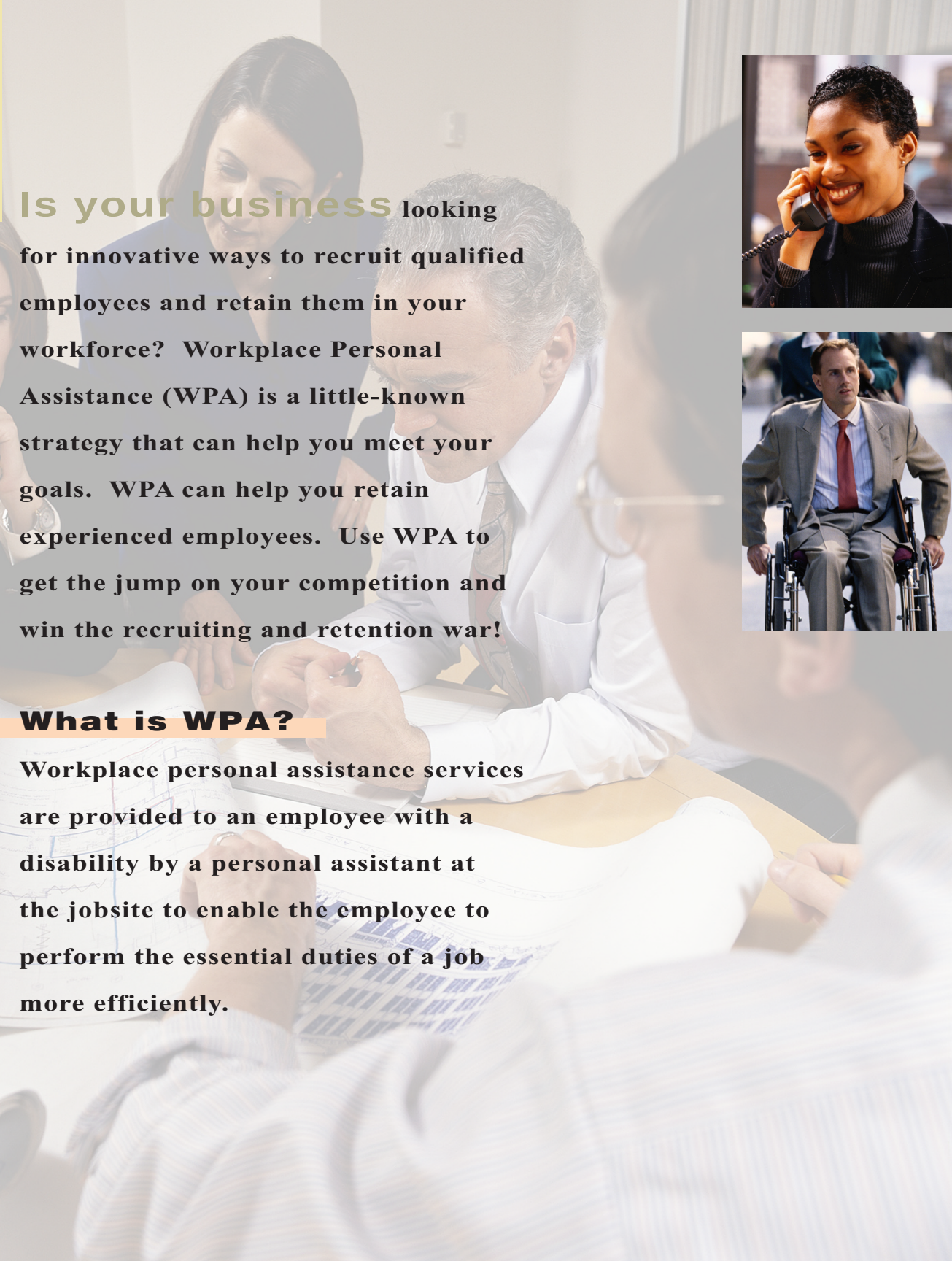


Business Solutions for the 21st Century



Using Workplace
Personal Assistance
to improve recruiting and retention



Is your business looking for innovative ways to recruit qualified employees and retain them in your workforce? **Workplace Personal Assistance (WPA)** is a little-known strategy that can help you meet your goals. WPA can help you retain experienced employees. Use WPA to get the jump on your competition and win the recruiting and retention war!

What is WPA?

Workplace personal assistance services are provided to an employee with a disability by a personal assistant at the jobsite to enable the employee to perform the essential duties of a job more efficiently.



These are examples of workplace personal assistance:

- Filing or retrieving work materials that are heavy or out of reach
- Providing travel assistance to an employee with a mobility impairment
- Reading hand-written mail to an employee with a visual impairment
- Helping an employee with a cognitive disability with planning or decision-making
- Ensuring a sign language interpreter is present during meetings to accommodate an employee with a hearing impairment

In the workplace, WPA is provided as a reasonable accommodation to enable an employee to perform the functions of the job. WPA begins when the employee reaches the job site and concludes when the workday ends. WPA in the workplace does not include skilled medical care.

Other types of personal assistance services can be offered at your place of business. While the examples of assistance below may go beyond the scope of your obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, they can also make the difference in your ability to attract the best candidates.

Examples include assistance from another person with activities of daily living to compensate for a functional limitation, such as:

- Providing assistance with meals or snacks at break time
- Providing assistance with personal care during bathroom breaks
- Providing assistance in administering medications



Dave's story

Dave was a partner in a national accounting firm when a bicycle accident resulted in a spinal cord injury. The accident left him paralyzed from the neck down. But Dave, his employer, and Dave's clients wanted him to continue working. After his hospitalization, Dave and the employer arranged for Dave to telecommute, allowing him to work from home. Because of the paralysis, Dave requires personal assistance services to perform his job. As Dave works on his various client accounts, the personal assistant provides services such as dialing the phone, readying files, typing data entries on the computer, and greeting clients when they arrive for meetings. Thanks to a combination of telecommuting and workplace personal assistance services, Dave's skills as a CPA remain available to his employer and clients.



Labor will remain in short supply

Consider these facts:

As the economy improves, more jobs will be created. Jobs that were closed during layoffs and downsizings will open again. As more positions become available, workers will start moving to new employers, leaving gaps that will be difficult to fill.

Projections report that by 2010 we will have 167,754,000 skilled jobs to fill in the United States alone. Yet the forecast is that we will only have 157,721,000 people in the workforce in 2010 to fill those jobs. If five percent of the workforce is assumed to hold 2 jobs, we will still face a shortfall of over 2 million jobs.



As the oldest baby boomers begin retiring in the next several years, the implication for the workforce could be enormous. The current tight labor market situation could be exacerbated, hindering prospects for economic growth and putting a greater burden on those remaining in the workforce....

Monthly Labor Review,
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Where will your company be...?



In the very near future, only businesses with a strategic recruiting and retention plan will have the workforce they need. When it comes to retention, these companies recognize and appreciate the value of keeping experienced workers. This includes minimizing Workers Compensation costs by getting employees back to work as soon as possible.

With labor demands expected to exceed availability, your future success will depend on the ability to recruit and hire from the pool of qualified workers with disabilities, the largest untapped resource remaining in today's workforce.

Over 15 million working-age Americans have a disability. Less than one in three (30.4%) are employed. This leaves a vast untapped pool of workers who have the skills you need and the desire to work. Employers who are willing and able to tap this labor pool will be able to operate at full capacity and outperform the competition.

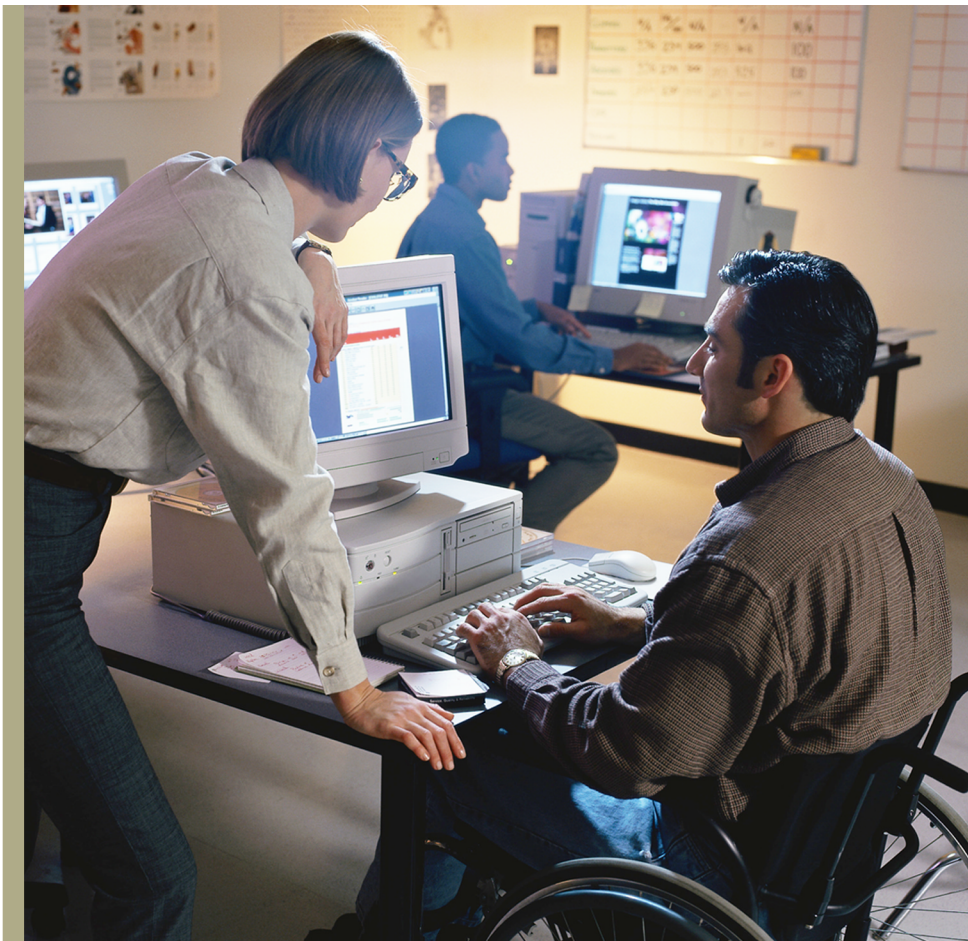


WPA as a recruiting strategy

Nationally and locally there is a large, untapped pool of people with disabilities who have the skills and qualifications you need for your business. Often the only thing preventing them from working is a lack of WPA.

By providing WPA in your benefits package, you will cast a wider net with your recruiting efforts. This will make your company attractive to more workers. At the same time your company will better reflect your customer base as a result of increased diversity in your workforce.

As the population ages, workers with disabilities will increase as a percentage of the overall working population. Strategic planning on your part will allow you to recruit this skilled pool of workers.



WPA as a retention strategy



- Has your business ever had a worker who was injured and disabled, requiring Workers Compensation and rehabilitation?
- Did that cause you to lose a valued, experienced worker?
- Would your business have benefited by having that person back to work as soon as possible?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, then consider this:

An employee wants to return to work but, due to a temporary disability, he or she may not be able to complete certain aspects of their job duties. If WPA was offered by your company, that employee could return to work faster than the average Workers Compensation beneficiary. Most importantly, you would benefit by retaining a skilled employee with valuable experience for your workforce.

- What about a person with a permanent disability?
- Is there value in providing WPA all the time, rather than for a short duration?

To answer a question with a question...

- How much does it cost your business to replace an employee?

Add up the costs of recruitment and training. Factor in lost productivity. Your bottom line will benefit from effective WPA. The annual cost of WPA is usually less than the costs you incur when you have to replace a skilled worker.

FAQs

Do co-workers provide WPA services?

You have options for providing these services. You could train a current employee to provide the assistance on an as-needed basis. You could hire your company's own personal assistants. Or you could engage the services of an outside agency. Your decision depends on the composition of your workforce. Evaluate the needs of your company and employees on a case-by-case basis.

What will WPA cost?

The costs of WPA can vary a great deal and must also be calculated on a case-by-case basis. For some assistance, such as lifting materials or reading hand-written material, another employee may perform the assistance and there would be essentially no extra cost involved. If an outside agency is contracted to provide the service, there may be additional costs.

Who pays these costs?

Again, this should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

- If WPA is provided as part of Worker's Compensation when a person returns to work, the insurer would be expected to cover the costs.
- If you have a Medical Flexible Spending Account as part of your benefit package, an employee could contribute pre-tax dollars and use them for WPA services, if such services have been defined as part of the allowed expenditures.
- Some costs might be covered by your regular employee health insurance plan.
- A qualified employee could enroll in your state Medicaid program or similar public healthcare plan. These plans can provide supplemental health care and services to people with disabilities who are employed, even if they are covered by your company health plan. (Contact your state Medicaid agency for specific information about your state Medicaid program.)
- You could cover the costs directly and take advantage of certain state and federal tax credits for doing this.



FAQs



Are there ways to reduce these costs?

Rather than focusing on providing WPA for one person at a time, your organization could provide a universal benefit that spreads the costs over a segment of your workforce, including employees with return-to-work issues, employees with disabilities, older workers, and others in your workforce. This could reduce the cost per employee significantly while improving general productivity.

Why invest in providing WPA when the person might leave for another job?

Turnover rates for people with disabilities are no higher than other groups in the workforce. By providing WPA you not only ensure that individuals currently working for you can stay on the job, but increase the labor pool by including more qualified people with disabilities.

Are there any special liability considerations if I provide WPA?

Every time one worker helps another do their job, there are risks of an accident or injury to either party. As long as the personal assistant is properly trained to provide the assistance, risks would be no greater than usual.

Who is responsible if the assistant is injured in the workplace?

If the Personal Assistant is your employee, your Workers Compensation insurance would provide the coverage. If services are provided through an outside agency, the assistant should be covered by the agency's insurance. You will want to check this carefully before authorizing an assistant from an outside agency to provide services at your company.

Resources and contact information

The Business Leadership Network (BLN) is a collaboration between the US Chamber of Commerce and the US Department of Labor. The purpose of the BLN is to assist businesses successfully employ qualified persons with disabilities through peer-to-peer mentoring and training. The BLN may be contacted at:

Business Leadership Network

Office of Disability Employment Policy
US Department of Labor - Room S1313
200 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20210

Phone: 202-693-7880
<http://www.usbln.com>

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) can provide a great deal of information about diversity, recruiting, and benefits. SHRM may be contacted at:

Society for Human Resource Management

1800 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Phone (US only): 800-283-7476
Phone (International): +1-703-548-3440
Fax: 703-535-6490
<http://www.shrm.org/chapters/>



For additional copies of this publication, contact:

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*The Center for Disabilities and Development is nationally designated
as Iowa's University Center for Excellence on Disabilities.*