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DID YOU KNOW...?

EARN and the National Organization for Diversity in Sales and Marketing, Inc. (NODSM) are hosting a series of webinars to help you understand the dynamics of recruiting and retaining people with disabilities. The next webinar, entitled *Access is More Than Brick and Mortar: The Basics of Website Accessibility*, will provide background on the laws regarding website accessibility, as well as an overview of what's needed to ensure that the site can be accessed by all. The webinar will take place on January 14th, 2009. [Visit EARNWorks' NODSM partner page](#) for more information.

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) will be hosting a free webinar on January 8th, 2009 to provide guidance on their recent directive regarding the accessibility of Federal contractors' online application systems and technical assistance tools. While the webinar is free, space is limited. [Reserve your webinar seat](#) now.

Creating an Inclusive Corporate Culture for People with Cognitive Disabilities

This is the second article of a two-part series. Please refer to EARN's November 2008 newsletter to read the first segment.

Nearly twenty years following the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there are still many misconceptions regarding the cost of accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace. However, according to the Department of Labor's [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN) service's multi-year customer satisfaction survey, almost half of the accommodations needed by employees and job applicants with disabilities cost absolutely nothing. Of those accommodations that do cost, the typical expenditure by employers is around \$500.

In order to hire the best person for the job, it is good business sense to provide the tools that all employees need during all aspects of employment. The process to determine what is needed offers an informal opportunity for the employer, employment support agency (when applicable), and the person with the disability to jointly explore accommodations that will best enable the individual to perform his or her job. During this process, the job coach or rehabilitation counselor can assist in communication, and the employee can be an active participant. Individuals with cognitive disabilities usually understand their own limitations, but may be sensitive to being identified as different or limited.

Considerations may include:

- Assigning and matching jobs that appropriately challenge and engage the individual;
- Speaking directly to the individual regarding matters of concern;
- Encouraging natural social relationships with co-workers; and
- When using adaptations, job modifications or other supports, making sure the individual with the disability is included in deciding which kinds of aids will be useful.

Initial Training and Support

In cases where an employment support service has been part of the recruitment process, the support worker or job coach will often accompany the individual into the workplace to help determine the most appropriate fashion to introduce that person to the initial training and orientation process. The following may be helpful procedures:

- Break the job down into separate tasks;
- Provide instructions in a format accessible to the person;
- Show/demonstrate how to do a task; and
- Check that the person has understood and, if necessary, repeat instructions.

Often an orientation period may involve shadowing a more experienced employee. This works particularly well for persons with cognitive disabilities.

Helping a Person with Cognitive Disabilities Fit into the Workplace

There are often unwritten rules in a workplace that may be difficult for a person with a cognitive disability to ascertain. Given these circumstances, it is important for colleagues to be aware that the new individual may need additional time to adjust to the work milieu, especially to understand the nuances and non-verbal cues. It is also important to respect an employee's right to confidentiality about his or her disability and any accommodations that are required. With this in mind, management can set an example, establishing a strong culture in the workplace that respects people's privacy and personal information.

Participating in company programs and communicating appropriately with co-workers are important aspects of continued employment. An employee might need added assistance to be included in company social events, or partake in in-service training or online courses, and to be considered for job advancement.

These supports may include:

- Encouragement to attend social events;
- Help to understand "work etiquette" to improve co-worker interactions;
- Accessibility of in-service training activities; and
- Ensure awareness of advancement opportunities within the company.

Team Building and Developing Productive Working Relationships

The attitudes of the people in the workplace will greatly impact the success of the employee with a cognitive disability. If someone is unaware of the nature of the disability, that person may take offense to an inappropriate comment or behavior. And when not accepted as a team member, the person with a disability may feel isolated, affecting work performance. Once the context of the behavior is understood, people with cognitive disabilities can help to create positive attitudes toward diversity and a better appreciation of what it's like to live with a disability. In time, colleagues feel that the person with a different learning style has something to offer them as well. For example, people in management have indicated that working with a person with a cognitive disability has improved their training and supervisory skills and helped them develop new approaches for teaching other employees how to do their jobs better. Lynn Watts, a staffing and placement specialist and job coach at [Jewish Social Service Agency's](#) (JSSA) Employment and Career Services Program, describes this as a team approach that "connects all the dots, creating a win-win situation and a successful work environment."

People with cognitive disabilities work best in a corporate culture that values every employee as an individual, embracing diversity and uniqueness, and discouraging disability myths and stereotyping. It is an atmosphere that encourages every person to excel and contribute, improving productivity and company morale.

GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK

IF YOU HAVE AN EARN SUCCESS STORY, TELL US ABOUT IT. WE WOULD LIKE TO FEATURE YOUR STORY IN THIS NEWSLETTER AND ON OUR WEB SITE.

E-MAIL YOUR STORY TO:
EARN@EARNWORKS.COM

EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

- [DisabilityInfo.gov](#)
- [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#)
- [Ticket to Work](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [National Organization on Disability](#)

INFORMATION YOU CAN USE

The Department of Labor (DOL) recently issued a new Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) poster, as well as revised optional forms based on revisions to the law published in November 2008. [Visit DOL's website](#) for more information or to download the poster or the forms.

EARN SUPPORT

EARN is funded by the [U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy](#).

EARN is managed and operated by [CESSI, Division of Axiom](#).

EARN offers employers free consultation and recruiting services for successful workplace integration of people with disabilities. To sign up with EARN and to learn more about EARN services, go to www.earnworks.com or call us toll-free at:

1-866-EARN-NOW (1-866-327-6669, V/TTY)