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THE LABOR CHALLENGE

LAST CHANCE JOB OR FIRST CHOICE CAREER?

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ALTERNATIVE LABOR POOL

Older workers and the disabled represent tremendous sources of talent, but both groups have special needs and considerations.

BY JIM PETERS

Dale Simmons, director of convention services at the Sheraton St. Louis Hotel, learned that the hospitality industry is not always such a hospitable place, at least for people with disabilities. While on a camping trip, he was walking to a lake to watch the sunrise when he slipped and fell over a small cliff, breaking both ankles. In a matter of minutes, Dale Simmons became one of 35 million Americans with a disability.

When Simmons returned to work, he was in the wheelchair which he would use for the next three years of his life. In retrospect, he recalls that he had attitudes not unlike many other hospitality professionals about people with special accommodation needs. "I was concerned, and thought we were an accessible hotel. We complied with all the regulations. I never realized what people with disabilities go through until I had my accident."

Fortunately for Simmons, he was able to continue to work at the Sheraton Hotel. His experience not only enlightened him to the importance of creating a barrier-free environment for all guests, but also to the need for offering employment opportunities to people with disabilities.

Those in the hospitality industry who implement optimum accessibility standards reflecting state-of-the-art developments and attitudes will benefit not only from the patronage of the growing number of disabled professional and pleasure travelers. Barrier-free properties will also attract the growing number of elderly, who, even without disease or traumatic disability, face reduced physical mobility. In addition,

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tion, barrier-free work environments will allow the industry to tap another labor force to meet growing personnel shortages. And finally, barrier-free environments reduce the risk of an accident occurring which would disable a guest or employee.

ACCESSIBILITY. The Decade of the Disabled (1983-1992) has now reached its midpoint. While the hospitality industry has been wrestling with alcohol liability, no-smoking regulations, and ingredient labeling, it has not fully felt the effects of massive changes occurring in our society regarding accessibility. Until recently, people with disabilities have been denied access to buildings, to transportation and appropriate housing, to education and employment, and to information.

Federal legislation has now made it clear that the country will no longer tolerate second-class citizenship for its disabled population. Section 504 of PL 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, has mandated equal rights for disabled people; PL 94-142, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act, guarantees an appropriate education for every disabled child in the country.

Through the end of this century and beyond, a new generation of people with disabilities will be better educated, better employed, and—with tight-knit grass-roots advocacy groups—better organized to lobby for their rights.

Who are the disabled? While the immediate reaction is to think of people in wheelchairs, this group represents a small percentage of those having special assistance needs. The visually or hearing impaired, stroke victims, arthritis sufferers, amputees, people with Alzheimer's disease, post-polio victims, people with mental retardation and mental illness, and those recovering from heart disease or accidents are just part of the disabled population.

Estimates vary as to the number of people with disabilities in this country, but many place the total at about 35 million. There are currently more than 62 million people over the age of 50 who are well educated, healthy and growing in number as the baby boom generation ages. The hospitality industry's professional planning for the future will have to recognize the importance of embracing the market

Since the industry
is vulnerable to
shifts in population,
it makes sense
to tap every source.

composed of people with disabilities and the mature and aging population.

MOST DIFFICULT ISSUE. According to John Cauley, president of Friendly Restaurant Corp., Wilbraham, MA, "The shortage of labor is the most difficult issue facing the hospitality industry today." Although the problem is currently regional, Cauley notes that it is spreading throughout the country, as the number of teenagers nationwide declines. "The solution to the problem is to reduce turnover. The way to do this is to become a better employer, pay more, and introduce benefits into the part-time work force that our industry never had before," Cauley observes. "There are many service companies competing for the same part-time labor force which are paying the benefits. Banks, insurance companies and other service organizations are hiring the people we used to hire." While Cauley admits this approach reduces profits, he believes that the long-term gain in stability and better service will reverse the short-term loss.

According to the 1986/87 U.S. Occupational Outlook Handbook, service-producing industries are projected to account for about nine out of 10 new jobs between 1984 and 1995. Rising incomes and the growing number of men and women who combine family responsibilities and a job are expected to contribute to faster than average employment growth among food and beverage preparation and service occupations such as bartenders, cooks and waiters/waitresses.

The younger employee—the primary worker during the hospitality industry's growth period of the 1970s—is becoming less available. To respond to the labor shortage, many companies are intensifying their recruitment of

the mature worker. Besides their increasing availability, mature workers are more reliable, flexible, and more skilled at public relations and accommodating guests. They seek part-time schedules and offer stability to the work environment.

A survey by the magazine *50-Plus* showed that 17 percent of people over 65 are still working, while most of their immediate juniors—the 55- to 64-year-old age group—intend to keep on working, at least part-time, after the age of 65. Those receiving Social Security benefits are able to earn up to \$6,000 per year, making many retirees primary candidates for employment in the hospitality industry. The growing percentage of older workers could result in higher productivity growth since these workers generally have substantial work experience and tend to be the most productive.

If the past 15 years have been any indication, an increasing number of workers with disabilities will also be entering the work force. Encouraged by federal implementation of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Section 402 of the Vietnam era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, disabled persons are more aggressively seeking employment, as well as advancement in employment, much as members of other minority groups have.

Additional factors contributing to an ever-increasing proportion of disabled employees in the work force are the expansion of vocational rehabilitation and job placement services at the state and local levels, publicized evidence of the productivity of disabled workers in competitive employment and an increase in the number of better-prepared disabled young people graduating from high schools and colleges.

FAVORABLE OUTCOME. As much as 19 percent of the working population of the United States is composed of noninstitutionalized disabled persons. It is estimated that about half of the disabled who could work are jobless. Many hospitality businesses that have experimented with hiring people with disabilities have been generally pleased with the outcome.

There are two broad categories of workers with disabilities: those with physical disabilities, and those with mental or developmental disabilities.

Each group can find many opportunities in a wide variety of job categories in the hospitality industry. The person with a hearing impairment can work in the dishroom, kitchen or accounting office, or in housekeeping or maintenance. The person with a visual impairment can work as an information operator, a kitchen worker or even as a manager.

Henry Scherling, manager of the Down Under Restaurant in Coeur D'Alen, ID, lost his vision in an automobile accident. While he was unable to return to his profession as an electronics manager, he did learn to work in a fast-food restaurant. With 50 percent vision, he is able to see outlines and detect motion. According to Scherling, "The psychological factor was the most dramatic. People treated me as an unintelligent person. I was shocked when people believed I wasn't able to do anything."

With training and experience, Scherling has been able to successfully manage the 60-seat restaurant. Some customers are cautious about handling money, but Scherling has worked out a system, counting it out by identifying its denomination. He is also a leading spokesperson for employing persons with visual impairments. "Only 10 percent of legally blind people are totally blind. The other 90 percent have some vision," he states. "People with a visu-

THE TAX INCENTIVES

Section 190 of the Tax Reform Act of 1986: Provides for up to \$35,000 tax credit annually for site improvements making privately owned, publicly used businesses more accessible to people with disabilities.

On-the-Job-Training (OJT): State agencies providing funds to compensate the employer at least in part for the time spent training employees with a disability and to compensate for consumable supplies used in training.

Supported Employment: Job coaching by on-the-job supervisor paid for by the state agency. Guarantees the job will be done.

Targeted Job Tax Credit: Provides employer a tax credit of 50 percent of employee's first \$6,000 in wages for one year (up to \$3,000).

In addition to filling personnel needs, hiring handicapped workers carries tax benefits.

al impairment are often the most productive employees, with the lowest accident rate because they have to be extra cautious."

Barbara Weinstein, director of human resources for Radisson Hotel Corp., Minneapolis, believes that employing the disabled also improves the productivity of the able-bodied worker. Cited for numerous awards for employing workers with mental or physical disabilities, Radisson has exceeded its original pledge to fill 100 positions. Weinstein reports that apart from low absenteeism and turnover among the disabled, the able-bodied also improve their productivity. "They love the company for what they do, and they begin to take pride in their own work."

An often overlooked benefit of making a business more accessible for people with disabilities is the potential savings on workers' compensation. Although many businesses fear that hiring the disabled worker will increase their compensation premiums, the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers conducted a joint study which proved that more than 90 percent of 279 companies surveyed reported no effect on insurance costs. In fact, many property and casualty insurance companies encourage employment of the disabled.

Making the work place accessible can also make it safer. In addition, an injured worker can often return to the job sooner if physical and attitudinal barriers are removed, thereby reducing disability payments.

COMMITMENT AND PATIENCE. Jay Braskie, manager of field recruiting for Friendly Restaurant Corp., believes that while it is not the total answer to the labor shortage, employing

the mature worker and people with disabilities solves some of the problem. But he cautions that such a program requires commitment, patience, dedication and hard work to be successful.

Overcoming fears of managers is the first step in employing workers with disabilities. Robert B. Nathanson and Jeffrey Lambert reported in *Personnel Journal* on basic attitudes affecting the disabled employee's integration into the business community. The first fear is often, "How will the public perceive these workers and will it affect our business?" Then there are the basic fears or attitudes of most people which interfere with the development of positive working relations.

The third attitude is that the disabled worker will add responsibility, requiring additional time and effort. The fourth attitude is characterized by the overriding feeling of revulsion and the conscious or unconscious rejection of the disabled employee.

Finally, because of the person's presumed limitations, achievements are overlooked and the person is regarded as being amazing or outstanding because such achievements were thought to be almost impossible to accomplish by the disabled employee.

SPECIAL NEEDS. Many companies which have initiated programs to employ the disabled have confronted these attitudes. Most are pleased with the outcome and realize the long-term potential.

Ken Butler, human resource manager for Burger King's Florida region, admits that the company has had to invest resources in its "Be Capable" program and had many fears and apprehensions about launching the program. In addition to the salary for an assistant manager who coordinates the program, the training materials and employees' wages while training add to the program's cost. However, Butler believes that these costs will be short term. "We placed 45 employees during the first year of the program. Although we have not analyzed it yet, the dependability, loyalty and consistent work performance of these employees will undoubtedly reduce our turnover costs."

While the "Be Capable" worker can have any variety of disability, some special accommodations were made for

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those with hearing impairments. Many of the training tapes now have sign language and video monitors and are placed in the stores for transmitting orders. New hand signs had to be developed for special Burger King items like the "Whopper," and there has been an increase in the number of deaf customers coming into the stores with employees who understand sign language.

Just as with any organizational change, the process of incorporating the disabled worker into a business requires four steps: planning, development, implementation and administration of quality control. The recruitment of mature workers or people with disabilities cannot be approached in the traditional manner. Friendly has developed a comprehensive approach that has been successful, and can provide a framework for other hospitality businesses to work within. This process can be summarized as:

- 1) Identify company needs.
- 2) Identify community resources.
- 3) Establish a mutual relationship.
- 4) Build the relationship and understand the pitfalls and problems. Cooperate to overcome the obstacles.

"A key component to properly placing a client," according to Friendly's Jay Braskie, "is to have clear job descriptions. Without these, the agency has difficulty in selecting the client with the necessary capabilities to fulfill the job and cannot adequately prepare the client for entry into the position.

"The second step," states Braskie, "is to establish a relationship with the various agencies within the community seeking to place clients in jobs. Very often, representatives of these agencies understand the feelings and attitudes of the general public, and work to dispel the fears and inner anxieties managers may have. This lays the groundwork for placing the clients, permits us to get to know them better, and they in turn learn more about us.

"The next step," continues Braskie, "is to visit one of their centers to meet with the clients, learn what they do, and see if we have a job that matches their skills. This process of making managers more sensitive is part of our management training program, and we teach them how to learn more about the agencies in their communities.

Older workers tend
to be more stable,
friendly and better
with people: all
valuable attributes.

"Implementation generally involves preliminary training at the agency's facilities to orient the client with the basic job requirements," says Braskie. "The client then goes through our regular training program as would any other employee, often with a supervisor from the agency present, and begins work. Just as much as we want the client to perform well, so does the agency. If a person isn't working out, we work with the agency to correct the problem or find a replacement."

Gerald A. Asselin, vice president of administration for Friendly, points out that the manager should not view this process as being similar to calling a job bank or employment service, defining their needs and waiting for the employee to arrive. Instead, the hiring of people with disabilities requires an extra commitment. The agencies which believe an employer is just looking to fill jobs will not work with him.

ALLIANCES. The National Restaurant Association, Washington, DC, is bringing members of the hospitality industry in contact with agencies attempting to place people with disabilities in jobs. Under the direction of Brother Philip Nelan, the Human Resources Program matches the vocational rehabilitation system closest to the restaurant manager seeking to hire people with disabilities.

For instance, a survey sent to NRA members in New York State resulted in more than 300 responses. Brother Philip forwarded these to the New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and according to Eloise Etkorn of the Marketing and Outreach Placement Unit, "This resulted in many placements. Another outcome was the development of a two-day conference held in July in New York City."

Etkorn noted that the Marriott Marquis Hotel in that city was a co-sponsor of the conference, and has done exemplary work in employing people with disabilities. "In June of 1985 the hotel held a job fair just for people with disabilities. Of the 54 hired on the first day, all but two are still employed at the hotel. Many of those hired have hearing impairments, so the hotel also hired an interpreter. Not only was this person helpful in supervising the employees, she has also assisted guests coming to the hotel."

Marriott Corp., like Friendly, has a comprehensive approach to employing people with disabilities. According to a Marriott spokesperson, the Washington, DC-based hotel and foodservice company employs over 6,000 disabled persons. The company's philosophy is that an individual identified and properly matched with a job, followed by proper training and support, can significantly benefit both the company and the employee.

Marriott's Handicap Employment Program consists of seven specific components at three distinct geographical levels—national, regional and local. These components are:

- liaison with handicap organizations' job referral network;
- job match;
- management training;
- employment training;
- communications/recognition programs; and
- corporate giving.

The job accommodations network (JAN) is another agency working to assist businesses wanting to share information about useful ways they have found to accommodate disabled workers. With federal financial assistance, the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) and West Virginia University created a computer-based capability to store and retrieve information about job-related limitations and aids that adjust for these. Employers can call a toll-free number, 1-800-JAN-PCEH, to request information.

Finally, Goodwill Industries of America Inc. received a grant from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services to establish the Foodservice Training Program as part of its Projects With Industry (PWI) initiative. Nine local facilities were estab-

lished throughout the country to train and place people with disabilities in hospitality businesses. Since its inception in 1984, more than 400 people have been placed in restaurant jobs throughout the country. National corporations such as Denny's, McDonald's, Marriott and Pizza Hut have taken advantage of this program and are recruiting housekeepers, custodians, cooks' helpers, bus persons, dishwashers and porters through PWI.

Maxine Fuller, PWI project coordinator, emphasizes that in addition to the nine special facilities, "Goodwill has 50 sites throughout the country that also have formal foodservice training and placement programs."

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES. In addition to the improved community relations and retention of dependable workers, there are many economic incentives to hiring people with disabilities. Through various tax credits and subsidies, federal and state governments support a business' employment of people with disabilities.

Obviously, the work site must be accessible to the person with a disability, and they must be able to get to the job. Section 190 of the Tax Reform Act of 1986 allows up to \$35,000 annually in income tax savings for costs associated with site improvements. These improvements are not limited to accessibility for the worker, but can be for the customer as well. Installing a ramp, widening a doorway, modifying the restrooms, buying new tables and chairs and adding new equipment are renovations that can not only make a location more accessible for employees, but will also improve and enhance the business surroundings.

Businesses using vehicles to transport customers, clients or employees also can take advantage of these deductions for making vehicles accessible to handicapped persons. A person with a disability may be ready and willing to work, but unable to obtain transportation to the work site, especially in suburban areas.

The next step after the employee gets on the premises is training. Through the state office of vocational rehabilitation, funds are provided to compensate the employer at least in part for the time spent training the client as well as to compensate for consumable supplies used in the training.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Restaurant Association
311 First Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 638-6100

Contact: Brother Philip Nelan

Responsible Hospitality Institute
11 Pearl Street
Springfield, MA 01101-4080
(413) 732-7780

Goodwill Industries of America Inc.
9200 Wisconsin Avenue
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 530-6500
Contact: Maxine Fuller

**President's Committee on
Employment of the Handicapped**
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 653-5006

Job Accommodations Network
West Virginia University
1-800-JAN-PCEH

**Association for Retarded Citizens of
the United States**
2501 Avenue J
Arlington, TX 76006
(817) 640-0204
Contact: Ron Harvey

Rehabilitation Svces. Administration
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 732-1282
Referral to state offices of vocational
rehabilitation

Paralyzed Veterans of America
801 Eighteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 872-1300

**Architectural and Transportation
Barriers Compliance Board**
330 C Street SW
Room 1010
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 472-2700
Contact: Ruth Lusher

Epilepsy Foundation of America
4351 Garden City Drive
Landover, MD 20785
(301) 459-3700

National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
(310) 659-9814

United Cerebral Palsy Associations
66 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 481-6300

On-the-job training places the disabled employee in a realistic work setting, allowing both the employer and employee to use time productively and evaluate compatibility.

A primary fear of many employers is that the disabled worker will be unable to do the job or the employer is not capable of providing adequate training. To overcome this concern, state agencies are offering "Supported Employment" or "Job Coaching." Through this program, an agency supervisor is on the job with the client to provide training and make sure the job gets done, even if the employee fails to show up for work.

Finally, the Targeted Job Tax Credit (TJTC) gives the employer tax credit of 50 percent of a qualified employee's first \$6,000 in wages for one year, or

up to \$3,000. There is no limit on the number of employees to whom an employer can apply the tax credit, and when an employee moves from one company to another, the new employer is also entitled to the tax credit. This program helps compensate for possible reduced productivity during training and development.

Sister Elaine Weber of the St. Colletta School in Jefferson, WI, trains people with mental retardation to work in the Fireside restaurant there, and her feelings sum up the issue: "Our clients need to be needed, have responsibility and feel that they can contribute to society," says Sister Elaine. With an 85 percent success rate (staying on the job for more than one year), her clients have demonstrated that when given the chance, they can excel. □