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MassWorks: Creating Effective Business Partnerships: What Businesses Want Human Service Agencies to Know

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EVENTS

September 18-19

Job Accommodation Network Conference, Boston, MA. This event unites JAN consultants with experts in employment law, innovative employment practices, and disability issues on behalf of employers and service providers. CEUs are available. Register at <http://conference.jan.wvu.edu>.

September 27

Building Teamwork, Increasing Morale, and Improving Communication, Worcester, MA. Improve your managerial effectiveness by enhancing your communication savvy to improve team communication and morale while maintaining productivity. Visit www.nercep.org for more information.

Online, on-demand

“Adding Value to the Business” and “Hiring People with Disabilities: Good Public Relations or Good Business?” Improve your business relationships by participating in these free archived webcasts from the Training and Technical Assistance for Providers (T-TAP) project: www.t-tap.org/training/online/seminars/los.html

RESOURCES

Learn about successful corporate models that promote the employment of people with disabilities through collaboration with human service organizations at www.worksupport.com/research/viewContent.cfm/578

To find out more about the local business climate, check out MassINC (www.massinc.org) an independent, nonpartisan research and education institute that brings together business and labor, advocates, and policymakers to analyze employment conditions in Massachusetts.

Visit the ICI website www.ForEmployers.com for resources on recruitment, accommodations, legal issues, and other topics that can help both employers and providers include people with disabilities in the workforce.

Creating Effective Business Partnerships: What Businesses Want Human Service Agencies to Know

In October 2005, the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston hosted Mission: Employment II, a conference that brought together people with disabilities and workforce, rehabilitation, and employment professionals. Representatives from the Massachusetts Business Leadership Network (MassBLN) presented these tips on how employment service providers can better respond to companies' needs. The MassBLN is an association of Massachusetts companies committed to a diverse marketplace that includes people with disabilities as both customers and employees. For more information on the MassBLN, visit www.massbln.com.

While the primary customer of employment services for people with disabilities is the job seeker, placement services can only succeed if they meet the needs of business. This issue of MassWorks examines the “demand side” of job development.

Effective business partnerships have three essential elements: knowledge, preparation, and strong relationships.

1. Knowledge is power

- ▶ Research potential businesses
- ▶ Review the qualifications and essential functions of posted positions
- ▶ Know the job seeker's abilities and skills

Knowledge—of the business and the job seeker—is a key ingredient for a good job match. Armed with a solid understanding of the job seekers' interests and skills, both job developers and job seekers should learn all they can about potential employers.

Most employers have a website that can be a wealth of information. Review job postings and descriptions thoroughly to make sure that both the job developer and job seeker understand the essential job functions and employer expectations. This will prepare job seekers for the interview process and demonstrate their interest in the company.

2. Be prepared

- ▶ Prepare the job seeker well for the application process and the job interview
- ▶ Develop a plan for requesting accommodations if they are necessary

Appearance counts. You can't undo a first impression. Both the job developer and job seeker should present themselves in a manner that fits the company's culture. Practice interview skills with the job seeker and make sure that applications are completed neatly and accurately. Resumes and any other written communication should be **flawless**.

If a job seeker needs an accommodation during the hiring process, develop a plan for requesting the accommodation that will give the employer enough information

without sharing unnecessary information. Disclosure should be handled functionally, avoiding diagnostic labels or treatment information. If the nature of a job seeker's disability might cause an employer to question the candidate's ability to perform the essential functions of the job, be prepared to explain clearly and simply how the job seeker will perform these tasks.

3. It's all about relationships

- ▶ Leave your agenda at the door
- ▶ Keep communication concise
- ▶ Nurture relationships

Identify the best entry point within a company, and then build a relationship with that employer by learning about their business and workforce needs. In larger companies, relationships with recruiters and human resources departments are important.

Stay attuned to the employer's priorities. Employers and recruiters schedule meetings or interviews with the hope that they will be able to fill a vacancy or meet a workforce need in the company. Your desire to place the job seeker or meet a placement quota should not be part of the conversation or tempt you to present an unqualified candidate.

Respect the manager or recruiter's time. All employers appreciate a well-prepared job seeker. The job seeker should bring extra resumes. Keep paperwork or documentation organized.

A good relationship with a corporate recruiter or other key contact can help you not only to create an opportunity for this job seeker but to open the door for future placements. Through these relationships, the job developer can clarify the skill sets a good candidate needs and come to understand a sometimes overlooked feature—organizational culture.

Be sure to maintain ongoing communication, arrive punctually for meetings, and follow through with your commitments. Remember, if an employer has unfilled job openings, it's a problem for the company. If you can help a company fill those openings, and be honest when you cannot, you will become a valued recruitment source.

Successful job development for people with disabilities boils down to good customer service. Developing good relationships—with job seekers to understand their skills, and with employers to understand their needs—will help you deliver services that **all** your customers value.

Acknowledgements

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