DISABILITY AND THE EMPLOYMENT ENVIRONMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities has remained virtually unchanged (Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot and Golden, 2003), and persons with disabilities continue to be at a "disproportionate disadvantage in the labor market" (Tozer, 2005, p.1). Research has shown that persons with disabilities are significantly under-represented in employment statistics and that persons with disabilities remain the nation's largest untapped minority workforce "in spite of repeated demonstrations of their ability to achieve gainful employment" (Brooke, Green, O'Brien, White and Armstrong, 2000, p163).

In March of 2007 the Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) set out to gauge employer-perceived barriers to successful job placement of people with disabilities among Southern Arizona employers for the purpose of informing activity development toward the center's employment goal, *to expand the availability of employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities*. Noting that the current literature provides ample documentation of employment barriers, the UCEDD's Community Advisory Council redirected the effort to identify local and national employer best-practices. The intent of this report is to share those findings, briefly discuss the nature of employer-based barriers, and provide information on the current status of individuals with disabilities and employment.

Disability and Employment Statistics

In 1994, Louis Harris and Associates were commissioned by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) to conduct a survey of Americans with disabilities. Results of their survey indicated that though three in five disabled adults perceived an improvement in public attitudes toward disability since the passage of the ADA, "significant numbers of adults with disabilities confront discrimination, unfavorable attitudes and underemployment" (p. 7). Thirty-three percent of working-age disabled adults believed

they had encountered job discrimination due to their disability, and 25% of those working full-time believed that employers were insensitive to disabled persons. The 2000 NOD/ Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities (Louis Harris and Associates) reported that there were still significant gaps between disabled and non-disabled persons in the following:

- Thirty-two percent of working age disabled persons were employed full or part-time versus 81% of non-disabled persons
- Twenty-two percent of disabled persons did not finish high school as opposed to 9% of non-disabled persons
- Thirty percent of disabled Americans versus 10% of non-disabled persons considered inadequate transportation a problem
- Disabled persons engaged in 15% less socializing than non-disabled persons.

While the 2004 NOD Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities reported no significant changes in employment rates, additional economic findings include the following:

- Three times as many individuals with disabilities live in poverty with annual household incomes below $15,000 (26 % versus 9%).
- People with disabilities remained twice as likely to drop out of high school (21% versus 10%).
- Eighteen percent of individuals with disabilities did not have health care coverage as compared to 7% without disabilities.

Authors found that the severity of disability made a significant difference in all of the gap areas; individuals with severe disabilities identified a greater degree of disadvantage. People with disabilities reported feeling worried about their future health and well-being and only 34% of individuals with disabilities indicated they were very satisfied with their lives compared to 61% of those without disabilities. On a positive note, 22% of employed people with disabilities reported encountering job discrimination, a dramatic decrease from 33% in the 1994 survey.

Statistics from the more recent 2006 Disability Status Report suggest a slight improvement, indicating that 37.7 % of non-institutionalized working age individuals (ages 21-61) with disabilities have full or part-time jobs as opposed to 79.7 % without disabilities. The figures are slightly lower for Arizona with 37% compared to 78% of working aging individuals employed full or part-time. (Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics, 2007).

Referenced above, the 2004 NOD Harris Survey reported that approximately three times as many people with disabilities live in poverty, with annual household incomes below $15,000, than non-disabled persons (26% compared to 9%). Lack of access to quality employment which provides opportunity for job advancement, promotion, and long-term employment may contribute to individuals with disabilities remaining in lower socio-economic classes. Stodden and Dorwick (2000) found that people with disabilities are often the last hired and the first fired and experience a larger relative layoff, suggesting an increased hardship for employees with disabilities. Those who frequently change or lose their job experience significant income loss associated with non-portable benefits such as vacation time and sick leave, as well as retirement benefits (Lustig, Strauser, Donnell, 2003). The difficulties that individuals with disabilities face when seeking meaningful, competitive employment are immediate, beginning with career exploration and continuing through the interviewing process and employment.

McCary (2005, p.16) asserted that "employers seeking talent… overlook people with disabilities largely as a result of misconception and fear." Employer uneasiness related to permissible employment practices under the provisions of the ADA (Rothenberg & Barrett, 1998) and misconceptions about the cost of accommodations contribute to the reluctance of hiring people with disabilities. Businesses cited the perceived cost of accommodation as well as time-intensive training as top concerns. Discomfort with the process of interviewing people with disabilities, negative attitudes from co-workers, concerns about absenteeism and anticipated low performance levels are among additional issues that deter employers from tapping into the disability community (McCary, 2005, p.16).

Employer Fear

While research exists reporting favorable employer perceptions in employment of individuals with disabilities (e. g. Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff & Mank, 2001), a greater volume of literature exists documenting the difficulties individuals with disabilities face in obtaining employment. According to Peck and Kirkbride (2001, pgs. 71-74), fear underscores the myriad reasons given by employers for not employing persons with disabilities. The authors grouped employer fears into the following four broad categories:

1. *Fear of cost associated with hiring* – related to the perceived costs incurred in providing reasonable accommodations
2. *Fear of additional supervision and loss of productivity* – premised on a false relationship equating disability with productivity and degree of qualification
3. *Fear of being stuck forever* – (this fear is noteworthy given that employers apply personnel policies uniformly, such as termination, regardless of disability)

4. *Fear of damaged goods* – implying that an employee with a disability is a liability rather than an asset

Peck and Kirkbride made the distinction that the fourth category may be the deepest seated fear among employers (i.e., that a disabled employee will negatively impact the business' bottom line because of his/her disability).

Regarding the first category, employers tend to assume that accommodations involve major restructuring, but more often than not accommodations are readily achievable and include things such as alternative lighting, large print information, sign language interpreters, minor adjustments to the height of desktops, flexibility of work hours, or the ability to work from home. Still, employers lacking experience with the process of accommodation assessment and provision may be less inclined to hire an individual with a disability, based on an assumption that such a process is necessarily cost prohibitive. According to the Job Accommodation Network, 51% of accommodations cost less than $500 and 15% cost nothing at all (McCary, 2005, p.17).

Similarly, Morgan and Alexander (2005) examined employer perceptions around employing individuals with developmental disabilities. The authors found that employers frequently identified concerns surrounding *safety*, *quality control* and *reduced productivity*.

Employer Misunderstanding About Employees with Disabilities

Smith, Webber, Graffam, and Wilson (2004) examined employer satisfaction with disabled employees in comparison to non-disabled employees. The authors focused on employer perceptions related to work performance variables including *workplace /climate, speed/rate* and a*ccuracy/quality* (p.65). Their findings indicated that while generally satisfied with the work of disabled employees, employers rated their level of satisfaction with disabled employees significantly lower than non-disabled employees. After further analysis, the authors reported that "there is a tendency for employers to be predisposed to be more satisfied with EWD [employees with disabilities] in relation to the three work performance variables" (p.67), explaining the seemingly conflicting

performance ratings. Employers assume that employees with disabilities are not able to perform at the level of their non-disabled peers; in setting their expectations accordingly, there is a tendency to inflate their level of satisfaction. This is a clear example of prejudice, however subtle, that disabled individuals face in the workforce – faulty assumptions that lead to differential treatment.

Employer Lack of Knowledge of Available Supports

Sadly, there is "little awareness of support available in employing a disabled person" (Tozer, 2005, p.2). Entrance into a job for an individual with a disability is often facilitated through an employment service provider such as a state vocational rehabilitation (VR) or developmental disability (DD) agency. Gilbride (2000) studied employer awareness and attitudes toward VR services. Although employers accessing employees through VR services reported mixed attitudes about their experiences, Gilbride found that a lack of awareness on behalf of the employer about services provided by VR agencies, as well as a lack of collaboration can increase negative outcomes. The majority of customers in the study who had hired employees through VR services did not realize that they had been served through VR. This finding is not surprising – in many states such as Arizona, the services of VR are most frequently directed at the individual with a disability and not at the work environment. Particularly within large businesses and corporations, employees with disabilities being served by VR may not ever make the business aware of VR supports which they receive.

"Barriers to employment…have imposed staggering economic and social costs on American society and have undermined our well-intentioned efforts to educate, rehabilitate and employ individuals with disabilities" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). Considering the difference in employment rates between people with and without disabilities, it is unsurprising that reported life satisfaction trails for people with disabilities, with only 34% indicating they are very satisfied, compared to 61% of those without disabilities" (Louis Harris & Associates, 2004). In addition to contributing to economic independence, work promotes a sense of dignity, self-worth, and community participation. Despite the barriers outlined in the previous section, there are promising signs in current employment practices regarding people with disabilities. Increased pressure from within the disability community, increasing support from employment agencies such as VR which emphasizes integration of individuals with disabilities into competitive employment, and laws that protect individuals from discrimination in the workplace are among important advancements signaling change on the horizon. Employers are starting to recognize that individuals with disabilities comprise "a stable workforce providing a wealth of knowledge, capabilities, a willingness to work, [and] a high level of retention." (McCary, 2005, p.18).

Paradigm Shift – How Disability is Viewed

Key to furthering this change is a shift in how employers conceptualize disability. While the legal system and disability service delivery models may have moved away from viewing disability as a medical condition or deficit, it is essential that business and industry reframe their view with an appreciation of individuals as diverse employees who add value to the workplace and to perceive individuals "in terms of their strengths and interests, rather than in terms of their disabilities" (Brooke, et al., 2000, p.166). "Just as employers want skilled and reliable employees, disabled individuals, like others, want to

be recognized for their skills and talents (Gilbride, et al., 2003). The truth is that "people with disabilities possess…skill sets that employers badly need" (McCary, 2005, p.16). Inaccurate perceptions of costly accommodations, lower productivity, lower quality or occupational risk diminish employment opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Disability, like race, gender, and ethnicity, should be considered in its appropriate realm as a societal construct with the emphasis placed not on the individual but rather on how society intersects with a person with a disability. Employers are beginning to think of disability in much the same way they think of race or gender – that is, as a diverse (and largely untapped) pool of potential skilled employees. "In today's highly competitive hunt for talent, smart businesses have recognized the value of adding disability to their diversity outreach, employing and retaining talented individuals with disabilities and marketing to customers with disabilities" (McCary, 2005, p.16).

Competitive Employment with Employment Supports

To begin a process of improving employment outcomes, a fundamental reordering of options is necessary, one that assigns competitive employment as the default, or first-choice for individuals with significant disabilities as well as employment support providers (Brooke, Green, O'Brien, White and Armstrong, 2000; Johnston, Villegas-Grubbs and Associates, 2006; Loprest, 2007; Wehman, Revell & Brooke, 2003). In 2006, Johnston, Villegas-Grubbs and Associates LLC in association with HCBS Strategies, Inc. and Virginia Commonwealth University was commissioned by the Arizona Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities to complete an analysis of the current status of employment support services in the State of Arizona for people with developmental disabilities. In discussing the importance of a paradigm shift, the authors noted that such a change

> *… would result in truly meaningful and life affirming employment options becoming available to people with disabilities. It is not sufficient to pursue incremental reform in which these services are gradually transformed from day habilitation and nothing more. The services must be re-thought entirely.*

As a strategy, "Employment Support" can only achieve its essential objective if the words used to name it are taken quite literally, in the order in which they appear: employment first, support second. Part of what has held this service back is that the facility-based day programs from which many employment support services have historically developed were predicated on the opposite of this strategy: support first, activities second.

Wehman et al. (2003) reviewed employment statistics for individuals receiving employment supports, and the data "dramatically demonstrate that for many people with significant disabilities, the dominant experience continues to be a nonintegrated setting" (p. 164). For example, in fiscal year 2000, there was a 3:1 ratio of non-competitive to competitive work outcomes for individuals served by state mental retardation/ developmental disability agencies. These statistics echo data provided by District II of the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) indicating that as of July 30, 2007, approximately 250 out of 600 individuals received employment supports in integrated[1] employment, with 37 of those "competitively" employed (Brockington, 2007).

Businesses Open to Diversity

As mentioned earlier in this report, employer based barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities are largely grounded in employers' lack of understanding, misconceptions, stigmas, fears and attitudes about disability. This lack of understanding about the nature of disability and how it intersects with work was also the most frequently identified barrier to employment cited among professionals working in

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[1] Arizona's definition of integrated employment is not the same as competitive employment (e.g., integrated employment may take the form of enclaves of workers who are at an integrated site but are not competitively hired, and are supervised and paid by the employment service provider). DDD defines competitive employment as a job placement where the person is hired through the same process as other employees, and is compensated and supervised in the same manner as all other employees, regardless of disability. An individual in competitive employment may still receive employment support

Arizona (Brockington, 2007; Orr, 2007; Steinbring 2007). Understanding the concerns of employers in regard to hiring individuals with disabilities, as well as addressing those concerns and providing supports to employers are all important steps in improving access to the employment environment. Research conducted in collaboration with companies who have previously hired or seem willing to hire individuals with disabilities has identified characteristics and practices that promote positive employment experiences. Companies that appreciate the competencies, talents and value individuals with disabilities can bring to the workplace, those which employ promising practices to achieve full inclusion and develop a culture of diversity, position their business at a competitive advantage.

Gilbride et al. (2003) examined the characteristics of businesses that are open to hiring individuals with disabilities. The authors identified several characteristics and organized them into 3 major categories:

1. *Work Cultural Issues* – These "include values and norms concerning diversity, work performance, organizational practices, and policies" (p. 133). Elements of best practice in this area may include "senior management expecting and rewarding diversity;" offering "cafeteria-style" benefits; proficiency in providing accommodations to all their employees, focusing on the worker's performance rather than the disability, and a personal and flexible management style. Other characteristics include welcoming diversity and promoting inclusiveness by integrating employees with disabilities with non-disabled employees (p133).

2. *Job Match* – Promising practices in this area relate to understanding essential versus marginal job functions. Routinely, individuals with disabilities are not offered positions because they are unable to perform one or more non-essential duty (e.g., having a driver's license in a non-driving position or lifting requirements in a sedentary position). Eliminating such requirements on a description of job duties, fostering employment opportunity by offering internships to determine job compatibility, and pursuing an interactive process for accommodation that includes the disabled employee are practices that contribute to successful employee job matching.

3. *Employer Experience and Support* – This relates to "the extent to which an employer was skilled at managing differences and the level of support the employer believed he or she had to include and accommodate workers with disabilities" (p134). Promising practices in this area may include employers who value and regularly take advantage of partnership and ongoing employment support, as well as employers that are skilled in managing a diverse workforce. The more the employer understood the value of utilizing agency support and disabled employee input, the better the employment outcome.

Employer Collaboration with Employment Resources

Resources, both public and private, are available to provide access to equipment and other services that aid in accommodation. Programs such as VR are designed to help companies willing to hire individuals with disabilities offset the cost of accommodation and open the door for people with disabilities into competitive employment opportunities. Collaboration with VR agencies can assist companies with ADA compliance as well as develop cost effective accessibility plans and design accommodations to help ease concerns and create an enjoyable work experience for the employee with a disability as well as the employer. Knowledge about the supports available to help employers hire people with disabilities increases the likeliness of them doing so.

In order for VR agencies to successfully assist businesses to recruit and retain people with disabilities into the workforce, they must "address employer concerns…[and] have more complete and accurate data about the employer needs and attitudes" (Gilbride, 2000). Some evidence exists to suggest that if successful interventions are made by a VR counselor (such as correcting attitudinal, perceptual, and procedural barriers limiting individuals with disabilities from obtaining quality employment), employers' receptivity towards hiring people with disabilities can be improved.

Outcomes for both employees and employers are greatly enhanced when the responsibility of supported employment for individuals with disabilities is shared by the VR professional and the employer. "Employers must be progressive enough to take

advantage of the expertise of rehabilitation professionals in the area of employment and disability issues in the workplace" (Anderson, 2001, p.105). Collaboration with VR can help employers' get the most out of VR services, including financial incentive to the employer; help with identifying and evaluating potential workplace barriers; disability awareness training; job analysis; collaboration to develop and improve programs; identifying and addressing personnel needs; and assisting with career development. While it is important that VR professionals have the ability to develop and maintain working relationships with employers that lead to confidence and trust, it is equally as important that the employer have favorable feelings towards state VR professionals (Gilbride, 2000).

In addition to state and other governmental agencies, private employment support agencies can facilitate access to the employment environment. Within Arizona, Linkages has been working to join Southern Arizona employers and local rehabilitation agencies in an exciting partnership. Serving as a liaison between area businesses with employment openings and participating rehabilitation providers with qualified applicants, Linkages, seeking to ensure that all people are given the opportunity to perform and be valued, provides training, support, and education for both the employee and the employer through participating rehabilitation providers, and provides employers with information about disabilities, reasonable accommodations, ADA requirements, and the VR system.

Rethinking Employment Support Services

District II of the Arizona DDD regularly brings together representative from among its contracted employment service providers to discuss issues relevant to DDD's management of employment services as well as more broadly to address employment of individuals with disabilities. Recommendations developed by this group for dismantling barriers to competitive employment for individuals with disabilities include the following (for implementation by DDD):

- Rethinking its employment support services to balance service to businesses with individualized supports

- Providing increased levels of education of area employers to dispel myths and fears

- Addressing policy and funding issues that make it difficult to place and support large numbers of individuals into competitive employment

- Taking the lead on statewide systemic change in the design and implementation of school to work transition services for individuals with developmental and other disabilities

- Creating policies that allow individuals with disabilities to engage in a process of career exploration similar to that which non-disabled individuals experience

- Redesigning policies and funding to focus on employment outcomes, rather than needs of residential service providers

- Creating forums for sharing of best/promising practices among employers

- Working in strategic ways to impact state and federal public policies that create disincentives to employment for individuals depending on state and federal benefits

- Working strategically with families to encourage *dignity of risk* (self-determination) and increased autonomy for individuals with developmental disabilities in career exploration and job seeking

Knowledgeable Human Resources/Personnel Management

 A significant barrier for many disabled job seekers is access to benefits such as sick leave, paid vacation, and retirement, as well as health insurance plans that take into consideration disabled employees (Gilbride, et al., 2003; Lustig, Strauser and Donnell, 2003). Companies have found success in using "shared/pooled expert human resources engaged in collaborative and coordinated efforts to assist persons with disabilities as they transition into employment…ADA accessible facilities and the full use of assistive technologies…ongoing communication among multi-agency policy makers, service providers, consumers with disabilities, advocacy groups, and the employment community" (Smits, 2004 p.657). Because many employers in the United States lack experience with the ADA and reasonable accommodation, partnerships with other

organizations to leverage expertise in disability-specific personnel management can additionally benefit companies by providing clarification on ADA requirements and practical information about costs associated with accommodations.

Southern Arizona Employers – Best Practices

Raytheon Missile Systems — Raytheon Missile Systems, a national defense contractor, is the largest employer in Southern Arizona with over 11,000 full-time equivalent employees. Raytheon has demonstrated a commitment to hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities at all levels as evidenced by the following innovative best practices:

- *Central fund for accommodations to reduce the association of disability with cost among supervisors.* An employee simply submits the request for accommodation to the supervisor, who in turn consults with Human Resources as necessary to determine the most effective accommodation and obtain funding. In terms of the physical office space for employees, all employees receive an ergonomic assessment and customized workspace, thus reducing the need for a disabled employee to request accommodations to their physical environment. All employees are provided a workspace that is comfortable while encouraging quality and productivity.

- *Resource group for employees with disabilities.* Raytheon provides infrastructure and financial support for the "Raytheon People with Disabilities" employee resource group. This is an employee led group of approximately 90 members who come together around a disability agenda. While the group provides social networking among individuals with and without disabilities, it also discusses and provides guidance and recommendations to Raytheon management on workplace issues that intersect with disability.

Raytheon remains committed to retaining disabled employees as well. As an example, when the company was preparing to solicit bids for health care plans, management consulted with disabled employees to identify the types of coverage and benefits that were important to individuals with disabilities or to family members of

disabled individuals. As a result of this process, Raytheon employees have a health plan that provides the benefits disabled employees need.

In addition to the above, disabled employees of Raytheon identified the following as among the reasons why Raytheon is a quality employer for individuals with disabilities:

- Supervisors flexibly assign job tasks based on an employee's strengths and weaknesses
- Team driven approach, leveraging different sets of skills
- Diversity of thought – employees draw on their many and varied backgrounds
- Openness to new and innovative ideas – opportunities to lead or provide key contributions at all levels of employment
- Many and varied opportunities for advancement or movement from one functional organization to another
- A sense of belonging and compassion, employees will go out of their way to mentor or help others, regardless of recognition
- Financial reward based on hard work and dedication
- Worry free employment – Raytheon has many programs to help employees manage personal concerns (Long-Term Care, Outstanding medical benefits, Sick child, Every other Friday off, personal accommodations as needed, employment support services (legal, concierge, etc…), employee discounts)

Eegee's Restaurant Corporation — As a midsize employer, the Eegee's corporation with 21 local restaurants featuring a frozen slushy drink (an "Eegee) has demonstrated great success in employing individuals with significant disabilities. Robert Jensen, Eegee's Director of Operations, identified his company's commitment to hiring diverse employees and partnership with VR as practices that have helped in maintaining "good food at good prices." Eegee's considers consistency and quality as key company strengths, and tapping into the workforce of disabled employees has enhanced these strengths.   Strategies for employing and retaining employees with disabilities include the following:

- *Central store location for training individuals with developmental disabilities.* In 1999, a partnership was created between VR, Eegee's, and the Beacon Group (a not for profit provider of employment support services for people with developmental disabilities). Eegee's utilizes a central store location as a training facility for new employees with disabilities. This central location is near the offices of the Beacon Group, allowing for employment support staff to work closely with Eegee's. In addition to creating a supportive training environment, this centralized training facility also helps to foster a sense of community among employees with disabilities.

- *Consideration for minimizing transportation barriers.* Once an employee completes their training, that employee is assigned to one of Eegee's 21 restaurant locations. In the event that transportation is a barrier for the employee, every effort is made to assign that individual to a location as close as possible to their home.

- *Flexibly assigning job tasks in response to individual strengths and weaknesses.*

Employees of Eegee's with developmental disabilities identified common characteristics they attribute to company values such as having employees who are honest, friendly, clean, responsible, and polite. When asked about the characteristics they personally posses of these values, responses included a positive attitude, honesty, dependability, cleanliness, and being respectful and polite. Most employees also indicated that Eegee's valued dependability over being a quick learner, while one employee even asserted that being a quick learner did not matter.

Safeway Corporation ─ Safeway Corporation, with 113 stores in Arizona and more than 1,650 locations across the United States and Canada, has a history of local and national success in employing individuals with disabilities. Robert Blaylock, Safeway's Phoenix Division HR Manager for Employment, reported that not only is diversity a central part of the company culture, but that 30 – 40% of Safeway's recruiting efforts are with the State VR and other government agencies. According to Mr. Blaylock, these agencies are Safeway's "3rd best source for candidates numerically [and] they are often

our best source for reliable and long term candidates." Among the company's top concerns is a shrinking employment pool, as well as the continued growth of discount grocers such as Wal-Mart. These concerns have led Safeway to prioritize job applicants who demonstrate reliability, a good work ethic, a sense of urgency and a great customer service attitude. Promising practices include the following:

- *Engaging in a national partnership with VR to recruit and retain employees with disabilities.*
- *Consideration for minimizing transportation barriers.* Safeway has many locations and strives to place new employees in locations where transportation to work is not a barrier.
- *Flexible work schedules.* Safeway provides both full and part-time options for employment and recognizes that many individuals with disabilities may choose to work part-time.
- *Management commitment to diversity in employment.* Safeway has been proactive in communicating its commitment to employment of individuals with disabilities throughout all levels of its management. According to Mr. Blaylock, Safeway has a two decade track record of successful practices in the employment of individuals with disabilities, and currently 8% of their total workforce is comprised of individuals with noticeable disabilities, many of whom spend their careers with Safeway and retire with a comfortable retirement plan.

Employees of Safeway who have disabilities articulated their commitment to customer service, reflecting the company's core values. Employees cited the excellent communication between themselves and supervisors. Additionally, they spoke about their desire to remain with Safeway as long as possible, even as they did not identify Safeway as their sole employment choice. In the words of one employee "I'm looking at promotion…Safeway is committed to promoting employees." Further, this employee indicated that if he did not move up within Safeway in the next couple years, he would find other employment. Employees of Safeway reported valuing the company's supportive environment, the flexibility and adaptability of management and the reputation of Safeway. Employees expressed pride in their work and more generally in

the company, and they reported choosing Safeway based on the company's reputation. One employee placed a high value on the presence of other employees with disabilities at his place of work, maintaining that having co-workers with and without disabilities more accurately reflects "the real world."

University of Arizona — As Southern Arizona's largest public employer, the University of Arizona employs more than 13,000 faculty and staff and is recognized for its economic impact on Southern Arizona. The University has demonstrated a commitment to employing and retaining individuals with disabilities by providing its Disability Resource Center (DRC) the authority to determine reasonable accommodations for all disabled employees. All employees regardless of College or Department receive support centrally through the DRC. DRC staff actively collaborates with departments and supervisors to create an employment environment that is productive and beneficial for all employees, pursing its mission of commitment to access through the following practices:

- *Central fund for accommodations.* This has the benefit of eliminating fears of accommodation costs in addition to maintaining confidentiality of disability information separate from departmental and institutional personnel records. Supervisors at the University often conflate issues of performance and personnel management with a need for disability accommodation. Having a both a strong Human Resource office and a separate Disability Resource office assists supervisors in managing personnel equitably regardless of disability.
- *Has responsibility for improving access to the physical and electronic environments.* This takes the form of consulting across campus on all new construction and renovations, as well as consulting to insure that web pages and other electronic hardware and software are accessible to employees. As the DRC works to systemically improve access to the workplace, there has been a reduced need for individualized accommodations.
- *Formed a Disability Advisory Council made up of employees and community members who advise the President on issues related to disability.* This has resulted in systemic changes such as University accessible design standards and

specifications that all architects and contractors must adhere to. These standards are well beyond ADA requirements and reflect the University's commitment to principles of Universal Design.

- *Partners with the Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation Program to locate a VR counselor onsite.* This counselor is available to work with the institution as well as individual University employees in the provision of ongoing employment support.

University supervisors and department heads point to the centralized fund for accommodations as a best practice. In addition, many supervisors note that having a unit that works closely with, but is separate from, human resources helps to facilitate equal opportunity, reasonable accommodation and universal design.

National Employers – Best Practices

Motorola Corporation is also a leading employer in focusing on hiring people with disabilities as acknowledged by the Arizona Business Leadership Network (AZBLN) (McCary, 2005). Motorola has demonstrated a commitment to employing disabled individuals that goes well beyond affirmative action and legal mandates. As an example, Motorola worked in collaboration with the National Business and Disability Council in New York to successfully place more than 200 individuals with disabilities into job positions after being displaced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks (McCary, 2005).

Recently, the Walgreens Corporation has partnered with the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the development of a new distribution center in Anderson, South Carolina. The new center embraced principles of universal design and diversity from the first day it was envisioned. Not only did Walgreens build an accessible facility, the company aspired to re-design its technology in order that as many individuals as possible could work at each Walgreens position. Currently, approximately 40% of the workforce at the Anderson Distribution Center is disabled, and all are competitively hired, earning wages and benefits equivalent to non-disabled employees. Walgreens reports that the distribution center is 20% more profitable than any other distribution

center nationwide and the corporation is beginning to replicate the model at distribution centers across the country.

Riley II (2006) researched what he termed "Disability-Forward" companies and identified many national companies that have implemented promising practices. In his research he set out criteria to rank companies according to their demonstrated performance in "(1) aggressively recruiting, training, and promoting people with disabilities, (2) investing in assistive technologies and accessible workplaces, and (3) recognizing the power of customers with disabilities" (p.155). It should come as no surprise that these top disability-forward companies are large corporations, often with multinational interests, and among the most profitable corporations in history. Companies on the list such as IBM, Microsoft, Wells Fargo Bank, Merck and Proctor and Gamble to name a few, have recognized that employing individuals with disabilities as well as marketing to customers with disabilities makes good business sense and improves the bottom line. One of the companies that Riley (2006) discusses, SunTrust Bank, has also been recognized as a "Top Ten Employer for People with Disabilities" by WE Magazine. SunTrust developed a Disability Resource Center "which provides information on recruiting, interviewing, disability etiquette, customer interaction, resources and accommodations" (McCary, 2005, p.17).   In addition, the bank created a program called "Put Ability to Work", which recruits individuals with disabilities into temporary positions, as an intermediate step into full-time employment. This has been successful with many disabled employees moving into full-time employment. Overall, these efforts have resulted in a noticeable increase in the number of Sun Trust Bank employees with disabilities. As Riley explained, "the Bank's disability policy has reached an advanced level of cultural integration" (p.155).

Many of the barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities have a long standing history in the social and political environments of our country. It is most often not the individual's condition or impairment that creates barriers to competitive employment; rather, it is fears, faulty assumptions, discriminatory policies and systemic design barriers that conspire to limit opportunities for individuals with disabilities to go to work. Employer based barriers to employment while varied, fall into the following three broad categories:

- *Employer fears* related to perceived costs (e.g., accommodations and additional training), loss of productivity, difficulty in terminating an unsatisfactory employee, and employee negatively impacting company performance
- *Employer misunderstandings* related to legal responsibilities, training processes, absenteeism, safety issues
- *Employer lack of knowledge of available employment supports/resources* such as VR, DDD, and private agencies

Strategies for overcoming these barriers are well-articulated by employment service providers in Arizona. Recommendations include, among others, redesigning employment support services to balance the provision of services to businesses and individualized supports; increasing efforts to educate area employers to dispel myths; redesigning policies and funding to focus on employment outcomes rather than the needs of residential service providers; working strategically to impact state and federal public policies that create disincentives to employment for individuals depending on state and federal benefits; and creating policies that allow individuals with disabilities to engage in a process of career exploration similar to that which non-disabled individuals experience.

While barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are well known, members of the Sonoran UCEDD Community Advisory Council directed the center to highlight current employment practices that are effecting positive change in the landscape of employment and disability. Critical to sustaining this momentum is the reframing of

disability in the context of the environment rather than the person. As such, in addition to identifying promising practices by employers, this report has also addressed progress in the realm of the changing perception of disability.

Promising Practices

- Paradigm Shift
  - Viewing disability as a construct, like race, gender, etc.
  - Perception of barriers as existing in the workplace environment, not within the individual
  - Appreciating disability in terms of diversity
- Universal Design
  - Physical environment
  - Job descriptions
  - Training materials
- Senior management expecting and rewarding diversity
- Individualized Training and Job Assignment
  - Job match and flexibly assigning jobs
  - Offering flexible schedules (full-time/part-time options)
  - Central training facility
- Collaboration with employment support agencies
- Centralized funding for reasonable accommodation
- Soliciting input on benefits design specific to employees with disabilities
- Utilization of assistive technologies
- Promoting social and cultural belonging through formation of employee group (networking and advising)
- Efforts to reduce barriers related to transportation

Again, these practices do not seek to alter the employee with a disability; rather, they evolved through an examination of and commitment to address constraints imposed by the workplace environment on people with disabilities.

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