

Disabled community can help fill the labor gap

As the U.S. labor shortage continues, businesses are struggling to fill essential jobs. An often-overlooked talent pool can help bridge the gap in the labor market – a group of people who are eager to work, can move the bottom line and bring a rich diversity to the workplace: individuals with disabilities.

The demand for workers in many industries across the United States is at an all-time high. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, there are 8 million job openings and only 6.8 million unemployed workers.

As businesses look at untapped labor markets or training programs to address employee shortages, people with disabilities should be at the top of their list. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that the rate of workforce participation for people with disabilities is roughly half the rate of their non-disabled peers.



Rachel Kaprielian is CEO of Triangle Inc. in Malden.

One reason for this is that there are legacy attitudes that continue to underestimate people with disabilities. However, organizations like the one I lead at Triangle Inc. that focus on teaching critical skills use proven methods of skill-building, community-based employment programs and job coaching that are of no cost to employers and that can help ensure a job candidate's suitability and success. This can include such things as instruction in technology and software, which is common in most workplaces but not always taught to students with disabilities in school. Employment-focused service providers learn each person's fluency as we help them acquire the skills and experience they need to forge a path to success.

Several government-funded employer resources provide incentives and tax credits to companies hiring people with disabilities. This includes the federal

Work Opportunity Tax Credit for new hires (around 40% of first year wages), as well as state-funded programs such as the annual Disability Employment Tax Credit as well as publicly funded training for employees with disabilities.

The benefits of employing individuals with disabilities goes far beyond the mere legal or regulatory compliance. Truly diverse workplaces, particularly those which prioritize recruiting people with disabilities into their ranks, prove to be more innovative, productive and equipped to respond to and serve a changing and more diverse customer base.

Every day we see the positive impact for businesses and employees. With each successful placement, we are reversing the decades-long trend of untapped potential one worker at a time. While many of these placements happen within large companies, most do not. Many small businesses

can offer modest-, low-, or no-cost accommodations to include people with disabilities in their workforce.

Beyond giving an opportunity to a qualified candidate, data shows people with disabilities stay longer in their jobs, which in turn significantly decreases churn and costs for re-training. Absenteeism rates are notably lower and job satisfaction rates are higher among workers who have disabilities.

From small-business owners to CEOs of major corporations, we should all take stock and further actions to better build and expand disability inclusion. Employers can reach out to employment-focused disability services agencies in the community and learn more about how to take steps and develop a new recruitment pipeline that can advance their bottom line. The results? A rewarding – and transformative – match of your business's needs with well-deserving people eager to work.