

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
Putting Ability to Work www.esbln.org
By Jackie Gast, Director

Things are not always as we assume. Assume. That word can get us into trouble. Just ask my husband.

Many of us assume people with disabilities can not do the same work as someone who is able-bodied or able-minded. After all they have a disability which means "can't". Or does it mean to do equal work but differently or more creatively?

Last fall, I had a conversation with Robin Hall, Senior Human Resource Manager at K & L Microwave who is a great believer in recruiting people with disabilities. Robin talked about the frequent demand among the six or so companies in the Salisbury area for assemblers/solderers. Although the work is different from company to company, the skills transfer. Those transferable skills include assembling electronic boards, working under a microscope, working with small parts, and soldering.

Having an idea of what job of soldering/assembly entailed, I asked Maria Waller, President of Quality Staffing Services in Salisbury, if she would host a group of local job coaches/counselors who work to place people with disabilities into competitive employment to observe the process. When the need arises, QSS will recruit, interview and train selected individuals for employment with their clients. Although these individuals begin as QSS temporary employees, the goal is always permanent placement. This, by the way, is a great way for the companies to try out an employee, as well as for an employee to see if they like the company. Without hesitation, Maria agreed to host our group.

Following the demonstration, the counselors were asked to identify individuals from their case loads. Those individuals identified were then assessed for having an aptitude for this type of work at the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS). The testing resulted in the recommendation of three individuals.

Usually, job candidates recruited by QSS for their employer clients are interviewed and then recommended for training. Under the Ability Matters – Soldering Program, the people with disabilities were pre-assessed as having an aptitude for this type of work and then placed into the training without a prior interview. The staff then decides if the work is satisfactory and if the person can handle the job.

The training usually takes three days. Not knowing what the disabilities were, we decided to allow an extra. As it turned out, the individuals learned so quickly, the training lasted two days with one person finishing in one and a half. The trainer said this was the best group of students she had worked with in a long time and looked forward to training the next group.

As of this writing, two of the three candidates were recommended for employment. One has been hired and we expect the second to be hired soon. Soon after the training, one of the students arrived at his representative's office at the Division of Rehabilitative Services with two friends who want to be trained.

Think about high demand jobs in your area where training can be developed and call us to help get the ball rolling.

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