

JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Accommodation and Compliance Series

Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact

Annually Updated Research Findings Address the Costs and Benefits of Job Accommodations
Updated: 09/01/12

Job Accommodation Network
PO Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080
(800)526-7234 (V)
(877)781-9403 (TTY)
jan@askjan.org
askjan.org



A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

Preface

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. JAN makes documents available with the understanding that the information be used solely for educational purposes. The information is not intended to be legal or medical advice. If legal or medical advice is needed, appropriate legal or medical services should be contacted.

JAN does not endorse or recommend any products or services mentioned in this publication. Although every effort is made to update resources, JAN encourages contacting product manufacturers/vendors and service providers directly to ensure that they meet the intended purposes. This guarantees that the most up-to-date information is obtained.

The following document is not copyrighted and reproduction is encouraged. Section 105 of the Copyright Law provides that no copyright protection is available for works created by the U.S. Government. Therefore, all works created by JAN fall under this provision. While individuals may use such work with impunity, individuals may not claim copyright in the original government work, only in the original material added. Individuals may access the full text of the law from the U.S. Copyright Office <http://www.loc.gov/copyright>. Please note that specific information cited by JAN may be copyrighted from other sources. Citing secondary sources from a JAN publication may violate another organization's or individual's copyright. Permission must be obtained from these sources on a case-by-case basis. When using JAN materials, JAN asks that the materials not be reproduced for profit, that the tone and substance of the information are not altered, and that proper credit is given to JAN as the source of the information. For further information regarding this or any other document provided by JAN, please contact JAN.

Authored by Beth Loy, Ph.D. Updated 09/01/12.

JAN'S ACCOMMODATION AND COMPLIANCE SERIES

Introduction

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act and regulations from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission refocused attention on workplace accommodations by broadening the definition of disability; more coverage means more employees will likely be entitled to workplace accommodations. This increased attention has some employers concerned about the costs of providing job accommodations. However, a study conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), shows that workplace accommodations not only are low cost, but also positively impact the workplace in many ways.

The JAN study has been on-going since 2004. JAN, in partnership with the University of Iowa's Law, Health Policy, and Disability Center (LHPDC), interviewed 1,182 employers between January 2004 and December 2006. In addition, JAN, in partnership with the West Virginia University School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS), interviewed 723 employers between June 28, 2008, and July 31, 2012. Employers in the JAN study represented a range of industry sectors and sizes and contacted JAN for information about workplace accommodations, the ADA, or both. Approximately eight weeks after their initial contact, the employers were asked a series of questions about the situation they discussed with JAN and the quality of the services JAN provided.

The study results consistently showed that the benefits employers receive from making workplace accommodations far outweigh the low cost. Employers reported that providing accommodations resulted in such benefits as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation and training costs, and improving company diversity. These benefits were obtained with little investment. The employers in the study reported that a high percentage (57%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost only \$500.

And to top off these positive results about the cost and benefits of workplace accommodation, the employers in the study also reported that JAN understood their needs and provided information that met their needs. In addition, 99% of employers stated that they would use JAN services again for assistance with workplace accommodations.

What is the bottom line? Workplace accommodations are low cost and high impact, and JAN can help employers make them, free of charge.

Findings

Finding #1: Employers want to provide accommodations so they can retain valued and qualified employees.

Of the employers who called JAN for accommodation information and solutions, most were doing so to retain or promote (83%) a current employee. On average (including those persons who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company about seven years, with an average wage of about \$14 for those paid by the hour, or an average annual salary of about \$49,700. In addition, the individuals tended to be fairly well-educated, with 47% having a college degree or higher.

Finding #2: Most employers report no cost or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Of the employers who gave cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 336 out of 590 (57%) said the accommodations needed by employees cost absolutely nothing. Another 221 (37%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 24 (4%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (2%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs; however, too few of these employers provided cost data to report with accuracy. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the typical one-time expenditure by employers was \$500. When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, employers typically answered around \$400.

Finding #3: Employers report accommodations are effective.

Employers who had implemented accommodations by the time they were interviewed were asked to rank the effectiveness of the accommodations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely effective. Of those responding, 76% reported the accommodations were either very effective or extremely effective.

Finding #4: Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.

Employers who made accommodations for employees with disabilities reported multiple benefits as a result. The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were: (1) the accommodation allowed the company to retain a qualified employee, (2) the accommodation increased the worker's productivity, and (3) the accommodation eliminated the costs of training a new employee.

The most widely mentioned indirect benefits employers received were: (1) the accommodation ultimately improved interactions with co-workers, (2) the accommodation increased overall company morale, and (3) the accommodation increased overall company productivity. The following table gives the percentage of employers who reported experiencing direct and indirect benefits as a result of having made an accommodation.

Direct Benefits	%
Retained a valued employee	90%
Increased the employee's productivity	71%
Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee	60%
Increased the employee's attendance	53%
Increased diversity of the company	42%
Saved workers' compensation or other insurance costs	39%
Hired a qualified person with a disability	13%
Promoted an employee	10%
Indirect Benefits	
Improved interactions with co-workers	66%
Increased overall company morale	61%
Increased overall company productivity	57%
Improved interactions with customers	45%
Increased workplace safety	45%
Increased overall company attendance	38%
Increased profitability	31%
Increased customer base	17%

Finding #5: Employers find JAN helpful during the accommodation process.

Ninety-eight percent of employers found that JAN understood their needs. In addition, 93% of employers stated that the information JAN sent them met their needs. Overall 99% of employers stated they would use JAN again.

Situations and Solutions

Data from the past year provide insight into successful situations and solutions from various employment settings and stages, including a wide sampling of industries and business sizes.

Situation: A sales representative with a construction company experienced migraine headaches and was sensitive to office lighting.

Solution: As a reasonable accommodation, the employer modified a workplace dress code policy and allowed the employee to wear sunglasses at work.

Reported benefit: By making this accommodation the employee's attendance improved, and the employer felt that it had accommodated a qualified employee and adhered to the ADA.

Reported cost: \$0.

Situation: An administrative support person with hearing loss had difficulty responding to emergency signals and communicating using the telephone.

Solution: As a reasonable accommodation, the agency provided an amplified headset and strobe light for the employee's workstation. This strobe light would let the individual know immediately when he was working at his desk and an alarm was activated.

Reported benefit: The employer was able to meet the employee's accommodation needs; the employee and supervisor were satisfied. By providing the accommodation the employee was able to function to his maximum potential.

Reported cost: \$100.

Situation: An attorney with a back condition worked for a court system and was required to stand for long periods.

Solution: As a reasonable accommodation, the employer purchased a stool that could be adjusted so that the individual could sit or stand comfortably.

Reported benefit: The employer stated that by making these accommodations the employee was effectively retained and able to return to work.

Reported cost: \$200.

Situation: A veteran who worked as an insurance company representative had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a traumatic brain injury. He was sensitive to certain environmental noises. The office had recently been remodeled and rearranged, and the employee was experiencing anxiety due to audio and visual distractions in his workspace.

Solution: As a reasonable accommodation, the employer provided noise canceling headphones with white noise capabilities and noise reduction barriers in his workstation.

Reported benefit: The employer stated that the employee and his supervisor were very happy with the outcome, and the organization was glad to accommodate a veteran.

Reported cost: \$350.

Situation: A teacher for a postsecondary institution had vision loss due glaucoma. She was having difficulty navigating around corners and being able to efficiently enter grades.

Solution: As a reasonable accommodation, the employer purchased a tablet computer for school purposes that was used to enlarge the computer system grid for inputting grades. A mirror was also strategically placed in the middle of the classroom to assist with her peripheral vision.

Reported benefit: The employer was able to meet its requirements and the individual felt more competent at work.

Reported cost: \$1,000.

To cite: Job Accommodation Network (Original 2005, Updated 2007, Updated 2009, Updated 2010, Updated 2011, Updated 2012). *Workplace accommodations: Low cost, high impact*. Retrieved xxxx xx,xxxx, from <http://AskJAN.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>

This document was developed by the Job Accommodation Network, funded by a contract agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL079RP20426). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. Nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor.