



Think 10% unemployment is high? It's been as high as 70% for people with disabilities.

Policy Alert: December 10, 2009:
Janet Fiore, CEO, The Sierra Group, Inc.

This article will address the current economic downturn and its impact on people with disabilities. It will also forecast how existing employment studies and workforce trends will redefine accommodation in the workforce during the next generation.

The Sierra Group follows economic and business development news around the country and regularly reports on these topics to help those in vocational rehabilitation and human resources keep current with workplace and ADA issues. The Sierra Group is a national consultancy that offers an array of vocational rehabilitation, recruiting, consulting, and training services designed to serve the needs of insurance companies, businesses, and workers with disabilities. The Sierra Group stands for reversing the high rate of unemployment for people with disabilities.

The Sierra Group

thesierragroup.com | 800-973-7687

- Candidate Sourcing
- Workforce Strategy
- Vocational Rehabilitation

Contributor: Janet Fiore ©2009 by The Sierra Group 588 N. Gulph Road, Suite110, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania 19406

Restricted Rights : The information contained in this document is proprietary to The Sierra Group, Inc. www.thesierragroup.com

With the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting a slight dip in the jobless rate to 10.0 percent in October, many Americans may be breathing a collective sigh of relief that we are, at last, seemingly turning the corner on the economic woes that have plagued us for the past year.

But for people with disabilities, it is not yet time to exhale. This community of people with disabilities has long experienced an unemployment rate that far outstrips America's most recent labor pains - even with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act more than 20 years ago. Why?

That's an excellent question to ponder as we recognize that October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Many employers may fear that hiring people with disabilities will detract from their bottom line. But workplace experiences, as well as studies, demonstrate that having workers with disabilities on the payroll does not automatically lead to higher costs for worker compensation or sick leave. In fact, studies show that employees with disabilities miss less time from work than others. Additionally, accommodation costs are often paid for by available Federal or state funding.

With an unemployment rate once as high as 70 percent, adults with disabilities have been an untapped labor resource - in or out of recessionary times. Today, the unemployment figures for the nation's 54 million disabled Americans annually, continues to represent the largest group of unemployed citizens in our country. And yet, American employers are still losing out by not tapping into this talented pool of potential workers.

In today's tight labor market, hiring a person with a disability serves many benefits. Employers broaden the diversity in their workforce and set an example of inclusiveness. Additionally, employers may be eligible for tax credits and other financial benefits from government agencies, and fewer employable people are dependent on government supports such as Social Security payments.

A decade from now, what has been commonly called 'reasonable accommodations' for disabled workers will be referred to as *training tools*, or *productivity enhancements*. The notion of accommodation will become obsolete as the modern workplace of the future begins to view assistive devices such as speech recognition technology, talking monitors, macro keypads, and amplifying telephone headsets, as ordinary workplace tools.

Just as we have come to expect fax machines, personal computers and e-mail capability at each workstation, by 2019, assistive technology will simply be run-of-the-mill tools for maximizing productivity for workers with slight to significant physical and cognitive disabilities.

In remembering National Disability Employment Awareness Month, as President Obama did on October 6th by announcing initiatives to ensure fair and equal access to employment for Americans living with disabilities, employers should remember that lots of talent exists among those who also happen to have disabilities.

Janet Fiore, CEO of The Sierra Group, Inc., is a national authority on disability policy and procedures in the workplace. She regularly writes and speaks on issues of compliance, accommodation and workplace trends. To look at other topics and available teleseminars on the ADA and employment, visit www.thesierragroup.com or call 800.973.7687.