

Reasonable Accommodation Case Study: McNaughton & Gunn

McNaughton & Gunn (M&G) is a privately owned book printing company with 230 employees, located in Saline, Michigan. McNaughton & Gunn was founded in 1975 by five partners from various book-manufacturing companies in the Ann Arbor, Michigan area on the principle that people make the difference. M&G has been consistently recognized for its excellence in the printing industry, its contributions to the wider community, and the quality of work environment for its employees. It has been named "Best of the Best Workplace" by the Printing Industries of America, Inc. for three years in a row, while achieving various other awards. Today, they print over 6,000 titles annually. M&G specializes in short to medium runs with standard trim sizes and offers a wide variety of binding styles including perfect and case bound and both sheet-fed and web presses.

This belief of the company is evident in the open and respectful relationships among employees at all levels, including the CEO; in the quarterly meetings of all people in each department with the CEO to share information about the company's performance; and in the comprehensive and creative benefits offered to employees and the ways in which employees are invited and educated to use them. These educational and communication efforts include a training center - M&G University - which has over 75% of employees participating. M&G also offers a monthly newsletter - the Starfish News (based on the premise every starfish makes a difference from the Joel Barker video) - which provides ongoing information to help employees utilize their benefits (such as the EAP, wellness cost reimbursement, tuition reimbursement) and celebrate their achievements.

They also hold special events such as employee appreciation week to recognize all team members' contribution to the continued success of the company, ending in a picnic cooked and cleaned up by management. The M&G culture is evident in safety and disability management efforts, as well. "We have a great safety record", says Press Manager, Jeff Briegel. "The industry average? We blow it away." They are doing pretty well in their workers' compensation experience too, with a program to assist workers in returning to work, including temporary placement to accommodate recovery needs, when indicated.

Best Practice Context

Nearly 20 years ago, M&G was contacted by the placement specialist from Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI) regarding job openings for some new graduates from its printing program. MCTI provides vocational and technical training and supportive services to prepare Michigan citizens with disabilities for employment in the competitive labor market.

The printing program is one of 13 programs guided by market needs and operating methods of Michigan's businesses and citizens. All curriculum areas are guided by recommendations of Business Advisory Committees, which has made it a national model

for the involvement of business and industry in training and placing persons with disabilities.

The Michigan Department of Career Development through its Michigan Rehabilitation Services division operates MCTI. When MCTI contacted McNaughton & Gunn, they found a receptive employer. "Compared to the other printing companies we contacted in this area, M&G was the most willing to work with us and explore how hiring graduates with disabilities from this vocational printing program could work", explained Paul Mulka, former placement specialist and now director of career and technical education for MCTI. Paul visited the plant, saw the jobs and worksite, and established a relationship with Rick Welch in HR.

Now, when Herb McPeak, training instructor for the printing program at MCTI has someone graduating from the program who wants to return to the Saline area, he calls Rick to see if there are openings. Herb knows the jobs at M&G, and recommends graduates for positions that match their strengths. If Rick has openings in these areas, they are invited in for interviews. Time is spent in the pre-screening interview, discerning what those strengths are, but the interview questions are no different. Department managers know that the candidates are coming from MCTI, but no information about specific disabilities is shared. The work team also interviews candidates. Then they are taken to the work floor to be sure they can manage the presses (which are about 20 times larger than those encountered in the training program), handle the cat walks, lift the paper, and observe the rest of the work environment.

"They are willing to give people a chance to prove themselves," says McPeak, "and many have succeeded. When I have someone from the area who seems to be a good match with the position open, I tell Rick their strong points and I tell him my concerns, and they go from there."

Together, they focus heavily on abilities and stress the quality of the match with the job requirements, so that accommodations have been almost irrelevant except for learning time as job responsibilities change. Most of the employees referred from MCTI printing program have had learning disabilities, and have benefited from the supportive work environment.

Years ago, M&G had access to a high school consortium with a vocational program in printing. Only one distant school program remains and most students are unwilling to make the commute. This situation adds to the value of referrals from MCTI. "This is not just a job to the printing faculty at MCTI", observes Welch. "We value their judgment in screening job candidates. Their candidates have a leg up on someone from off the street. They come with a concept of printing work, they know the terms and are interested."

Rick took Jim Gilbertson, Operations Manager, to MCTI to speak to the students and provide input to the training program. "As I looked at the people we had hired and how it had worked out, I could see it was a win-win situation", explains Gilbertson. "We expected longer training periods for these employees, and in some cases that has been

needed. But, overall, the employees we have from MCTI are particularly dedicated to this work, they have good attendance records, they are willing to work needed shifts, they stay longer and are eager to get ahead."

Results Achieved

Over the nearly 20-year period, about 20 graduates have been placed into employment with M & G. "Overall, it has been very successful," comments Welch. "We have had some disappointments, but that happens also with people we hire off the street. The people we have hired from MCTI just needed a break to get in and get started. They bring knowledge of the industry with them and are eager to apply that knowledge, as compared to most applicants.

If you look at participation in our M&G University, our employees from MCTI are more likely to sign up for the training related to our industry." Five MCTI graduates are currently employed at M&G, ranging in tenure from 3 years to 17 years. They receive a competitive wage and all receive full benefits. One of the three original graduates placed with M&G is entering his 18th year of employment at M&G, where he has had earned promotions through several positions to his current position as press operator. Says this long time veteran, "This is the first place I applied to. It's a good environment to work in".

The two most recent graduates placed at MCTI have found many benefits to being with this employer, as well. One, who began as a press helper and the only woman in the press department, is well on her way to running a press. At M&G for three years now, she explains, "This is the longest I've ever worked for one place." And the benefits are not all in earnings and productivity, either. This September marks the first wedding anniversary for these classmates who became co-workers at M&G, and are now building their life in Saline.

Conclusions

"We have had excellent employees come from MCTI", explains Welch. "And, from a social standpoint, it's important that businesses get involved and give people with disabilities the same opportunities to work as you and I. Lots of employers don't know these training programs exist. That's a shame. MCTI is a valuable source of employees." A people-oriented culture makes many things possible--particularly productivity, commitment and profitability for the company; job satisfaction for employees, and a good worklife balance for all M&G employees.

This type of work culture also delivers high quality performance and service for customers, and economic and social contributions for the community. Hiring qualified and trained individuals with disabilities into a work environment demonstrated at M&G, with genuine consideration for the abilities and needs of the individuals involved, and careful attention to the requirements and demands of the job, results in long-term

employment and career development for the employees which can in turn lead to sustained independent and productive lives for individuals with or without a disability. This philosophy is definitely a win-win situation for all.

For information regarding this Case Study contact:

Rick Welch
Human Resource
Manager

734-429-8721

rickw@mcnaughtongunn.com

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.