Workplace Accommodations in Information Technology – Attract and Retain a Quality Workforce

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Presenters

Beth Gaertner
Director of Education,
SVRI

Brianne Warner
Assistive Technologist,
SVRI

Lynn Hardginski
Business Services
Consultant, WI DVR

Krissy Neyrinck
Vocational Rehabilitation
Counselor, WI DVR
Vocational Rehabilitation

• The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is a federal/state program designed to obtain, maintain, and advance employment for people with disabilities by working with DVR consumers, employers, and other partners

• The Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI) provides solutions to positively impact the future of people with disabilities through services, research and education programs that prepare VR professionals
Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant (H421C210018) from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1221e-3 and 3474).
Objectives

1. Define disability, universal design & accommodation
2. Discuss the benefits of hiring those with disabilities, particularly in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
3. Explore how universal design and accommodations impact the information technology sector
4. Share success stories
5. Learn about the Business Services Team at Wisconsin DVR and how to leverage their support
Definitions of Disability

*The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability within a legal context but is important to remember that disability is defined differently in other settings.

Part 1
Physical or mental impairment

Part 2
Substantially limiting

Part 3
One or more major life activity
How many adults in the U.S. report having a disability?
Prevalence

1 in 4

Adults in the United States report experiencing some type of disability

CDC Infographic
Disability and the Labor Force

U.S. Dept. of Labor – Disability Employment Statistics

Labor Force Participation Rate (16+)
- Persons with a Disability: 24.50%
- Persons without a Disability: 67.60%

Unemployment Rate (16+)
- Persons with a Disability: 6.60%
- Persons without a Disability: 3.90%
Myths Debunked

- Not everyone with a disability may need an accommodation(s)
- Accommodations vary, just as people's strengths, work environments, and job duties vary
- Accommodations can be little to no cost
- Retain valuable employees
- Reduced workers' compensation & training costs
- Increased productivity, morale, and company diversity
- Many employees with disabilities are skilled problem solvers by virtue
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

• Evidence from Research

• Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder possess higher than average abilities in many skilled areas

• Individuals with developmental disabilities are more productive, have fewer absences, and are very loyal to their employers

• Individuals with mental health conditions feel work gives them a sense of purpose and belonging
U.S. Surgeon General’s Framework for Mental Health and Well-Being in the Workplace

Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy stated this new framework gives us “an opportunity to rethink how we work”

“A healthy workforce is the foundation for thriving organizations and healthier communities”
Career Pathways

• Upskilling Workers
  • Construction
  • Healthcare
  • Information/Digital Technology
  • Manufacturing

• Focus on competitive integrated employment
  • Company advancement
  • Learn additional skills

• Apprenticeship programs
Universal Design

• Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used by all people regardless of age, size, ability, or disability

• Application of universal design principles minimizes the use of assistive technology, results in products compatible with AT, and makes products more usable by everyone, not just those with disabilities

• If well designed with accessibility and usability, everyone will benefit
Universal Design in IT

• Universal Design can guide the development, procurement, and use of technology that is accessible, usable, and inclusive of all.

• Schools are required to provide equal access to web-based services, program, and activities.

• Examples: Accessible documents, accessible websites, computer labs.

“Specifically, universal designs, job accommodations, and assistive technology can play a significant role in enhancing a person’s ability to interact with his or her environment and to meaningfully participate in society” (Huang et al., 2016)
What is an Accommodation

- Any change to the work environment or job that enables a person with a disability to be successful or enjoy equal employment opportunities including promotions, raises and recognition.

- The employee must meet the skill level required and must be able to perform the essential functions of the job.

- Through an interactive process between employer and employee, it is determined what is effective but ultimately, is the employer's choice.
What accommodations have you seen in your workplace or out in the community?
IT vs AT

- Information Technology (IT)
  - Includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware
- Assistive Technology (AT)
  - Includes computers, software, wheelchairs, alternative keyboards, hand splints

- Can be used interchangeably
- Differences
- Ergonomics
- To determine IT or AT, consider the function in a specific situation, not just the tool itself
Assistive Technology

- Smart phone
- E-books
- Laptops
- Screen readers
- Speech to text software
- Standing desks
- Adapted keyboards & Mice
Monitor Magnifier

Headband Magnifier

Lighted Glasses

High Contrast Keyboard Stickers
Information Technology Success Stories

"Fred"

- **Diagnosis**: chronic pain from a work injury that affected his mobility and work tolerance
- **DVR**: Goal was to get a job after years of unemployment due to not being able to stay in usual type of work
- **Solution**: DVR provided vocational counseling, training funds for his Associate's Degree as a Computer User Support Specialist, currently employed FT as an IT Infrastructure Service Analyst

"John"

- **Diagnosis**: autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder and struggles to focus despite medications and simplified instructions
- **DVR**: Goal was to get a job
- **Solution**: DVR provided vocational counseling, authorized an assistive technology assessment and purchase, provided funds for Associate's Degree and then Bachelor's in Information Science & Technology; hired FT as a Service Desk Analyst
The DVR Business Services Consultants (BSCs) are statewide and connect employers to a larger integrated business services team to assist in solving challenges in hiring and retaining qualified employees.

At no cost to the employer, we provide:
- Recruitment assistance
- Match candidates to business needs
- Connect you to workforce partners and more.
Business Services Team at WI DVR

- Engage in outreach to employers and build relationships
- Learn about the company culture as a whole and understand its workforce needs
- Provide disability expertise
- Connect with partner agencies and services
Have you connected with a Business Services Consultant from WI DVR?
# DVR Business Services Consultant Contacts

![Map of Wisconsin](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BSC</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shaun Lukas</td>
<td>262-270-8518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Markus Watts (MKE North)</td>
<td>414-250-6568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sameer Bhaiji (MKE South)</td>
<td>414-456-8072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Denise Puffer</td>
<td>262-886-0181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nicole Greetan</td>
<td>920-312-6037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lynn Hardginski</td>
<td>262-977-1021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mallory Bryan</td>
<td>715-907-2580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dawn Stocks</td>
<td>715-415-2712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tara Burns</td>
<td>715-931-7394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Amy Studden</td>
<td>608-799-6308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ismael Luna</td>
<td>608-931-0765</td>
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Resources

Accommodation Training Library

Job Accommodation Network

Resources
Additional Resources

- U.S. Department of Labor – Accommodations
- U.S. Department of Labor – Disability Resources
- Office of Disability Rights
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)
- What Can YOU Do – Campaign for Disability Employment
- National Alliance on Mental Illness – Wisconsin
- Disability: IN
- National Industry Liaison Group (NILG)
- Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT)
- Strengths and abilities in autism - Altogether Autism
- Seven Reasons Why Hiring People With Disabilities Is Good For Business (forbes.com)