

Myths and Facts about Working with People who have Disabilities

Many myths exist that keep people with disabilities from entering the workforce. The fact is people with disabilities are no less reliable, talented or productive than their peers. Often, they do not require customized work arrangements. The following is an eye-opening exploration of myths and facts from credible sources and studies.

Myth: People with disabilities don't have the education they need.

Fact: Seventy-two per cent of working-age people with disabilities have high school diplomas or higher levels of education. However, people with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed than able-bodied people, regardless of their levels of education.

Fifty-five per cent of people who have bachelor's degrees and a disability are unemployed. This is significantly higher than the average unemployment rate of the general population with post-secondary education, which is only 14 per cent. As a result, there is an excess of educated people with disabilities looking for employment¹.

Myth: Hiring employees will cause my Worksafe BC (WSBC) rates to increase.

Fact: This is false. Insurance rates for employers are determined by the health and safety risk of your type of business, the size of your payroll, and the health and safety record of your company. The level of ability of a new employee has no impact on insurance rates.

¹ "Executive Summary: 2000 N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities." *The National Organization on Disability*. N.p., 2000. Web. 20 Aug. 2012.
<http://nod.org/research_publications/nod_harris_survey/2000_survey_of_americans_with_disabilities/>.



Myth: Employees with disabilities have a higher turnover rate and will miss too much work to effectively perform their job responsibilities

Fact: Employers report that absenteeism rates are the same as those without disabilities and job performance of people with disabilities often exceeds those without. For example, Washington Mutual, a financial services company, reported an 8 per cent percent attrition rate in 1999 among people with disabilities working at its call centers, compared to an overall attrition rate of 45 per cent. Thus, people with disabilities, on average, had lower turnover. The cost to recruit, train, and develop new employees was \$15,000. Washington Mutual saved money by hiring more people with disabilities because *they had better attendance and were more committed to their jobs*².

Myth: Persons with disabilities are not reliable.

Fact: Anecdotal and survey research data shows that employees with disabilities may be less likely to leave a company than non disabled workers. For example, Hire Potential found that on average, its placements stayed on the job 50 percent longer than those without disabilities. Furthermore, Marriott employees hired through its pathways to independence program only had a 6 percent turnover rate versus the 52 percent turnover rate of its overall workforce³.

Myth: It is too expensive to accommodate employees with disabilities.

Fact: Research cited in the Conference Board of Canada's "Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities" indicates that less than 80 per cent of people with disabilities who are employed need any form of accommodation⁴. In many cases, an employee already has the special equipment they may need, and if not, there are many government programs available to assist employers with these costs.

² Gray, Craig. "N.O.D. Annual Report." *The National Organization on Disability*. N.p., 1999. Web. 20 Aug. 2012. <http://nod.org/about_us/our_history/annual_reports/1999_annual_report/>.

³ Hasse, Jim. "People with Disabilities." *Perfectly Able: How to Attract and Hire Talented People With Disabilities*. N.p.: AMACOM Div American Mgmt Assn, 2010.

⁴ Wright, Ruth. "Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities." *Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities*. The Conference Board of Canada, Apr. 2011. Web. <<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-Library/abstract.aspx?DID=85>>.



Myth: Persons with disabilities are inspirational, courageous, and brave for being able to overcome their disability.

Fact: Persons with disabilities are simply carrying on normal activities of living when they drive to work, go grocery shopping, pay their bills, or compete in athletic events.

Myth: Persons with disabilities need to be protected from failing.

Fact: Persons with disabilities have a right to participate in the full range of human experiences including success and failure. Employers should have the same expectations of, and work requirements for, all employees.

Myth: If an employee with a disability does not fit in or doesn't work out, there is nothing I can do about it.

Fact: Employees with disabilities should be treated the same as other employees in terms of expectations, opportunities and workplace standards. If an employee is not meeting performance expectations, employers should follow routine procedures: they should discuss the problem(s) with the employee, look for solutions, document the situation and if necessary, terminate employment.

Myth: It is very difficult to interview individuals with disabilities because it is so easy to violate human rights laws.

Fact: Use the same interview techniques and ask the same job-related questions that you would ask other applicants. Remember to focus on abilities rather than disabilities, and interviewing should be easy.



Spinal Cord Injury BC

Myth: Persons with disabilities have problems getting to work.

Fact: Persons with disabilities are capable of supplying their own transportation by choosing to walk, car pool, drive, take public transportation or a cab. Their modes of transportation to work are as varied as those of other employees.

Myth: There aren't many people with disabilities, so it is not an issue for our company.

Fact: In 2006, there were 4.4 million Canadians with disabilities, an increase of 21.2 per cent from 2001. At the same time, the non-disabled population experienced lesser growth, increasing by 3.3 per cent to reach 26.2 million people. As a result, the national disability rate increased from 12.4 per cent in 2001 to 14.3 per cent in 2006⁵.

Myth: It doesn't matter to my customers if I address the disability issue or not.

Fact: Canadians with disabilities have a combined annual disposable income of \$25 billion annually in consumer buying, making this a spending group with significant clout. They also have influence on a large secondary market of friends and family⁶.

⁵ Disabled World News (2008-12-10) - The survey results confirm that the disability rate in Canada increases steadily with age: <http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/statistics/disability-statistics-canada.php#ixzz23q1M2bnN>

⁶ Wilkerson, Bill. "Business Case for Accessibility." *Paths to Equal Opportunity*. Queen's Printer of Ontario, Nov. 2001. Web. http://www.lauriercc.ca/content/documents/fileItemController/business_case_for_accessibility.pdf