



JOB ACCOMMODATION NETWORK

Fact Sheet Series

Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact

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JAN'S ACCOMMODATION FACT SHEET SERIES

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS: LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT: NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS ADDRESS THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

All employees need the right tools and work environment to effectively perform their jobs. Similarly, individuals with disabilities may need workplace adjustments—or accommodations—to maximize the value they can add to their employer. Employers accommodate workers everyday—with and without disabilities—to build a loyal, dedicated and productive workforce. A few examples include:

- Flexible work schedules to accommodate family responsibilities;
- Software to allow efficient manipulation of data;
- Ergonomic chairs to alleviate back pain;
- Wrist supports to reduce the effects of repetitive stress disorders; and
- Telecommuting to reduce stress or other issues associated with commuting to work.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers must provide employees with disabilities the “reasonable accommodations” they need to perform the essential functions of their jobs. In the 15 years since the ADA became law, many employers have expressed concerns about the potential costs of accommodations. This concern often is accompanied by a reluctance to hire individuals with disabilities who may need accommodations. In fact, based on individual stories and media reports from businesses that actually have hired and retained employees with disabilities, these fears seem to have little foundation.

In an effort to separate fact from fiction, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, is going beyond the anecdotal information and is more rigorously assessing the costs and benefits to employers of providing accommodations.

In total, the University of Iowa's Law, Health Policy, and Disability Center (LHPDC) interviewed 1,182 employers between January 2004 and December 2006 who contacted JAN. The employers represented a range of industry sectors and sizes.

Finding #1: Employers want to provide accommodations so they can retain valued and qualified employees.

Of the employers who called JAN for accommodation information and solutions, most were doing so to retain or promote (83%) a current employee. On average (including those persons who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company about seven years, with an average wage of \$13.70 for those paid by the hour, or an average annual salary of about \$47,000. In addition, the individuals tended to be fairly well-educated, with 53% having a college degree or higher.

Finding #2: Most employers report no cost or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Of the employers who gave cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 167 out of 366 (46%) said the accommodations needed by employees and job applicants with disabilities cost absolutely nothing. Another 165 (45%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 25 (7%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (2%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs; however, too few of these employers provided cost data to

report with accuracy. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the typical one-time expenditure by employers was \$500. When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, employers typically answered around \$300.

Finding #3: Employers report accommodations are effective.

LHPDC asked employers who had implemented accommodations at the point they were interviewed to rank the effectiveness of the accommodations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely effective. Of those responding, 75% reported the accommodations were either very effective or extremely effective.

Finding #4: Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.

Employers who had made accommodations for employees with disabilities reported multiple benefits as a result. The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were (1) the accommodation allowed the company to retain a qualified employee, (2) the accommodation increased the worker's productivity, and (3) the accommodation eliminated the costs of training a new employee.

The most widely mentioned indirect benefits employers received were (1) providing the accommodation ultimately improved interactions with co-workers, (2) the accommodation increased over all company morale, and (3) the accommodation increased overall company productivity. In addition, a significant number of employers said the accommodation helped improve workplace safety. The following table gives the percentage of employers who reported experiencing direct and indirect benefits as a result of having made an accommodation.

Direct Benefits	%
Company retained a valued employee	86%
Company promoted an employee	10%
Company hired a qualified person with a disability	18%
Increased the employee's productivity	71%
Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee	56%
Increased the employee's attendance	49%
Saved worker's compensation or other insurance costs	39%
Increased diversity of the company	42%
Indirect Benefits	
Improved interactions with co-workers	67%
Increased overall company morale	58%
Increased overall company productivity	56%
Improved interactions with customers	43%
Increased workplace safety	41%
Increased overall company attendance	34%
Increased profitability	32%
Increased customer base	16%

What's the bottom line?

The bottom line is that, according to the employers who participated in this study, the benefits of making accommodations for individuals in the workplace far outweigh the costs. Specifically, these employers found that on average, for every dollar they put into making an accommodation, they "got back" a little over \$10 in benefits. There probably are few other changes an employer can make that will result in such a return on the investment. Making accommodations just makes good business sense!

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