

JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Accommodation and Compliance Series

Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact

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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 survey conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which is funded by a contract from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), indicates workplace accommodations not only are low cost, but also positively impact the workplace in many ways.

The JAN survey has been on-going since 2004. Since then, a total of 2,387 employers have been interviewed. At present, the West Virginia University School of Social Work conducts these employer surveys. Employers participating in the JAN survey represent a broad range of industry sectors and sizes. Each of these employers had contacted JAN and obtained specific information about workplace accommodations, the ADA, or both. Approximately eight weeks after their initial contact, these employers were asked a series of questions about the situation they discussed with JAN, the quality of the services JAN provided, and the resulting outcomes.

The survey results consistently have shown the benefits employers receive from making workplace accommodations far outweigh the associated costs. Employers reported providing accommodations that resulted in such benefits as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation and training costs, and improving company diversity. The employers participating in this survey reported a high percentage (59%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make (\$0), while the rest of the accommodations made had a typical cost of only \$500.

Employers who participated also reported that JAN understood their needs and provided information that met those needs. In addition, 100% of employers stated they would use JAN's services again for assistance with workplace accommodations.

What is the bottom line? Contacting JAN to obtain information on workplace accommodations typically results in modifications that have a low cost and a high, positive impact. And JAN's services are always free of charge!

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FINDINGS

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

Of the 2,387 employers who have participated in the JAN survey, most (83%) called JAN for accommodation information and solutions to retain or promote a current employee. On average (including those who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company about seven years. Average wages for these employees were about \$14 for those paid by the hour or approximately \$51,400 for those with an annual salary. In addition, the individuals tended to be fairly well-educated, with 55% having a college degree or higher.

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

Of the 718 employers who were able to provide cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 423 (59%) said the accommodations needed by their employee cost absolutely nothing. Another 261 (36%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 25 (3%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (1%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs. Of those accommodations that did have a one-time cost, the median one-time expenditure as reported by the employer 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, the median answer given by employers was \$300.

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 the 714 responding, the majority (75%) 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 valued employee, (2) the accommodation increased the employee'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: 89%
- Increased the employees productivity: 72%
- Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee: 61%
- Increased the employee's attendance: 56%
- Increased diversity of the company: 41%
- Saved workers' compensation or other insurance costs: 38%
- Hired a qualified person with a disability: 15%
- Promoted an employee: 11%

Indirect Benefits

- Improved interactions with co-workers: 63%
- Increased overall company morale: 62%
- Increased overall company productivity: 56%
- Increased safety: 46%
- Improved interactions with customers: 46%
- Increased overall company attendance: 41%
- Increased profitability: 29%
- Increased customer base: 18%

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

Ninety-eight percent of employers surveyed found that JAN understood their needs. In addition, 94% stated the information JAN sent them met their needs. **And 100% of employers stated they would use JAN again!**

Situations and Solutions:

An insurance specialist with post-traumatic stress disorder had difficulty handling stress and controlling his emotions.

The employee's physician stated that these limitations were due to his mental health impairment and the side effects of his diabetes. His job performance and attendance were declining. As a reasonable accommodation, the employer allowed the employee to use a service animal. By making this accommodation the company was able to hire (and retain) a well-qualified employee. Reported cost: \$0.

A dispatcher for a large college had difficulty coping with long-hours.

The employee requested no overtime due to fatigue from kidney disease. As a reasonable accommodation, the employer exempted the employee from overtime. By making this accommodation the company was able to retain a well-qualified employee and improve the employee's attendance. Reported cost: \$0.

A bank employee with fragrance sensitivity was having problems working due to irritants such as perfume and candles.

As a reasonable accommodation, the agency made changes to its policy regarding the use of fragrance items, such as wax warmers and cleaning chemicals. The employer also purchased an air purifier and provided all employees with education packets about the policy change and fragrance sensitivity. The employer reported that the accommodation was extremely effective because the "employee is able to work without worrying about getting sick from strong fragrances and odors." A good employee was retained and her work environment is now a comfortable place for her to be productive. Reported cost: \$200.

A quality control manager had trouble sitting for long periods of time due to chronic pain.

As a reasonable accommodation, the employer purchased a sit/stand workstation. The employer stated that the accommodation allowed the employee to increase her productivity. Reported cost: \$500.

A county government employee had color vision deficiency and had difficulty reading a color dashboard, which provided information on daily schedules for all employees.

As a reasonable accommodation, the employer provided glasses that made the colors easier to detect and purchased a hand-held device to help distinguish among colors. The employer reported that the employee can now work effectively with his condition while he's on the job. The change also helped retain an excellent employee. Reported cost: \$1,000.

References

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