

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

SPONSORED BY THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT (CASE)

Canadian organization makes compelling case for hiring people with disabilities

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As Canada confronts the challenges of its aging population and dwindling labour force, Canadians with disabilities largely remain an untapped pool of talent.

The employment rate among Canadians with disabilities is estimated to hover around 50 per cent, though there's evidence to suggest it's actually lower. While some may be limited in their capacities to perform certain work, most people with disabilities who are not working — around 800,000 — are eager and able.

Within this sizeable minority, nearly half possess some form of post-secondary education, though misconceptions surrounding ability and skill level often deter employers from seeking out these candidates.

For employers struggling to find the talent they need, it's a good time to dismiss these outdated notions. "We have employers who are look-

ing for people who have specific skills, education, insights and traits, and we have a vast, very diverse, untapped labour pool in Canadians who experience a disability," says Joanna Goode, executive director of the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE).

Promoting a more inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities, CASE strives to facilitate full labour force participation through key resources, expertise and support to service providers at no cost.

"Our role is to facilitate opportunities for service providers to do their job well, as they link employees who have a disability with employers who are looking to diversify their workforce," says Goode.

Beyond championing inclusion as a social good, the organization quells common misconceptions regarding employing Canadians with disabilities, making the case that it's also good for business.

Behind the veil of partiality that informs many

mainstream hiring practices lays compelling evidence that embracing diversity can positively impact the bottom line. A University of Waterloo study found that workers with disabilities often feel exceedingly obligated to perform well, leading to better results for employers. In fact, research confirms 90 per cent of workers with disabilities perform on par with or outperform other team members.

Lower turnover costs and increased attendance — demonstrable attributes among employees with disabilities — can also go a long way in terms of reducing costs and boosting productivity.

While the pandemic has compounded many of the inequalities facing Canada's workforce, it's also allowed businesses to become more agile, making it easier to accommodate employees with disabilities.

Since no single disability is like another, Goode encourages employers to broaden their perceptions by understanding

that "people who experience a disability have a wide range of skills, level of education, personality traits, working styles and accommodation needs."

By making a commitment to diversity, companies signal their willingness to adapt to a constantly-evolving world and marketplace, demonstrating their dedication to fostering a culture of individual respect.

Increased teamwork, creative thinking, improved morale and innovation are just a few of the tangible social benefits observed internally when diversity and inclusion are made a priority.

Plus, as consumers increasingly expect to see themselves and their communities mirrored in the businesses they support, "to see that segment of the population reflected in the companies actually goes a long way to actually bringing dollars to those companies," says Goode.

As Goode points out, when we consider how many Canadians either experience disability



There is a very diverse, untapped labour pool in Canadians who experience a disability. ISTOCK

themselves or have a loved one who does, it's a logical inclination.

So what's the first step companies can make towards inclusive hiring? "Having a policy framework is useful, and that means having an explicit commitment to diversity and inclusion. It also means living that policy, not just writing it and having it on a shelf, gath-

ering dust," offers Goode. She adds that businesses interested in moving their diversity agenda forward should use CASE to connect with local service providers who can provide access to the right employees.

To learn more about why hiring Canadians with disabilities is good for business, visit supportedemployment.ca.

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