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Did someone say, 'Labor shortage'?

By **Burt Brooks and Brittany Liscoe, Easterseals NJ**
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Easterseals NJ

Burt Brooks is manager of creative services and Brittany Liscoe is communications assistant at Easterseals NJ.

There is a labor shortage in America. If you haven't been feeling the pain, then count yourself lucky. According to the **U.S. Department of Labor**, as of July 2019, while there were 7.4 million open job positions, there were only 6 million individuals actively seeking employment. That's 1.4 million jobs that will almost definitely go unfilled. These vacant positions will end up costing businesses time, money and growth.

But, what if we told you there was an untapped workforce out there, just waiting for your call? A group of workers who are ready, willing and *disabled*.

That's right. *Disabled*. According to the **Bureau of Labor Statistics**, workers with disabilities (age 16-64) represented only 3.2% of the total workforce in the United States. This means, in New Jersey alone, there are potentially 1 million-plus working age adults without a job. So, if you are not actively recruiting from this population, you may be missing out on hundreds, possibly thousands, of viable job candidates.

And don't let the stigma surrounding hiring workers with disabilities stop you. Hiring managers have a multitude of concerns, like accommodations "cost too much" or "they won't be able to do the work." This is patently untrue and now there is data that proves it.

Dispelling disability myths

When it comes to productivity, a recent study (a report from **Accenture**, in partnership with **Disability: IN** and the **American Association of People with Disabilities**) has shown, for the first time, that "Companies that championed people with disabilities outperformed others — driving profitability and shareholder returns. Revenues were 28% higher, net income 200% higher and profit margins 30% higher. Companies that improved internal practices for disability inclusion were also four times more likely to see higher total shareholder returns."

Need more proof? You got it. Reports released by the **Institute for Corporate Productivity** and the **Society for Human Resource Management** found workers with disabilities were more productive and had a lower turnover rate than their colleagues without disabilities. Also, a study by the **Job Accommodation Network** revealed 60% of workplace accommodations can be made for free, while the remaining cost is \$500 per employee, on average. So, with higher productivity, low turnover and cheap accommodation costs ... it looks like you'd be losing money if you didn't hire someone with a disability!

If studies aren't your "thing," perhaps you'd appreciate this anecdote from Michael Menzer, managing director of strategic development at **Rotator Staffing Services Inc.** (headquartered in East Brunswick). He shares the following story:

"I was once tasked with finding a candidate to fill a position at a manufacturing company in South Jersey. I came across an individual with extensive experience in the manufacturing industry who was a great fit for the role; they also happened to be blind. The company's owner agreed that this individual met all the qualifications for the role, and did not see an obstacle with the individual being blind. Instead, the owner understood that there were accommodations they could make in order to integrate their new employee into the role.

"The owner allowed their new employee to be accompanied by a support person during their first few days of training. This accommodation was simple, and allowed the new employee to become comfortable in their new position, setting them up for success with the company.

"As a result of providing accommodations, the company has expanded their applicant pool to include

qualified individuals that includes those with disabilities. Furthermore, employees at the work site have reported higher morale and a more positive work culture as a result of increased diversity."

Recruiting and accommodations

Now, you must be asking yourself, "So where do I start?" Glad you asked. When it comes to making your workplace more accessible, there are some general accommodations you can look at, like accessible bathrooms, allowing service animals into the workplace, or braille and raised lettering for signage.

However, each individual's needs will often differ depending on their level of ability. As long as you are willing to listen and are open to change, accommodations can be made. The very first thing you should consider however, is how you will attract these candidates to apply for your open positions.

Posting jobs on the internet may not be enough, as only one in four American adults with a disability report having access to high-speed internet. Try some print or radio postings instead. If you do post online, be sure to include large graphics and perhaps some audio descriptions. Another sure-fire way to find a candidate would be to reach out to community-based organizations like [Easterseals](#) or state agencies like the [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#), as they provide direct employment assistance to job seekers with disabilities.

Do not let the labor shortage get you down. Companies must be flexible and adapt. With one in four Americans identifying as having a disability, this shift in the workforce is coming whether you know it or not. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, so, as we celebrate the occasion, ask yourself, will you be a leader or a follower in this workforce revolution?

See more statistics and learn more at eastersealsnj.org/NDEAM.

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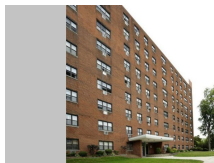
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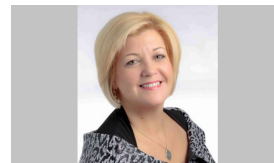
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