

SUCCESS STORY

OPERATION JOB MATCH Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers

When people find out you have a disability, some people underestimate you.

– Gloria Alexander, Operation Job Match Client

Key Lessons Learned



Interact with employers on a regular basis, whether by offering services such as disability awareness training or hosting luncheons and other networking events.

Urge employers to broaden their recruiting methods to include alternative sources such as EARN.

Organization Background

Steve Nissen is Program Director of the National MS Society's Operation Job Match (OJM) in Washington, D.C., an employment assistance and support program for individuals with adult-onset disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, lupus, arthritis, and spinal cord injuries. Steve says, "OJM works with clients to make informed choices regarding employment, assessing the impact of their disabilities in the workplace, managing symptoms, understanding rights and responsibilities under the law, and handling disclosure and accommodation strategies." To learn more about Operation Job Match, please visit: www.msandyou.org/ojm/ or contact Steve Nissen at: SNissen@MSandYou.org.

Serving Two Clients

Steve enrolled with EARN in 2000 and has been an active member of EARN's provider network ever since. Steve sees himself as serving two separate client groups: jobseekers with disabilities and the employer community. Among other things, Steve assists jobseekers with developing job seeking skills, role-playing for interviews, providing job leads, and reviewing résumés and cover letters. For employers, he maintains a job bank, provides disability awareness training and guidance on key federal laws, and advises managers on disability and accommodation concerns. He also regularly networks by hosting employers at free breakfasts and luncheons, collaborating with other local providers, and attending community events.

Matching a Candidate

When Steve received an email from EARN in April 2005 recruiting for a customer service representative, he immediately thought of his client, Gloria Alexander. He was working with Gloria on finding a job in her field and collaborating with Gloria's counselor at Montgomery Works career one stop center in Maryland. Gloria had

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over 10 years of customer service experience and it looked like a great match based on Gloria's skills and interests and what the employer was looking for.

He contacted Gloria to see if she was interested in applying for the job and to get her permission to refer her to EARN. He then emailed EARN Gloria's résumé and spoke with EARN's Employment Specialist, Rochelle Patterson, about the job. They agreed that Gloria appeared to be a good candidate and that, although the employer wanted a higher degree than Gloria possessed, it was worth a shot.

From the Employer's Perspective

Joe Belger, Customer Support Manager for Star Compliance in Rockville, Maryland, was the employer posting the position with EARN. Star Compliance is a software development company for financial institutions conducting securities trading to assist them with complying with Securities and Exchange Commission rules. He says he first heard of EARN from a friend working at U.S. DoL's Office of Disability Employment Policy and decided to take advantage of its free recruiting assistance when he was tasked to build a customer service department for Star Compliance. He was looking for viable

candidates with good customer service skills to interact with the company's clients.

Joe received a couple of candidate referrals from EARN and decided to follow up with Gloria based on her years of experience in customer service. Gloria says she was pleased to hear back from the employer and worked with her counselors on preparing for the interview. The preparation paid off and Joe was impressed with her enthusiasm for the job. After passing a mandatory background check, Gloria was hired as a customer service representative in May 2005.

Succeeding in the Workplace

Gloria is now on the front line of customer service, handling incoming inquiries from customers with software questions and following up until cases are closed. She says, "I handle the back and forth with IT, professionals, and customers, and keep their cases open until their problems are solved." What she likes most is the work atmosphere, stating her "boss is excellent" and human resources has been a "big help." Joe says that Gloria is working out very well and has been instrumental in training a person they recently hired.

Gloria says her disability of multiple sclerosis has not had much impact on her ability to get her job done. What she notices most at work are some tremors and that

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she doesn't pick up on things as fast as she used to, although she says that might be due to age. She's managed her symptoms by getting up to move around so her "muscles don't lock up" and is exploring medication options. While she hasn't asked for any accommodations, she has an appointment with Maryland's state vocational rehabilitation services to see what her options are.

While Gloria has not requested any accommodations, she did decide to disclose to her employer. The reason she gives is that she had assistance writing her application because of tremors and she "just wanted to get it out in the open." She was pleased that both her boss and human resources responded by asking her if she needed anything. She told them she did not need anything more to get the job done at this time but is now comfortable coming to them if circumstances change.

Challenges for Employees with Disabilities

Both Steve and Gloria say one of the biggest challenges they face are pre-conceived notions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do. Steve says that despite laws such as the ADA that protect against discrimination and research showing higher retention and productivity rates for employees with disabilities, attitudinal barriers still exist. Even though Gloria says her experience disclosing her disability was positive, she would have hidden it if she could have: "When people find out you have a disability, some people underestimate you."

Steve says another struggle is to get employers to broaden their recruiting methods to include alternative sources such as Operation Job Match and EARN. He states: "Usually employers do standard recruiting through Monster and other sites but there are additional [free] resources out there that can help them locate candidates and diversify their workforce."

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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