

Right mindset and being proactive are the keys to sourcing “hidden” talent

Any business owner or hiring manager wants to make sure they hire the best-qualified person for the job who’s the right “fit,” when they are recruiting talent. That’s because the entire recruiting process is a significant investment of time and money.

These days, most recruiting happens online. For businesses, posting career opportunities online is a double-edge sword. On the one hand, it reaches a vast pool of skilled, qualified talent. On the other, companies are missing out on another vast, hidden talent pool — skilled people who have a disability.

Online recruitment is one of the most cost-effective methods to reach a large, diverse pool of candidates. For talented job seekers who have a disability, however, online recruitment may be creating unintended barriers to accessing employment. Inaccessible websites, with tools and applications that are not user-friendly for people who have a disability can make it difficult to search and apply for jobs.

Once you have determined your website is accessible, attracting talent using inclusive job postings is a great start. Employers need to ensure that job descriptions are also written with inclusion and diversity in mind; ensuring that essential duties for the job have been identified and that inadvertent barriers have been removed from the document.

For example, be sure you distinguish between essential and non-essential job requirements. (Does the candidate really need a driver’s licence and access to a vehicle, or do you really want an employee who has access to reliable transportation?). Provide concrete examples of duties and tasks whenever possible. Don’t forget to identify the desirable characteristics or qualities an employee should bring to the job, ie., leadership, problem-solving abilities, reliability. These simple steps will move you closer to an inclusive and accessible job posting.

What it takes to source the hidden talent pool

Successfully attracting skilled candidates who have a disability requires broadening the candidate search beyond posting a job online. Bring a human element back to your recruiting process

There’s a school of thought that the recruiting process is broken. If your recruitment strategy for talent relies on algorithms and key words in resumes uploaded online, you could be weeding out many qualified candidates who may have been the perfect fit regardless of whether they have a disability.

These days recruiting for talent relies on algorithms and key words in resumes uploaded online. This can weed out qualified candidates regardless of whether they have a disability.

Mary McIninch and Ted Maksimowski noted in a June 17 *Globe and Mail* article about chatbots, algorithms and artificial intelligence used in recruiting today, “We’re not against innovation in talent acquisition, but the human element needs to be at the heart of recruitment.”

Making the candidate search human again

For job-seekers who responded to a Canadian Abilities Foundation study, the top two ways they secured employment were:

- through personal contacts (24%)
- with help from employment service organizations that work with people who have a disability (20%)

Looking at it from a hiring manager’s or recruiter’s perspective, then, this clearly shows that the ideal ways of accessing the disability talent pool to find qualified people are by:

- connecting with employment service organizations in their business’s local communities
- making better use of their employees and personal networks as referral sources to skilled candidates who have a disability

This is confirmed by a major American joint survey by the National Organization on Disabilities, the Harris Interactive and the Kessler Foundation. According to the extensive study, these are the top four ways businesses source qualified candidates in the disability talent pool:

- employee referrals (70%)
- word-of-mouth referrals (70%)
- online job portals (58%)
- help from community service organizations (40%)

Job seekers are utilizing their networks. It makes perfect sense for hiring managers to do the same.

That word-of-mouth route to this talent pool is a key one. A study by the Canadian Abilities Foundation, titled *Neglected or Hidden: Connecting Employers and People with Disabilities in Canada* found the top way job seekers who have a disability get information on job leads is through friends and personal contacts (73%).

Job seekers are utilizing their networks. So, it makes perfect sense for hiring managers to do the same.

Gaining access to the talent

An excellent way of sourcing qualified people is connecting with employment service agencies in your area that engage with job seekers who have a disability.

The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN), for example, works with businesses and employment service organizations to enhance and increase employment opportunities and outcomes for job seekers in the hidden disability talent pool. ODEN connects businesses to its member organizations — attaching them to local support and a local pipeline of talent — and helps foster those relationships to ensure long-term connection.

Have the right mindset and be proactive

Successfully accessing the disability talent pool requires having the right mindset and being proactive. When you:

- commit to hiring with diversity and inclusion top of mind you are looking for qualified people who are the right match for the job, and also happen to have a disability
- proactively research the resources available to you; make human connections in recruiting efforts; and go beyond posting a job online you will source skilled, qualified people in this talent pool

Next in this special series on recruiting with diversity and inclusion: How to handle your recruiting process to make it more accessible for people who have a disability.

This article was supplied by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (odenetwork.com).