



Ten Steps To Put Ability To Work

Strategies for Diversifying Your Workforce by Including People with Disabilities

Properly implemented, disability initiatives should improve the organization for everyone. Before trying to determine where to begin:

- Spend time determining the purpose of implementing a disability initiative in your organization.
- Explore, at both an organizational and an individual level, the reasons for beginning a disability initiative.
- Identify critical strategic drivers for your initiative. What are the challenges and where is the opportunity?

The following strategic steps are both fundamental and basic to starting a disability initiative. Consider these when developing and implementing a disability program for your organization.

Strategies:

1) Get executive commitment.

Having commitment from the top sends a clear message to senior management about the seriousness and business relevance of this issue. Also, top-down commitment will reinforce the desired outcomes and assist with conveying the expectation of cooperation, involvement and commitment on the part of senior management and their staffs.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Explain the Business Case. How does effective diversity management impact the bottom line, productivity, and achievement of organizational goals? Do you need to serve an increasingly diverse customer base? Are you at a disadvantage in competing for top talent? Is turnover eating



up profits and burning out remaining staff? Managing disability is a feel good frill. Rather it is a pragmatic, strategic advantage. If competitors do it better, your organization will lose out in the long run.

- Provide statistics or specifics to support the business case.
- Have your CEO/senior management provide a quote supporting the business case to use on print material, website etc.
- Ask senior management to send an internal letter to employees indicating their support.

2) Articulate the desired outcomes.

Be explicit about how support and commitment are to be shown and from whom it is expected.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Show staff what's in it for them both for the organization and personally.
- Identify roles and responsibilities of senior management.

3) Assess the climate, needs and issues at your organization.

Do so before determining what interventions will be offered to staff. You may need information from employees about their perception of disability issues. Questionnaires and focus groups can help clarify the obstacles.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Find out what employees already know through the use of surveys, quizzes with prizes, focus groups.
- Meet with HR managers to determine their needs and issues regarding hiring people with disabilities.
- Use the information gathered to assist you in planning your activities.

4) Create and maintain open channels of communication with employees at the launch of your disability initiative and throughout the process.

Communication is crucial to the success of your plan and should occur not only at the beginning of an initiative, but also throughout the process.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Establish procedures for reporting to senior management.
- Let staff know what concrete steps to expect.
- Post information about initiative on company Intranet or website.
- Provide training for staff.
- Show how this is an ongoing process, rather than an event, and how it will become an integral part of the organization.
- Share the successes and benefits.

5) Incorporate disability into existing diversity committees.

This group is usually composed of a vertical and horizontal cross-section of the organization and can help analyze assessment data and make recommendations to top management.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Commit executive team members to serve on a diversity task force will signal the organization's seriousness and commitment to this effort.
- Diversity committees could include information about persons with disabilities in their programs or sponsor a program such as Disability Mentoring Day

6) Develop a mechanism for dealing with systemic changes and procedural problems.

Once identified, obstacles and problems must be addressed. Is recruiting a diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities an issue that your organization struggles with?

Suggested Action Steps:

- Review job vacancy listings; be sure that positions indicate “essential functions”. Is your recruiting and testing procedures accessible?
- Do you use supplemental staffing vendors? Provide your vendors with resources that can assist them in identifying candidates with disabilities.
- Provide information on resources available through the Virginia Business Leadership Network, local vocational rehabilitation agencies and community services to hiring managers.

7) Design relevant, interactive applicable training.

The purpose of good training is to not just increase awareness and understanding about disability, but to also develop concrete skills that employees can use. Starting with awareness training and advancing to knowledge training and training that builds specific skills is common.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Start with disability awareness/sensitivity training for Human Resources, senior management, supervisors, and employees. Training is available through the Virginia Business Leadership Network.
- Identify areas in which staff feel they need further training such as specific disabilities, Americans with Disabilities Act, accommodations etc. The VABLN can assist in providing training resources for your company.

8) Evaluate and measure each component of your diversity initiative (training, taskforce, mentoring initiative, employee networks, etc.).

Another key element to a successful disability initiative is evaluating the results of your initiative and measuring progress. Set measurable criteria and determine what you would like to accomplish and how you will gather data.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Find out about recognition and best practices awards that recognize businesses for being “disability friendly”.
- Establish communication methods to broadcast your internal efforts and successes.

9) Ensure integration.

Integrate the concepts, skills and results of your disability efforts into the fabric of the organization.

Suggested Action Steps:

- Include materials in your new employee orientation package on disability etiquette and resources available for persons with disabilities.
- Participate in a mentoring program or intern program
- Be clear that the business case for diversity has clear implications to the bottom line and that is why your company has undertaken this initiative.

10) Partnerships

There are a number of organizations that can assist your company in the successful integration of people with disabilities into your workforce.

- The Virginia Business Leadership Network will work with you to develop your plan and provide information on best practices from Virginia businesses and resources available in Virginia.

- The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services offers pre-screened qualified candidates and acts as your one point of contact for community service providers in your area.
- The US Business Leadership Network provides information on best practices and resources nationwide. This information can be accessed at <http://www.usbln.com>
- Another valuable partner in this effort is your supplemental staffing company. Using a supplemental staffing company can make it easier to introduce people with disabilities into your workforce. In Virginia and the nation, Manpower is a leader in creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities and tearing down barriers to equality. Manpower received the New Freedom Initiative Award in recognition of its employment outreach program. The program includes in-depth disability awareness and accommodation training for Manpower staff as well as the use of assistive technology to enhance job accessibility for people with disabilities. In addition, Manpower works extensively with community rehabilitation providers throughout the country to actively recruit and employ people with disabilities.

Action Steps:

- Join the Virginia Business Leadership Network to find out about the resources available to you to begin diversifying your workforce.