



A World In Which People With Disabilities Have Unlimited Employment Opportunities

Career Development

Career Development for Persons With Disabilities

People with disabilities are like other employees; they want to do a good job, appreciate constructive supervision, enjoy new challenges and want to get ahead. Businesses that successfully recruit and retain qualified employees maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace. One way for employers to retain employees is to establish career development plans for all employees, including those with disabilities. Typical programs include goal setting, team building, networking, mentoring, performance evaluations, leadership opportunities, supervisory and management development, and professional skills training.

Career Planning

Employers must recognize that people with disabilities have aspirations and career goals. Supervisors should discuss career expectations with each employee, including an evaluation of the employee's interests, talents, and skills in relation to the requirements of available jobs. If an employee's career goals seem unachievable, the supervisor should provide constructive feedback and try to reach an agreement with the employee on appropriate goals and the path to achieving them. However, the supervisor should not assume an employee's disability will be a barrier.

Employers should encourage career lattice movement for employees with disabilities as part of a career development program. Career lattice opportunities include moving laterally within the company to gain new experiences and skills, and possibly finding a better fit of an employee's skills and interests with available jobs. Job rotations familiarize employees with disabilities with the entire operations of the business, helping an employee recognize the transferability of skills and abilities to other positions. Job enrichment (i.e., more responsibilities and new assignments) is another important career development tool for people with disabilities.

Team Building

Team building opportunities give employees chances to solve problems and develop solid working relationships with co-workers. Employers should ensure that employees with disabilities have leadership opportunities and are assigned to special projects, planning sessions, off-site projects, and assignments requiring travel. Do not make career development decisions for an employee with a disability based on limiting concepts or stereotypes about that employee's disability.

Networking

Employers should include employees with disabilities in both formal work groups and informal employee gatherings. People with disabilities enjoy the same types of social and recreational activities as employees without disabilities. Frequently, important business is discussed at these events and interpersonal relationships are developed. All employees should be given the opportunity to participate. Employers must arrange events in accessible facilities and arrange transportation to accommodate staff with disabilities.

Mentoring

All staff can benefit from the guidance of a more experienced employee. All employers should encourage employees with disabilities to find mentors, whether or not the mentor has a disability. When these younger employees become more experienced, they should be encouraged to mentor other new employees, who may or may not be disabled.

Mentors provide many benefits:

Broadened perspectives about the transferability of skills and interests, as well as future career directions to consider

Motivation to take calculated risks

Advice on the "politics" of dealing with human relationships within the organization

Honest and constructive **feedback** about problem areas

Coaching on technical, interpersonal, and management skills

Encouragement

Networking contacts, references, and introductions

Performance Appraisals

Performance appraisal procedures vary widely among companies. Some companies use formal, written documents; others use less formal, often oral, procedures. Employers must treat employees with disabilities the same as all other employees. If a position has been restructured to accommodate a person's disability, evaluate the employee only on those tasks he or she is expected to perform, but apply the same performance standards to employees with disabilities that are applied to all employees. Supervisors should discuss the evaluation with the employee prior to the final writeup. After the discussion concerning the job performance in the current job is completed, it is important to have a career development discussion.

Training

Training opportunities should be available to employees with disabilities. Management and leadership training should be among the options available, in addition to specific skills training. Formal classes must be held in accessible facilities. Materials should be available in large print for persons who are visually impaired, interpreters should be provided for participants who are hearing-impaired, and other necessary accommodations made.

Self-Development

An employee with a disability also must take responsibility for his or her career development. Employees should continually seek out new education, training and information. They should keep up on the latest information in the field, network and volunteer for new assignments.

July 2000