

APSE HR Connect *Creating 'Internal Capacity'*

By James Emmett

APSE HR Connect was created to assist businesses in developing systems to successfully tap the amazing labor and customer power of the disability community. The services offered by HR Connect focus on supporting companies in developing **internal capacity** to successfully recruit workers from the disability community.

The critical component of creating **internal capacity** involves helping each company develop systems that meet bottom-line business needs through collaboration with the disability community. The process of developing **internal capacity** involves assessing business needs, creating an action plan and goals related to disability outreach, training and mentoring company staff, and evaluating systems.

The power of the disability community is undeniable; it is an incredible labor and customer market. Below are a few facts that highlight this point:

- 1) 56 million people with disabilities plus close family, friends, and supporters comprise almost one-third of the United States population.
- 2) 20 million of 70 million families in the U.S. have at least one member with a disability (and 1 out of 10 families raising children have at least 1 child with a disability).
- 3) People with disabilities in the U.S. have an annual discretionary spending power of \$220 billion. This does *not* take into account family, friends, and supporters!
- 4) With 40% higher unemployment than the general population, people with disabilities are the last untapped labor source in the country.
- 5) Targeting the disability community as a customer and labor source is one of the hot, rising trends in the American business community. Companies like Walgreens (www.walgreensoutreach.com), CVS, Starbucks, and Hyatt

have already initiated large-scale outreach efforts to the disability community.

TIAA-CREF, Best Buy Efforts

TIAA-CREF and Best Buy are two key businesses that HR Connect is currently working with. TIAA-CREF is a large investment house that owns a variety of businesses across the world. HR Connect is working with this company on a pilot project to set up supported employment opportunities in one of the orchards that TIAA-CREF owns. Basically, HR Connect is helping the orchard create systems to recruit and retain workers with disabilities as a critical new labor source.

With Best Buy, HR Connect is piloting a project out of a grant with a community rehabilitation provider in Illinois — El Valor. HR Connect is assisting Best Buy in furthering their strategy in recruiting from the disability community.

More on Internal Capacity

Most companies have to be responsive, flexible, reliable, and demonstrative of integrity as their guiding principles. As Baby Boomers retire and immigration restrictions continue to impact the available labor pool, a systematic outreach to the disability community is a highly strategic way to assist companies in strengthening their guiding principles. The development of **internal capacity** involves demonstration of strategies that positively impact a business's bottom line.

Positive Impacts on the Bottom Line

The following are some of the ways that a strategic disability outreach initiative can impact a company's bottom line:

- 1) **Reduced Turnover:** A well-run disability community outreach effort reduces turnover compared to recruiting from other labor pools. Therefore, the costs associated with turnover

are decreased. These include: training time, loss of productivity, and loss of hours, overtime for other staff, human resource & payroll.

- 2) **Reduced Recruiting Costs:** A well-run outreach effort coordinates and takes true advantage of the recruiting services of the state vocational rehabilitation system, community based organizations, and schools. This can help reduce the need for recruiting with expensive job boards, newspaper ads, and temporary agencies. Through pre-screening collaborations, a company can increase the efficiency of human resource & recruiting department staff.
- 3) **Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC):** A business can access a direct tax credit of \$2,400 per hire of an individual with a disability who earns at least \$6,000 in salary. Often, businesses have the perception that the paperwork for this credit is overwhelming, but a system to efficiently capture this credit is typically easy to create.
- 4) **Training Program Incentives:** Business can tap state grants & incentives to set up training projects in partnership with vocational rehabilitation programs, schools, and community-based organizations. This results in having trained workers available immediately with little ramp-up time, which provides a tremendous savings in training costs.
- 5) **Customer Outreach:** By setting up specific disability-related programs and completing a disability community marketing effort, businesses can expect an increase in patronage from the disability community. Studies have shown that the spending power of the disability community rivals almost every other niche group that companies target through strategic marketing efforts.

Businesses can also realize other benefits when they develop **internal capacity**, such as an increase in diversity, better preparation for supporting injured workers and the return to work process, as well as improved community and public relations.

Possible Components of a Disability Outreach Effort

A sample Disability Outreach Program that focuses on creation of internal capacity could contain any or all of the following components:

- 1) *Disability Awareness Program* — training targeted at team members in various levels of a company to help lay the foundation for the initiative;
- 2) *Disability Community Recruiting Program* — development of a recruiting initiative targeting the disability community to efficiently locate qualified applicants for positions across the company. This program could partner with various community based organizations and schools across the country;
- 3) *Specialized Training Program* — in partnership with vocational rehabilitation, community-based organizations and schools, companies can develop a pre and/or post-hire training program. This program could help potential applicants with disabilities develop the skills required to work at the company as well as assess an individual's interest in working for the company;
- 4) *Natural Supports Initiative* — working with department supervisors and managers to build job aids and creative accommodations, such as visual supports that help all employees to do their job better;
- 5) *Accessibility Support* — part of an outreach could involve ensuring that the business goes above and beyond in making areas of the company accessible to everyone, including building and physical structures, employment screening and training processes, as well as Internet communication; and
- 6) *Disability Community Marketing Effort* — working in cooperation with a company's media & marketing and sales departments to develop a disability community marketing effort that would target potential new customers for the business.

Summary

The creation of **internal capacity** is a win/win venture where the business ends up profiting and people with disabilities access quality career opportunities. APSE HR Connect is proud to offer services to help companies develop **internal capacity**. ■

James Emmett is the Director of APSE HR Connect. He has spent the last 10 years as a supported employment consultant focusing on consulting within the corporate community including setting up the Disability Outreach for the Walgreens Corporation. For more information on APSE HR Connect, contact James at (574) 808-9779; or james@apse.org.

For more information, visit www.apse.org