

Governor's Committee on Employment
of People with Disabilities



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

ABILITIES

Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities

September 2007- Vol 1, Issue 4

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the Vermont Business Leadership Network, I would like to welcome you to the latest issue of "Abilities".

The Vermont Business Leadership Network is a business initiative, led by TD Banknorth, to stimulate best practices that encourage employers to attract, hire, retain and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. Our program relies on a fundamental principle - *Success Breeds Success*. When employers share the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, other employers are educated and inspired to do the same.

October is a busy month for the Business Leadership Network! October is Disability Employment Awareness Month. To kick the month off, we are hosting a business recognition breakfast at the Holiday Inn in Rutland on Tuesday, October 2nd. Kerin Stackpole, Esq. from Bergeron, Paradis & Fitzpatrick, will be our keynote speaker with a presentation titled, "The Top 10 Mistakes Employers Make in Dealing with Disability Issues". For information on this event, or to register, please contact the BLN at 1-800-639-2909.

October 17th is Disability Mentoring Day. This is a day for employers to welcome students and adults with disabilities into the workplace for job shadows, job tours and mentoring experience to expose them to career opportunities. This is a statewide effort and I urge all businesses to become involved at your community level. For more information on Disability Mentoring Day, please call us at 1-800-639-2909.

Also, on October 9th, Governor Douglas will be signing a proclamation recognizing both Disability Employment Awareness Month and Disability Mentoring Day.

Approximately 55,000 Vermonters with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed. I encourage every employer in the State to help change this. Join the Vermont Business Leadership Network! Membership information is available by calling 1-800-639-2909.

Best Regards,



Susan Chicoine
Vice President, TD Banknorth
Lead Company, Vermont Business Leadership Network

and

Fred Jones, Chair
Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities

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The Truth on Hiring and Firing a Person with a Disability

Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and all the work done since 1990, the fact remains that the majority of people with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed.

While it is true that some people with disabilities are lacking the job skills needed to succeed in 2007, the fact is many employers are fearful of hiring a person with a disability. Businesses fear the costs associated with accommodations. Supervisors fear the need to spend more time assisting a worker with a disability and a loss of productivity. HR managers fear that it would be difficult to fire a person with a disability, even if they cannot perform the essential functions of their job.

Let's take a look at some of the myths and facts associated with hiring and firing people with disabilities.

Myth: The ADA forces employers to hire unqualified candidates with disabilities.

The **fact** is that in order to be protected by the ADA, an applicant with a disability must meet all the requirements for a job and be able to perform the essential functions with or without reasonable accommodations.

Myth: When there are several qualified applicants for a position and one is disabled, the ADA requires that the employer hire that candidate.

The **fact** is that an employer can hire any of the applicants as long as the decision is not based on disability.

Myth: Under the ADA, an employer cannot fire an employee who has a disability.

The **fact** is employers can fire workers with disabilities under three conditions: 1) the termination is unrelated to the disability; 2) the employee does not meet legitimate requirements, such as performance or production standards, with or without reasonable accommodations; and 3) because of the employee's disability, they pose a direct threat to health or safety in the workplace.

What is a Reasonable Accommodation?

When an employer thinks about hiring a person with a disability, one of the first issues that comes up for them is the term "reasonable accommodation". These two words put fear into the minds of business owners, HR managers, and senior managers. How much is it going to cost?

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity. The ADA requires reasonable accommodation in three aspects of employment: 1) to provide equal opportunity in the application process; 2) to enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job; and 3) to enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

A reasonable accommodation can take on many forms. Examples include making existing facilities accessible, job restructuring, modified work schedules, acquiring or modifying equipment, changing training materials, providing interpreters, or reassignment to a vacant position.

Many employers believe that the cost to their business would be thousands of dollars to provide accommodations. The fact is that is rarely the case. **The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) reports that two thirds of accommodations cost less than \$500, with many costing nothing at all.**

Here is an example of how an accommodation request can be met (based on a true case):

An employer has a strict tardiness policy. Employees who are more than three minutes late in reporting to work or returning from lunch more than 14 times a year will be fired. An employee with a bone disorder and confined to a wheelchair is often late, due to the lack of handicap parking spaces. The employee tries to arrive to work early, but even still the closer parking spaces are already taken. Narrow aisles in the building also make wheelchair navigation difficult. The employee requests an accommodation from the employer: an extra 15 minutes to return from lunch. In this case, the extra 15 minutes is a reasonable accommodation and does not create a hardship on the employer.

Requests for reasonable accommodations can arise at any time, not just when hiring a new employee. As current employees grow older, sustain injuries, or develop illness, accommodations may be needed.

For assistance in determining accommodations, contact your local VocRehab Vermont office, www.vocrehabermont.com. They have staff that can assist you.

There are tax incentives available to help employers cover accommodation costs for employees and/or customers with disabilities to make their business environment accessible.

Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction - businesses may take an annual deduction for expenses incurred to remove physical, structural and transportation barriers for persons with disabilities. Examples include: accessible parking spaces, bathrooms that are accessible, making walkways at least 48 inches wide, or providing accessible entrances to buildings. The IRS allows a deduction of up to \$15,000 per year for qualified expenses.

Small Business Tax Credit - small businesses may take an annual tax credit for making their businesses accessible to persons with disabilities. The tax credit can be used for a variety of costs including: sign language interpreters, readers, purchase of adaptive equipment, print materials in alternate formats, removal of architectural barriers in building/vehicles or other similar services such as a job coach or use of a co-worker to provide support to an employee with a disability. The credit is 50% of expenditures over \$250 but not to exceed \$10,250 for a maximum benefit of \$5,000.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit - provides a tax credit for employers hiring individuals from certain targeted groups including an employee receiving Social Security Income (SSI) or who is a certified vocational rehabilitation (VR) participant, after certification is received from the State Employment Security Agency (SESA)

For more information on these tax credits, you should consult an accountant.

Additional resources:

The Internal Revenue Service, at www.irs.gov

VT Department of Labor, WOTC Certifying Unit, phone: 802-828-5277.

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Quick Links

[The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities](#)

[Vermont Business Leadership Network](#)

[Department of Labor](#)

The Boss with a Heart - Making a Difference

Linda Carbino of White River Junction, Vermont wants everyone to know that Betsy Dickerson, manager of the McDonalds on Beswick Drive in White River Junction, is truly "The Boss with a Heart".

It was in 2003 that Linda, then grappling with severe anxiety and agoraphobia, went to Betsy's

[Disability Program Navigators](#)

[Vocational Rehabilitation](#)

[Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation](#)

[Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

[Job Accommodation Network](#)

[Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#)

McDonald's to apply for a part time job. Immediately Betsy seemed to take Linda under her wing, helping her complete her application and offering her a position. After a few days working the register, Linda became nervous and anxious, and told Betsy she wasn't able to carry out that position. Expecting to lose her job, Linda instead found Betsy to be extremely supportive. After learning more from Linda about her disability and the accommodations that would support her, Betsy gave Linda other tasks in the restaurant to carry out. Linda was thrilled. Over time, with Betsy's support and constant encouragement, Linda continued to grow in her job and be recognized for her good work.

Ultimately after a few years Linda left her position with McDonald's - but she hasn't forgotten the difference that Betsy made in her life with respect to her self confidence and self esteem as she grew and tackled workplace challenges. Betsy helped Linda see what she could do, not what she couldn't. She also allowed her the opportunity to experience the personal pride and feeling of community that comes from employment.

Today Linda has her own television show on cable access TV in White River called "Walking Through Life", and as she says now - "they can't keep me inside or shut me up"!

Simple Ways *You* Can Make A Difference

How You Can Help - Mentoring

As far as we think we have come since 1990 and the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act, people with disabilities continue to face attitudinal barriers when it comes to employment. Mentoring is a way to help break down these barriers. By providing a mentoring experience, you can gain access to potential new employees, as well as promoting an understanding of disability in the workplace. You can provide an opportunity to a person with a disability that they may not have otherwise had.

Mentoring a person with a disability, or allowing your employees to, can bring great benefit to your business. First and foremost, mentoring offers businesses a chance to build their future workforce. While the mentees are gaining confidence and skill, you can train potential future employees.

Mentoring can also create positive attitude changes in your business. It shows your employees that you care about professional growth and care about

people. Mentoring will have a positive effect on all your employees. People will learn to see ability, not disability.

Positive role models can make such a difference. Some tips for starting a mentoring program include:

- Help staff to ensure that they understand the concept of mentoring;
- Training for staff to make sure that they understand the commitment of mentoring;
- Provide disability awareness training for staff who are working with individuals with disabilities for the first time;
- Provide incentives for people to both mentor and receive mentoring. For example, hold special recognition events for individuals participating in mentoring;
- Have the mentor and the individual being mentored agree on expectations up front, including how long the mentoring will last and how frequently meetings will take place.

Disability Mentoring Day is Coming!



Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) is coming! The Kick Off will be **Wednesday, October 17th** at the University of Vermont with events scheduled around the State.

So, what is Disability Mentoring Day, you may be asking. DMD is a day that promotes career development for people with disabilities. Started in 1999 with less than three dozen students participating, Disability Mentoring Day is celebrated every October as part of Disability Employment Awareness Month. In 2006, DMD saw 13,000 people with disabilities placed in mentoring situations around the U.S., as well as twenty four countries. Thousands of employers participated.

The goals of Disability Mentoring Day are many. They include: enhancing internship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities; promoting disability as part of a diverse workforce; increasing self esteem and confidence for people with disabilities seeking employment; and helping to dispel an employer's fear about hiring a person with a disability.

Although the core focus of DMD is one-on-one mentoring situations, activities can take many different approaches. Here in Vermont, there will be activities all around the State.

In Burlington, the kick-off event will be held at UVM on Oct 17th at the Memorial

Lounge in Waterman Building from 9:00-12:00. The Awareness Theater Company is going to perform a morning of short shows followed by tours in and around UVM. The Awareness Theater Company (ATC) is a theatrical group composed of an eclectic group of people who have been drawn together by a desire to create and perform original theater. The following shows will be formed as a part of DMD:

I'll Fly Away - In **I'll Fly Away**, the ATC tells the story of a green bird whose neighborhood is filled with pink birds. This show was originally created in a VSA arts Theater class by a group of adults who have developmental disabilities.

My Hamster - This piece tells the fictional story of how a pet Hamster advocates for a better life.

Changing Places - This autobiographical work uses puppets, dance, text and a big red cardboard house, to relate the mundane, exotic, tragic and heroic moments of life.

Silent But Outspoken: The Edward Burke Story - This piece highlights the educational, emotional, social and spiritual development of the author as he grows up learning to live with a learning disability as the result of complications at birth.

Hamster Heaven - The funny and poignant sequel to "My Hamster".

Festive Finale - Music, Flags and Dancing!

The Bennington area is hosting a Craft, Bake, and Tag Sale on October 19 from 10:00-3:00, where people with disabilities will display their crafts. This event will be held on the Bennington Chamber of Commerce lawn (Rt. 7A)

In Springfield, the Chamber of Commerce has contacted 300 local employers to participate as mentors as part of DMD. There will also be a kick-off breakfast.

The Rutland area has 200 employers who have agreed to serve as mentor locations. Several job tours have been lined up at the Police Station, General Electric, V-Mass, the Post Office, SSA, and Green Mountain College.

In Middlebury, several local employers will be participating, with a highlight on post-secondary educational options, including tours at CCV.

DMD participants include employers (private, non-profit, government, educational), people with disabilities, and educators. The benefits for all participants are great. For the mentees this is an opportunity to evaluate goals, explore possible career paths and develop lasting mentoring opportunities. For employers, DMD is an opportunity to learn more about disability, to outreach to a pool of potential employees, to attract positive media coverage, but most importantly to make a difference.

So, what can you do if you are an employer? Be willing to have your business

sponsor a mentoring opportunity. Allow your employees to become volunteer mentors. If you are interested in becoming involved, go to www.vermontapse.org and click on the link to DMD.

October is Disability Employment Awareness Month

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is an annual event that recognizes the contribution of workers with disabilities, as part of an effort to educate Americans about issues surrounding disability and employment. The theme for 2007 is "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team"

This effort to educate Americans started over 62 years ago. It started in 1945 with the U.S. Congress declaring the first week of October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week". The word "physically" was removed in 1962 in recognition of the employment needs of people with all types of disabilities. Congress expanded the week to a month in 1988, and changed the name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month".

Nationwide, 14 million working age Americans have a disability. In Vermont, one in five people have a disability. Approximately one-third of the people with disabilities ages 18-64 are working. Two-thirds of those who are unemployed are ambitious and would prefer to be working. Employment offers freedom and independence.

Employers who hire people with disabilities find they have tapped into a skilled pool of workers who can meet their staffing needs. In observance of Disability Employment Awareness Month, take the opportunity to get involved. Plan an event or program to educate your managers and employees on the abilities of employees and job candidates with disabilities. For more information go to: www.dol.gov/odep/. For help in planning events for your business, contact the Vermont Business Leadership Network, 1-800-639-2909.

Resources You Should Know About

Resources for Employers

When discussing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the hiring of people with disabilities, employers often have questions.

A number of resources are available to assist employers in understanding their responsibilities:

ADA Technical Assistance

Information and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act

(800) 949-4232 (Voice/TTY)

www.adata.org (Website)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Enforces ADA's employment provisions. Has information available through their

website to answer employer questions and concerns.

(800)669-4000 (Voice/TTY)

www.eeoc.gov (Website)

Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities

Vermont's legally designated leadership and coordination group on issues related to employment of people with disabilities.

www.hireus.org (Website)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Assists employers to provide reasonable accommodations to their employees:

(800) 526-7234 (Toll-free/TTY/TDD)

www.jan.wvu.edu (Website)

New England ADA Technical Assistance Center

Information and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act

(800) 949-4232 (Voice/TTY)

www.adaptenv.org (Website)

US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

Provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities

(866)633-7365 (Voice) (877)889-5627 (TTY)

www.dol.gov/odep/ (Website)

Vermont Association of Business, Industry & Rehabilitation (VABIR)

(800) 639-2909 (Voice/TDD)

www.vabir.com (Website)

Vermont Business Leadership Network (VTBLN)

(800) 639-2909 (Voice/TDD)

www.vtbln.org (Website)

VocRehab Vermont

1-866-VRWORKS

(866-879-6757) (Voice/TTY)

www.vocrehab.vermont.gov (Website)

Melita DeBellis,

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

melita@gcepd.org; 802-434-6600; www.hireus.org

and

Christine McCarthy

Vermont Business Leadership Network

vabired@aol.com; 802-878-1107; www.vtbln.org

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