

Loyalty and Above Average Performance: An Employer's Dream!

Although there have been recent shifts in the economy, the nation's unemployment rate remains low and employers in the manufacturing industry continue to feel the effects of the resulting labor crunch. Fortunately, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in the manufacturing industry is expected to increase 0.3 percent by 2010.

According to Manpower Inc.'s 2002 first quarter survey of 16,000 firms nationwide, 27% of the manufacturing companies stated that they planned to add jobs between July and September of 2002. Jeffery Joerres, Chairman and Chief Executive of Glendale, Milwaukee - based Manpower, stated that the trend has definitely turned. Last year the number of new hires in many companies was on the way down, but this year hiring has increased. The manufacturing sector improved the most, with 27% of the manufacturers expecting to increase hiring in the third quarter.

Some employers in the manufacturing industry have looked beyond traditional labor sources and focused recruitment efforts on qualified, yet under-represented workers - skilled candidates who happen to have disabilities. Persons with disabilities comprise one-fifth of the population, yet are not equally represented in the workforce. While unemployment of the general population is low (about 5.8%), 65% of Americans with disabilities - half of whom want to work - are unemployed.

Hiring workers with disabilities has its benefits with respect to retention, but also with regards to job performance levels. According to a BusinessWeek Online article "The New Workforce," a 30-year study by DuPont, revealed that workers with disabilities demonstrated a level of job performance that was equal to or better than their non-disabled peers. The study indicated that workers with disabilities had a 90% above-average job performance. In addition, their safety and attendance records were also far above the norm.

Disabled Workers in the Manufacturing Industry

Marv Van Wyk, Corporate HR Manager for Vermeer Manufacturing, which designs and manufactures quality construction equipment, is pleased with the success of its employees with disabilities, "Persons with disabilities have the inner desire to succeed.

They have the drive to not allow their disabilities to limit them in any way! Their quality of work is equally as good as any other employee at Vermeer. Our employees with disabilities work in all aspects of the company, from the assembly line to running the machinery." According to Van Wyk, there are 17 persons with disabilities currently working at Vermeer, 12 of whom have over 10 years of experience.

Medtronic Physio-Control (MPC) develops, manufactures, sells and services the renowned LIFEPAK® defibrillator/monitors and automated external defibrillators. MPC has employed people with disabilities since 1976. In 1983 MPC committed to hiring people with developmental disabilities.

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Ladrene Coyne, Senior Production Supervisor, at MPC stated that, "We started hiring disabled workers in 1983. At the time we hired eight disabled workers with developmental disabilities. Nearly all of these workers have been with our company for over 16 years. They have a great deal of loyalty, and are extremely competent in all aspects of their jobs. Their exceptional attendance record and work experience has added to the value of our workforce."

MPC's commitment doesn't stop there. They are the lead company for the Washington State Business Leadership Network (BLN). The BLN is a national network of industry leaders who recognize that corporate success in the New Economy hinges on a diverse workforce that includes employees with disabilities. BLN chapters are formed on a local level to help employers in their state or region access this often overlooked population of valuable workers.

Gale Schmidt, President of Accessibility2000, a company that builds modular ramps for businesses and residences, has had success hiring people with disabilities. Gail, also the Chair of the Oregon BLN, hired a woman in 1999 with multiple sclerosis to work in the fabrication unit at Accessibility2000. In Gail's words, "She was the epitome of what you want in an employee. She was enthusiastic, hard working, energetic, and always contributed great ideas for the company's growth."

The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), offers several programs that employers in the manufacturing industry can

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access to help satisfy their need for qualified workers. ODEP's mission is to communicate, coordinate and promote public and private efforts to enhance the employment of people with disabilities. Additional information about ODEP is available on the Internet at www.dol.gov/dol/odep/.

Available Resources:

The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy offers the following programs to help promote best disability employment practices:

The Business Leadership Network (BLN) is a national business-led endeavor of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The BLN offers participating employers resources for recruiting candidates with disabilities, information on disability employment issues, recognition for best disability employment practices, and exposure to an untapped market for goods and services. Currently, there are Business Leadership Networks in 31 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. To join the BLN or for more information contact: Carol Dunlap (dunlap-carol@dol.gov or 202-376-6200). Visit the national BLN Web site at: www.usbln.org.

The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP): a free database of more than 1,300 college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are ready to enter the workforce. Visit the WRP Web site at: www.wrpjobs.com, for more information or contact Kelly Egan (kegan@higherpotential.com) or 1-888-590-8808 X1011).

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is an international free consulting service providing information to help employers accommodate workers with disabilities, and understand the employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. JAN has made over 250,000 job accommodations to date and estimates that about 70 percent of accommodations cost employers less than \$500. JAN helps employers hire, retain, and promote qualified workers with disabilities. JAN can also help reduce worker's compensation and other insurance costs, address issues pertaining to accessibility, and help identify accommodation options and cost-effective solutions.

For a free consultation, call 1-800-526-4698 (Voice/TTY). Visit the JAN Web site of over 250 links to information on specific disabilities,

accommodations, legislation, selected EEOC documents, and much more at: www.jan.wvu.edu.

Employer Assistance Referral Network (EARN) is a national toll-free service which provides employers with a direct connection to agencies in their own communities that place job ready candidates with disabilities. EARN also provides technical assistance on issues such as tax credits, disability-related laws, lawful job interviewing techniques, recruitment and hiring strategies and reasonable accommodations.

To learn more call 1-866-EarnNow (1-866-327-6669), Monday - Friday from 9:00am - 10:00pm EST, or visit the Web site at: www.earnworks.com.