

Disability Inclusion in the Workplace: Recognizing Talent Value in People with Disabilities Is Not Charity, It Is Common Sense

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There is no more critical conversation about disability inclusion than the ROI of Disability Employment—the Return on Investment AND the Return on Influence. Of equal importance is that businesses and hiring managers engage and participate fully in this conversation. Recently, disability inclusion conversations have expanded from the decades-old tales of heroism in the face of hardship or with the exclusive tone of pity at the watercooler to policies and action items for large corporations and small businesses alike. The ROI of disability inclusion should be a factor in hiring every new employee in your firm.

Just because a candidate may be a person with a disability does not mean that you—the business owner or hiring manager—must accept him or her to be employed by your company. The individual must meet the same qualifications as other candidates and/or employees. Individuals who wish to be participants in your company must be able to perform the essential functions of the position with or without accommodations. The ROI of disability inclusion is no different than ROI in other business applications. It is common sense. It is a performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency of an investment, albeit human capital instead of financial capital. The grouping of assets in this human capital portfolio of investment includes:

- Educating all employees and stakeholders on disabilities etiquette, language, and work habits
- Improving physical accessibility (universal design) to buildings, offices, cubicles, public areas, restrooms, and outdoor areas
- Raising awareness within your firm of hidden disabilities and how to support people working with chronic health conditions, serious illnesses, mental health issues, nonvisible, and temporary disabilities
- Supporting disability-owned businesses when vetting suppliers, services providers, and consultants

Many companies and hiring managers are unaware of the positive impacts of employees with disabilities. I do not think the lack of awareness stems from a conscious opposition, but more from a lack of exposure to people with disabilities, particularly in the workplace.

The myths and concerns to a business or hiring manager are exacerbated by:

1. A lack of familiarity with disability inclusion
2. The absence of a good fit between job candidate/employee and employer including the company culture

3. Insufficient understanding of accommodation of disabilities
4. The scarcity of time to become acquainted with the ROI of disability inclusion and related information

The last mention on the list, scarcity of time to become acquainted with the ROI of disability inclusion and related information is a human resources and business owner velleity and is universal. Businesses, especially small businesses, are inundated with many tasks to simply keep the doors open and maintain a balance sheet that allows the owner to sleep at night. Time and energy are arguably the biggest deterrents for business owners and hiring managers in creating a more comprehensively represented workforce. The expanded conversations about disability inclusion can only benefit these businesses. The more information that is available, and the frequency with which that information appears in the news media and social media, the more cognizant businesses and hiring managers become. Because knowledge is power, employees with disabilities will no longer be an untapped pool of talent for employers. By looking more closely at the first items on the list will help alleviate the burden of the last thing on the list and gain better perspective on the ROI of disability inclusion in the workplace.

From a business's bottom-line, common sense perspective, we know that employees with disabilities reduce turnover costs, increase productivity, and do not impact company healthcare benefits expenditures. From an economic perspective, we know that individuals with disabilities contribute more than \$1.4 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Gainfully employed people with disabilities experience reduced or eliminated reliance on public assistance programs such as Social Security Insurance (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid, food stamps, and other local assistance programs. The oft-overlooked benefit to gainfully employed people with disabilities is quantifiably improved self-esteem and quality of life.

For more information on common sense disability inclusion strategies, please read [*The DisABILITY A-Player Plan: Employee of the Month Every Month.*](#)