Chapter 6
Impetus for Culture Transformation: Pre–Hire Training for Employees with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors describe how Walgreens distribution centers are conducting training evaluations to effectively integrate individuals with disabilities through the Transitional Work Group pre-hire training program. In particular, the aim of the pre-hire training program is to hire employees with disabilities to execute core business functions as an integral part of the organization. As other employers seek to become more inclusive in their hiring practices, there is a need to evaluate and identify individuals with disabilities who can demonstrate mastery of required technical tasks and soft skills, such as social skills, teamwork, and conflict resolution, to ensure job readiness. The authors conclude this chapter by assessing the program and providing recommendations to current and future evaluators of training programs.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Walgreens is the largest drug retail chain in the United States, with more than 8,000 stores in all 50 states, the District of Colombia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.
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(Walgreens, n.d.). As Walgreens makes changes in its organizational strategy and desired employee behaviors to “empower employees to come up with solutions on their own,” Walgreens leaders are focusing on providing the “right training and leadership” (Wagner & Orvis, 2013). Walgreens leadership initiated organization-wide culture changes with an investment of “about $30 million on training alone” to improve employee engagement and customer service in retail stores (Wagner & Orvis, 2013). One of its competitive advantages derives from its strategic employment practices. In all of its distribution centers around North America, the company actively recruits individuals with disabilities, including cognitive, sensory, or physical limitations. Unexpectedly, employees with disabilities in the South Carolina distribution center have become a catalyst, which dramatically altered the organizational culture of the work units, resulting in increased productivity, innovation, and quality while lowering costs due to reduced turnover and fewer safety incidents (Kalargyrou, 2014; Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012; Moore, Hanson, & Maxey, 2015). This chapter reveals the keys to success in building a pre-hire training program that enables healthy and effective inclusive organizational cultures.

PRE-HIRE TRAINING PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Walgreens’s pre-hire training program is referred to as the Transitional Work Group (TWG) training and is divided into three phases. In particular, the aim of the TWG is to hire employees with disabilities to execute core business functions as an integral part of the organization. The first learning objective is for identified individuals with disabilities to demonstrate mastery of required technical tasks and soft skills, such as social skills, teamwork, and conflict resolution, to ensure job readiness. The second learning objective is to achieve productivity and accuracy benchmarks in specified job functions.

Walgreens’s first step in recruiting employees with physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities is to partner with local and state agencies that serve that constituency. Two excellent sources in South Carolina include the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) department and the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN). These agencies assist the potential job candidate by finding community resources that provide support ranging from transportation to social skills development. These agencies not only provide a referral source for candidates, but also assist employers in developing valuable pre-hire training program content to meet specific operational needs.

Research and case examples have demonstrated that the ultimate success of an inclusive employment emphasis is directly linked to the quality of the pre-hire selection and pre-hire training program, the TWG. Those agencies that provide