

# Managing human resources (hrm)



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A critical issue National Lewis and Clark Corporation's (NL&C) Human Resources is facing is the emergence of several disabled employees who feel they are not being treated "fairly". Although not immediately apparent, such situation can escalate to hostile work environments and disability harassment that can cause inefficiencies and setbacks for the company not limited to the loss of qualified employees with disabilities, a decrease in the performance of employees with or without disabilities, an increase in the costs related to the loss of qualified individuals with disabilities and possible expenses brought about by litigation claims (Blanck, 1996; Ravitch 1994 in Blanck & Marti, 1997). To prevent the circumstances at NL&C to escalate into an unmanageable situation, it is therefore imperative to introduce policies and programs that will accommodate employees with disabilities, encourage collaborative behavior amongst all employees, promote the empowerment of employees with disabilities to avoid hostility and prevent disabled employees from feeling that they are not being treated fairly.

One company that has successfully achieved these goals is Sears. As Blanck (1996) illustrates, Sears' success is due to its evolutionary implementation of the ADA and its two-fold strategy of integration and empowerment, based on a culture that focuses on work force diversity. Through its culture of "workforce diversity and inclusion", which seeks to incorporate the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) in providing accommodations to disabled employees, Sears has achieved an accommodation model that goes beyond compliance with the law but also "enhances its customer base, employee morale, and its overall business strategy goals", thus improving their bottom line and preventing its 20, 000 disabled employees from feeling they are not being treated fairly (Blanck, 1996, p. 8).

Hence, it is evident that implementing accommodations that benefit disabled employees must focus on policies and programs that seek to influence employers' and employees' - both with and without disabilities' - corporate attitude and enforcement behavior. As illustrated in Ravitch's study (1994 in Blanck and Marti, 1997), the underlying biases in corporate attitudes and opinions of employers and employees without disabilities regarding disability contributes to the development of hostile work environments and a disabled employees' perception of unfair treatment, harassment, and discrimination. However, as Sears experience has shown, the success of an accommodation model is evolutionary, rather than revolutionary (Blanck, 1996, p. 10). Thus, for NL&C, prior to designing a universal accommodations strategy, the company must first conceptualize a strategy to educate its management and workforce regarding the issue. This therefore illustrates the need to implement policies and programs that, based on Sears own goals, must first seek to " dispel myths about persons with disabilities, inform people of their rights and obligations [], equalize opportunities for advancement, empower employers and employees to make informed decisions, and diffuse, avoid and resolve disputes without formal litigation", through constant education, dialogue, and study (Blanck, 1996, p. 16). In this respect, the company will not only lay down the foundations to condition its workforce towards cooperative behaviour, but also provide training and knowledge necessary for the design of its own long-term accommodation model.

Upon educating its workforce, NL&C must then assess its current infrastructure and corporate policies to identify possible architectural and procedural barriers that prevents or limits its disabled workers from functioning properly within the company. As Sears has illustrated,

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eliminating these barriers are not only cost-effective, but also brings about relative economic, productivity and safety-related benefits that positively affect employees both with and without disabilities (Blanck, 1996). Lastly, NL&C can implement a self-advocacy program geared towards its disabled employees to help improve their skills, promote their independence, improve self-esteem, and aid them in identifying whether or not they need accommodations, and how these accommodations can be implemented. As illustrated in the Sears study, disabled individuals who are empowered and more independent are more inclined to improve performance, feel more integrated within their work environment, and thus less likely to feel that they are not being treated fairly (Blanck, 1996, p. 46).

Thus, looking into the situation at NL&C, and the benefits of providing accommodations for disabled employees, NL&C can implement several solutions based on Sears' experiences, to help its disabled employees feel integrated within the workforce and prevent them from feeling that they are treated unfairly. As Sears has illustrated, the costs of implementing such accommodations and programs need not to be costly, and at most times are more cost-effective than ignoring the issue or replacing qualified employees with disabilities. It should be noted, however, that companies seeking to provide accommodations for disabled employees can always seek the help of government agencies such as the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) in providing them with necessary information and assistance to aid them in successfully implementing their programs and policies.

## References

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