

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
Putting Ability to Work www.esbln.org
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Did you know that many of today's hottest technologies were first developed for people with disabilities? Take text messaging. Long used by the deaf community, it's an increasingly popular communication tool for everyone. Similarly, the technology used to improve wheelchairs now powers people on Segways® up and down city streets.

What powered these ideas was innovative thinking—the same kind of thinking that drives business success. To effectively compete, businesses of all sizes need employees who can think outside of the proverbial box, especially in today's difficult economic environment. And more and more employers are discovering a ready source for such talent—people with disabilities. On a daily basis, people with disabilities must think divergently about how to tackle challenges and get things done. At work, this translates into innovation.

For this reason, innovation is one of the key themes highlighted in the Business Case for Hiring People with Disabilities, an online, multi-media resource that illustrates how people with disabilities add value to America's businesses across six key concerns common to all employers, regardless of size or industry. In addition to innovation, the Business Case addresses return on investment, human capital, marketing, diversity and social responsibility.

A few years ago, when Walgreens Co. adjusted the technology used in one of its distribution centers to make it easier to use for employees with disabilities, it quickly found that the change actually made everyone more productive. "We got rid of the keyboards. Replaced those with touch screens," a company representative said. "And guess what we discovered? This makes it better for everyone."

Of course, innovation isn't always about technology. When Michigan-based A & F Wood Products, Inc. worked with an employee with a visual impairment to reorganize a workstation for optimal productivity, the company found that the new layout made more sense for all employees. Sometimes the most innovative ideas are the simplest—all that's needed is a fresh perspective.

The Business Case for Hiring People with Disabilities, which includes Frequently Asked Questions on disability employment, is one of many resources available from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to help America's businesses implement policies and programs that foster more inclusive workplaces.

This article was taken directly from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) web site, Business Sense section. For more information about ODEP, visit www.dol.gov/odep.