

Reasonable Accommodation Case Study – Bank of American Corporation

Bank of America Corporation is a bank and financial holding company that provides a diversified range of banking and non-banking financial services and products. The company operates in consumer and commercial banking, asset management, global corporate and investment banking, and equity investments.

Bank of America is in 21 states, the District of Columbia and in 31 international offices and is a member of the S&P 500. The Bank employs approximately 137,000 employees nationally. Since 1998, Bank of America has been recognized as a national leader in workforce development related to welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act.

Its America/ Works program seeks to build a diverse powerful workforce and to build stronger communities by promoting self-sufficiency and workforce opportunities for all Americans. Bank of America is committed to hiring persons with disabilities, individuals on welfare, homeless veterans, youth at risk, the working poor, and low income seniors. Through extensive outreach and recruiting efforts, the company has hired more than 7,000 former public assistance recipients since 1998 and provided 222 job training program grants across the United States. National alliances include the Veterans Administration, Department of Labor, Women's Alliance, National Council of La Raza, the Jobs Partnership, and others. Bank of America contributes tens of thousands of volunteer hours annually in activities that include mentoring the disadvantaged, mock interviews, workplace tours, career presentations, and participation on the boards of nonprofit community organizations.

Programs also include financing daycare facilities that expand community childcare resources and reduce childcare barriers to employment. Since 2001, the Bank of America Foundation has awarded \$29 million in grants to organizations providing job training and placement programs and services for low-income individuals with barriers to employment.

Contributions to Disability Outreach

Bank of America has a very strong presence in the Seattle area, and in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The company is a key member of Washington's Business Leadership Network (BLN) and Seattle staff also participate as members of regional Projects With Industry (PWI) on their Business Advisory Councils (BACs). In Seattle, the bank has made a strong commitment to local community rehabilitation agencies. Through these outreach efforts, Bank of America has been able to access individuals with disabilities and those with low incomes. These partnerships have been in effect since 1997, helping to develop pre-hire training programs, and designing career advancement programs at Bank of America. The goal is to assist people with disabilities and minority group members achieve solid private sector jobs with advancement opportunities.

Working with local community rehabilitation programs, the bank has modified jobs such as ATM and the vault. These positions have been beneficial to employees with developmental disabilities. Employees with disabilities make sure checks have been completely processed from the ATM's or in the vault and that all poly bags have no residual checks, money, or deposit materials. These positions used to be part-time duties for banking associates. Betty Burton, Manager of the Seattle vault, states that the employees with disabilities do a considerably better and more consistent job than their co-workers in clearing deposit containers and envelopes. They are both "more focused and accurate" in this work activity.

Brad Baker, Staffing Manager, indicates the bank also has eight to 10 classes annually for the customer service center. Many individuals with disabilities take advantage of the five week training program. This customer service center handles all customer concerns/complaints relating to diverse banking activity over extended hours throughout the week. It is estimated that approximately five percent of the customer service specialists have significant disabilities.

Upon employee request, the bank has assigned caseworkers to handle transportation and other independent living concerns as well as to assist with efficiency in areas of life activity that can affect job maintenance and performance. Once such example was an individual referred from the University of Washington Epilepsy Center who was hired in the customer notification department. This individual handled customer notification mailings while having weekly generalized seizures at the workplace. Modifications made for this individual included a padded floor area and mailing tables with padded edges. Significant clearance around the table was also provided due to frequent seizures. Additionally, employees in the department were trained in basic first aid and the employee's hours were altered so he had routine bus access to the banking facility.

Norm Bauer, Senior Vice President of Personnel indicates that individuals with developmental disabilities have worked in the mail room for many years. He states that once managers have some experience with individuals with disabilities, they are more apt to make accommodations. With exposure, comes the "awareness of these individuals as competent employees". He notes that some of the effort to hire minority populations began several decades ago with the awareness of the work contributions made by new immigrants. The initial hiring of new immigrants within the bank opened up the thinking of the contributions that could be made by other minority groups such as people with disabilities. Mr. Bauer notes that other typical accommodations include various lenses, magnifiers, and screen adapters, for individuals with visual disabilities.

Brad Baker, Staffing Manager, noted two unique components to the bank's infrastructure that supports hiring and career advancements of people with disabilities:

- The Disability Awareness Guide--an online internal website. Managers are required annually (consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act) to be updated on interviewing strategies, managing approaches, and reasonable

- accommodations. This site provides an updated "tool kit" to assist in effectively reaching and working with individuals with disabilities.
- The Reasonable Accommodations Service--located in the personnel center. Any department manager, when confronted with a reasonable accommodation issue, can call the personnel center and request assistance from an accommodations case manager which is part of a national team. This team problem solves accommodation issues and returns relevant information regarding the accommodation needed to the manager. The manager is not fiscally responsible for the accommodation cost incurred, but the costs are paid out of a national accommodation funding pool maintained by the bank. Assistive technologist specialists are also part of this national accommodations team.

In 2001, Bank of America was recognized with the "Large Employer of the Year" award by the Washington Governor's Committee on Disability and Employment.

Personnel Interviewed:

Karen Shawcross, Senior Vice President, Portland, Oregon

Norm Bauer, Senior Vice President of Personnel, Northwest;

Betty Burton, Vice President/Manager, Seattle Vault;

Brad Baker, Manager, Exult (Bank of America Staffing); and

Erica Shaw, Recruiting Specialist, Exult (Bank of America Staffing)

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McMahon, B., Wehman, P., Brooke, V., Habeck, R., Green, H., and Fraser, R. (2004). Business, Disability and Employment: Corporate Models of Success. A Collection of Successful Approaches Reported from 20 Employers. Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention.