

Reasonable Accommodation Case Study – Pitney Bowes

Pitney Bowes is the world's leading provider of integrated mail and document management systems, services, and solutions. The company's products enable the processing, folding, and inserting of 100 million pages of financial credit card statements each month. The US Postal Service receives more than \$15 billion each year, 61% of its annual metered postage revenue, from 1.4 million Pitney Bowes mailing systems.

The company manages facilities that produce 1.7 million copies hourly. With more than 3,500 patents worldwide to its credit, Pitney Bowes is among the top 200 firms receiving US patents. More than 35,000 individuals are employed by Pitney Bowes mail and document solutions for more than 2 million customers in 130 countries worldwide. In the June/July issue (2003) of Diversity Inc. magazine, Pitney Bowes is ranked 27th nationally for the diversity of its workforce and was cited for recruitment of qualified individuals with disabilities.

Disability Practices In the Spokane area, the company has hired 400 people in the last 12 years at its North Atlantic Street site to handle billing issues, customer equipment consultation, and customer retention. The site handles 12-14,000 calls daily which includes all customer calls west of the Mississippi. Ms. Besenyody was initially exposed to a pool of qualified individuals with disabilities by S.L. Start, a Rehabilitation Services Administration which funds Project With Industry. She indicated that she was particularly impressed by Project With Industry's emphasis on learning "how we do business" at their work site.

Pitney Bowes made a commitment to establish 2% of its workforce as qualified individuals with disabilities. The company has more than exceeded this goal, and now 6% of the employees on site (24 individuals) have diverse disabilities. Ms. Besenyody has also been recruited to serve on the Project With Industry's advisory board, and Pitney Bowes has become a leader in the establishment of the area's Business Leadership Network (BLN). Pitney Bowes, along with other area companies, has led the effort to secure State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation funding for part of the BLN infrastructure and job placement centrix.

Of particular interest is the company's effort to engage in reasonable accommodation. The company has hired individuals with disabilities such as deafness, diabetes, blindness, mental illness and back injuries. Adaptations have included such items as a headset with magnified sound (employee with legal deafness), computer screen magnifications (employee with legal blindness), screen magnifier on eyeglasses (employee with visual field cut), chair adaptation and risers (allowing an individual to be supported while standing) for individuals with back injuries who require changes in positions, etc.

Ms. Benesyody indicates that prevailing employer attitudes about individuals with disabilities can be "ridiculous". She describes her employees with disabilities as "role models" relative to both work productivity and attendance. In relation to other employees these individuals have above average productivity and almost optimal attendance. In

addition to outreach activities, Ms. Besenyody assisted the state vocational rehabilitation agency in developing a job seeking skills program and developed program segments related to optimal interviewing techniques.

The company has also made a commitment to mentor high school students with disabilities. They have provided internships to the students with disabilities from the Goodwill's High School/High Tech Program. In addition to its efforts to outreach to these individuals, the company has also made exemplary efforts to engage new employees through the Work First Program for those subsisting on welfare funding. In recent years, Pitney Bowes has hired 80 new employees through the Work First Program. Ms Besenyody is curious as to why more companies don't make efforts to hire with disabilities. She states that "the company is very willing to spend funds on accommodations, generally with some state rehabilitation agency match. Most of the accommodations at the Spokane site have been under \$500 per employee with a disability, a very reasonable expenditure."

Unique Aspects of the Outreach Effort

- Ms. Besenyody and Pitney Bowes have truly engaged the rehabilitation community, not only in relation to outreach, but in preparing individuals with disabilities for entering into the workforce and attempting to develop an infrastructure for hiring individuals with disabilities through the Spokane area (BLN). She has taken a leadership role with the local Project With Industry and also in assisting the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. This is an exemplary expenditure of both time and business expertise.
- There is a true emphasis at Pitney Bowes on making accommodations for their employees with disabilities. A number of companies make an attempt to outreach to those individuals with disabilities, but the emphasis on making reasonable accommodation is not prevalent.
- Identifying an actual percentage or workforce quota for involving qualified individuals with disabilities at Pitney Bowes is unique. The company is truly making an effort to have a diverse workforce that reflects its customer base and communities in which it does business. The company's number 27 ranking by Diversity Inc. magazine reflects this effort. It has received numerous awards for its disability related efforts, including the 2001 Prism Award for Successful Efforts in the Hiring of Qualified Individuals with Disabilities, the 2001 State of Washington Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment Certificate of Appreciation, and the 2002 Spokane Mayor's Human Rights Award, Honorable Mention, for its efforts to hire and retain workers with disabilities.

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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.