Learning Disabilities in the Workplace

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The U.S. Department of Education reports that one in five individuals in the United States has a learning disability, and for some, this can be a challenge in the workplace. The key is being aware of employees’ strengths and understanding that with minor accommodations, they can be productive and high-performing.
A learning disability (LD) is a neurological disorder that affects the brain’s ability to process information. Possess average or above average intelligence levels, and often have varying areas of abilities. Varying types of learning disabilities.
Who Do We Know Has a Learning Disability?

- William “Bill” Hewlett (Hewlett-Packard)
- Charles Schwab (Charles Schwab Foundation)
- Erin Brockovich (Environmentalist)
- Whoopi Goldberg (Actress)
- Sir Richard Branson (Virgin Enterprises)
- Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA)
- Cher (Singer)
- Ted Turner (TBS)
- Kiera Knightly (Actress)
- Bill Gates (Microsoft)
- Tom Cruise (Actor)
“The advantage is that my brain sees and puts information in my head differently, more interestingly than if I saw like everyone else.”

- Whoopi Goldberg on her Dyslexia
Language Disorders
Visual Perceptual and Visual Motor Disorders
Auditory Disorders
Memory Disorders
Gross Motor and Fine Motor Disorders
Language Disorders

- Involves the processing of linguistic information.
- Barriers that may be experienced can involve grammar, semantics, or other aspects of language.
- Are often viewed as difficulties with receptive language (understanding and remembering) or with expressive language (oral in writing).
Visual Perceptual and Visual Motor Disorders

- Difficulties with processing information visually, thus leading to problems with reading, spelling, and writing.
- Dyslexia is a common diagnoses that many hear.
- 1 in 10 people are thought to be affected by dyslexia.
Auditory Disorders

- Difficulties processing sounds, such as distinguishing words that sound similar.
- Adversely affects how that sound travels unimpeded through the ear is processed and interpreted by the brain.
- Individuals may not recognize subtle differences between sounds in words, even when the sounds are loud and clear enough to be heard.
- They can also find it difficult to tell where sounds are coming from, to make sense of the order of sounds, or to block out competing background noises.
Memory Disorder

- Difficulties retrieving certain information from memory within a reasonable time.
- Affects storing and later retrieving information or getting information out.
- Three types of memory are important to learning, “working memory”, “short term memory” and “long term memory.”
Gross Motor and Fine Motor Disorders

- Difficulties with coordination.
- Dyspraxia is a common diagnoses for gross motor and fine motor disorders under the umbrella of learning disabilities.
- Can lead to difficulty with holding and pencil and learning to write.
Strategies for Consultation and Collaboration
Attempting to bring people around to our way of seeing the world, to valuing our way of thinking, or agreeing to set actions.
Putting Purpose First

- Adding to the well-being and prosperity of individual businesses must be as important a mission for the job developer as any other goal or purpose.
- Our role is to help employers make a good decision, not to convince them that utilizing our services is the best decision.
Embracing Role as Consultant

- The decision not to move forward in a “hiring relationship” with an employer at one point in time does not preclude a future working relationship, and it does not shut the door to the possible exchange of secondary resources.
- There is an unlimited number of possibilities for exchange and unlimited opportunities for continuing relationships between job developers and employers. To focus solely on a hiring relationship is to unnecessarily narrow the scope of possibilities.
“Partnership is created when the employer’s investment in your unique combination of abilities and resources equals your investment in their unique combination of opportunities.”
Understanding Employer’s Needs

- Employer Needs
- Employer Assessment
- Employer Decisions
Workplace Accommodations
What Should Employers Know About the ADA?

• The American with Disabilities act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law that was passed in 1990. Its purpose is to protect people with disabilities from discrimination in employment and other areas of life.

• Title I of the ADA prohibits discrimination in employment and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.
What is a REASONABLE Accommodation?

- In relation to the ADA, a reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.

- This is without causing undue hardship to the employer.
Same Accommodations for Individuals with Learning Disabilities in the Workplace

• Use screen-reading software, which highlights and reads aloud the information on a computer screen
• Allow employees to give verbal, rather than written, responses or provide speech-to-text software
• Allow employees to organize their workspace as best fits their strengths and ideas for organization
• Color-code materials, folders, labels, etc.
• Promote the use of calendars and schedulers that provide digital reminders of meetings, deadlines, upcoming tasks, etc.

• Provide checklists for tasks
• Use flowcharts to describe steps of complicated processes
• Allow the use of a voice-activated recorder to record verbal instructions
• Divide large assignments into smaller tasks with specific goals
• Teach the employee to “learn the ropes” by initially providing a job mentor
• Allow the use of a calculator or a talking calculator if needed
• Provide additional training time on new tasks or processes
Scenario 1
Barrier: You have severe difficulty reading.
Scenario 2
Barrier: You lose things frequently.
Scenario 3
Barrier: You have difficulty following spoken directions
Scenario 4

Barrier: You have difficulty doing more than one task while managing interruptions from co-workers
Questions?
Thank you!

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