



From the helm of the Navigator

March 6, 2007

FUTURE OF THE EMERGING WORKFORCE

People with disabilities in the competitive workforce and marketplace represent a larger number of individuals with each census, now topping 20% of the American adult population and a higher percentage for African Americans and Native Americans. At the interface between the business environment and trends that will affect Oregon business sectors in the next 5–15 years, there are some unique challenges and opportunities immediately ahead. A growing pool of skilled workers traditionally undervalued by business, the skill dearth as aging boomers begin leaving the workforce, the cost of lost days from injury on the job, and the emergence of a new consumer market expanding faster than any other, all share a common characteristic: this is the profile of people with disabilities in the workplace and as consumers between the years of 2005-2020.

The practice of building employer supports and accessible workplaces is evolving nationally into cultures of inclusion in many corporations with ties to internal or external expertise to support the vision of leadership. While every sector of business and industry has its own unique needs regarding it, accommodation of disability has become part of the business strategy and key competencies of many leading Oregon businesses, large or small, around the state.

The successful growth of such cultures, in Oregon and nationally, is founded on traditional business practices of efficiency, quality, and timeliness linked with access to expertise. For business to be successful around employment of people with disabilities, it must understand its special interests around inclusion of disability in the workplace and marketplace, develop the internal practices to assure that all parts of its operation are working to promote these interests, and access the expertise and resources it will need to take full advantage of accommodation as an effective business strategy. For experts from the VR/employment community to be successful, they must be prepared to engage with business on these terms. This includes helping business analyse its needs, have resources available, and provide a coordinated response for recruitment, training, assessment, accommodation, modification, strategy or other supports. In larger businesses much of the expertise may be internal, but in many others it is a combination of internal leadership linked with private consultants or the comprehensive array of government expertise and resources within Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Developmental Disabilities (DD), and WorkSource Oregon's Employment Department and One Stops.