



## **Employment Accommodations for People with Developmental Disabilities**

Many people with developmental disabilities want to work and represent a substantial source of untapped commitment and talent.

Once someone has been offered a job, you may need to put in reasonable accommodations to ensure they can perform to their highest capability. Consult the individual and make sure that the employee's manager or supervisor understands the agreed upon accommodations. Disability awareness training may be especially useful for the candidate's team.

Build in regular reviews of accommodations, for example at the end of the probationary period, in supervision sessions and appraisals to ensure that the accommodations are still effective. Ensure that you take the same approach to accommodations when a person with a developmental disability applies for promotion, again not making assumptions about what the employee can or cannot do.

### **Orientation and Training:**

Disability and the need to make accommodation should be embedded in all policies, for example, policies on sickness, training, and performance appraisals. New recruits should be made aware of these policies during the orientation procedure.

- It is important that your standard orientation and training program is accessible, so that an employee with a developmental disability has the same information about, for example, the company profile and office procedures
- allow more time for the person to acquire skills (this does not mean that the person will be less productive once adequate training has taken place)
- break down duties into smaller, manageable tasks
- provide a workplace mentor to ensure supportive training. This can provide another employee with valuable personal development
- do not assume that skills learned in one part of the business can be automatically transferred to another. It may be that new associations need to be developed, e.g. a person inputting data may need retraining if asked to perform a similar task on a different computer system

- remember the 'unwritten rules' of your workplace and do not assume that the person will just pick these up (e.g. dressing in more formally professional attire when external clients visit the office).

### **Accommodations to Retain Employees:**

- developing a work pattern that the person is able to learn, remember and maintain
- being prepared to reallocate some duties throughout the team. This does not mean that the core tasks need to be removed from the job
- ensuring that the person is familiar with existing tasks before you look at increasing the pace of the work
- using an external support worker if necessary
- providing the employee with clear expectations. Outline the job requirements and how they fit into the overall business objective, e.g. show an assembly-line worker the finished product and how their job helps to develop it. This will alleviate stress and help give a sense of purpose
- allowing flexible working hours
- encouraging feedback. Praising employees for good work instils confidence. Constructive criticism helps to define boundaries and expectations
- appreciating that a person with a developmental disability may require extra management support. Allow additional time.
- Be aware that employees may request accommodations to hours because of their provincial or federal disability benefits. Some benefits are lost if an employee earns or works more than a certain limit.

### **Communication:**

- keep language simple and to the point
- avoid using jargon and sarcasm
- develop a flexible approach to communication. People with developmental disabilities may remember instructions that are explained in picture form or verbally with the use of a dictaphone rather than in writing
- talk to the person and not through a third party, i.e. a support worker
- be patient. It may take more time for a person with a developmental disability to understand instructions and provide responses
- ask the individual to repeat what they understand to be their instructions.



## **Teamwork:**

Employees with developmental disabilities often become valued team members. To maximise their involvement with the business and with colleagues:

- ensure that colleagues are aware of any adjustments needed to maximize interaction, e.g. communicating verbally rather than by email
- do not presume that workplace jargon/abbreviations are understood
- do not assume that hesitancy to take part in social activities reflects a desire not to be involved. Colleagues with a developmental disability may have had limited experience of social interaction and could have concerns that are not immediately apparent, e.g. they might be unsure and anxious about the route home from the after-work gathering
- ensure that every employee is aware of your disability policy
- implement disability awareness training. Remember that flexible working practices will have direct business benefits, encouraging participation and loyalty across the workforce.

## **Performance Management:**

- enlightened employers understand the benefit of using a holistic approach when assessing an individual's contribution to an organization. Different employees bring different qualities. A person with a developmental disability may not produce as much as other employees. They can, however, promote diversity in the organization, develop supervisor learning, improve task analysis, increase team morale etc. These contributions can far outweigh the more 'tangible', traditional outputs.
- before deciding that a person with a developmental disability cannot produce a target output, ensure that all reasonable accommodations, which would increase their performance, have been tried.
- while you do not have to accept a lower quality of work from anyone, rigidly applied performance standards can constitute discrimination and undervalue your aim to be a fair employer.

Like any employee, a person with a developmental disability may on occasion need to go through a disciplinary procedure. As part of the orientation:

- ensure employees are aware of the rules and what is expected of them
- clearly explain the disciplinary procedure, explaining their rights and obligations.



Should a disciplinary procedure need to be enforced, ensure that:

- the person understands why this is happening
- the meeting is conducted in a way that the person understands
- adequate time is given in the meeting to allow for full explanations and responses.
- this may require expanding the usual investigation period

Following is a brief list of useful resource links for employers wishing to increase their capacity to recruit, employ, and retain employees with developmental disabilities:

accessWORKS: <http://www.accessworks.ca>

BC Association for Community Living: <http://www.bcacl.org/employment>

Burnaby Association for Community Living: <http://www.gobaci.com/>

Community Living BC: <http://www.communitylivingbc.ca>

Polaris: <http://www.polaris-employment.bc.ca/howwehelpemployers.html>

