



Project No 561847-EPP-1-2015-1-EL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP (2015-3720)

Benefits of employing people with disabilities- Workshop

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

School-to-Work Transition for Higher education students with disabilities in Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro

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- How can we communicate the benefits of employing people with disabilities?

Introduction

- The answer to the basic question ‘why companies are reluctant towards employing people with disabilities’ lies to prejudice against them, as well as to employers fears and concerns regarding:
 - ❑ the cost of employing people with disabilities in general,
 - ❑ the cost for the accommodations,
 - ❑ the lack of experience and skills,

- the clients attitudes,
- the coworkers' attitudes,
- the lack of knowledge/ information in regard to the benefits of employing people with disabilities.

Benefits of employing persons with disabilities

- The work performance of employees with disabilities has been shown to be equally and in some cases better than that of employees without disabilities.
- People with disabilities are capable to manage a variety of demanding job positions.
- Employees with disability appear to maintain their employment at least three times more in comparison to employees without disabilities

- ❑ The companies that employ people with disabilities improve their public image, as these companies are viewed as ethical companies that provide equal opportunities.
- ❑ The vast majority of the consumers show preference to companies that employ individuals with disabilities, and would prefer to give their business to them.

- ❑ Employees with disabilities appear to be loyal, punctual, conscientious, responsible, reliable, productive and accurate.
- ❑ Especially reliability appears to be an asset for employees with disabilities as they in comparison to employees without disabilities are not so often late at work, don't call in sick and don't miss scheduled appointments.

- ❑ Most of the accommodations needed are of no cost or at a small cost. In any case the total cost should be divided by the number of employees that are going to use the accommodation or benefit from the accommodation and by the time the accommodation will be used.
- ❑ There are state programs that offer employers tax credits for the employment of individuals with disabilities.

- ❑ The employment of people with disabilities:
 - increases company's profitability and productivity
 - has a positive impact on employees' morale
 - increases workforce diversity
 - improves the company's cooperative climate and culture
 - increases the positive interactions with colleagues and clients

As emerges from the above mentioned, employees with disabilities can be seen as a catalyst for positive change. This positive change is being translated to overall financial profit and general benefits for the companies.

Ways to communicate the benefits of employing people with disabilities

- The main strategy to fight prejudice, employers fears and concerns, is to communicate the benefits of employing people with disabilities through:

Ways to communicate the benefits of employing people with disabilities

- Training to raise awareness in regard to disability to employers and to the society in general.
- Training on targeted subjects in regard to the employment of people with disabilities, such as workplace accommodations, skills/competencies and performance appraisal issues to employers.
- Training the existing staff in companies.

- ❑ Exploitation of employers' experiences employing people with disabilities.
- ❑ Consultation from vocational rehabilitation providers to employers in regard to legal matters and to policies for the employment of people with disabilities.
- ❑ Working collaboration between employers and vocational rehabilitation agencies.
- ❑ State support given to employers for the employment of people with disabilities. That way employers will have the motivation to further explore the benefits of such an employment.

- Particularly, disability awareness training and training to targeted subjects appear to be significant tools to improve the employment rates of people with disabilities. A training of that kind would provide knowledge and information to correct misconceptions such as the fear that people with disabilities are not productive, can't manage the tasks given etc.
- That way employers could be more encouraged in hiring people with disabilities, as better understanding could address many of their fears and concerns.

- In the study of Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden (2003) one employer said:

*"So perhaps that could go back to the education of us and supervision about disability in general, and you know, going beyond the obvious [disability issue] and you know, **help us to understand and not, say, be afraid.**"*

Type of information required

- Lack of information and inaccurate information appear to be the main reasons for employers fears and concerns.
- It is clear that provision of accurate information is actually the key for the employment of people with disabilities.

- The power of accurate information is shown in the study of Hunt and Hunt (2004), on a sample of 190 adults (considered as potential employers) as well as in the study of Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (in press), on a sample of 40 employers.

In these studies is proven that informative program in regard to the employment of people with disabilities, can have a positive impact on the level of knowledge and on the attitudes towards the employment of people with disabilities.

- It is shown that the type of information that would have an greater impact on employers decision to hire a person with disability is basically information about:
 - Skills and competencies
 - High productivity
 - High performance, and
 - Economic and other kind of direct or indirect benefits for the company

- Companies of a small and medium size seem to pay more attention to information regarding high performance,
- whereas larger companies pay more attention to information based on statistics and research.

- The amount of information provided should focus on the advantages and the benefit of the employment of people with disabilities rather than the on the disability or the costs of that disability.

Measures for the provision of information and training

- Major information campaigns in the media, such as the anti-smoking campaign or the prevention of breast cancer,
- relevant school science classes,
- informative booklets,
- websites, which addresses topics in regard to persons with disabilities and employment.

Conclusions

- If employers' questions in regard to the employment of people with disabilities are answered, then their fears will be dissolved and the attention will be on the benefits of employing people with disabilities rather than on the costs,
- as accurate information will make them realize the range of those benefits in comparison to the misinterpreted cost.

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- Thank you

