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On Tuesday, February 1, leaders from the Society for Human Resource ...



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Sniff, sniff. Achoo! With cold and flu season upon us, ...

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What is "it"?

(Accommodation, Explained)

Although the word "accommodations" conjures up visions of screen readers and voice-activated software, in reality, most accommodations aren't assistive technology, but changes in policies and procedures. Many employees don't need technology, they need breaks to administer their insulin, or a schedule that works with their transit needs.

Shelley Kaplan, Director of the Southeast DBTAC, says, "Most accommodations really deal with flexibility." Flexibility, that's another one of those qualities that make companies an employer of choice — and it works for more than just people with disabilities.

"I think flexibility draws people with all kinds of situations: disability, aging parents, individuals who have other interests in their lives," says Lori Golden, Ernst and Young's AccessAbilities Leader. "It's important not just when individual workers have disabilities, but when employees have family members with disabilities. That population is going to increase as baby boomers age and take care of aging parents.

Ms. Golden telecommutes, as do many of the people we interviewed, including Ann Andreosatos, North America Region People with Disabilities Leader for Procter & Gamble. "The ability to work remotely — whether sitting in home offices, working in the field to manage the business or even working somewhere around the world — frees up people to better manage their own personal situations. It's such an equalizer — and a great way to retain top talent and increase productivity," says Ms. Andreosatos.

At IBM, it frees up a lot of people, with and without disabilities. "We've been using telecommuting at least 50 percent of the time since 1991," says John Evans of IBM's Human Ability and Accessibility Center. "It's amazing that more companies don't do it. I think a lot of people think, 'If I can't see them and touch them, they're not really working.'"

That's where the difficulties lie. "I knew a great employee who had significant disabilities, as well as difficulties surrounding those disabilities. He had to take the bus, for example, and he'd wait for three or four buses until an accessible one came by. Then the lift would be broken or the driver didn't know how to operate it. His condition was also affected by heat and cold, and he spent a lot of time battling the elements, both natural and man-made," says the Southeast DBTAC's Ms. Kaplan.

A perfect candidate for telework, this employee did telecommute—for a while. "It was working well until supervisors who were not part of the decision began to question why he was allowed to telework," says Ms. Kaplan. "It actually got to the point where they were trying to deal with him from a medical point of view — trying to figure out why his body wasn't dealing with the cold — instead of working with him on reasonable accommodations."

That's why it's so important to have comprehensive written telecommuting policies accompanied by established protocols for guiding the decision-making process. "It assures everyone that the telecommuting program is administered in a consistent manner, and minimizes misperceptions about the intent of the request," says Ms. Kaplan.



Dads & Shopping Carts

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Work on a Wire

This blog was cross-posted to Broadband for America. My mother has ...



Memo to Accounting Firms, "Pull Back the Curtain"

Kyra Cavanaugh, president of Life Meets Work, responds to Flex ...

"Most importantly, it enables an individual with significant disabilities to remain productively employed in his or her career of choice." It's not enough to allow employees to telework; expectations need to be made clear, and lines of communication kept open.

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