



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT **WORK-BASED LEARNING AND APPRENTICESHIP** FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN HOSPITALITY

JACQUELINE GONZALEZ

A HISTORY OF BARRIERS AND INEQUITIES

Employer biases and systemic wage loopholes have plagued workers who have disabilities with longstanding inequitable workforce solutions surrounding training, placement, and advancement. This cohort currently makes up 20 percent of the workforce.¹

Disabilities in the workplace are not limited to hearing, vision, and mobility. The majority of workers with disabilities are those with “hidden disabilities,”² which include chronic, mental illnesses, such as anxiety, autism, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, and sleep disorders. It is estimated that about 10 percent of the U.S. population lives with a hidden disability.

The issue of self-disclosure continues to be an area that needs further attention, especially for individuals with hidden disabilities. People in low-income communities are less likely to be

diagnosed or be self-aware of their own learning disabilities and are significantly less likely to disclose a disability for fear of discrimination in the workplace and within their communities.³ While the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) legally prohibits such discrimination, the responsibility to disclose a disability—and the choice of whether or not to disclose it—remains solely with the individual.

EXCLUSION IN APPRENTICESHIP AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Research has consistently demonstrated that young people with disabilities who engage in work-based learning and exploratory career programming have higher post-school outcomes than their peers.⁴ As apprenticeship offerings are expanding beyond traditional industries such as hospitality, there are new opportunities to design work that complements the needs and skills of people with learning or physical disabilities. Identifying apprentice-able occupations can often be done with the support of an industry association or a nonprofit organization.

Internships, which often have more flexibility in their offerings and structure than traditional apprenticeships, and which already exist within most industries, have shown promise in developing positive work-related outcomes for people with disabilities, including interpersonal skill development, mastery of specific job tasks, and increased understanding of the workplace. Research has shown that companies with internship programs designed for young people with disabilities are more than five times more likely to have hired an individual with a disability.⁵ Apprenticeship programs and other work-based learning opportunities have also positively impacted employment opportunities and advancement options for these workers.⁶ There are, however, factors that cause employers

to hesitate to invest in training to support workers with disabilities. For example, employers in the hospitality industry may be hesitant to hire people with disabilities because they generally desire individuals who have effective communication, social, and technical skills.⁷ However, several hospitality employers have begun to change their outlook and are thinking about ways to attract and accommodate workers with disabilities and help them develop skills for success.

Hospitality employers Hilton, Starwood Resorts, and Marriott International have been ranked among the top employers across industries in hiring and promoting people with disabilities.⁸ Their efforts include designing training opportunities and job placements for people with disabilities. Marriott's Bridges program, for example, has helped hundreds of young people with disabilities secure job placements with more than 500 employers.⁹

UNDERSTANDING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Legal efforts such as the ADA have helped make positive changes for workers facing challenges and barriers in the workforce. Adjustments in physical offices and technology enhancements have provided needed assistance to those with mobility or communication impairments. Interpersonal communication, however, continues to be a challenge for many work teams¹⁰—research suggests that employer attitudes and anxieties around appropriate levels of sensitivity and “what to say, how to say it” often lead to further segregation and additional unintentional exclusion. The ADA National Network is one of a few organizations that has designed tools and resources to help employers develop competencies and better understand the training needs of people with disabilities. The organization's Hospitality and Disability initiative provides employer-facing training materials designed to help large and small employers support people with disabilities. The materials include resources with information about compliance and safety.

Many current apprenticeship opportunities present challenges that discourage participation for individuals with disabilities. While some are intrinsic challenges, such as the need for flexible transportation and adequate compensation during training, there are also significant barriers relating to workplace and academic competencies.¹¹

Most apprenticeships require a high school diploma as a prerequisite for participation, but many young people with disabilities graduate from high school without earning industry-recognized diplomas, if they graduate at all. Research has demonstrated that up to 20 percent of young people with disabilities drop out of high school, and 14 percent exit with a certificate of attendance or another non-industry-recognized credential.¹²

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

Employers have misconceptions about the cost of providing workplace accommodations (physical and otherwise) to people with disabilities. While perceived as expensive, these often cost less than one might think—some cost nothing at all. Learning disabilities, which are the most prevalent type of disability in the workplace, can be supported via universal design for learning.¹³ Universally designed environments and tools are developed to meet the needs of the greatest number of users, in order to benefit more people and help prevent costly and time-consuming adaptations later on. The universal design for learning framework is intended to focus on ensuring multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement, providing a more inclusive learning space and strategies for learning.¹⁴

Modifications in work schedules or variations in general onboarding instruction and communication styles can support a variety of learning styles while boosting efficiency. Universal design in a physical sense may involve the installation of new equipment or the adjustment of work spaces in order to create a reduced-distraction work environment

or providing access to a computer for written work. In some cases, a simple rearrangement of office furniture and equipment is enough to accommodate mobility-challenged individuals.

Most expenses are incurred before the hiring of a worker and are related to access to training and credentials. Training for workers with disabilities needs to be multifaceted, involving an array of partners to collaborate and provide ongoing and aligned supports for success. Those partners could include schools, community organizations, youth enrichment programs, and tailored vocational and academic services.

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

For an employee, work-based learning can provide authentic, fulfilling learning opportunities and a clear pathway for growth and wage increases. From an employer's perspective, work-based learning can provide strategies to support workers with disabilities by providing a business case to design a scalable infrastructure for training, coupled with defined metrics for advancement to utilize across the company.

Currently, there is insufficient data to determine whether existing wage gaps for workers with disabilities can be attributed to insufficient training opportunities or to discrimination that leads to the funneling of this population into low-wage, low-skilled occupations.¹⁵ In the hospitality industry and beyond, apprenticeships and other paid work-based learning opportunities that include equitable, personalized training can provide a way to help address wage gaps for workers with disabilities. Structured apprenticeship offerings for individuals with disabilities can also provide reliable hourly employment, leading to improved access to benefits. Currently, research suggests that people with disabilities may shy away from the hospitality industry because their employment, even if only part time, may prevent them from receiving supports for their disabilities, such as government assistance for the cost of medication.¹⁶

Most resources surrounding this topic are tailored for intermediaries and workforce development partners, and they cover subjects such as organizational attitudes, workplace accommodations, and recruitment.¹⁷ Limited employer-facing resources are available to help employers understand the considerations associated with the design and rationale of building career awareness and engagement opportunities for workers and young people with disabilities. Resources have begun to emerge that offer strategies for people with physical and cognitive challenges to maximize their employability and alleviate the concerns an employer may have if a potential employee needs, or chooses, to disclose their disability during the hiring process.

Federal funds available via the Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act¹⁸ can provide support for additional training that a worker may need before entering an apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship program; they can also be used to cover general employer expenditures for things like tools, uniforms, and accommodation adjustments.¹⁹

Similar to the population at large, there continues to be a perception among persons with disabilities that careers achievable through college pathways are preferable to careers achievable by completing a Registered Apprenticeship. There is a need to inform state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and other organizations supporting workers with disabilities of the career potential of Registered Apprenticeships through trainings and other knowledge-building opportunities.

A major threat to the success of work-based learning solutions for workers with disabilities surrounds initial qualifications for enrollment. If young people are unable to secure industry-recognized high school diplomas or credentials such as the GED during their high school experience, they can be prevented from participating in most federally supported apprenticeship programs under existing funding structures. Future policy recommendations would be to alleviate such restrictions or create a new qualification, such as age or a universally designed basic skills and literacy qualifying exam.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADA National Network has a Hospitality and Disability website with training resources for employers working with individuals with disabilities, along with training tools to help able-bodied workers understand disability etiquette and become familiar with the protocol for serving customers with disabilities. <http://www.adahospitality.org/content/training-materials>

CareerOneStop is a go-to source for career exploration, training, jobs, and many other topics related to workforce development. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.careeronestop.org/>

Workforce GPS offers a Disability and Employment Community of Practice featuring ongoing webinars and regularly updated resources related to disabilities and employment. <https://disability.workforcegps.org/>

The National Center on Workforce and Disability offers a Universal Design for Workforce Development System toolkit and many other resources for workforce development professionals. <http://www.onestops.info/>

The National Conference of State Legislatures released a report examining the following four areas of focus surrounding employment and workers with disabilities: career readiness and employability; hiring, retention, and re-entry; entrepreneurship, tax incentives, and procurement; and transportation, technology, and other employment supports. http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/employ/Work_Matters_Report.pdf

JFF's Center for Work-Based Learning & Apprenticeship curates resources surrounding work-based learning and apprenticeship for a range of industries and populations, including hospitality and workers with disabilities. <https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/resources/?demographics=people-with-disabilities&page=1>

ENDNOTES

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19 Hospitality employers and others can locate an American Job Center in their area to secure region-specific information and find answers to questions relating to workforce development through the CareerOneStop American Job Center Finder. <https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/AmericanJobCenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx>

