

## **ABILITY MATTERS**

Presented by: The Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network

**Jackie Gast, Director, Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network:** Hi. My name is Jackie Gast. I'm with the Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network, based at the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce. We are a network of businesses on the Delmarva Peninsula that promote recruitment, hiring and retention of people with disabilities. We have an exciting program to tell you about, it's been very successful, called Ability Matters Soldering. Ability Matters Soldering is about putting people's ability to work, regardless of their disability.

### **K & L Microwave**

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** I am Robin Hall. I work at K & L Microwave as the Human Resource Manager.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP K & L MICROWAVE SIGN AND AMERICAN FLAG)**

K & L Microwave manufactures radio frequency and microwave filters that are used in the communications industry, for both military and commercial products.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF ROBIN HALL)**

By partnering with Lower Shore Enterprises, ESBLN, even Parkside High School, through their CTE Programs or their high school high tech programs, we have been able to fulfill our customers' requirements, and put people to work who may not otherwise have that opportunity.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP HANDS ASSEMBLING ELECTRONIC BOARD)**

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** K & L Microwave, as I mentioned, does military products and as you can imagine with the war efforts that are currently going on,

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF ROBIN HALL)**

we along with our competitors, have had a tremendous influx of business. What that creates for us is an opportunity to go find additional workers, and that's difficult. Recent stats say that the unemployment rate is well below 4 percent in Wicomico County.

### **Quality Staffing Services**

**Maria Waller, President, Quality Staffing Services:** Quality Staffing Services is a Human Resources' solution. We do everything from recruiting to training to Human Resources consulting.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)**

**Maria Waller, President, Quality Staffing Services:** One of the reasons why we started the training center was because

**(END VIDEO CLIP)**

we were servicing a lot of the companies here, like K & L and LORCH and Filtronic Comtech, at the time. What was happening was the mean for people with soldering skills was great, and we were kind of robbing Peter to pay Paul, you know somebody who will leave LORCH to go to K & L, somebody who would leave K & L to...

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP HANDS WITH ELECTRONIC BOARD)**

and we were not expanding the number of folks for that kind of skill. So, it seemed appropriate at the time, to go ahead and teach people how to solder.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP ROBIN HALL)**

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** One of the ways that K & L has chosen to overcome that is to find non-traditional recruitment avenues. We work through a contingency workforce in a lot of our positions, and particularly in assembling and soldering. The contingency workforce offers some flexibility that you may not, otherwise, have. In that, because we were also reaching those real low labor pool numbers, in talking with Quality Staffing, they had already established a soldering training program. So, we talked about... could we go to that non-traditional workforce,

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP REMOVING SMALL PARTS FROM ELECTRONIC BOARD)**

those folks that may be disabled and select folks that could go through the training program, who would be successful.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP BEGIN VIDEO OF ROBIN HALL)**

So, Quality Staffing, along with ESBLN worked together with that partnership and K & L is just fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of the results.

**Jackie Gast, Director, Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network:** Using a contingency workforce through a staffing agency benefits both the company and the employee where they both get to try each other out before making a permanent arrangement. Knowing that Quality Staffing Services already has a training program setup, we decided to ask a network of service providers and job support agencies that are trying to get their folks into competitive employment to see if they had any candidates that might have an aptitude for working with small parts

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)**

and electronics and using the soldering tools.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF JACKIE GAST)**

The Division of Rehabilitative Services were able to help us with the program in getting the people with disabilities into the Quality Staffing Training by providing the assessment/pre-assessment for them to make sure that they had an aptitude first, before placing into training, and then also providing the training dollars that were also necessary.

**Maria Waller, President, Quality Staffing Services:** One of the great things about this job is to have the ability to help people find work. It's very rewarding.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP YOUNG MAN WITH HAT AND SOLDERING TOOL)**

People are often very grateful for your help! When you deal with people with disabilities and you are able to really help them to find a job, you're really, really making a difference in their life. It's great. They are extremely...

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP MARIA WALLER)**

It's not a matter of being grateful. It's a matter of they want so much to contribute to something, and being part of the workforce is very important. You're going to end up with an employee who is just dedicated and who is going to work very hard.

**Faye Larimore, Soldering Trainer, Quality Staffing Services:** With the disabilities, I did not change anything, and most of the people out here would think that you would have to. These people were just like sponges! They were just so willing to learn. They sat there. They listened,

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP TRAINER WITH TRAINEE AT MICROSCOPE)**

and when you told them something, they remembered. It was just an honor to work with these folks.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF FAYE LARIMORE)**

I can see that the two that I recommended going a lot further than what people think. I see big things for these people. Because, as I say, they were just like a sponge, they just wanted so much more! You know. I think it's great and I feel very privileged to have taught these people.

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** One of the advantages to working with employees that may have disabilities is their absolute diligence at their job.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF MAN WITH RED SHIRT WITH PLYERS)**

Typically, we find that their attendance is exemplary. They miss little to no time, compared to the other workers in the manufacturing setting.

**(END VIDEO CLIP)**

Their quality of work is generally, very, very good and their dedication and their focus is extraordinary!

**Jackie Gast, Director, Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network:** We found that people with disabilities, in general, they tend to want to be at work, and that could be due to the fact that it's been very difficult for them to get a job. Many people with disabilities don't like to draw attention to the fact that they do have a disability. Many of them feel that they don't have a disability when it comes to doing the job that is needed to be done, and that's the attitude that we see over and over again.

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** At at least 5-10, at any one time, folks who may have disabilities, we have one gentleman who has been with us for over thirty years, we have another gentleman who has been with us for a little over seven,

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP MAN DIPPING WIRE)**

and we just recently acquired two other employees who have disabilities

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP MAN WITH HAT)**

who are both working on one of our military product lines, and doing a very good job.

**Brian Mills, Production Supervisor, K & L Microwave:** Hi, I'm Brian Mills. I'm the Production Supervisor at K & L Microwave.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)**

Tony, right now in his position, he is training to do what we call prep work. He's taking wiring in straight form and winding it into coils. He's then preparing the leads of those coils with some solder dipping to prepare them for final assembly.

**(END VIDEO CLIP)**

Tony has done very well so far. In fact, we see a lot of potential. He's had the opportunity to some final assembly work, which came from his solder training. I've taken a very different approach to training. I've paired them with a very experienced assembler. That's not something that I have done before. But I have found it's been very beneficial.

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** Introducing employees with disabilities into the workplace, you perceive that there is going to be some issues. Whether we've been very fortunate or there really isn't an issue, I can't speak to that. But I can tell you that our employees are, they treat these folks just like themselves. They bring them into their inner circles...

**Brian Mills, Production Supervisor, K & L Microwave:** In my interview with Tony, I clearly understood where his impairment lied. What we've found is that the mentorship kinda helps offset some of that. Tony spends most of his days seated. So what we've done for him is his mentor will do many of the up and down and walking to accommodate for him. No what's that mean for Tony, long term, I'm not sure, and we'll cross the bridge when we get to it, especially, as he moves into a more final assembly role. He will be more up and down and need to be much more mobile. What I see is

that the group dynamics, they all support each other and they work through each other's strengths. So, it wouldn't surprise me if his co-workers just say "Oh, I'll take that for you", walk it to the cleaner, "Oh you need a hand with that?" "Sure!, and we all bond together pretty well as a tight-knit team.

## **Louis**

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** You often hear other employees saying "Wow! Louis is, again, Louis is always here. He is never absent." So, I think they are role models, in some instances, for other employees. So, it becomes just the reverse where you think the employees with the disabilities may be looking for our folks to be their role models, it's often the tables have turned, and it's the "regular folks" who are looking at the folks with disabilities as role models.

## **Clem**

**Brian Mills, Production Supervisor, K & L Microwave:** It was a brand new experience for me to deal, work with, and enjoy the company of someone with his hearing deficiency.

### **(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP MAN WITH SOLDERING TOOL AND MICROSCOPE)**

His job coach has been very helpful. He's responsible for the very first piece of assembly, taking resonators, putting them together, T-bar insertion, spring tab insertion, coupling board assembly, and he's also paired with another veteran assembler.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF BRIAN MILLS)** We had an instance where his job coach couldn't be with him, and we all, including Clem, had some concern over his ability to communicate. But, he's done very well. He now works pretty autonomously with some guidance. The other advantage that I see happening is that many of us are learning to sign.

### **(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF BRIAN MILLS)**

So, his mentor is learning some words. I'm learning some words, and Clem's meeting us half way, because he's using his voice more.

**Robin Hall, Human Resource Manager, K & L Microwave:** We had another individual a couple of years ago that was hearing impaired,

### **(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)**

who actually spent five minutes every morning and worked with her group in teaching them sign language,

### **(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF ROBIN HALL)**

and it was just a tremendous morale booster.

**Brian Mills, Production Supervisor, K & L Microwave:** I think what I'm going to do is change my approach to training long term, for exactly this positive experience. Absolutely am I going to change the way I think about how I bring in new employees and temporaries for training. I intend to do more of this mentorship

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)**

of close hand-holding as we launch them into their own abilities. It'll completely across the board for all employees.

**(END VIDEO CLIP TRAINER WITH TRAINEE AT MICROSCOPE)**

**Maria Waller, President, Quality Staffing Services:** Fortunately, I had never encountered anyone who was negative. As a matter of fact, if anything else, I find people wanting to help and figure out a way.

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP MAN CLEANING TOOL ON SPONGE)**

Actually, we need to get more creative. There's got to be other things that maybe require more involvement

**(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP OF MARIA WALLER)**

and maybe we can figure out a way to make it just totally acceptable.

**ENDING CREDITS**