

SUCCESS STORY

IBM

Creating a Path for Talented Candidates

We can't afford to hire people because of how they look or whether they are disabled or not and carry them as a social responsibility. I've got to make that very clear because none of the guys or gals we bring in are lightweights. They come from computer science engineering and legal backgrounds: They are among the best we can find.

– Jim Sinocchi, Director, HR Communications, IBM

Key Lessons Learned

Create awareness of your company (and access to the best-qualified candidates of the future) by getting involved in the local community and school system through mentoring and internship programs.

Convey the message that all employees, both with and without disabilities, are held to the same high employment and productivity standards.

The most “reasonable accommodation” is not always the least expensive; to avoid resistance to accommodations that may prove costly to a single manager or department, establish a company fund to cover any costs that exceed an established level.

My, How Times Have Changed

Jim Sinocchi sees a significant difference between today's job market for people with disabilities and that of years past:

[Twenty three years ago you] never heard of companies seeking to recruit people with disabilities and now look forward to 2004 and [we are] in bidding wars for people with disabilities. We recently bid for a person who was blind, putting us up against our competitors. It got hot and the stakes were getting higher so I recommended to the team that they pull out of the bidding war, but they refused ... and they did get the person. This person now works for us and wants to be an executive. So when you look at this situation, my have times changed.

Part of the Corporate Culture

Prior to becoming incorporated in the state of New York on June 15, 1911 as the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company (C-T-R), IBM can trace its origins back to developments at the close of the 19th century. According to Ted Childs, Vice President, Global Workforce Diversity,

IBM hired women and blacks in 1899 — 20 years before women were given the right to vote and 10 years before the National

Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY www.earnworks.com

SUCCESS STORY

IBM

Creating a Path for Talented Candidates

Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded. We also hired our first employee with a disability in 1914 — 76 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act; and we were the first company to support the United Negro College Fund in 1944.

We have done things like this before they were requirements or fashionable to do,

States Jim Sinocchi,

It's part of the culture. It's about inclusion, it's about IBM being the type of company that makes us want to have a workplace where the best skilled candidates [want to work] no matter what color, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc It has to do with talent and not ignoring people who could help us achieve our business goals.

Company History

Incorporated in the state of New York on June 5, 1911, the character and culture of IBM has been formed over nearly 100 years of doing business in the field of information-handling. Nearly all of the company's products were designed and developed to record, process, communicate, store and retrieve information. IBM helped pioneer information technology over the years, and it stands today at the forefront of a worldwide industry that is revolutionizing the way in which organiza-

tions and people operate and thrive. IBM boasts almost 320,000 employees worldwide and serves clients in 170 countries.

Internships and Mentoring

When considering outreach to qualified people with disabilities, IBM looked at successful ways to recruit other groups of people to the IBM company. One way was through the development of internships. IBM worked with the American Association of Advancement of Science (AAAS) and created an intern program, which now serves as a "pipeline to employment". Millie DesBiens, Program Manager, Global Workforce Diversity states,

We have to do a lot of things to get the yield. We can't find people with disabilities from just one place. We are now going down to the middle and high school levels with our IBM mentor program. Doing online mentoring in schools to: first, expose young people to IBM; and second to tell them about the IBM paths [to employment]. The goal of the mentoring program is to determine if they have that interest and potentially open some door to what they may consider.

Recently, IBM initiated another pipeline to employment by operating a camp for blind and visually impaired people. Next year the company plans to expand its mentoring program once again by exposing children

Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY www.earnworks.com

SUCCESS STORY

IBM

Creating a Path for Talented Candidates

to the world of technology. At the very least, young people with disabilities will be given tools that will enable them to be more productive and independent. It is the hope of IBM executives that some of them will be interested in a technical career.

Countering Stereotypes

According to DesBiens,

We still have society's view of people with disabilities prior to the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act], which was 'take care of them,' 'they are going to take longer to do things,' 'they won't be as productive,' and 'it's more charity work.' What we've done with the ADA is develop our own strategy which is, 'This is strategic.' Diversity for us is strategic. We feel we are a better company and are more successful because we have the best no matter what group you're in.

Sinocchi adds,

...you have to look at this not as a compassion play, not as a religious play, not as a moral play, but as a business play. When you do that, you get people to shed some of their paradigms in terms of their beliefs." He continues, "When they come in here, the people with disabilities are not exceptions or substandard people. They come in here with the highest skills possible.

Forming Partnerships

IBM has developed long term relationships with several organizations; one of them is the National Business Disability Council in Albertson, New York, which IBM helped to found. They have also worked with the Department of Labor's Office on Disability Employment Policy. More recently they have been partnering with organizations such as the American Association for Persons with Disabilities and other local disability organizations.

Accommodations for All

What we do is accommodate any employee: Whether they are disabled or not. Every employee gets what they need. When it comes to people with disabilities, it may be assistive technology or services. Even if you're not disabled - if there is something you need in order to make your job more productive, you would get it,

Proclaims DesBiens,

The second thing I want to say is that we want to take away any sub-conscious bias a manager might have in choosing to hire someone with a disability vs. someone without a disability. [Money for accommodations] comes from a central fund called 'the cost recovery' and is eventually charged back to the business unit. That means if someone needs an accommoda-

Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network

6858 Old Dominion Drive Suite 250 McLean 22101
1-866-EARN-NOW, V/TTY www.earnworks.com

SUCCESS STORY

IBM Creating a Path for Talented Candidates

tion they get it. This process ensures consistency. Sometimes the manager or others may just look at whether or not [an employee with a disability] needs to be accommodated instead of looking at the emotional changes someone may be going through. So consistency, looking at the whole person, getting what they need, ensures that when they go to their work station they can be evaluated like any other person.

IBM started a new initiative a few years ago called "Building Accommodations". Distributed throughout the company as a global policy letter, this initiative states that, regardless of prevailing legislation, IBM is ensuring that their locations are accessible for employees and customers. This policy letter is structured on the basic

principles of the ADA. IBM has discovered that making accommodations is often just a one-time expense and that the costs are often minimal. Regardless of whether there is an employee with a disability at a given location, IBM has decided to make its facilities accessible in order to become a more receptive company for customers and visitors with disabilities. Sinocchi says,

We think it's a win-win situation. There is an expense associated with that, but the company has accepted that responsibility.

Share Your Story

If you have a success story you would like to share, please email us at:

earn@earnworks.com.