Cherry Engineering Support Services, Inc. (CESSI)

A Private Employer's Perspective on Workplace Accommodations

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Overview of CESSI

- CESSI contracts with federal agencies and private companies to provide project support including:
  - **Information Technology**
  - **Disability Policy and Services**
  - **Studies/Analyses**
  - **Program Management**
  - **Conference Management**
  - **Accessible Technology**

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Characteristics of Upper Management

- President is a former Vietnam POW who sustained disabling injuries from torture.
- Vice-President has degree and work experience in Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Management staff have research and professional experience in disability.

Characteristics of Staff

- CESSI is a division of a company with 550 employees. CESSI has over 50 employees.
- 22% of CESSI Division employees have self-identified as having a disability.
- CESSI Division employees work in four locations in the Washington, DC area
- Several employees telecommute at least 50% of their time.

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CESSI Philosophy of Accommodation

- CESSI has a philosophy of "practicing what we teach."
- Support for reasonable accommodation comes from the top of the company.
- No qualified applicant or employee has been denied reasonable accommodation in the 13 years of the company.

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Types of Accommodations

- Assistive Technology
- Modifications to work stations
- Modifications to schedule
- Telecommuting
- Structural changes within leased space
- Structural changes to building during renovations

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Assistive Technology

- Screen readers
- Voice Input
- Braille and Speak
- CCTV
- Ergonomic Keyboards
- Headsets

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Modifications to Work Stations

- Furniture

- Office layout

- Equipment adaptations

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Modifications to Schedule

- Flexible scheduling
- Delayed start time

Telecommuting

- Telecommuting can be an option for employees as a reasonable accommodation or means to keep valued employees.
- 20% of Division employees telecommute at least one day per week.
- One blind employee worked from home 100% of the time!

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Structural Changes within Leased Space

- ○ Bathroom door modifications
  - Door openers
  - Signage
- ○ Rearrange furniture in employee kitchen
- ○ Keep reception area furniture out of main path of travel
- ○ When carpeting needed to be replaced, low pile was priority
- ○ Some offices reconfigured for greater accessibility

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Structural Changes to Building During Renovations

- Main level parking lot modifications
- Main level door opener
- Main level curb cuts
- Lower level ramp to door
- Lower level door opener
- Marking accessible parking spaces
- Signage on elevators

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Steps to Workspace Accommodations

- Discuss accommodation needs with employee/s.
- Ask for suggestions for solutions.
- Research options.
- Make sure solution doesn't pose obstacle for another employee!

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Steps to Office Modifications

- Invite employees to notify you of hard to use or inoperable elements of your facility.
- Ask for suggested solutions.
- Research options.
- Make necessary modifications – can be useful for all employees!

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Steps to Building Modifications

- Discuss needs for accessible features with building owners/managers.
- Provide written information on ADAAG, state or local codes.
- Provide referrals for technical assistance if necessary.
- Follow-up.

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Development of Evacuation Plan

- Like many accommodations, evacuation plans are for everyone!
- Invite employees with/without disabilities to discuss evacuation strategies/needs.
- Meet with fire marshal to determine average response times and their on-site protocol.
- Meet with staff or committee to devise evacuation plan.
- If necessary, purchase evacuation chair.
- Provide staff training on evacuation procedures.

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Summary

- Commitment to accommodation begins at the top of the organization.
- Accommodations are individual and may be:
  - Structural
  - Equipment
  - Flexible scheduling
- Accessibility increases the ability of the organization to attract qualified applicants.
- An organization agile enough to create accommodations can be a more creative, flexible employer attracting the best potential employees!

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Web Resources

- ○ ADATA.org – Web site of ADA & IT Technical Assistance Centers.

- ○ Earnworks.com – an employer oriented job placement program of the U.S. Department of Labor.

- ○ Jan.wvu.edu – Web site of the Job Accommodation Network, an employer resource of the U.S. Department of Labor.

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