

Employment of people with physical disabilities.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



Introduction

All people have their own set of skills, strengths and abilities, even though each one might differ in the level of ability. As industries and hiring criteria change, employing people with physical disabilities is no longer seen as a great obstacle for employers, provided the work environment and culture is inclusive. Moreover, people with disabilities have a lot to offer and should be employed for their skills and what they can bring to a company.

Discussion

There are many jobs that suit people with physical disabilities and that do not require extensive or expensive accommodations. At the same time all employees must be employed because they have appropriate skillsets to do perform their duties. It is important for both employer and employee to feel that the person's strengths are being harnessed and that they feel confident in their positions.

Sweeny (2023) maintains that the increase in remote work brought about by the 2019/2020 Covid pandemic enabled people with physical disabilities to pursue a wide range of careers. Nevertheless, remote work is not the only option as there are many careers that do not

require great physical fitness and dexterity, stamina, or mobility. Examples of such careers are in areas of finance, management, education, business, tourism and hospitality, technology, sales and tele-sales, art, design, healthcare including counselling, therapy, among others.

Both employers and employees with physical disabilities should be open-minded to possibilities but should also be sensible when they either employ or apply for employment. During the recruitment process employers should identify and state the essential requirements of a position and describe the necessary skills clearly so that the selection requirements are easily understood. In addition, application forms should be structured in such a way that the abilities and responsibilities are plainly set out (HWSETA, nd). On the other hand, prospective employees should know their own limitations to ensure that they do not set themselves up for failure.

Certain accommodations might be necessary to enable an employee with a disability to perform the required duties but should not be a burden to the employer. Reasonable accommodation does not change the essential function of the job, it merely assists a person with a disability to function (Bonaccio et al., 2020). For example, a kitchen manager who uses a wheelchair will need wider spaces in which to move easily, or a work surface and hand sink to be at a comfortable height. The same would apply to other types of careers where employees function in ordered spaces.

People with physical disabilities can excel in both visual and performing arts: television, movie, stage and radio offers careers for actors, producers, sound technicians and voice artists. The list goes on.

Conclusion

Even though there is a growing list of careers that can be accessed and followed by people with physical disabilities, there are still many employers who have misgivings about employing them. While diversity in the workplace is legislated, people with disabilities are often overlooked as candidates (Bonaccio et al., 2020). However, there are local and multinational organisations, like the ILO Global Business and Disability Network and the National Institute for Development and Training (NIDT). The ILO promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace (ILO, 2014), and the NIDT specialises in training people with disabilities to enter the workforce (NIDT, 2023), who hope to change employers' views on and approach to inclusivity.

For further information about this article contact
lientjievansburg@nidtraining.org.za

References

- Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C.E., Gellatly, I.R. et al. (2020). The Participation of People with Disabilities in the Workplace Across the Employment Cycle: Employer Concerns and Research Evidence. *Journal of Business Psychology* 35: 135-158. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9602-5>
- Health and welfare sector education and training authority (HWSETA) (nd). A guide to employing people with disabilities. HWSETA.
- International Labour Organization (ILO) (2014). Employing people with disabilities: It's right and smart. International Labour Organization: disability and work. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives/features/WCMS_239534/lang--en/index.htm
- National Institute for Training and Development (NIDT) (2023). Annual Report. NIDT. <https://nidtraining.org.za/annual-reports/NIDT%20AGM%20Report%20August%202023.pdf>
- Sweeny, M. (2023). The best careers for people with physical disabilities. The best schools, <https://thebestschools.org/careers/career-guide/best-jobs-for-physically-disabled>.