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## Viewpoint: Disability Inclusion Pays Dividends

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By Kathy Bernhardt 3/10/2016

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Since 2002, when former Walgreens senior vice president of supply chain and logistics Randy Lewis advocated for hiring more individuals with disabilities without sacrificing profitability and efficiency, more companies across the U.S. and other nations have been exploring the bottom-line benefits of disability inclusive workforces.

As disability inclusion consultants, we meet hundreds of business executives and HR professionals each year who are curious about disability inclusion, but don't know how this type of initiative will impact their businesses, and they worry about the cost of implementation, legal matters, and other considerations. Something we frequently tell businesses is that disability inclusion isn't about charity; it's about your company's bottom line. You consider every company policy and practice from a business first perspective and disability inclusion should be no different.

That said, with Disability Awareness Month upon us, we're going to take you on a myth-busting journey that shows the benefits of a maintaining a disability-inclusive workforce.

### **Myth No. 1: Making accommodations for individuals with disabilities is expensive.**

This is a common misconception. In fact, a study conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) found that most accommodations (58 percent) cost nothing at all, while the rest typically cost \$500 or less. (Read more: <https://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html> (<https://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>))

### **Myth No. 2: My company's insurance and medical costs, absentee and turnover rates will rise if we hire individuals with disabilities.**

Simply stated, hiring individuals with disabilities has no negative impact on insurance or medical costs. A study of Walgreens' distribution centers by the American Society of Safety Engineers found that workers with disabilities had a turnover rate 48 percent lower than that of the non-disabled population, with medical costs 67 percent lower and time-off expenses 73 percent lower. (Read more:

<http://www.fastcompany.com/3002957/disabled-employee-amendment>

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**Myth No. 3: I will have to create a new job to hire someone with a disability.**

Disability inclusion is about hiring qualified individuals for existing positions and realizing the positive impact they can have on your business and company culture. Individuals with disabilities can meet and exceed expectations just like any other group of people. Keep in mind that disabilities range from hidden disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder or dyslexia to visible disabilities like cerebral palsy. The key is finding qualified individuals who can perform the essential functions of a job.

**Myth No. 4: There are too many legal concerns around hiring someone with a disability, especially if I have to fire them.**

Legal concerns are common when talking about disability inclusion. This is why we can't think of a better reason to have a formal disability inclusion program in place. Creating a culture of inclusion from the top down is a key step in protecting your business. Again, finding the right person for the job should mitigate performance issues that would lead to termination.

**Myth No. 5: Disability inclusion only benefits individuals with disabilities.**

Let's debunk this myth by taking a look at how businesses benefit from disability inclusion:

- Expanded customer base—\$1 trillion is the market segment represented by individuals with disabilities and their families. Furthermore, 87 percent of consumers prefer to give their business to companies that employ people with disabilities.
- Tax credits: Businesses that hire individuals with disabilities may qualify for tax incentives
- Improved safety statistics
- Increased productivity—Walgreens' most-productive distribution center has the highest percentage of individuals with disabilities
- Decreased absentee rates, turnover rates and recruiting costs
- Improved employee morale
- Federal contractor compliance

How the community benefits from disability inclusion:

- More tax-paying citizens

- Fewer individuals utilizing government benefits
- More individuals with spending power

As you can see, there are many reasons for businesses to explore this undertapped pool of qualified individuals to fill their hiring needs. It is important to note that disability inclusion doesn't happen overnight, and success is dependent on buy-in from every level of a company, but doing the work to create a culture of inclusion undoubtedly makes good business sense.

*Kathy Bernhardt is managing director for Tangram Business Resourcing where she focuses on disability inclusion and developing disability outreach initiatives for companies. Most recently, she has been the project lead for a disability inclusion initiative for a national retail chain and an energy company. Reposted by permission from the HR + People Strategy blog*

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