



WHY HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS NOW: The “New Normal” and New Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the way that we work. Employers have been adapting their business models to fit a “new normal” of remote work, shifting consumer demands, and increased flexibility for staff. In many ways, the crisis has shifted our organizations and our conception of work to align perfectly with the principles of accessibility. While the period has been hard, the increased accessibility is something we can celebrate and reap the benefits of.

The Presidents Group knows that accessibility and hiring people with disabilities has always been good for business. However, in the current context, removing barriers and intentionally hiring people with disabilities can help your business create new opportunities and adapt to the pressures of COVID-19.

Benefits of employing people with disabilities in the age of COVID-19

COVID-19 has transformed business and employment practices. Chances are those changes have made you a more accessible employer. By necessity, we have become more transparent about our lives beyond work and shared the needs and responsibilities we are juggling—from childcare to our mental health. Employers are listening more closely to what individuals need to be effective in their roles during this time. As a result, many teams are embracing work arrangements and exhibiting a level of flexibility that once seemed operationally impossible.

Recent calls for a more equitable society also make accessibility a crucial part of how we move forward as businesses. We are facing unprecedented economic and social challenges. Employing people with disabilities not only demonstrates your company’s social value, it also allows people with disabilities to contribute their skills and knowledge to help you adjust and thrive in this new context.

Remote work: now an accommodation and business requirement

Many people with disabilities are **primed for the world of remote work that COVID-19 has required**. For instance, while call centers were fielding an increased volume of calls, they learned that their quarantined employees were ill equipped to work from home and lacked strong Internet connections. Many turned to people with disabilities to fill gaps in their capacity during COVID-19.¹

In many ways, the pandemic has shown us that accommodations are not difficult and actually benefit employers. Accommodations cost less than employers

anticipate: **58% cost nothing at all** and 37% require a one-time expense of \$500.² And they typically also have a return; a recent study showed **an economic benefit of 2 to 7x the cost of accommodations** for employees with various mental health disabilities.³

Remote work, one of the most common accommodation requests, has now become a business requirement.⁴ Noting the strategic advantages of lower overhead, increased productivity, and flexibility, some companies have permanently closed their offices.⁵

Leaders in adaptive workplace practices

People with disabilities have always had to be flexible and resourceful. Throughout their lives, they have **made their own adjustments to overcome barriers**. Their adaptability makes them more able to see opportunities or creative solutions that can make your business more resilient to the pressures of COVID-19.

Studies have shown that people with disabilities boost innovation in a workplace, providing a competitive advantage.⁶ That advantage becomes even more important when we are faced with a situation that requires our businesses to be agile in shifting how we work and serve our customers.

Filling gaps in your workforce

As our businesses adjust, many of us have the need for support on a temporary, flexible, or casual basis to maintain or adjust operations. Such opportunities can be of interest to people with disabilities who may prefer a more flexible or periodic work arrangement to help them return to work or learn to work with an episodic condition.⁷

Why employing people with disabilities is always good for business

Being an accessible employer can improve business outcomes, make your team more effective, and help you tap into a significant, underserved market.

Employing people with disabilities **improves business outcomes.**⁸

Research shows that diverse and inclusive workplaces are:

- **2x** more likely to meet or exceed financial targets
- **6x** more likely to be innovative
- **6x** more likely to effectively anticipate change

People with disabilities also make **great employees.**⁹

Research shows among employees with disabilities:

- Staff retention was **72%** higher
- **86%** had average or better attendance
- **90%** performed equal or better than their coworkers without disabilities

In Canada alone, people with disabilities represent a large market with **spending power of over \$55 billion** that is consistently underserved.¹⁰ By 2030, real consumer spending by Canadians with physical disabilities alone is projected to advance at nearly three times the pace of overall consumer spending.¹¹ Having people on **staff with lived experience of disability can improve how your company designs customer experiences** that meet the needs of this significant demographic.

Highlighting that you are an inclusive employer can also help your brand appeal to ethical shoppers and people whose lives are touched by disabilities. In fact, market research shows that **92% of consumers prefer to support companies that hire people with disabilities.**¹²

Above all, creating a more inclusive world benefits all of us. Even if you don't have a disability now, it's likely that you will at some point in your life. **83% of all disabilities are acquired and the average age of acquiring them is 53.**¹³ Many of us eventually have a personal stake in improving accessibility—**47% of Canadians** have a relationship with someone who has a physical disability or challenge.¹⁴

Opportunities

67% of job seekers consider diversity and inclusion when evaluating a job opportunity, so being an accessible employer can help your business attract top talent.¹⁵ A focus on employment equity also opens doors to new opportunities that your organization may not have previously been eligible for, such as **federal and provincial procurement contracts**. Federal contractors are required to report on employment equity statistics and in B.C., bids are evaluated in part based on their potential for social impact.¹⁶

The opportunity is a natural progression from what you are already doing—**you already have people with disabilities on staff**, even if you aren't aware of it. Over 70% of disabilities are invisible¹⁷ and 90% are hidden at work.¹⁸ Becoming a more inclusive organization allows all employees to ask for what they need to be their most effective and improves overall job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Improving accessibility and employing people with disabilities is good for business, now more than ever. Join our [Community of Accessible Employers](#) to access more emerging research, tools, and training to help you optimize your business to capture these benefits.

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