



**Strategic
Employment
Solutions**

Mobilizing An ABLE Workforce

5 Steps to Hiring Employees with Disabilities:

An Inclusivity Guide to Get the Ball Rolling





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Hello, my name is Amy Ostrowski, and I am a disability inclusion consultation expert located in San Diego, CA. My affinity for working with the disabled began with my sister who happens to have Down syndrome. Growing up, our parents treated us both just like typical kids/ siblings. Both of us were expected to do our chores, go to school, get good grades, get a higher education, move out and have a job.



I know that sounds typical, but from my experience, that is not the typical view society has when it comes to people with disabilities. By the time I went to school, I noticed that students with disabilities were teased and underestimated. I noticed how they were put in classes based on diagnosis and/or by stereotypes instead of ability.

Having seen this inequity, this led me to become a special education teacher and help change the perspective of schools, helping them see that a diagnosis did not determine which class they would or should be placed in. My parents had to continuously fight the schools because teachers wanted to put my sister into a “life skills” (aka: non-academic) class and we knew she could do more. And she did!

Then I went out into the community and saw how people with disabilities, including my sister, had so much more difficulty finding work and being accepted by society. This led me to become a job placement specialist and I was personally able to get over 100 people who have disabilities hired within 2.5 years.

In diligently following up and checking in with the clients I placed, I then I saw that they were not valued in their jobs. People hired them out of the goodness of their heart, as charity cases, or for the limited tax benefits at the time, instead of for the skills they possessed. I saw half of those employees lose their jobs because management didn't see their value or potential.



The frustration from this drove me to create Strategic Employment Solutions. I have seen first-hand what people with disabilities CAN do, their drive, and their desire to be part of the “working” world, just like the rest of us. I saw the need to help companies overcome their fears and stereotypes that surround the disability community and open their eyes to the multitude of benefits a company can tap into by hiring these well qualified and motivated individuals.

My sister and many others are living proof that they bring value to the businesses they work for. My sister currently works in an office setting where her supervisor has said that they love how productive and self-motivated she is to get the task done efficiently, quickly and to learn more as she grows into the position. They are already looking at increasing her hours because they see her value.



This is all because they took the time and effort to learn and to go through the 5 steps in this guide and really seek out the value that hiring employees with disabilities would have on their business. To this day, these employers have hired more employees who have disabilities and both the employees and the company are thriving because of it.

Most people have heard the phrase “Together Everyone Achieves More” (T.E.A.M), Together, let’s create a TEAM and create a more diversified workforce for your business by tapping into this highly skilled and disproportionally underemployed workforce. Be the catalyst in your industry and set a new standard!

By reading this guide, you are taking the first step in a rewarding journey and I am always here to assist you. I look forward to working with you and your team.

Sincerely,
Amy Ostrowski



Getting started!



So, you are thinking about diversifying your work force? Congratulations! I bet you might have considered diversifying based on culture/ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, etc., but have you considered diversifying by adding employees with a disability? It is ok if you did not initially, because if you are reading this then you have at least started to consider this as an option for your company.

My hope is that this guide will not only show you the benefits you are missing out on by not hiring people with disabilities, it will also give you a step by step plan to determine if hiring from the disability community is the right step for your company. It will also give you valuable resources to make it an easy decision.

It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that you do **ALL 5 steps**. These steps are the foundation of your diversity plan. Without all 5 steps you will not have a complete plan and executing it will prove to be more difficult and frustrating for you, your company, and the employees as well.

It is important to go through the activities in this book in order to gain the most benefit from it.

If at any time you need clarity or assistance you can reach out to me directly at:

Strategic Employment Solutions

www.SESadvocacy.com

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619-786-4076

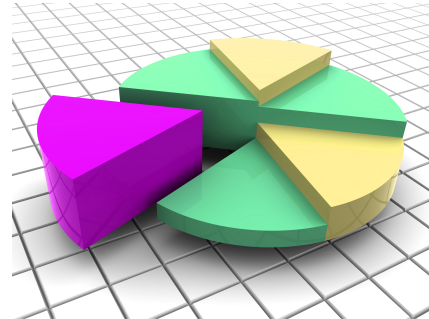


Benefits of Hiring Employees with Disabilities

The **LARGEST** untapped, skilled workforce!

Let's start with some facts...

- 20% of the population has a disability
- As of 2017 only **18%** of working aged people with a disability were employed
- 70% of people with disabilities want to be employed (2/10 actually are)
- Of the following disability categories
 - 51% of people who are deaf/hard of hearing are employed
 - 41% of people who are blind/visually impaired are employed
 - 25% of people with intellectual disabilities such as learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury and mental illness, are employed
 - 24% of people who have physical disabilities are employed
 - 16% of people with independent living disabilities, aka developmental/intellectual disabilities such as Down Syndrome, Autism and Cerebral Pals, are employed



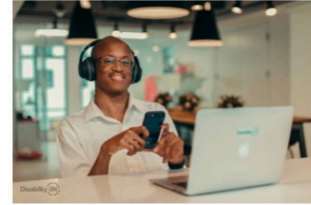
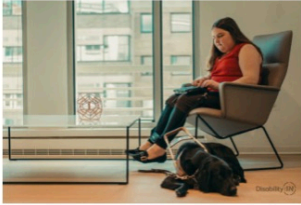
This means that about **80% of people with disabilities are NOT employed**, and unfortunately this number has not changed in over 4 decades. Yet the unemployment rate for the average person has fluctuated between 3%-10% since the 1970's.

Consider this...

Would you agree that **people can become disabled at any time of their life** due to a number of reasons including illness and accident? Now consider, if YOU were the person who became disabled (i.e. in a wheelchair, traumatic brain injury, or??), how would you like to be seen and/or treated as you come back into the workforce? Would it be "business as usual"? What if YOU were the one looking for a job? How would you like to be treated?



Benefits of Hiring Employees with Disabilities



So now let's talk about some benefits of hiring employees with disabilities.

Do you have positions with high turnover rates?

People with disabilities are 20% more likely to stay with a company through thick and thin compared to their “typical” co-workers. How much money could that save your company in hiring, onboarding, and training?

Do you have high absenteeism?

People with disabilities are 20% less likely to take sick and vacation days. It is a myth that all people with disabilities will have more sick days due to their disability. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule which can be easily worked out through accommodations.

Do you have a high number of workman's comp claims?

People with disabilities have significantly lower incidence of claims AND most are minor (think band-aide type of injury). People with disabilities may put in more claims, on paper, but most are minor things like a cut on the hand. They are actually just following the company policy to “report” that the average joe may not if the injury is minor like a paper cut. Walgreens, who has 33% of their employees in their distribution centers identify as having a disability, has 60% fewer workman comp claims than their “typical” coworkers.



Benefits of Hiring Employees with Disabilities



Do you feel like there are tasks that eat up your precious time that you wish someone else could do so you can get to the important stuff?

You can save money by pooling these tasks across departments if needed and creating a new job, full or part time, that can be a great fit for someone with a disability. Pay your highly paid employees for the unique work only they can do. Give away the mundane tasks to another to free up their time.

Would you like to grow your customer base?

People with disabilities have more discretionary funds than the average person. When you employ people with disabilities you also gain more customers because friends and family support businesses who support people with disabilities

Are you looking for more innovative ways of doing business, new innovative projects to take on?

People with disabilities are known for innovation because they have had to adapt to the “typical” world so they see things from a different perspective. Not to mention, many people with disabilities have degrees in many fields. Think of all of the soldiers who come back from service with an acquired disability. Many have degrees in higher education and a wealth of knowledge not to mention innovation and the skills to do things more efficiently. But you have to look at their experience first and not their challenges.

Do you value productive employees?

People with disabilities consistently meet or exceed job performance and productivity expectations by 20-140%.



Benefits of Hiring Employees with Disabilities

**Now let's get down to the
nitty-gritty facts.**

Companies who hire and retain people with disabilities have...

- 28% higher revenue on average
- 30% greater economic profit margins on average
- 2 times the net income of industry peers (2015-2018)
- those rated as "Disability Inclusion Champions" are 2 times as likely to have higher shareholder returns than their peers
- most of the financial burden of health care is covered by work opportunity tax credits, ticket to work and medi-care programs
- abundant TAX WRITE OFFS AND CREDITS for hiring and retaining employees with disclosed disabilities. The amounts vary by business size and number of hours worked.
- an employee's salary covered by the PAID INTERNSHIP PROGRAM for a year or \$10,000 whichever comes first. This means you can try it out before spending money. (Note: this is for California based companies only)



Source: www.fastcompany.com/90311742

Are you ready to create a plan so your company can reap all of these benefits?

Is the thought of hiring people with disabilities overwhelming and scary? No worries, it is for many people.

That is why we have 5 things to consider before building a plan to successfully hire employees with disabilities.

Let's get started!



Step 1: Start a Conversation



STEP 1: Start a Conversation

The place to start this conversation is in upper management meetings. Research shows that if initiatives around disability start from the top down they are more successful overall. Open up a discussion about disability in the workforce and specifically in your company.

- Write down fears, stereotypes, wishes, dreams and ideas.
- What information do you need?
- How do you see it benefitting your company? (revenue, customers, retention, etc.)
- What would be the ideal situation for your company? (starting big or small?)
- What company initiatives does hiring employees with disabilities serve?
- Are your goals/initiatives clear?

It is ok to aim high: you have to start somewhere and it is a work in progress. Research shows that the clearer you are in your vision the better it is for your employees to make an informed decision and make the changes needed.

Remember, you do not need to get there “overnight”. Making an implementation plan will ensure your success at every step of the way. Take a step. Evaluate. Take another step. Keep going.



Step 1: Start a Conversation

START A CONVERSATION

Write down your thoughts and ideas. Use extra sheets if needed.

Why are you considering hiring employees with disabilities?

(Is it an initiative, an employee suggestion, a random idea, because you were approached by a community agency looking for jobs for their clients, trying to fill high turn-over positions?)

What fears/stereotypes do you have about hiring employees with disabilities?

How do you see hiring people with disabilities benefiting your company?

(revenue, customers, retention, tax saving benefits, employee morale, or ??? etc.)

What are your dreams or ideas about how to make hiring employees with disabilities into your workforce a successful option?

Where do you want to start?

(one department, the entire business, or ?? etc.)

What information do you need before making the decision to hire employees with disabilities?



Step 2: Reach out to Community Agencies



STEP 2: Reach Out to Community Agencies

Do you know that there are local agencies who specialize in sourcing employees with disabilities. Ask them about their job seekers, their placement programs, supports options, and volunteer opportunities.

This is beneficial because it starts to create a partnership between your company and the agency/agencies you choose in your area. By creating this partnership, you can set standards for potential employees coming from them as well as promote them to other businesses who may also be looking to hire.

It is your choice if you source from one or from many different agencies. If you are not sure about which agency/agencies to work with, do some research on them. If, after you have researched them, you still have questions, feel free to reach out to Strategic Employment Solutions for assistance. You can reach us at info@SESadvocacy.com



Step 2: Reach out to Community Agencies

REACH OUT

Names of Agencies in your area:

(Get online and research agencies in your area. Note their: phone numbers and addresses, why these agencies interested you. You may be interested because you want to hire veterans, or you want to hire from the blind community, etc)

1) Agency name: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Why this company interests us:

2) Agency name: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Why this company interests us:

3) Agency name: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Why this company interests us:

4) Agency name: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Why this company interests us:

5) Agency name: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____

Why this company interests us:



Step 2: Reach out to Community Agencies

Agency/Agencies to reach out to:

(Print out one sheet per agency you are going to reach out to)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Employment Placement Specialist name: _____

Notes about agency:

Questions to ask the company:

What is the mission of your job placement department?

(full time/part time work, paid internships, # placed and retained/year?)

Do you have job seekers who are interested and skilled in _____?

(Taylor this to your company's needs. i.e. help in the office? Warehouse? Customer service? Etc.)

What supports do you provide for your clients?

(job coach, on site/off site, permanent/temporary, communication support, company trainings)

How can we (your company) support your agency?

(volunteering, donations, attend events, host job information workshops)

Any other questions/notes...



Step 3: Look at your Policies and Procedures



STEP 3: Look at Your Policies and Procedures

What hiring, interviewing, accommodation processes, etc. do you already have in place? It is important to take an inventory on what you already have so that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. You can use current policies etc. as a foundation for any changes.

Questions to consider:

- Do you have an interactive process (accommodations process)?
- Is your website advertising that you are recruiting from the disability community?
- Is your website accessible? (screen readers, accessible to enlarging for the blind etc.)
- Is your interview process accessible?
- Are all policies/procedures up to date?
- Do you have employees who are trained to implement your policies?
- Is your HR department trained in working with recruiters and sourcing agencies whose clients have disabilities?

Use the following worksheet to track which policies are in place, which are in place but need some revamping, or if you need to develop a new policy, procedure or training.



Step 3: Look at your Policies and Procedures

YOUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

(Use additional pages as needed)

Do you have...

YES NO



Interactive process (accommodation process)?



Is your website accessible? (screen reader compatible, photos have alt text, etc.)



Is your employee application process accessible?



Is your interview process accessible? (Different methods of interviewing other than traditional face to face?)



Is your website advertising (Other than EEOC disclaimer) that you are recruiting people with disabilities into your workforce?



Are your trainings accessible to many learning needs?



Do your managers/supervisors have experience working with people of different abilities?

If you answered YES are there any improvements that you need to make on your current policies and procedures?

Policy & associated Improvement needed:

Policy & associated Improvement needed:

Policy & associated Improvement needed:



Step 4: Brainstorm With Your Team



STEP 4: Brainstorm With Your Team

“Your team” is your upper management and possibly mid management teams (think departments). This step will help you determine if you want to start big or small. Remember, there is no wrong place to start, as long as you do in fact start! Think of areas where you are losing money, have high turnover rates, or need more assistance. These are great areas with a lot of potential. This is your time to **THINK BIG** and **THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX**. You may not do everything you write down, and that is fine. This is a place to do a brain dump and collect all of your ideas.

Ask yourself:

- What positions/departments would you like to hire for/within?
- Is there a position that can be created to help your business be more productive?
- Are there tasks that you need done more often that are just not getting done?
- Do you see the position being full or part time?
- Are there higher positions that are hard to fill where a veteran may have the qualification but also have a disability?



Step 4: Brainstorm With Your Team

Brainstorm

1. What department(s) do you want to start within?

2. What position(s) have a high turnover rate that you would like to fill more permanently?

3. Can you create a position by relieving higher paid employees from mundane tasks like filing, pulling inventory, cleaning, unpacking inventory, etc.? What duties would be considered?

4. What tasks just are not getting done frequently enough for your liking? Are there several departments that have the same or similar tasks that are not getting done effectively or regularly?

5. Are you creating a full of part time position? If part time, how many hours on average/week?

6. What is your budget for implementing your goals and initiatives? Where can you creatively pull money to fund these changes? (Marketing, training/development, recruiting, HR?)

7. Are there upper level positions where a veteran may have the degree you need as well as a disability?



Step 5: Educate ALL of your Employees



STEP FIVE: Educate ALL of Your Employees

Whenever there is an addition of a employee, there is a time of adjustment. This can be especially true when you hire an employee with any type of disability or make changes to corporate policy, culture, etc. Talk with ALL of your employees, even if the changes are not happening in their department. It is important to talk to everyone because at some time they will encounter the employee with the disability and/or you may expand hiring into other departments.

You might find that you may have some employees who are not onboard with the changes. Other companies have gone through this as well, you are not alone. Inevitably some people do leave because they no longer see eye to eye with company goals or culture. Don't see this as a failure, see it merely as an evolution of your company. People come and go from companies for many reasons, some leave because they don't feel the culture fits them anymore and that is ok. It just means that the next person to be hired will know what the company culture is and will accept the position if it fits their idea of a good culture for them. This is a good thing, and it increases and strengthens your company culture.



Step 5: Educate ALL of your Employees



STEP FIVE: Educate ALL of Your Employees continued:

Set out your expectations, learn their thoughts, fears, and stereotypes. You may be surprised about who from your company steps up and has information that could be useful. Open up communication so everyone can feel safe and heard. This way you don't have to start all over again when you expand with other new employees who have disabilities and everyone is comfortable with the change.

Before having this conversation with your employees, make sure your goals are clear and measurable. Fill out the following form so you are clear and can communicate the changes that will be made. This will help to open up communication and will let everyone ask pertinent questions, get clarity and share ideas. You never know who will have resources, experiences, or other valuable insights to share. Do your best to create a space where everyone can feel heard and appreciated for their input. You might be surprised at what you learn from your current workforce.

Tip: Have upper management share your ideas, fears, stereotypes, experiences FIRST. If you show vulnerability it will help create an environment that promotes safe and open communication.



Step 5: Educate ALL of your Employees

EDUCATE YOUR TEAM

Inform your employees...

Our intentions, as they relate to diversity and inclusion initiatives, are...

(Have very clear goals.)

We have these intentions/initiatives because...

(Be very clear on your “WHY”, state the facts to back up your “WHY”)

If you already have a plan ready to implement to hire employees with disabilities share this plan in detail with your current employees. Write your notes here.

Remind everyone that this is an open and safe conversation where they can share their concerns and ideas.



Step 5: Educate ALL of your Employees

Ask your employees:

(document their answers)

1) What fears/stereotypes/concerns do you have about working with employees who have disabilities?

2) How many people know someone who has a disability? Visible or invisible disabilities?

3) Would anyone like to share an experience, good or bad, they have had with a person with a disability? (It is ok if no one wants to share, trust in communication can take time, sometimes it helps if upper management can give some examples of their own experience to break the ice)

4) Do you have tasks in your department that you would like to hand off so you can be more productive in your primary (most important) duties?

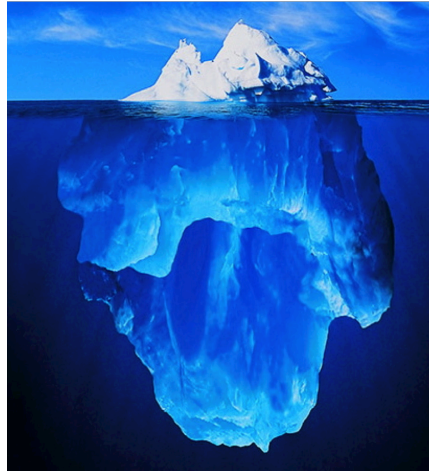
5) Do you have tasks in your department that don't get done as often as you would like? What are they? And why do they not get accomplished? How would it benefit your department?

6) What suggestions/ideas do you have in regard to hiring people with disabilities into your workforce? (Someone may have a connection with an agency or previous experience at a prior job)



NEXT STEPS

Once you have gone through these five steps, reach out to us at Strategic Employment Solutions and let us help you put an actionable and measurable plan together so you can start hiring. Remember, this is a process; it does not happen overnight. There is not a one size fits all solution for every company and situation. But if you stick with it and create a method and environment that works specifically for your company you can reap the many benefits of hiring employees with disabilities. We are aware that you and your employees are busy already, and we want to make this shift as smooth as possible. By filling out the work sheets in this book you have already filled out most of the questions we will need to help you create a comprehensive plan to learn and support your goals. So you are already ahead of the game!



NEXT STEPS:

Completing these 5 steps is just the tip of the iceberg. Rest assured that the professionals at Strategic Employment Solutions are here to support you every step of the way to ensure your success.

Other available trainings provided by Strategic Employment Solutions include:

- I.D.E.A full package
- Management/current employee training
- Modifying job descriptions
- Strategic new hire trainings
- Connect with agencies who source employees with disabilities.
- Active Recruiting of people with disabilities
- Etiquette Training
- Affinity (ERG) group facilitation for employees with and without disabilities
- Accommodations



RESOURCES

Strategic Employment Solutions:

Web site : www.sesadvocacy.com

E-mail: info@SESadvocacy.com

Phone Number : 619-786-4076

FAQ's: <https://www.SESadvocacy.com/faq/>

Services: <https://www.SESadvocacy.com/services/>

Government Resources:

ADA incentives : <https://www.ada.gov/taxcred.htm>

Work Opportunity Tax Credit : <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/work-opportunity-tax-credit>