

The "R" Words

The Rules for Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Individuals with Disabilities

A few months ago, I wrote an article addressing the OFCCP's new rules to improve job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The article highlighted changes to the regulations impacting Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, requiring U.S. Federal Contractors take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain these individuals. This article will focus on best practices relative to the successful implementation of these rules.

The 7% Utilization Goal has contractors realizing they need a talent acquisition strategy for individuals with disabilities, but are challenged with how. Since the majority of these companies regularly recruit recent university graduates, campus recruiting of students with disabilities is a logical first step, but only when the unique issues relative to launching such an initiative, such as the three tier classification system for these schools in terms of the services they provide, are understood. The key to long term success is establishing a solid relationship with each school's disability services office (DSO) and, more specifically, its director. The company will need to share its commitment to and strategy for hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities—from providing information about how they train recruiters and managers regarding disability etiquette

and awareness, as well as interviewing techniques, to making reasonable accommodations. Only then, will the DSO feel comfortable in pursuing a collaborative relationship.

Then, there is the requirement for contractors to ask applicants and employees to voluntarily self-identify as an individual with a disability. Requesting this information is important, but does not address the reasons these individuals often don't disclose in the first place. Although fear is believed to be the primary reason people don't disclose, in focus groups with employees with disabilities, Springboard learned the main reason is that most don't know how. They are unsure what and how much information to share, with whom, and what to expect in response. Providing such guidance via a disability disclosure guidance tool on a company's intranet helps candidates and employees feel more informed, better equipped, and more confident and comfortable in disclosing their disability.

Disclosure is only one part of the process. Should a candidate or an employee require an accommodation, the process by which this is accomplished can have a tremendous impact on everything from the acquisition of the candidate to onboarding and beyond. Keeping in mind that the new rules



By Nadine Vogel

require the implementation of the changes necessitated by the passage of the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008, creating a reasonable accommodations process that is consistent, fair, and equitable across the footprint of the enterprise should be considered a minimum standard. An accommodations committee, company-wide communication, and a well-thought-out process that includes how requests are made, criteria for providing the accommodation, turnaround time, and so on, are all part of what is often referred to as a RAC, which if developed appropriately, is a sure-fire way to ensure reasonable accommodations are being addressed appropriately.

If these new rules are not enough to get a company thinking about the way in which it recruits and retains people with disabilities, contractors need to consider the impact of these rules on other disability-related legislation and guidance. For instance, sourcing often begins with a candidate's search of the company's career portal. What is be-

ing done to ensure the site meets the WCAG 2.0 global standards for accessibility for those who are blind, visually impaired, or are unable to use a mouse or keyboard? And how do we know if a candidate can perform the essential functions of a job with or without accommodation, or whether an accommodation request is reasonable, if our job descriptions do not delineate each position's essential and marginal functions?

The good news is that although these issues may seem overwhelming, there are practical tools and scalable solutions that any contractor can implement regardless of size, geography or even corporate culture.

Profiles in Diversity Journal readers are invited to contact Springboard to get your most pressing questions answered and begin to successfully conduct the outreach and recruitment of people with disabilities. Call Nadine at 973-813-7260 or email her at Nadine@consultspringboard.com.

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board Consulting LLC. Founded in 2005, Springboard is recognized as the expert in mainstreaming disability in the global workforce, workplace, and marketplace. Serving corporations and organizations throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Asia, Springboard has become a trusted partner in relation to disability issues and initiatives across virtually every business category. Nadine is also the author of *DIVE IN, Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce*.

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² Source: Thomson Reuters *Project Finance International*, 2013 Roll of Honour.

³ Source: *Global Finance*, "World's 50 Safest Banks," October 2013.