

SUCCESS STORY

MARRIOTT

Training Investment Yields Exemplary Employees

Our partnerships with the National Federation of the Blind have turned out to be a win-win situation for everyone involved.

- L. Kaye Dengel, Senior Vice President, Marriott Global Customer Care & Reservation Sales

Key Lessons Learned



When business needs are for higher retention and lower turnover in the workforce, consider under-utilized labor pools such as people with disabilities.

Develop cooperative relationships with resources such as local disability organizations and state offices of vocational rehabilitation. These relationships can lead to candidates who are better prepared for your organization's jobs and culture, as well as help defray the cost of assistive technologies needed for accommodation.

Include the worker with the disability as well as coworkers in identifying essential job duties and planning job accommodations, so that the accommodations are as effective as possible for all workers.

Spreading the word about success can open up new opportunities for employees with disabilities within the company, as well as within other companies.

Company Background

Marriott International, Inc. is a leading worldwide hospitality company. Its heritage can be traced to a root beer stand opened in Washington DC, in 1927 by J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott. Today, Marriott International has nearly 2,800 lodging properties located in the United States and 69 other countries and territories. Since its opening in 1986, Marriott's Regional Worldwide Reservation Center in Santa Ana, CA has demonstrated a commitment to opening its jobs to people with disabilities. The Center complemented its commitment with partnerships with the Department of Rehabilitation, National Federation of the Blind, Braille Institute and US Veterans Initiatives.

Beginning July 1, 1998, Marriott entered into an agreement with the National Federation of the Blind to become partners in "Job Opportunities for the Blind" (JOB) under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. As a result of this partnership, Marriott Worldwide Reservations hired 138 visually impaired associates in the 3 ½ years of the grant. "We've enjoyed tremendous success with the implementation

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of the Visually Impaired program, and our partnerships with the National Federation of the Blind have turned out to be a win-win situation for everyone involved", stated L. Kaye Dengel, Vice President, North American Reservations. Soon several other Marriott sites began partnering with local resources to recruit visually impaired associates in their own communities.



Kaye Dengel, Senior Vice President, Marriott Global Customer Care & Reservation Sales

— Photo courtesy of Marriott

Assuring Qualified Candidates

In 1999, Marriott established its "Pathways to Independence" program to teach persons with visual impairments and veterans the skills to obtain and retain a job. Kellie Perez, the program's Coordinator, notes, "Retention and productivity tend to be the areas they score highest in." Perez never imagined back when she began her career with Marriott that she herself would be dividing her busy schedule between roles as a Training Manager and the Pathways to Independence Coordinator.

I came to this company over thirteen years ago, and the one thing I remember clearly was my very first day on the job. I noticed that there was a blind associate doing the same job I was getting trained to do! Although he has moved on to another job, he was with our department for over 15 years. This really made an impression on me, especially in an industry where there is high turnover. This individual truly sent a message to me and others as he set a clear example of an associate doing a pretty good job with solid attendance. It only made sense to question, 'Why aren't we hiring more people from that labor pool?'

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Kellie Perez, Training Manager /
Pathways to Independence
Coordinator
— Photo courtesy of Marriott

“Pathways to Independence” focuses on communication skills, appropriate workplace behavior, strong work ethic, dependability, accountability, and addressing personal challenges. Participants must receive 60 hours of classroom instruction and 120 hours of occupational training. Because both classroom and occupational training are conducted at a Marriott business by Marriott managers and supervisors, participants receive up-to-date, reality based training.

While in training, participants are not employees of Marriott, and they do not receive wages or benefits while in the program. In addition, trainees do not displace any current Marriott employees, or cause a

reduction in employee work hours. Once the participants successfully complete the program, they are placed in full-time positions, with benefits, at a Marriott business. To help them on their successful career path, program participants continue to receive appropriate training and counseling.

Successful Placements = Higher Retention, Lower Turnover

Marriott's Regional Worldwide Reservation Center in Santa Ana, CA is one of the locations realizing the benefits of the Pathways program. “We have been able to tap into an unutilized workforce of hard-working, loyal and dedicated associates,” states Sjaloom Stringer, General Manager of the Regional Worldwide Reservation Center.

Pathways Coordinator Kellie Perez notes,

In part it is implementing the general corporate standards but the individuals themselves have made it a success and have paved the way for others. The bottom line goes down to our business needs-higher retention and lower turnover... and we are getting it from those underutilized pools such as the visually impaired group.

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Sjaloom Stringer notes:

The greatest benefit of hiring visually impaired associates is the turnover is substantially lower... This loyalty and dedication brings tremendous value to our Reservation Center.



Sjaloom Stringer, General Manager
— Photo courtesy of Marriott

Center statistics show 6% turnover among Pathways participants, versus 52% overall workforce turnover between 1999 and 2003.

Partners Help Purchase Accommodation Technologies

Assistive technology for persons with visual disabilities is developing rapidly, and Marriott has made considerable invest-

ments in job accommodations for its employees with visual disabilities. Training materials were rewritten to make them accessible to screen-reader technology, enabling the materials to be spoken aloud through computer voice output.

To enable blind employees to read their mail, a costly scanner was required. Because of its ongoing partnership with Marriott, the Braille Institute donated the equipment to Marriott's Reservation Center, along with a CCTV, which allowed employees with partial sight to read their mail as well.

As a result of its partnership with California's Department of Rehabilitation, Marriott's Pathways to Independence program receives \$3600 for each person hired who is a client of the Department of Rehabilitation.

Promoting Employees with Disabilities

Kellie Perez recalls a recent story:

We had an associate who went through our Pathways Program, was a regular Reservations Sales Associate and then promoted to our regional desk, where they represent hotels in the western region. He was very bright, technically savvy, but unable to see. He came to me one day

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and said he was interested in the regional lead position, so I went to discuss this opportunity with the current regional lead person. Needless to say, the individual thought he was a great guy but felt he would not be able to do the job because he would need to see to complete the paperwork.

Perez reported that she was very intrigued by this response and was up to the challenge of proving that the associate could do the same job despite his visual impairment.

By analyzing the entire job, we were able to devise ways for the individual to perform the work, but it also impacted the work of the entire unit for the better. One simple change we made that created greater efficiency was setting up email which also includes fax and print directly from the computer. This alone made a huge difference for the job. So by helping him into that position, which he has successfully been in for about 6 or 7 months, it has also improved the job efficiency as well as overall productivity for the entire unit...The reason I love that story is because people are too quick to say 'No, that's not going to happen' before they thoroughly consider the options available to them to make something work. This particular blind associate is now one of their strongest leads in the department!

Spreading Success Stories across the Company

Kellie Perez explains that success in Santa Ana has created a wave of response among other reservation centers under the Marriott umbrella:

We used to only have three centers that hired individuals with disabilities, specifically individuals with visual impairments. What started as a way to spread the word among the reservation centers has quickly proven to be even more successful beyond what they had dreamed...We spread the word with our own reservation centers by creating a video of what we do here, along with a handbook on adaptive equipment and who to contact with questions.

According to Perez, Marriott Worldwide Reservations is currently in the process of implementing the visually impaired program at each of their 12 North American Reservation Centers.

Spreading the Word to Other Companies

Sjaloom Stringer and Kellie Perez report that Marriott works actively in the community to look for opportunities to employ associates with barriers to success:

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Often, we have companies seek us out to learn about our programs and inquire how we have successfully implemented recruiting and hiring plans for individuals with disabilities...Unfortunately, after meeting with us, many just take the information and never do anything with it.

Which is very frustrating, according to Perez.

However, if you stick with your message and believe in what you do, it will eventually click with others businesses, such as our work with Disney Travel.

After numerous meetings and more than a year and a half of outreach from Marriott's Pathways program, Disney Travel hired its first three employees with visual impairments.

Not only did the outreach activities result in more people being hired at our site, and across various Marriott Reservation Centers, but also with other companies, such as Disney Travel.

Notes Perez.

Program Perspective

Sjaloom Stringer adds corporate perspective to this story:

Our associates have courage, pride and determination to make this program a success. Yes we have to do things differently and adapt our work environment for our visually impaired associates, but that is nothing compared to the impact we have been able to make on someone's life... we are giving back to our communities, while at the same time reaping the benefits of a work team that is dedicated, loyal, dependable, and most of all, successful. A win-win situation has been realized for all involved in this initiative.

Share Your Story

If you have a success story you would like to share, please email us at: earn@earnworks.com.

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