MYTHS ABOUT HIRING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities who are not in the labour force are faced with the misperception that they are either unable or unwilling to work. Failure to recognize and address these myths and negative stereotypes results in discrimination and the exclusion of individuals with disabilities from the workplace despite their willingness and ability to actively participate in the labour force.

Myth: Employees with disabilities have a higher absentee rate than employees without disabilities.
Fact: Studies by firms such as DuPont show that employees with disabilities are not absent any more than employees without disabilities. In fact, these studies show that on the average, individuals with disabilities have better attendance rates than their non-disabled counterparts.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities should be placed in jobs where they will not fail.
Fact: Everyone has the right to fail as well as to succeed. Be careful not to hold someone back from a position or a promotion because you think that there is a possibility that he or she might fail in the position. If this person is the best-qualified candidate, give them the same opportunity to try that you would give anyone else.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are not reliable.
Fact: Individuals with disabilities tend to remain on the job and to maintain better levels of attendance. A US Chamber of Commerce study revealed that workers with disabilities had an 80% lower turnover rate.

Myth: Someone will always have to help them.
Fact: This is not the case with proper training. Individuals with disabilities have adjusted to their disability in most cases. It does not affect their ability to work unaided.

Myth: Persons who are deaf make ideal employees for noisy work environments.
Fact: Loud noises of a certain vibratory nature can cause further harm to the auditory system. Persons who are deaf should be hired for all jobs that they have the skills and talents to perform. No person with a disability should be prejudged regarding employment opportunities.

Myth: Considerable expense is necessary to accommodate workers with disabilities.
Fact: In reality and with proper planning and knowledge, most job accommodations are simple and inexpensive. According to the Job Accommodation Network Canada, 80% of accommodations cost less than $500. In addition, the 1991 Health and Activity Limitations Survey (HALS) found that fewer than 30,000, or 4% of the 890,000 working Canadians with disabilities required accessible washrooms, ramps or other building modifications. There are government programs which can defer some or all of the cost of the accommodation.

Most frequently reported accommodations were changes in job duties and modified hours of work. Accommodations mostly have more to do with creativity, flexibility and sound management practices than expensive structural modifications or specialized technology.

Accommodations like ramps, automatic door openers, widened doorways, and wheelchair accessible washrooms make the employers workplace more accessible to other potential employees with disabilities. Clients and customers like parents with baby strollers and people making deliveries also enjoy the comforts of a less cumbersome environment. It is therefore misleading to consider the cost of these changes as the cost of accommodating just one employee.

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Myth: I can't fire or discipline an employee with a disability.
Fact: While there are laws in place, such as the Human Rights Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that serve to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities by providing equal access in the areas of employment, transportation, public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications, there are no special procedures for firing or disciplining employees with disabilities.

Establish clear performance expectations from the start. If a performance problem does occur, follow your company's usual guidelines: discuss the problem with the worker, look for solutions, document the situation and, if necessary, terminate the employment agreement.

Myth: An employer's worker's compensation rates rise when they hire individuals with disabilities.
Fact: Insurance rates are based solely on the relative hazards of the operation and the organization's accident experience, not on whether workers have disabilities. A study conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers showed that 90% of the 279 companies surveyed reported no effect on insurance costs as a result of hiring workers with disabilities.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are more likely to have accidents.
Fact: Two studies, one conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics during the 1940's and a current study recently completed by the DuPont Company support the findings that workers with disabilities performed significantly higher than their counterparts without disabilities in the area of safety. These studies included people in professional, technical, managerial, operational, labor, clerical, and service areas. It evaluated individuals with orthopedic, vision, heart, health, and hearing disabilities. Conclusion: Workers with disabilities are often more aware, not less, of safety issues in the workplace.

Myth: Workers with a disability are a bad influence on other workers.
Fact: More often than not, the worker with a disability brings additional diversity into the workplace. For example: Someone who uses a wheelchair may point out ways to make physical access better for all by uncluttering walkways and offices. Someone who has a learning disability may develop a filing system based on colors in addition to words that increases efficiency and ease of use.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are not able to contribute to society.
Fact: More than anything, individuals with disabilities are restricted not by their abilities, but by society. As an employer, do not let a person's disability get in the way of an opportunity for him or her to demonstrate talents. Misconceptions that insurance costs/ rates will go up, and that they have a high rate of absenteeism and low productivity levels should be overcome and an equal opportunity afforded to individuals with disabilities.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are more sensitive than other people, more courageous, kinder, more creative, more admirable or more conscientious.
Fact: Individuals with disabilities do not possess any special characteristics — they are just like other person you employ.

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Myth: It's almost impossible to interview individuals with disabilities because it's so easy to break human rights laws.
Fact: Interviewing is easy. They key is to focus on abilities rather than disabilities. Ask the same job-related questions that you ask other applicants. And once you've hired someone with a disability, there's a good chance they'll stay. Pizza Hut Corporation finds that workers with disabilities are five times more likely to stay than people without disabilities.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities don't have the education I need.
Fact: Over half of individuals with disabilities have high school diplomas and over a third have post-secondary diplomas. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada reports that, overall, combining university, college and trades, Canadian adults with disabilities are about two thirds as likely to have a post-secondary education as adults without disabilities.

Myth: It doesn't matter to my customers if I address the disability issue or not.
Fact: Canadians with disabilities have access to a combined annual disposable income of $25 billion annually, making this a spending group with significant clout.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are more prone to additional injuries.
Fact: Workers with disabilities have average or better safety records on and off the job. The US Department of Labor, through four national studies, has found that individuals with disabilities experience fewer disabling injuries than the average employee exposed to the same hazards.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are unable to meet performance standards, thus making them a bad employment risk.
Fact: In 1990, DuPont conducted a survey of 811 employees with disabilities and found 90% rated average or better in job performance compared to 95% for employees without disabilities. A similar 1981 DuPont study which involved 2,745 employees with disabilities found that 92% of employees with disabilities rated average or better in job performance compared to 90% of employees without disabilities. The 1981 study results were comparable to DuPont's 1973 job performance study.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities are not as productive or don't work as hard as employees without disabilities.
Fact: A 1987 Louis Harris and Associates survey of 920 American employers revealed that employees with disabilities have about the same (57%) or better (20%) productivity levels than employees without disabilities. 90% were rated as average or above average in performance of job duties. 79% of the managers also responded that their disabled employees work 33% as hard or harder than 46% of their employees without a disability.

Myth: Employees with a disability are more difficult to supervise than employees without a disability
Fact: The Harris study also revealed that 82% of managers found employees with disabilities no more difficult to supervise than employees without disabilities. Employees with disabilities should be held accountable to the same job standards as any other employee. Managers should be confident that their supervisory skills will work equally well with employees with disabilities.