

SUCCESS STORY

CINGULAR WIRELESS

Quality Employees Attracted to an Accommodating Workplace

It's a common-sense business decision. If you want to recruit talented people you have to have an environment that allows us to use their talent.

– Susan Mazrui, Director, Federal Regulatory Affairs, Cingular Wireless

Key Lessons Learned



Think of job accommodation as business tool to enhance productivity for all employees; reasonable accommodation can enable your company to take advantage of the available pool of job candidates with disabilities, as well as to retain current employees aging into disabilities.

Establish relationships with disability organizations, which can help promote a disability-friendly work environment, reach out to employees with hidden disabilities, and consult on specific technical or accommodation issues.

Company Background

Cingular is the second-largest wireless company in the United States and is dedicated to providing customers with wireless technology designed to enrich their lives. The vision of Cingular is to simplify the wireless experience for consumers and businesses by offering easy-to-understand, affordable rate plans, and

excellent customer service. In 2003 Cingular touted annual revenues of more than \$15.4 billion and served more than 25 million voice and data customers across the U.S.

Valuing Diversity

In addition to the leadership Cingular Wireless has demonstrated in its efforts to promote diversity in the workplace, Cingular recognizes that people with disabilities represent an excellent pool of potential employees. According to Susan Mazrui, Director of Federal Regulatory Affairs for Cingular:

As the workforce ages, more and more people with disabilities will be employed, and the better we can accommodate the access needs of our employees, the more productive they will be in their jobs and the easier it will be to retain a knowledgeable and experienced workforce. Employees with disabilities can also provide greater insights into the needs of older customers and those with

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disabilities. [Employing people with disabilities] impacts every [company] because it increases their resources.

Accommodating People

Cingular Wireless approaches the concept of reasonable accommodations in terms of productivity tools.

It's just another part of doing business,

Says Mazrui.

Both management and labor have shown support for accommodating employees with disabilities as Cingular has received backing for its efforts to develop more accessible work stations.

In an effort to make the work environment more accessible to employees with disabilities, Cingular has conducted an audit of all existing facilities and ensures compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) building codes for all of its new facilities. In addition, the company created a Human Resources Employment of People with Disabilities Task Force in order to develop or modify methods and procedures, thus allowing for reasonable accommodations throughout the hiring and employment process. Cingular also

established methods, policies, and procedures to make return to work easier for employees who acquire disabilities.

Cingular Wireless ensures that applicants and employees with disabilities receive assistive technology as needed, including alternate media and support services such as readers or sign language interpreters. Such services are usually coordinated by the employee. Today, technology at work ranges from screen-reading software and Braille note-takers to speakerphones and TTYs. Accommodations have also been made to make employee training accessible. Some employees, depending on the essential functions of their jobs, are able to telecommute for disability-related reasons.

Barriers to Accommodating Employees with Disabilities

While managers did not appear reluctant to hire people with disabilities, some requested assistance with handling issues such as the potential liability of service dogs in the workplace, job restructuring, and how to handle auxiliary services such as readers. Since Cingular Wireless has promoted both diversity and the expectation that people with disabilities are part of the company's workforce, there has not been any reluctance

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expressed to accommodating people with disabilities. According to Mazrui,

One of the most difficult challenges we have had is to make the technology accessible. For example, making our [constantly changing] coverage maps accessible to someone who is blind [has been a very daunting challenge]. One of the problems is that AT manufacturers are always playing catch-up. [Accessible] technology [lags behind] the technology we use to serve customers.

Outside Support

Cingular Wireless has worked with organizations such as the Youth to Work Coalition, the U.S. Department of Labor Office on Disability Employment Policy's High School High Tech program and the Access Board in an effort to develop and share best practices. They have also received assistance from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). Through these relationships, Cingular has been able to provide invaluable resources to their employees.

In addition, the company has formed relationships with many consumer organizations such as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, American Association of People with Disabilities and the

National Spinal Cord Injury Association. These groups have not only helped Cingular promote a better disability-friendly work environment and reach out to employees with hidden disabilities; they have also provided consultation on specific technical or accommodation issues.

Cingular has also received assistance from the State Departments of Rehabilitation in Georgia and Florida. Company representatives have forged working relationships with vocational rehabilitation counselors as well as assistive technology specialists and manufacturers in order to address reasonable accommodation issues.

Share Your Story

If you have a success story you would like to share, please email us at:

earn@earnworks.com.

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