

# Job Placement for Employees with Disabilities— Manpower Leads the Way

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The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is a problem of national proportion. Although the United States has been enjoying record low unemployment rates, there has been only a relatively modest increase in the employment rate of people with disabilities. Addressing the employment problem of people with disabilities is a national concern.

Every year the United States spends more than \$109 billion in private and public support payments for people with disabilities. More than 3 million Americans with disabilities between the ages 16 to 64 receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Fewer than 3 percent of these people are working and earning more than \$500 per month. Fewer than 1 percent of individuals who receive Social Security benefits ever leave the Social Security rolls.

A study recently undertaken by this author and sponsored by the University of Iowa Law, Health Policy, and Disability Center and Iowa Creative Employment Options examines the central role the staffing industry can play in expanding competitive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This article presents some of the findings of the study, which focuses on Manpower Inc.'s efforts in this area and provides a selection of case illustrations that were included in the study.

## **The Staffing Industry's Role**

On a daily basis, the staffing industry places millions of people in U.S. workplaces and assists them in making the transition from unemployment to employment, from one job to another, and from school to work. The industry has expanded rapidly during the past 25 years. Temporary employment placement has risen from 165,000 in 1972 to more than 2 million by 1995, reflecting an annual growth rate of more than 11 percent. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that between the years 1994 and 2005 temporary employment opportunities will expand by more than 50 percent.

By filling temporary employment needs, staffing agencies offer both employers and employees unique opportunities. While employers meet their staffing requirements on an as-needed basis, they are able to "try out employees" who may be able to fill permanent positions when they arise. Similarly, employees have a chance to find out

whether a particular company's culture is attractive and whether the specific tasks of an assignment appeal to the temporary employee, so that he or she can make decisions regarding future employment. The employee also benefits from substantial flexibility in work schedule and opportunities for job training.

### ***Manpower Inc. Offers HR Support***

The largest staffing industry firm is Manpower Inc., a Fortune 500 company founded in 1948 and headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Manpower annually places almost 2 million workers into employment through its 2,800 offices in 48 countries. Manpower's job-placement mix in the United States is roughly 40 percent light industrial, 40 percent office, and 20 percent technical and professional assignments. The company provides workers with job opportunities in positions at all skill levels, including secretarial, file clerk, customer service representative, quality control inspector, production worker, laboratory technician, software engineer, and systems analyst.

Roughly 95 percent of Manpower's sales are generated from the business of providing supplemental temporary workers. The remainder of sales is derived primarily from job training services provided to employees of Manpower's customer companies.

Manpower's initial focus as a provider of short-term workers has evolved into a complex human resources support service for its clients. For many smaller companies, Manpower acts as a de facto human resources department. The company has expanded its services to include sole-sourcing arrangements; provision of on-site HR staff to manage supplemental staffing needs; staffing of special projects; employee evaluation, testing, and training; development of programs that transition temporary workers to permanent jobs; and job skill assessments and training services for permanent staff. Manpower trains office personnel on more than 300 different software and hardware combinations and customizes job training programs for its larger business clients. Manpower was one of the first worldwide service firms to be certified under ISO 9000, the international standard for quality.

## **Breaking Down Barriers to Work for People with Disabilities**

Manpower works with people with disabilities in the same way it works with people without disabilities—providing accommodations that are necessary and effective for job placement. The focus of the job placement process for all applicants is on individual abilities, job skills, and interests.

### ***Focus on Abilities***

Applicants complete various job skill assessments selected according to their abilities and interests. For its industrial division, Manpower uses its Ultradex system, a set of job skill tests designed for light industrial workers. Ultradex assesses work skills and abilities for general job categories. Several job skill tests comprise the Ultradex system: inspection, sorting and checking, coordinated rapid movement, tool-related assembly, PCB and small-parts assembly, aiming, and logging production. These tests demonstrate a person's proficiency in a variety of job tasks, including spotting defects and inconsistencies; sorting objects by number; using a hand tool to assemble objects;

and using rapid, continuous movements to complete a task of high precision. Further, Ultradex assesses a variety of basic work skills including eye-hand coordination, bi-manual dexterity, following a blueprint or a schematic plan, and using math skills (such as calculating percentages).

Manpower uses its SURESKILL tests for office workers to assess proficiency in using a variety of computer programs, including word processing, spreadsheet, and database management. These assessments show individual mastery of the software and are used to identify potential jobs and training paths for applicants. Other assessments are available for clerical jobs such as mailroom work, customer service, and call-center positions. Actual samples of the work are incorporated in the assessments to provide a preview of essential tasks that employees may be required to do on the job and to measure their related skills and aptitudes.

### ***Match Worker Skills to Workplace Demands***

Manpower staff track emerging labor-market trends and related business demands. Service representatives collect information from employers and complete Work Environment Service Call reports to assess customer expectations; physical details of the work area; work pace and dress requirements; hours and breaks; safety issues; parking; accessibility issues; and required equipment, software, and machinery tasks. The Work Environment Service Call reports also include information on customers' building accessibility and the workplace accommodations available to workers with disabilities.

The assessment of customer needs, coupled with the ability to assess the job skills of applicants, enables Manpower to successfully place qualified workers into jobs. Manpower describes this job-matching process as a "reverse funnel." In a typical placement approach, job candidates are put in the large end of the "funnel," where one individual emerges as the most qualified person for the job. The reverse-funnel approach enables an individual worker to emerge with multiple skills and job opportunities. A quality performance program monitors Manpower's job-placement matches, addressing customer satisfaction, employee job satisfaction, staff performance, assessment validity, and training program effectiveness.

### ***Focus on Individualized Training***

Staffing companies provide skills training to approximately 2.2 million people every year. Manpower offers its employees job skills enhancement through training programs provided to workers at no cost. For example, Manpower offers Skillware training for a range of office computer software, data entry, and customer service skills. The cornerstone of the Skillware system is a computer-delivered instruction package that provides explanations and advice on software functions and applications. Skillware helps trainees become productive in a relatively short period of time, generally eight hours or less. The training is continually updated with new equipment and software programs. Skillware has been translated into nine languages, and Manpower estimates that Skillware is delivered to more than 60,000 workers annually.

Manpower has plans to make training available to its employees through an Internet site called the Global Learning Center (GLC). The GLC offers more than 300 TechTrack courses and in the future will offer the full range of Manpower's training programs, providing Manpower employees with free, instant access. Employees will be able to access the GLC through computers in Manpower offices or in their homes. The ability to train at home will be a significant advantage for employees with and without disabilities.

## **Case Studies**

In producing the Manpower report, in-depth telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with applicants and employees with disabilities, Manpower staff, and client employers. Ten case studies were included in the report, illustrating a diversity of disabilities, job placements, and geographical locations. Four of those cases are described below. Names of individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

### **Exhibit 1: Summary of Findings for Ten Case Studies**

#### **Placement**

Time from application to placement (range): **1 day to 14 days**

Starting hourly wage (range): **\$5.88 to \$14.12**

Starting hourly wage (average): **\$8.47**

Hours of training (range): **0 to 490**

Placed in industry of choice: **9 of 10**

Consecutive months in employment from first placement (range): **4 to 60**

Workplace accommodation direct costs: **\$0**

Incidence of work-site injury: **0**

Cost due to work-site injury: **\$0**

#### **Nature of Workers' Disabilities**

Physical disability: **3**

Visual impairment: **2**

Amputee: **2**

Deaf: **1**

Epilepsy: **1**

Mental health: **1**

#### **Job Types**

Administrative assistant: **3**

Computer operator and trainer: **3**

Factory assembler and packager: **2**

Maintenance: **1**

Data entry: **1**

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### **Case 1: Shelly Tillman**

Shelly Tillman, from Hillsboro, Oregon, applied to Manpower in May 1996. As a mother of three children, she was looking for a permanent position that would give her the

flexibility to spend time with her children. Tillman, who as a child had lost her arm to cancer, said she applied to Manpower because she thought it would give her a chance to sample a variety of jobs.

Within a week of applying to Manpower, Tillman was placed in an insurance firm as an administrative assistant. After working three months, she was offered a position by the company, but she turned it down, preferring the flexibility of staying with Manpower. Her next assignment was with a high-tech company where she provided administrative support. This placement led to a permanent job offer that she accepted. After a few months, Tillman returned to Manpower and accepted another assignment as an administrative assistant. Less than a month after starting this position, she was offered and accepted a permanent position.

At her job of choice, Tillman works a part-time schedule that fits her family responsibilities. She requested no workplace accommodations. A Manpower service representative noted that Tillman never focused on her disability during the placement process.

### ***Case 2: Rico Arenas***

Rico Arenas accidentally found a Manpower office in his quest for employment. While Arenas, whose disability is spinal muscular atrophy, was looking for employment at the U.S. Postal Service headquarters in Washington, D.C., he met a Manpower manager whose office had a service account with the Postal Service headquarters. The day after his application appointment, he started working in the consumer affairs division of the Postal Service headquarters.

Over the next several months, Arenas held a series of long-term job assignments with Manpower, including administrative assistant positions and jobs with a bank and a security company. One of these assignments resulted in a permanent job offer, but Arenas turned it down because the pay would have been less than what Manpower was paying.

Arenas is currently working on a long-term assignment with the Postal Service headquarters performing database management. He had excellent computer skills when he applied to Manpower, and he was provided with 12 hours of Skillware training to build on those skills. He requested no workplace modifications at his job assignments, though he did request and receive a parking spot close to the Postal Service building.

Arenas plans to continue employment with Manpower. He reports: "There have been no gaps in employment for me. When I finish an assignment, Manpower has another one waiting. I like the temping arrangement because it exposes me to new jobs and new people."

### ***Case 3: Valerie Meyer***

More college graduates are using the services of staffing companies to help them enter the workforce. This is the route taken by Valerie Meyer. Meyer graduated from college with an associate degree in business management and marketing but found it difficult to

find employment. Although she uses a wheelchair, Meyer did not think that this was a barrier to employment. "I think that it was more my lack of employment experience," she said.

After months of trying to find employment in her chosen field, she applied to the Manpower office in Vernon Hills, Illinois, to get the work experience and additional computer training she needed. Manpower's skill assessments confirmed Meyer's ability to perform complex computer data entry tasks. Meyer received 32 hours of training, increased her computer keying speed, and learned other financial management computer programs.

Meyer's first placement occurred nine days after her application. In early 1996, Meyer received a temporary assignment at Nursing Spectrum magazine. After one year of working at the magazine as a Manpower employee, Meyer was hired as a permanent customer service representative. Her supervisor said that Meyer was one of 60 people Manpower had provided for that project and that, after observing her work, the magazine's staff knew she was the right person for the job.

At Nursing Spectrum, Meyer answers phones and performs data entry tasks. She did not request any workplace accommodations, although her employer installed an automatic door opener for a restroom to make it more accessible for her and for other visitors.

#### ***Case 4: Jack Lind***

In 1996, Jack Lind of Rochester, New York, fell and broke his wrist. The fracture was severe, and he lost more than 50 percent of the strength and mobility in his wrist. Prior to his injury, Lind was co-owner of a moving company. However, the wrist injury and subsequent disability required him to find another line of employment.

He was referred to the Rochester Rehabilitation Center for computer training by New York's Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities. The Rochester Rehabilitation Center, in a joint training program with Manpower, provides computer training programs for people with disabilities. An integral part of the computer training is the Manpower Skillware program.

Lind opted to take the Client Support Administrator curriculum that trains individuals to work in "help desk" positions. Prior to completing the 14-week program, a Manpower Training Center Manager inquired whether Lind would be interested in accepting a permanent position with Manpower as a Skillware training administrator. Lind said that although he hadn't intended to work for Manpower when he started training, the position that was offered seemed to be a perfect fit because he likes working with people.

Lind is currently responsible for administering Skillware training to Manpower employees and trainees from the Rochester Rehabilitation Center. Because Skillware is a self-paced program, it is able to accommodate the needs of trainees with disabilities. Lind estimates that more than 90 percent of the trainees from the Rochester Rehabilitation Center find permanent employment after completion of the training.

## **Core Findings**

Although the experiences of any single study are insufficient for drawing sweeping conclusions about the staffing industry's role in helping people with disabilities bridge the gap between unemployment and employment, five core implications emerge:

1. **Unemployment to Employment.** Manpower effectively and promptly transitions people with disabilities from unemployment to employment. Ninety percent of the individuals studied in this report were at work within ten days of applying to Manpower.
2. **Workplace Accommodation Costs Minimal.** Consistent with prior studies, the direct cost of accommodating workers with disabilities is low. There were no direct costs to Manpower or to its customer companies in accommodating the workers studied in this report.
3. **Staying at Work.** Sixty percent of the individuals studied moved from no employment to permanent employment. Annually, more than 40 percent of Manpower's entire workforce transitions to permanent work as a direct result of the temporary job placements.
4. **Choice in Work.** Ninety percent of the individuals studied were placed into an industry or job in which they expressed interest, and job placements were consistent with individualized work skills.
5. **Retaining Work that Pays.** Ninety percent of the individuals studied remained in the workforce from the time of their first job assignment, earning above the minimum wage, either through a series of temporary job assignments or permanent employment.

## Conclusion

Although in the past two decades there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, disability policy continues to reflect an underemphasis on initiatives for equal employment opportunity. The Manpower report highlights that the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act alone did not change attitudes about the importance of equal employment opportunity for qualified workers with disabilities.

Three central factors stand out as necessary for persons with disabilities to obtain and keep equal employment: access to education; job-skill assessment, development, and training; and adequate health insurance. As highlighted by this report, Manpower has developed useful and economically sound employment placement strategies in support of these goals.

The analysis of Manpower and the staffing industry provides a springboard for discussion about evolving employment policy and corporate practices affecting millions of persons with disabilities. The report illustrates the ways in which staffing organizations are well-positioned to assist individuals with disabilities to transition from unemployment to temporary work and permanent employment. This industry will help shape the lives of the next generation of citizens with disabilities who have experienced integrated education and who will become an integral part of the U.S. workforce of the next century.