Florida Provider Network

University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support
Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

Study: Hiring Yields Business Advantages

Customers Want Businesses to Hire People with Disabilities

Dozens of studies exist that show employers' positive perceptions of workers with disabilities. In the last decade, marketing experts have urged job developers to use these studies to encourage the employers in their area to hire people with disabilities. The advice pays off – business owners listen to other business owners.

Perhaps only one other group has as much influence on employers as their peers – their customers. Until recently, very little research existed about how customers perceive businesses that hire people with disabilities. But a new study by UMass Boston's Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE), in collaboration with the America's Strength Foundation sheds light on this influential group.

Three-fourths of the 803 customers surveyed had direct experience with people with disabilities in a work environment. Of these, an overwhelming **92% felt more favorable toward businesses that hire individuals with disabilities**. And **87% agreed they would prefer to give their business to**

Application for Year Two Pilot Sites To Be Offered Soon

Trainings Completed for Year One of Supported Employment Effective Practices Project

The Pilot Site Teams for the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council funded Supported Employment Training Project have each completed their five, three day live training sessions and have developed action plans in order to implement effective practices in Supported Employment. The project is now solely focused on technical assistance for implementation.

The primary technical assistance activities will address the implementation of Discovery. Discovery is a structured process that involves exposing an individual to real environments in order to identify likes, dislikes, capacities, relationships and connections. The initial environments and people involved are based individual interest and those involved in the person's life. The process does not stop there – one place and/or person leads to another.

Below: J.B. Black from Florida APD discusses state supported employment initiatives to a seminar in Pensacola in May, 2006.

Join the Florida Provider Discussion Board on the Web:
http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/

Tammara Geary, Griffin-Hammis Associates, works with Pensacola Supported Employment providers to develop a task analysis to put away a folding table.

Hiring People with Disabilities = Social Justice

companies that hire people with disabilities. Among those surveyed, hiring people with disabilities ranked third behind offering health insurance to all employees and protecting the environment as an indicator of a company's commitment to social justice.

"The uniqueness of this research is its focus on the consumer," said Gary Siperstein, director of CSDE and lead author of the study. "In business, consumer interests drive corporate decision-making. We've been able to demonstrate that the majority of consumers favor companies who hire individuals with disabilities. Companies who respond to these findings will not only help individuals with disabilities lead more fulfilling and productive lives through employment, they will also improve the company's brand image."

This is a powerful message, and one that job developers need to get to local employers. **Action steps:**

• Summarize the study findings in agency brochures.
• Include the source of the study for added credibility.
• Mention the study and its implications in verbal meetings or presentations with employers.
• Prepare a press release for your local media about the study and what it means for local employers.
• Do a simple survey of customers in your area and their attitudes toward companies that hire people with disabilities. Use results to supplement the national study.

"Employers across the US are finding that there are many business benefits associated with the employment of people with disabilities," said Katherine McCary, president of US Business Leadership Network. "People with disabilities have much to contribute, and businesses are taking notice by proactively and successfully including disability as a diversity strategy." And their customers like it.

Source: G. Siperstein, N. Romano, A. Mohler and R. Parker, "A National Survey of Consumer Attitudes Towards Companies That Hire People with Disabilities," *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2006, IOS Press. Study conducted by UMass Boston's Center for Social Development and Education, in collaboration with the America's Strength Foundation and The Gallup Organization, with assistance from the Center for Survey Research.

SCIETT Training Project Update...

The more activities, locations and people involved the more diverse the thought and the richer the information gleaned. Discovery should not be viewed as an assessment and does not ask, "What job or business would be best?" It does, however, provide those supporting the person towards employment with incredibly valuable information in regards to potential job matches and supports systems.

The technical assistance has already begun with both pilot sites and will continue through the fall. The agencies participating in the implementation of Discovery are:

• Agency for Persons with Disabilities – District 1
• ARC Gateway – Pensacola
• ARC of Palm Beach – West Palm Beach
• Escambia County School District – Pensacola
• Gulfstream Goodwill – West Palm Beach
• Palm Beach Habilitation Center – West Palm Beach
• Southeastern Vocational Services – Pensacola
• Vocational Rehabilitation – Area 1

The highlight of the Discovery technical assistance and implementation has been the involvement of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Area 1 office. The Area 1 office has been working with the pilot site from the start of the project and continues to be committed to the project's efforts. VR is using Discovery and evaluating it's effectiveness in determining individual interests, capacities and employment goals. The Area 1 office continues to meet with the project staff and the pilot site agencies and is currently in discussion about establishing a rate for Discovery.

In addition to Discovery, the West Palm Beach Pilot site will begin receiving technical assistance on self-employment. Three individuals will be supported in starting their own businesses.

The training materials used with the pilot sites, on both Discovery and Self-Employment, can be obtained online at:

www.flse.net/flprovidernetwork/fpn.asp.

The project has been approved for continuation for a second year by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. The second year of the project

Job Support
Comes in All Shapes and Sizes

By David Hagner & Dale DiLeo

Employees receive different types of support and assistance from different sources. Support is an expansive concept, and is important at work at different times for different reasons. In a particular situation, support may or may not be related to an individual's disability, and may or may not be perceived as above and beyond the support that other employees receive.

An important distinction can be made between instrumental support and expressive or affective support Instrumental support is aimed at solving a specific problem or achieving a specific result. A baker may need the assistance of a coworker to pour a large container of batter because it "takes more than two hands." Or an office clerk may go to a supervisor for clarification of a new procedure.

Instrumental support may extend beyond work itself to other areas as well. Employees help each get back and forth to work, find apartments, get by until payday with a loan, and in countless other ways.

But instrumental support is not where job support ends. Because workplaces have people, and people have ups and downs, evolving relationships, emotions, personal crises, and the like, affective support is also needed. When someone is depressed, worried, or anxious, coworkers may express comfort, concern, tell a joke, or offer advice. Affective support may simply express solidarity, caring or group cohesion. Not only does this help productivity, it strengthens the human aspect of a workplace.

Another important distinction can be made between routine and episodic support. Routine support needs occur predictably and relatively often, such as help in stacking heavy boxes at the end of each shift. Episodic support is needed less regularly or relatively infrequently, such as help loading boxes onto a truck for a special shipment.

Still another way of viewing support is to understand the source. Support can be personal or organizational, and can come from within the setting or from an external source.

Internal Support

Individual coworkers and supervisors within a work setting, as they go about the business of being together through each work day, provide personal support. Some companies, and especially many larger organizations, also sponsor their own programs of employee support. With adequate support, companies can increase the work performance of employees. Some of the more common organizational supports are:

- Employee assistance programs
- Skill development workshops
- Wellness programs
- Employee recognition programs
- Mentorship programs
- Company parties and picnics
- Sponsorship of bowling and other sports leagues
- Retirement and outplacement counseling

External Support

Families and friends support employees from outside the workplace by helping with getting ready for work, with transportation, and by listening to an employee about the events of the day. Vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs also fall into the external-organizational category, as do a number

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Job Supports

of types of consulting firms, especially human resource development consultants, and labor unions.

Employees with disabilities, like others, need and receive both instrumental and expressive support from coworkers and supervisors, from companies, and from outside organizations. Some workers with disabilities need intensive or specialized support some of the time, including external services from a human service agency.

In any satisfactory employment situation, most support will be internal. It only appears that people with disabilities need a lot of external support if we are used to the support coming from an external agency source. If someone is sad, we may think they need to talk to a counselor. If someone forgets what to do, we may think they need a retraining program, a more structured environment, or some other special procedure. In our own lives, we handle most sadness or forgetting without professionals, and we know how to handle a situation where a coworker of ours is sad or forgets what to do.

When people with disabilities receive on-the-job support we may think that something special is going on. To the participants in the setting, giving and receiving support is something they may not even be very conscious of. As one coworker put it, "We don't do anything special -- we just give whatever help is needed."

If the employer has been involved in employee training, and working relationships have developed on the job, ongoing support will not be a separate issue. People who know each other and depend on each other will support each other. One study of supportive coworkers found that support provided to employees with severe disabilities by their coworkers included:

• Help managing time, including pacing and knowing when it's time to finish one task and start another;

• Feedback on performance and reassurance that the employee is doing a good job;

• Attending to the impact of personal problems or life crises on work performance and helping the employee work through a "bad day;"

• Explanations and assistance dealing with personnel, workplace layout, or other changes at the site;

• Modifying or shifting work tasks to find the best match with the employee's interests and abilities.

Coworkers do not view support of this nature as burdensome or especially different from the support they give to anyone else. And they do not view support as a one-way street. Supported employees are in turn a source of support for their coworkers.

Sometimes We Just Need to Get Out of the Way

When effective supports are available at a worksite, the best "service" an employment consultant can provide is to let them happen and not get in the way. Other times support systems within the worksite will not develop spontaneously but will need to be partly "engineered" by a support consultant. Other support resources may need to be adapted or supplemented. And some individuals do present emotional, physical, intellectual, or behavioral challenges that call for specialized expertise or skill which must either be taught to internal support persons or be provided externally, by agency staff. When support is provided externally we speak of providing support services.

When support is simply available at the worksite with no particular assistance from outside we speak of it as natural support. When some effort has to be put into developing or accommodating internal support resources to suit someone's needs, we sometimes refer to facilitating natural supports.

Both companies and employment support agencies can make a range of support options available as needed by the employee and the setting. Current federal supported employment regulations require that a source of ongoing, or extended support for a prospective supported employee be identified. Extended support usually involves agency staff contacts at the job site with supported employees related to maintaining the job at least twice per month, with allowance for exceptions regarding location and numbers of contacts depending on individual circumstances.

But the source of support does not necessarily have to be a traditional disability organization. And ongoing support partnerships can be maintained without a formal arrangement or official designation as "supported employment." According to federal regulations, support may be provided from a variety of different sources, includes agency staff "as well as other qualified individuals, including coworkers, through natural supports." The frequency and type of support beyond the minimum twice monthly contact should be dictated solely by the needs of the individual and the setting.

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