



Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Accommodation and Compliance Series

Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact

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JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series

Introduction

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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act and regulations from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission refocused attention on workplace accommodations by broadening the definition of disability; more coverage means more employees will likely be entitled to workplace accommodations. This increased attention has some employers concerned about the costs of providing job accommodations. However, a survey conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), which is funded by a contract from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), indicates workplace accommodations not only are low cost, but also positively impact the workplace in many ways.

The JAN survey has been on-going since 2004. Since then, a total of 3,369 employers have been surveyed, with 625 surveys completed since October 21, 2019. At present, the West Virginia University School of Social Work conducts these employer surveys. Employers participating in the JAN survey represent the total spectrum of industry sectors (e.g., manufacturing, service, and wholesale/retail sales) and sizes (from individual-owned to Fortune 500 mega-companies). Each of these employers had contacted JAN and obtained specific information about workplace accommodations, the ADA, or both. Approximately eight weeks after their initial contact, these employers were asked a series of questions about the situation they discussed with JAN, the quality of the services JAN provided, and the resulting outcomes.

The survey results consistently have shown the benefits these employers reported they received from making workplace accommodations far outweigh the associated costs. Employers reported providing accommodations that resulted in such benefits as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation and training costs, and improving company diversity. The employers participating in this survey reported a high percentage (56%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to implement (\$0), while the rest of the accommodations made had a typical cost of only \$500. This \$500 typical cost has been consistent across the many years of the JAN survey.

Employers who participated also reported that JAN understood their needs and provided information that met those needs. In addition, 100% of employers stated they would use JAN's services again for assistance with workplace accommodations.

What is the bottom line? Contacting JAN to obtain information on workplace accommodations typically results in modifications that have a low cost and a high, positive impact. And JAN's services are always free of charge!

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FINDINGS

Finding #1: Employers want to provide accommodations so they can retain valued and qualified employees.

Of the 3,369 employers who have participated in the JAN survey, most (82%) called JAN for accommodation information and solutions to retain or promote a current employee. On average (including those who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company slightly less than seven years. Average wages for these employees were about \$20 for those paid by the hour or approximately \$61,375 for those with an annual salary. In addition, 58% of the individuals for whom the accommodations were made had a college degree or higher.

Finding #2: Most employers report no cost or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Of the 1,029 employers who were able to provide cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 571 (56%) said the accommodations needed by their employee cost absolutely nothing. Another 403 (39%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 46 (4%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (1%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs. Of those accommodations that did have a one-time cost, the median one-time expenditure as reported by the employer was \$500. When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, the median answer given by employers was \$20.

Finding #3: Employers report accommodations are effective.

Employers who had implemented accommodations by the time they were interviewed were asked to rank the effectiveness of the accommodations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely effective. Of the 986 responding, the majority (75%) reported the accommodations were either very effective or extremely effective.

Finding #4: Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.

Employers who made accommodations for employees with disabilities reported multiple benefits as a result. The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were: (1) the accommodation allowed the company to retain a valued employee, (2) the

accommodation increased the employee's productivity, and (3) the accommodation eliminated the costs of training a new employee.

The most widely mentioned indirect benefits employers received were: (1) the accommodation ultimately improved interactions with co-workers, (2) the accommodation increased overall company morale, and (3) the accommodation increased overall company productivity. The following table gives the percentage of employers who reported experiencing direct and indirect benefits as a result of having made an accommodation.

Direct Benefits

- Retained a valued employee: 90%
- Increased the employee's productivity: 68%
- Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee: 58%
- Increased the employee's attendance: 57%
- Increased diversity of the company: 36%
- Saved workers' compensation or other insurance costs: 30%
- Hired a qualified person with a disability: 12%
- Promoted an employee: 8%

Indirect Benefits

- Improved interactions with co-workers: 57%
- Increased overall company morale: 55%
- Increased overall company productivity: 49%
- Increased safety: 46%
- Improved interactions with customers: 38%
- Increased overall company attendance: 35%
- Increased profitability: 20%
- Increased customer base: 13%

Finding #5: Employers find JAN helpful during the accommodation process.

Ninety-eight percent of the 3,201 employers surveyed who responded reported that JAN understood their needs. In addition, 94% stated the information JAN sent them met their needs. **And 100% of employers stated they would use JAN again!**

Situations and Solutions:

An office worker with limitations in using her hands had difficulty manipulating the mouse on her computer.

Her employer purchased a foot mouse, speech to text software and a foot mat. Without this accommodation the employee may have been reassigned to a position of lesser pay. The accommodation was very effective and cost \$300.

An office worker who was sensitive to cold was developing headaches and neck pain as a result of the office temperature.

The employee works in a cubicle environment. The employer turned off one AC vent in the employee's work area and diffused another vent away from the individual's cubicle. A heated scarf was also provided. The cost of the accommodation was \$115.

A professor with a mental health impairment was having difficulty concentrating in the office.

The professor shared office space and constant interruptions were causing problems with concentration. The individual was provided a private office space. No cost.

An employee working for a county government requested to work from home because of need for frequent breaks due to a kidney disorder.

The commute to work was also difficult. The employer allowed the employee to work from home and allowed for a flexible schedule for medical appointments. The employer also provided the employee with computer equipment at home. They consider the accommodation cost to be \$0 as they provide the same equipment to all employees. The employer also stated it was effective because the employees' job could unequivocally be completed at home 100%.

A new hire in a small law office asked to bring a service animal to work.

After determining it was needed to decrease anxiety because of PTSD, the employee was allowed to bring the service animal to work. The employer reported the accommodation was very effective. No cost.

An individual with a progressive hearing loss working in a lab environment was having difficulty communicating with coworkers.

He requested co-workers be sure he is looking at them before speaking. In addition, verbal communication was followed up with written communication by email. All employees benefited from having the written communication to which they could refer. No cost.

References

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