

Disability Awareness Training: Corporate Plan

Awareness Training

Awareness Training is the key to opening the doors within any company. It is vital to understand what we do not understand. This is done through training that has as its base sensitivity into education – inform the audience of what they are doing that may be counterproductive to the acceptance of individuals with disabilities while equipping them with tools to move forward in a manner that is welcoming and appropriate. Once this is conveyed, there is a comfort level that begins to permeate throughout employees, and from enhanced knowledge comes a favorable change in behavior. From this point, the company can then move forward towards addressing more involved matters such as hiring practices to include accommodations and flexibility, on-going accessibility reviews and events that embrace diversity in disabilities.

Employee Orientation

DAT will develop customized materials for the company to use on a regular basis in training and orienting new and veteran employees. This will include etiquette and interaction skills, accessibility review guidelines, response to both customer and employee needs and challenges, Person First language and defining disabilities and disability characteristics.

Accommodations & Flexibility

A key to hiring certain individuals with disabilities is the ability to be flexible in areas such as scheduling and job description responsibilities and how to best accommodate. Both lead to a positive working environment that allows the company to boast about its diverse approach to hiring while doing what is right in and for their community. Important in this is simply understanding what accommodating an employee means, from assistive technology to adaptive equipment – usually an answer exists that is affordable and brings a level playing field.

Accessibility/Universal Design

Often misunderstood, the most glaring way to show a willingness to accept individuals with disabilities is to ensure that the physical plant is accessible and that the incorporation of universal design is prevalent throughout all structures. This goes beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) but does not, as some may perceive, fiscally handcuff a company. In reality, it is intended to benefit all people who enter any structure and use any facility therein. Cost could certainly be a factor, but oftentimes it is as simple as signage, large print or website design – that is all that is needed to assure compliance and a user-friendly environment.

Disability Awareness Training (DAT) will develop a customized, progressive program to assist and ensure a business/corporation has all the necessary information and tools to respond to individuals with disabilities. This includes employee matters, customer responsiveness, and community needs. As the disability movement heightens, many businesses and companies still lag behind in their understanding of what to do and their inability to respond appropriately.

DAT will address the following:

- ✓ Customer interactions: response to need
- ✓ Etiquette and interaction skills
- ✓ Understanding disabilities: hidden, physical, intellectual, emotional/psychiatric, learning, sensory
- ✓ Person first language
- ✓ Hiring practices
- ✓ Employer responsiveness to needs
- ✓ Accessibility/Universal Design
- ✓ Accommodations and flexibility
- ✓ Visible top management support
- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Americans with Disabilities Act
- ✓ Tax incentives
- ✓ Government support programs
- ✓ Awareness events

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Tax Incentives/Breaks & Government Support

Now, more than ever, there is the ability for a company to receive reimbursement for some individuals with disabilities as they enter the workforce. President Obama has embraced the need to better employ individuals with disabilities and many incentives exist beyond the traditional source from areas such as New York State's Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and other state's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Built into this are federal supports like the Job Accommodations Network (JAN) and the Office for Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). Providing the company with the means to both access and understand what they can utilize makes for greater acceptance.

New York Makes Work Pay & Other Initiatives

There is a big push for hiring individuals with disabilities as the increased awareness of discrimination coupled with the desire to do what is best for the company and the community continues to be understood and embraced. What many of these initiatives are doing is finding ways to make it easier for Human Resource departments and managers to hire. Programs such as Linkages (a website staffing service at no cost to the employer) and federally funded initiatives like NY Makes Work Pay work on many of the areas discussed above.

Top Visible Management Support

Without the executive office endorsing the plan to move forward, nothing can be generated at any pace or rate that shows true results. Companies such as Wegmans, Walgreens, and Ernst & Young are leading corporate America in embracing both the disability workforce and clientele. DAT will bring a customized program that will have unique components per the company's business interests and product lines. This also shows that inappropriate verbiage or language, subtle or open put downs, and in-house discrimination will not be tolerated.

Disability Awareness Events

Momentum needs to be ongoing as staff will come and go, new questions and issues will arise, updated program models will be developed and the community becomes more cognizant of positive response from corporate America. Providing programs that welcome high school and college students with disabilities, events open to the public, sponsorship of new programs, speaker series, and recreation opportunities are all ways to show the company's intent is real and true.



Most people want to show respect and sensitivity to people with disabilities. But they simply don't know how, and with good reason: amid dozens of disabilities and millions who have them, there is so much to know that it overwhelms most people. *That's where David Whalen comes in.* An engaging speaker with nearly 20 years in the field of disabilities, he strips down the complex issues to their understandable essence — and clearly communicates the steps anyone can take to respond properly to people with disabilities.

**“DIGNITY, RESPECT, EQUITY,
INCLUSION...BE AWARE!”**



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