

The Newsletter From The Cleveland Society For Human Resource Management

Working with a Disability Is Still Working Gary Convertino, Ed.D., PHR

Close your eyes... keep them closed. Now go ahead and send an e-mail, work on your computer, or make a call on your cell phone. People who are blind or visually impaired do this every day, and with limited interruption to their daily lives. How? With Assistive Technology, using adaptive programs such as J.A.W.S., which turns written words on a computer screen into spoken words. This is just one of the many adaptive technology items available to people who are visually impaired or blind to help them access computer and other technology that might not have been otherwise available. This technology allows for people who are visually impaired or blind to gain meaningful employment. Many today work in call centers, office environments, and banks, to name a few. Employment is not an issue to those who are given the opportunity to prove their skill set, with limited accommodation. Cheryl Garcia, a blind employee using assistive technology at an area call center, states; "Having a job, it gives me a sense of I'm doing something for myself. It helps me to feel better about me" (Stoessel, 2011).

Assistive Technology is not just for the blind or visually impaired. The folding wheelchair, designed in 1933, and technologically advanced for its time, is still the most used item today to help people with various motor disabilities gain access to employment opportunities (Bellis, 2012). The cost to an employer to hire someone with this accommodation is limited. Someone in a wheelchair still has access to a desk, to filing cabinets, and is able to perform many office duties independently, and with little accommodation.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is an umbrella term that encompasses methods of communication for those people with impairments or restrictions on their ability to speak or write. Those using these devices can create words using speech synthesis, that are capable of storing hundreds of phrases and words (Gillam, Marquardt, 2000). There are many writers and poets who have used AAC to create their articles for newspapers and literary platforms throughout the world, including the writer of the "My Left Foot", Christy Brown, and movie critic Roger Ebert (LaPointe, 2009).

Certainly there is an investment in hiring people with disabilities, such as wheelchair ramps, special computerized technology and even staff support. But, the diversity outcomes, and community support in offering gainful employment to all, via ethnic diversity, race diversity, gender diversity, or disability, proves a company's dedication to people, and profit.

OK, go ahead and open your eyes now...

For further information on this topic, visit the Workforce Readiness webpage at Clevelandshrm.com

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