

## THE IMPORTANCE OF HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH A DISABILITY<sup>i</sup>

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Competence and flexibility are vital skills that are sought in new hires. Perhaps more than any other group, individuals with a disability must think creatively about how to solve problems and accomplish tasks. In the workplace, this resourcefulness translates into innovative thinking, fresh ideas, and varied approaches to confronting challenges and achieving success.

Research shows that individuals with a disability make excellent employees. Research also demonstrates that employees with a disability consistently meet or exceed performance expectations and have a lower than average rate of turnover. Yet, as a whole, individuals with a disability represent one of the largest untapped pools of skills and talent in the United States.

### RECRUITMENT

As mentioned earlier, individuals with a disability often have the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to succeed in today's rapidly changing workforce. Taking the following kinds of steps can help you ensure that individuals with a disability are included in your recruitment efforts:

- Post job announcements in disability-related publications, web sites and job fairs
- Contact the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services for job referrals.
- Establish summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with a disability
- Create partnerships with disability-related professional or advocacy organizations

### PROVIDING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Employers have an obligation to make reasonable accommodations to enable applicants with a disability to apply for jobs. Employers must either make their application processes accessible or provide an alternative means for people with a disability to apply for jobs. Job vacancy announcements should include contact information if an individual needs assistance in applying for the job. Inform applicants ahead of time if they will be required to take a test to demonstrate their ability to perform actual or simulated tasks so that they can request a reasonable accommodation if necessary.

### INTERVIEWING INDIVIDUALS WITH A DISABILITY

Under the ADA, employers may not ask disability-related questions or conduct medical examinations until after they make a conditional job offer to an applicant. This helps ensure that an applicant's possible hidden disability (including a prior history of a disability) is not considered before employers evaluate an applicant's non-medical qualifications. However, they may do a wide variety of things to evaluate whether an applicant is qualified for the job, including asking about an applicant's ability to perform specific job functions, asking about an applicant's non-medical qualifications and skills, and asking applicants to describe or demonstrate how they would perform job tasks.

When interviewing candidates, keep in mind the basic rule:

**Ask applicants about their *abilities*, not their *disabilities*.**

Relax and make the applicant feel relaxed. Do not try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability. He or she has mastered alternate ways of living and working. Do not make assumptions about what the person can or cannot do.

It is not unusual to feel uncomfortable to communicate with an individual with a disability. Focus on the communication itself—what information needs to be transmitted and how best to transmit it. Talk directly to the person. If the person has a speech impairment and you are having difficulty understanding what he or she is saying, ask the individual to repeat rather than pretending to understand. For more information, see Effective Interaction: Communicating with and About People with Disabilities in the Workplace at:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/effectiveinteraction.htm>

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<sup>i</sup> Sources: [http://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/Flip%20Guide\\_FINAL\\_3%2030\\_508%20compliant2.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/Flip%20Guide_FINAL_3%2030_508%20compliant2.pdf)

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