As a general rule, employers do not look for the charitable side when contemplating a business proposal. Companies do not want to be involved with things that risk the profitability of the business. When businessmen talk about hiring people with disabilities they may mention that they hire from a particular recruitment pool because it's the right thing to do. They make this statement because they understand the business reasons for hiring people with disabilities, not referring to a noble cause or crusade they have undertaken. It is therefore critical that the placement professionals market the assets of people with disabilities. The potential employer needs to understand that he or she is being offered a qualified candidate that can do the job. If appeals are made to the employer's charitable side for the placement, the chances for success are limited. A company will not be willing to hire an individual with a disability if they feel like they are getting damaged goods.

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References

