



## Tips Shared for Recruiting Workers with Disabilities

By Kathy Gurchiek

Building a strong employer brand is the first step in recruiting employees with a disability, Laura Wilhelm pointed out during the Feb. 13, 2013, webinar “Best Practices in Disability Recruiting.” Think Beyond the Label.com (TBTL) hosted the hourlong webinar, moderated by Brazen Careerist, that showcased tips on how organizations can find highly skilled, college-educated professionals who have disabilities.

TBTL is a public-private partnership managed by the nonprofit national advocacy group Health & Disability Advocates. Among the job candidates TBTL works with, 10% are new college graduates, 20% have between five and 10 years of work experience, and 30% have more than 11 years of work experience, said Wilhelm, who is the project director at the Chicagobased Health & Disability Advocates.

“The job candidates we are connecting with are looking for high-skilled professional jobs” and are people “who aren’t connected to any kind of services from the public employment system,” she said. This is “a group of individuals who are coming to the table with some really good education and experience in their background.”

Building a strong employer brand that is focused on diversity—not just on disability—is critical and “good for all your recruiting efforts.”

She offered the following advice:

Advertise your company as an equal opportunity employer. Include a statement on your corporate website that acknowledges that your workplace is accessible to people with disabilities. “Talk about what you’re doing for current employees,” she said, such as offering telecommuting or flexible schedules. Such actions “are going to be really appealing [to] candidates with a disability ... [and] all of your workforce.”

Additionally, include contact information for anyone having problems accessing your website because of a disability.

“People really do appreciate acknowledgment [that] ... you have some work to do” on making your site more accessible, and that acknowledgment demonstrates transparency. Start associating your employer brand with strong disability employment practices. “It’s going to bring more of these candidates to you,” Wilhelm emphasized. There are approximately 54 million people with disabilities in the U.S., she noted, citing U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

People with disabilities in the U.S. control \$250 billion in annual disposable income, according to a TBTL spokesperson. Numbering approximately 57 million, they are the second largest market segment,

behind Baby Boomers (77 million) and Hispanics (50 million), according to the March 2012 edition of *The Global Economics of Disability*.

Reaching out to those with disabilities has a ripple effect of attracting the family and friends of people with disabilities to your business, Wilhelm added.

Use recruiting formats that this talent pool accesses. Consider making your employer's online application process easier to use, with fonts that can be enlarged or a site that can be used with a screen reader. Also use social media and weigh the merits of working with sourcing firms that specialize in placing job candidates with disabilities.

"Job candidates with disabilities are heavily engaged in social media," Wilhelm observed. Virtual job fairs are another way to target this demographic, she said, because the anonymity affords them "a way to begin the conversation [with an employer] without having to deal with some of those things that are stumbling blocks on a first impression." What's more, this option removes transportation costs.

Create formal policies and procedures on accommodations to help ensure consistency. Invite employees with disabilities to work with you on these policies. Monitor accommodations to make sure they are effective, and update them as needed. Wilhelm advises companies to communicate accommodation policies to employees.

"If our supervisors, managers [and] HR professionals have some strong policies and procedures to refer to," she said, "it's more likely accommodation requests will be handled well and consistently."

A recent Job Accommodation Network study found that 57% of 590 employers reported that accommodating employees and job applicants with disabilities cost them nothing. Thirtyseven% reported a one-time cost, 4% reported an ongoing annual cost, and 2% reported a combined one-time and annual cost.

Tell job candidates that your organization will accommodate them during the hiring process, and have information about accommodation policies in all offer letters/communications. This includes details about the interview and job location and the easiest way to get to the interview site. Advising the candidate as to when the interview process concludes is helpful for those who have to arrange for transportation.

Assign a contact person that the candidate may get in touch with for more information before the interview, and consult with candidates to determine what interview format works best for them. If the interview site is not accessible for the applicant, think of an alternative location that he or she can get to, Wilhelm suggested.

The TBTL website lists best practices for employers seeking qualified individuals with disabilities, including participating in National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October); embedding disability components into training for HR and new employees; hosting a Disability Mentoring Day; including disability in diversity training; creating internships for individuals with disabilities; and working with vocational rehabilitation agencies in your state and distributing job announcements to them.

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Wilhelm reminded employers that they cannot ask disability-related questions before a job offer is made, but they can address specific job duties and ask how the candidate would perform them. Moreover, they can ask how he or she performed a similar task in the past.

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*Kathy Gurchiek is Associate Editor at SHRM Online, where this article appeared on March 14, 2013. It is reprinted with permission courtesy of the Society for Human Resource Management.*

