



The Business Case of Employing People with Disabilities

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As the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age, the retirement wave swells creating workforce shortage. Moreover, employee loyalty is declining; one recent study shows that 76 percent of full-time workers are willing to leave their current job for opportunistic reasons. The combined effects of these recent trends present a challenge for the labor intensive hospitality industry that requires both experienced and loyal workforce. Hence, employers should look for alternative sources of loyal and dedicated expertise [1-3].

People with disabilities are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the world. This untapped source of employment includes more than 750 million individuals. In the United States, there are more than 54 million people with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities are employed at less than half the rate of their non disabled colleagues. Skepticism about their ability to perform the job, the cost of accommodation, the fear of litigation and the lack of managerial knowledge to supervise people with disabilities are amongst the barriers that impede their active employment and full integration into the workforce [4-6]. Recently, organizations are taking constructive steps to create a disability-friendly culture, educate management and employees and inform strategic decision makers that the cost of accommodation is minimal. Studies show that 56 percent of all accommodations cost nothing, and formal in-class and on the job training provide remedies for the above concerns [5,7].

An increasing number of companies have actively recruited people with disabilities, looking past the existing stereotypes, and viewing their employment as a competitive advantage. Walgreens, Mohegan Sun, Marriott, Sodexo, Habitat International, Carolina Fine Snacks, Lowe's, Best Buy, Dow, GlaxoSmithKline and Clark shoes are representative companies that focus on the abilities of their employees rather than their disabilities. Walgreens aims to raise the proportion of workers with disabilities in their distribution centers and stores to 20 percent and 10 percent respectively.

Research shows that people with disabilities are as productive as workers without disabilities when they are properly trained. They are more loyal and dedicated to the company and have lower rates of

turnover and injuries than people without disabilities. In addition, by employing people with disabilities a company may be eligible for federal tax credits that can offset accommodation costs [8]. An example of a tax incentive is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. This allows an employer to receive a credit of up to 40% of the worker's first \$6,000 dollars in wages earned during the first 12 months of hire. Finally, managers working with people with disabilities state that their management skills improved and became more empathetic and understanding towards their employees [2,6,9,10].

In conclusion, employers and HR departments should overlook myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities and actively employ them because of the competitive advantage they can offer. Giving an opportunity for persons with disabilities to work and live an independent life will pay off by employing loyal and productive employees with minimum accommodation cost and low turnover rates. Creating a disability friendly environment and placing the right person at the right job are the necessary prerequisites for a successful initiative.

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