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# PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATOR

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**FOCUS ON**  
Benefits: p. 54  
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## Shaping the Global Workplace

A globe is centered in the upper half of the cover, surrounded by a ring of human figures. A large key is being inserted into a slot on a computer terminal in the lower half. The background is a dark grid pattern.

From :  
HR International  
To :  
Field Offices

## Building Fun in Your Organization

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# How To Bridge the Hiring Gap

*Linking people with disabilities with employers  
who need qualified workers*

By James E. Peters

## WANTED:

American industry is seeking people to fill its diminishing work force. Applicants must be willing to work hard; be reliable, loyal and dedicated; and be able to overcome daily challenges and function efficiently with limited resources. Employer will be flexible and accommodating for qualified applicants and offers fair compensation, advancement opportunities and recognition for performance.

If an ad like this appeared in the media, American industry could receive eight million applications from the largest unemployed minority population in the country — people with disabilities. With an unemployment rate of 66 percent for the disabled population and with industry desperate for qualified workers, something must be done to bridge the gap between these two groups.

Although employers are becoming more sensitive to the needs of disabled people, some advocates, like Mary Ann Breslin, executive director of Disability Rights Educa-

tion and Defense Fund Inc. (DREDF), believe success can only occur "when there is a combination of strategies, including strong legislative protection and appropriate advocacy to employees." She says, "Without a national policy, we are carving out 20 percent of the population from the mainstream."

### *Disabled population*

While most people think of the disabled as those requiring wheelchairs, guide dogs or communication by sign language, these groups represent only a small percentage of those who have special assistance needs. The visually or hearing-impaired, stroke victims, those with arthritis or low-back pain, amputees, people with AIDS or HIV-positive status, people with Alzheimer's disease, post-polio victims, people with mental retardation and mental illness, and those

recovering from cancer, heart disease or accidents are just part of the disabled population. Since the majority of disabilities are acquired, most people will become disabled in some form as they grow older.

Breslin of DREDF compares this to an everyday reality. She says, "Fifty or 100 years ago, wearing glasses was not acceptable, but today, wearing corrective lenses is taken for granted, because it is a technology so ingrained into our culture."

Glasses are orthopedic devices that are no different than an artificial limb or wheelchair, back brace or elevated desk," says Breslin.

Frank Bowe, author of many books that analyze U.S. data, estimates that 36 million people in the country have some type of disability. According to Bowe, 18 million disabled people are under the age of 64, two million are institutionalized and the remaining 16 million are over 65.

Because many disabilities are acquired through the aging process, the number of disabled people will increase as the baby boom generation passes its own half-century point. The Census Bureau reports that between now and the year 2000, the population of 55- to 74-year-olds will increase by 11.1 million — a jump of 13 percent. As this population increases, it will join the number of older Americans and

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people with disabilities lobbying for access to public and private facilities.

### **Attitude barriers**

Michael Winter, current president of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), an association of more than 300 independent living centers throughout the world, believes attitudes represent the greatest barrier to employment of people with disabilities. The principal attitudes he observes are the attitude of the employer against people with disabilities, and the attitude of the disabled themselves.

"Employers are fearful that employing people with disabilities will cost more money," says Winter. "Often, they try to create jobs for the disabled rather than thinking in a broader perspective of accommodating people in current jobs and offering advancement opportunities through normal promotional procedures."

Although Winter strongly believes that employers need more education about how to work with people with disabilities, he also believes attitudes of the disabled population can be barriers to employment.

"Because people with disabilities have been denied equal access to employment, they have not had the opportunity to explore career options. They are often unaware of their full capabilities," says Winter.

Sometimes, people with disabilities do not consider themselves disabled, or else assume responsibility for their own situation. Marca Bristo, immediate past-president of NCIL, says that when people with disabilities are frustrated with an obstacle or barrier, they see it as their problem, and therefore assume it is their responsibility to overcome it.

"In many cases, it is time for people to recognize these barriers for what they are — discrimination," says Bristo. "There is a deeply rooted attitude among the general population that because they do not see disabled people out in the world, it is because they do not want to be there. They do not see

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

There are many agencies and organizations around the country available to provide technical assistance about employing people with disabilities. The following are key contacts to make to get additional information.

### **Publications**

**1988 Rehabilitation Facility Sourcebook.** Available from National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, P.O. Box 17675, Washington, D.C. 20041, (703) 648-9300.

**Directory of Organizations Interested in People with Disabilities. Ready, Willing, and Available: A Business Guide for Hiring People with Disabilities.** Available from The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1111 20th Street, NW, Ste. 636, Washington, D.C., 20036-3470, (202) 653-5044 (voice), (202) 653-5050 (TDD), (202) 653-7386 (FAX).

**Disability Etiquette.** Available from National Easter Seal Society, 2023 West Ogden Ave., Chicago, IL 60612, (312) 243-6400.

### **Adaptive Equipment:**

**Job Accommodations Network.** West Virginia University, 1-800-JAN-PCEH.

**National Support Center for Persons with Disabilities.** Atlanta, GA, 1-800-IBM-2133.

that collectively, the society has created barriers that discriminate against people with disabilities."

Jean Mahoney, employment advisor for the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, agrees that part of the unemployment problem is the passivity of some disabled people.

"When you are beaten down so much by inaccessible housing and transportation, when you can't get a job, can't get good health care, when society patronizes you, passivity is a natural response," she says.

Fred Francis, director of the marketing, outreach and placement program of the New York Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, says, "The law can require you to hire a person, and that is a behavior. But when a company is willing to give an opportunity to a person who can do the job, that's an attitude."

In the past few years, Francis and his office have presented conferences for select businesses with a high demand for labor, including the hospitality industry, banking and finance, insurance and retail merchants. They have found three common barriers to expanding employment opportunities to people with disabilities.

First, employers only think of people in wheelchairs as representing the disabled. Second, they are not aware of the resources for employee development and pay high costs for similar services. Finally, they do not include recruitment of people with disabilities in their planning. Francis thinks that with the changing labor market, hiring people with disabilities will become an economic necessity, and the disabled will go from "a hidden to preferred population."

Francis lists three components to successfully hiring disabled employees:

- The ability of the person with the disability to do the job.
- The ability and willingness of the supervisor to concede that it is possible for the person to do the job.
- The right job match.

### ***Employer initiative***

Employing people with disabilities requires commitment, patience, dedication and hard work. William Thomas Leonard, manager of corporate recruitment for McGraw-Hill Inc., discounts any concerns that the process requires more expense or effort than filling any position with the right person in today's tight labor market.

Leonard says, "Good people are hard to find. If you do not go

through the effort, a lot of jobs will go unfilled."

Leonard became involved with the disability issue when he came to McGraw-Hill Inc. 10 years ago. Harold W. McGraw, Jr., CEO at the time and member of the Board of Trustees for the International Center for the Disabled, encouraged Leonard to get involved in this worthy cause.

Overcoming disabled workers' fears of managers is the first step in

hiring these employees. "Line managers are often under a lot of pressure to generate revenue, have a lot of administrative responsibility, and are very busy, pressured people," says Leonard.

"In the business world," says Leonard, who is responsible for overseeing recruitment of professional staff at McGraw-Hill Inc., "the line manager who needs help usually wants somebody who is very good, sharp, promotable, a quick learner, someone who looks the part, sounds the part and is qualified for the part."

The manager's expectation is very subjective and many of the factors used to describe the person they need are difficult to identify in the recruitment process. Noting that our culture makes us very youth- and beauty-oriented, Leonard says one of the first attitudes to address is the conscious or unconscious rejection of the disabled employee because of physical appearance or disability. More emphasis should be on evaluating the person's ability to do the job.

"The most important skill of a professional recruiter is to be objective and focus on the individual facts such as background, skill, education and achievements," advises Leonard. "It is important to remove all emotions immediately. Look at the person in an objective light; remove all biases and misperceptions."

Most experts agree that creating the proper corporate climate supports the hiring process. Pizza Hut Inc. has made a commitment to hire 1,604 severely disabled people in over 800 locations throughout the country by 1991. The company's goal is to eventually have five percent of its total labor force represented by severely disabled people.

Steve Zivolich, president of Integrated Resources, the California-based firm working with Pizza Hut in implementing its program, sees this type of corporate commitment as a rare occurrence. Usually, the involvement begins at a branch office or individual store with a manager

who is committed to the idea, or is in an area with a severe labor shortage. He observes that when commitment does happen at the corporate level, it usually involves the personnel department.

"Unfortunately," says Zivolich, "it is not being duplicated at the same time in the operations division."

The Friendly Restaurant Corp., based in Wilbraham, Mass., has developed a comprehensive approach that has been successful and can provide a framework for other businesses to work within. This process can be summarized as:

- Identify company needs.
- Identify resources in the community.
- Establish a mutual relationship.
- Implement the process.

### *Company needs*

Gerald A. Asselin, vice president of administration for Friendly's, points out that the manager should not view hiring people with disabilities as being similar to calling a job bank or employment service, defining your needs and waiting for the employee to arrive. Instead, the hiring of people with disabilities requires an extra commitment.

A key component of the Friendly's program to properly place a client is to have clear job descriptions.

"Without these," says Jay Braskie, manager of field recruiting, "the agency has difficulty in selecting the clients with the necessary capabilities to fulfill the job, cannot adequately prepare the clients for entry into the position, and limits the ability of the manager to evaluate and provide feedback on the employee's performance."

Katherine Marr, director of human resources for E.I.L. Instruments Inc., a Maryland-based electronics distributor with 435 employees, has evaluated each job and job description to determine what type of person with a disability would be qualified to do each job.

According to Marr, "When a position becomes available, announcements can be sent to the proper agency in the community."

Besides having clear job descriptions, the process for screening applications should also be evaluated. Medical or physical requirements, tests or other job requirements that bear no relationship to the successful performance of the job can exclude many disabled people from the outset and deny them an opportunity for an interview.

Sometimes, unions and collective bargaining agreements impede promotions or advancement of people

with disabilities. For example, a person may be able to do one job, but in order to qualify for promotion, the person has to work in other unrelated jobs he or she may not be able to perform because of the disability. Alternative career ladders need to be defined.

### *Community resources*

The second step in the Friendly's program is identifying resources in the community. Agencies and

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organizations exist at the national, state and local levels.

The National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities publishes a directory listing 3,000 rehabilitation facilities throughout the country; a directory of organizations interested in people with disabilities is available from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities; and each state Employment Security Agency or Vocational Rehabilitation Agency can provide assistance or direct HR professionals to local resources.

Braskie says that, very often, representatives of the agencies understand the feelings and attitudes of the general public and work to dispel the fears and anxieties managers may have. They will visit the work site, meet with managers, supervisors and employees, and evaluate the potential for client placement.

Zivolich of Integrated Resources cautions that not all social service

agencies work to place people with disabilities in employment and may sometimes discourage efforts of companies seeking workers. Some advocates believe people with disabilities need to be cared for, and they work only to obtain housing, medical care and transportation for their clients. The people working in some sheltered workshops are considered almost as children and not as adults who may have limitations.

Systemic barriers exist within the community as well as within companies. It is important to be more expansive in thinking about options and recognize that not all the answers have been found.

#### *A mutual relationship*

Once a variety of agencies is identified and mutual interest and trust are established, a long-term working relationship begins. Leonard suggests inviting agency representatives to the company's facilities to tour the work site, tell them what jobs

are available and answer any questions they might have with respect to accommodation, access, benefits, health care coverage, flexible hours and transportation.

At Friendly's, managers attend a training seminar to learn more about the special needs of the agency's clients, and are shown how to assist or aid the new employee through the first few weeks on the job. Elizabeth P. Dixon, staff manager of equal opportunity and affirmative action for AT&T, says that her company has created a network of job accommodation specialists who provide this type of sensitivity training for supervisors and workers.

At McGraw-Hill Inc., a section of all employee orientation sessions discusses the company's commitment to employing people with disabilities.

Periodic follow-up visits by agency representatives and discussions with managers, supervisors and employees allow both parties to ex-

plore possible conflicts and resolve them in a productive manner. Leonard sees this as an ongoing, two-way educational process.

He says, "By establishing a relationship with a dozen agencies, you have a dozen bridges built, and soon, people start coming over these bridges."

### ***Process implementation***

Once the corporate climate is set and internal and external attitudinal and physical barriers are removed, the process of recruitment, selection and employee development begins. The moment of truth is when a person with a disability wants to apply for a job opening.

The two primary fears of the interviewer are: What questions can I ask and not violate the law? What questions can I ask and not offend the applicant?

Dixon of AT&T trains receptionists and interviewers to be sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities. For a blind person, an application can be sent in the mail, or an interviewer can assist in completing it. For a person with a hearing disability, questions can be written rather than spoken. When a person calls about accessibility, describe the most convenient and direct way of getting to the office, and include a description of parking, entrances and elevators. The National Easter Seal Society distributes several informative booklets about "disability etiquette."

Dixon stresses that for a job applicant, there is a thin line between independence and necessity: "I want to be independent, I need to be independent to get the job, but I also need assistance."

The interviewer should offer assistance but wait until the offer is accepted before helping, and listen to any instructions. If the person rejects an offer, accept that and respect the person's decision.

The interview should be conducted in the same manner as for anyone else. There are things you need to know and things the person applying for the job needs to know.

The line of questioning should be job-related and should never stray into areas of national origin, race, sex, marital status or child care. Forbidden territory would also include focusing on a disability. Focus instead on the specific job and the skills the applicant brings to this position.

When an interviewer believes a disability may be related to job performance, specific questions can be asked. For instance, if a visually impaired person applied for a job that required typing, Dixon of AT&T advises questions to ask might include:

- "Do you type?"
- "If you are visually impaired, how do you manage to type?"
- "How do you read the material to be typed?"
- "If you lack a certain degree of dexterity, do you use something else?"

### ***Tax Incentives for Hiring Disabled Employees***

**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. Efforts being made to extend credit to each site, rather than to company, and to include equipment as well as facilities.

**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).

• "Are there accommodations you would need to perform this job?"

At McGraw-Hill Inc., Leonard suggests following up on the question because it allows the applicant to dispel any preconceived attitudes of the interviewer about the person's disability.

"This is the job. These are the requirements of the job. This is the amount of travel in the job. This is the amount of physical dexterity required for the job. Given that these are the requirements, is there anything to prevent you from successfully performing this job?"

Because technology is so advanced and there is so much adaptable equipment for a variety of disabilities, it is important that the interviewer allow applicants to describe how they can perform the job, rather than assuming it is impossible. The person with the disability is often the best source for accommodation information.

Both Dixon and Leonard agree that if the applicant has the necessary job qualifications but there is some question about the accommodations that may be needed, the person should be taken on a job tour.

When the job requires certain equipment or the facility has a particular barrier, there are a number of resources a company can turn to that provide information about removing barriers. The Job Accommodations Network (JAN) is one such agency, established by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and West Virginia University.

IBM established the National Support Center for Persons with Disabilities in Atlanta in December 1985. The center provides information about technology available from IBM and other vendors around the country (see sidebar for further information).

Mary Pat Radabaugh, creator and manager of the National Support Center, explains the philosophy of the agency: "Individuals have disabilities, but handicaps reside in the environment. Computer technology cannot take away a disability,

but it can change the environment. It can minimize and sometimes even eliminate the handicap of the environment. With the aid of technology, the barriers of the body can be torn down so that the mind is free to explore and achieve."

### *A typical case*

Leonard describes a good case study of the process. "Our sales department needed to fill an opening. I was contacted by Lighthouse,

an agency representing people who are blind or have severe visual impairments. When I told our sales manager about a candidate referred by the agency, he immediately came up with 15 problems. 'Look, the guy's blind. How can he read memos? How can he find his way around? This is a sales job. It requires a lot of people contact.

There are relationships to maintain.'

"The manager allowed his emotions to distort his thinking process.

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I tried to get the manager to stop focusing on the problem and look at what the person has achieved. We had a meeting with a representative from the Lighthouse, the EEO manager and the sales manager, and walked the manager through each of his objections. When he saw the facts, he was still skeptical but open. We moved the manager from a rejection mode to a listening mode.

"Next, we presented the candidate to the manager and discussed the line manager's concerns. The job candidate was well dressed, intelligent, articulate and confident. He uses a scanner attached to a voice box to read memos and other materials. He uses a cane to navigate around the room. He is pleasant and establishes relationships easily. He is good on the phone.

"The manager went from a listening mode to a being-open mode. The candidate was hired, performed well and was eventually promoted."

### *Future planning*

With just a little more than 10 years left in this century, our country will be in the midst of drastic demographic changes. The baby boom generation will be in their 50s, improved medical technology will keep people alive longer, technology will break down many physical barriers and a whole generation of people with disabilities will be better educated and will demand equal access and opportunity.

Business needs to plan today for the changes that will occur in the next decade. Competition for qualified labor will become intense. Without exception, making a decision to expand recruitment efforts to employ more people with disabilities has become a rewarding and worthwhile venture for all those companies interviewed for this article.

Making facilities accessible expands the available labor pool and in many cases broadens the potential market of customers. It is not only the right thing to do, it is the most profitable thing to do. ■

