



Business Matters

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace • Promoting a Positive Environment for Business Growth

Fall 2003

October is Disability Employment Awareness Month



Inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, as well as in other facets of life, strengthens our economy, our businesses, and society as a whole. October's Disability Employment Awareness Month takes the time to reflect and recognize the skills and talents that people with disabilities contribute every day to our workforce and to our communities. This year's theme, "America Works Best when ALL Americans Work" calls for us to embrace diversity and reminds us to focus on the *abilities* found in all of us! DRS invites our area employers, workforce partners, and community leaders to take this opportunity to recognize fellow employees and colleagues with disabilities in providing their ideas, knowledge, talent and dedication to our workforce! To view the Proclamation for Disability Employment Awareness Month in Virginia, go to www.vadrs.org/businessnews.html.

Upcoming Dates and Events

October	
15	Virginia's Disability Mentoring Day
15-17	Virginia SHRM Conference
29	- Manassas Employer Appreciation Breakfast - Disability-Friendly Business Awards Press Conference - Virginia Tech
30	Shenandoah Valley Regional Disability Awareness and Awards Luncheon, Staunton, VA
November	
5-7	BLN National Summit, San Francisco, CA

Resource: Reader-Friendly Fonts

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) conducted surveys of individuals with low vision and found that the majority of respondents preferred the Arial, Tahoma or Verdana fonts over others. They also studied which characteristics made the fonts more reader-friendly and, based on this information, APH designed a new font called the *APHont*. Though not everyone is required to use the APHont, people should be encouraged to use it or one of the fonts mentioned above, as they are generally perceived to be easier to read by everyone. For more information about the APHont or to download this FREE product, please visit <http://www.aph.org/products/aphont.html>

Employer of the Year Awards

The Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) honored three area businesses with "Employer of the Year" Awards for their commitment and excellence to supporting the employment of persons with disabilities. Presentations were made on August 28, 2003 during the Awards Luncheon at the Blue Ridge Regional Training Conference at Sweet Briar College, Amherst, Virginia.

Recipients included the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Bridgewater, Virginia, the Yellow Cab Company of Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Beam Brothers Trucking, Inc., of Mt. Crawford, Virginia. Wayne Boyers and Debbie Peterson, Counselors, DRS Harrisonburg Office, presented the awards under the following merits:



Famers and Merchants Bank – Gary L. Knott, Vice President - commended for making banking services easily available to persons with disabilities; evaluating clients banking needs and providing education and counseling to ensure quality account management; arranging for small business financing (equipment and vehicles) for customers with disabilities.

Yellow Cab Company – Jon Keith, Owner – commended for continuous efforts in working with DRS by hiring and supporting employees with disabilities; providing accommodations such as ramps for employees who use wheelchairs; and rearranging office space to accommodate new hires. Mr. Keith also serves on the Board of Directors for Community Association for Rural Transportation (CART).



Beam Brothers Trucking, Inc. – Gerald and Garland Beam, Employer – commended for hiring a number of clients referred by DRS; working with employees to provide any necessary accommodations; and promoting positive awareness about disability-issues to all employees.

Providing Quality Service to Customers with Disabilities

The business community constantly tries to provide better services to existing customers and to expand its market by developing new customer bases. A large untapped customer market is the disability market, which can be an economically advantageous niche for business. More than 20.3 million families in the U.S. have at least one member with a disability. Persons with disabilities themselves have a combined income of nearly \$700 billion. Below are some basic tips for interacting with customers who have disabilities. However, in most cases, the best way to learn how to accommodate customers with disabilities is to ask them directly.

Serving Customers Who Are Blind Or Visually Impaired

- Speak to the customer when you approach her or him. Speak in a normal tone of voice.
- Never touch or distract a service dog without first asking the owner.
- If you are offering a seat, gently place the customer's hand on the back or arm of the chair and let her or him sit down by her or himself.
- When dealing with money transactions, tell the customer the denominations when you count the money he or she is receiving from you.
- Make sure the customer has picked up all of her or his possessions, before leaving.

Serving Customers Who Are Deaf Or Hard Of Hearing

- Gain her or his attention before starting a conversation (i.e., tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm).
- Identify who you are (i.e., show them your name badge).
- Look directly at the customer, face the light, speak clearly, in a normal tone of voice, and keep your hands away from your face; Use short, simple sentences.
- Ask the customer if it would be helpful to communicate by writing or by using a computer terminal.
- If the customer uses a sign-language interpreter, speak directly to the customer, not the interpreter.
- If you telephone a customer who is hard of hearing, let the phone ring longer than usual; speak clearly and be prepared to repeat the reason for the call and who you are.
- If you telephone a customer who is deaf, use your state telecommunications relay service. The number is listed in the front of the telephone directory. Consideration should also be given to purchasing a TTY.
- Discuss matters that are personal (e.g. financial matters) in a private room to avoid staring or eavesdropping by other customers.

Serving Customers With Mobility Impairments

- Put yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level.
- Do not lean on a wheelchair or any other assistive device.
- Do not assume the customer wants to be pushed, ask first.
- Provide a clipboard as a writing surface if counters or reception desks are too high; come around to the customer side of the desk/counter during your interaction.
- Make sure there is a clear path of travel.

- If a person uses crutches, a walker, or some other assistive equipment, offer assistance with coats, bags, or other belongings.
- Offer a chair if the customer will be standing for a long period of time.

Serving Customers With Speech Impairments

- Concentrate on what the customer is saying; concentrate on listening and communicating.
- Avoid barriers like glass partitions and distractions, such as noisy, public places.
- Do not speak for the customer or attempt to finish her or his sentences.
- If you are having difficulty understanding the customer, consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask the customer if this is acceptable.
- If no solution to the communication problem can be worked out between you and the customer, ask if there is someone who could interpret on the customer's behalf.

Serving Customers With Learning/Cognitive Disabilities

- Be prepared to provide an explanation more than once.
- Offer assistance with and/or extra time for completion of forms, understanding written instructions, writing checks, and/or decision-making.
- If a customer has difficulty reading or writing, she or he may prefer to take forms home to complete.
- Be patient, flexible, and supportive; take time to understand the customer and make sure the customer understands you. Consider moving to a quiet or private location, if in a public area with many distractions.

The key points to remember are to relax, listen to the customer, and deal with unfamiliar situations in a calm, professional manner. Like all other customers, treat people with disabilities with dignity, respect, and courtesy.

Five Steps to Choosing Assistive Technology

When determining what assistive technology (AT) will be needed as a job accommodation, consider using the following five-step process:

1. Define the situation by determining the job tasks and the individual's functional limitations (e.g. employee having difficulty viewing a computer screen).
2. Consult with and explore resources in your community. Consider the individual with the disability as an essential resource in the accommodation process.
3. Choose the AT by making an informed decision based on explored resources.
4. Implement AT accommodation(s) and determine if training is necessary.
5. Monitor accommodations to ensure the AT is effective and working properly.