

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Dale S. Brown
Program Manager
President's Committee on
Employment of People with
Disabilities
1331 F Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004-1107

THE WHITE HOUSE

8 July 1993

Dear Dale,

I am delighted we had the opportunity to meet yesterday! I appreciate and admire your work and dedication and look forward to visiting with you more.

Sincerely, Carol H. Lasco



President's Committee on Employment
of People with Disabilities

May 28, 1993

Carol Rasco
Assistant to the President
for Domestic Policy
White House
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Ms. Rasco:

Patsy Fordyce told me that you had asked me to write you in order to schedule a time for us to meet. I've been working on using total quality management to improve quality and productivity of people with disabilities in the work place, as described in the attached article. The end result is not only improvement for individual workers with disabilities, but increased competitiveness for American industry. Here is what is on my mind that may be helpful to President Clinton's domestic policy agenda.

*improving innovation of production systems and empowerment of all American workers through effective accommodation of people with mild and severe disabilities.

*use of labor-management cooperation to improve quality and productivity of Americans with disabilities in the work place.

*developing incentives that will encourage the public and private sector to invest in people with disabilities. This can pay off rapidly in improving the bottom line of any company that tries it.

In order for the nation to tap the full productivity of people with disabilities, the issue must be considered throughout President's Clinton's domestic policy process. I hope to be helpful to you in making this happen.

Patsy Fordyce told me that your appointment secretary would be calling me shortly to set up a time to get together in the middle of June.

Sincerely Yours,

Dale S. Brown
Dale S. Brown
Program Manager

I had no idea we were to call her first. Anyway give her 30 minutes

Ext. 30

2:00

30 minutes July 1st 8.

Quality Through Equality: Using TQM To Hire And Retain Workers With Disabilities

By Dale S. Brown

President's Committee on Employment
of People with Disabilities

Two national trends are changing the face of American industry today. They are: a decision to reach for total quality in order to achieve global market share, and a commitment to civil rights for people with disabilities. As organizations move into total quality management (TQM) and become more responsive to their customers and employees, those employees and customers with disabilities should be seen as internal and external customers whose input should be valued in product design and marketing.

The trend towards TQM has been thoroughly discussed and documented, but the national commitment towards hiring people with disabilities may be newer to the reader of this article. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed on July 26, 1990, after two years of work within the legislative process, prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications and activities of state and local governments. It is a civil rights bill, guaranteeing people with disabilities similar rights to those held by women and ethnic minorities. Last July, on the anniversary date of the legislation, it became illegal for organizations that employ 25 or more people to discriminate against qualified people with disabilities in hiring, firing, salary, training and promotion.

President-elect Clinton has made a strong commitment to enforcement of the ADA. At the ADA employment summit, held by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, he sent a letter which stated: "My highest priorities as your next President are to restore economic opportunity and rebuild a sense of community to our great nation. That is why I believe the ADA is so

important. In a competitive global economy, our country doesn't have a single person to waste — opportunity must be open to everyone. I am strongly committed to full implementation and

People with disabilities are often able to come up with an inexpensive solution to an apparently insurmountable problem.

enforcement of the ADA, because I believe our entire nation will share in the economic and social benefits that will result from full participation of Americans with disabilities in our society. I look forward to working with you to help create a greater sense of understanding and support for ADA throughout our nation."

A 1987 Harris Poll of more than 900 managers showed that a large majority said that workers with disabilities were "good" (64 percent) or "excellent" (24 percent). Forty-six percent of managers rate persons with disabilities as harder workers than their peers with no disabilities and 33 percent rate them about the same as their non-disabled coworkers. A more recent Harris Poll (1991) showed that American people recognize this potential contribution. Eight out of 10 Americans said that people with disabilities have underused potential to contribute by working and producing. Only one out of 10 disagreed.

Not only does industry obtain the benefit of "unused potential," but individual companies may save money in worker's compensation and long term disability costs. People with disabilities who return to work save the company the costs of training a new employee.

In order to reap these benefits, people with disabilities may have particular needs that must be met in order for the employee to perform well. "Reasonable accommodation" is the phrase that is used for this process. Under the ADA, employers must make reasonable accommodation to the known limitations of a qualified applicant

or employee unless to do so would cause an undue hardship. For companies that practice TQM, accommodation is more than a legal issue. It refers to the process of matching the communication style,

work environment, expectations of the supervisor and the production system to assure that the disability of the employee does not hamper their ability to produce quality products or services.

For the most part, people with disabilities are experts on their own accommodation needs. They have lived with their disability and they can often come up with an inexpensive solution to an apparently insurmountable problem. For example, one person with a disability suggested putting a paper cup dispenser next to a water fountain rather than lowering it. A computer programmer who was blind showed his manager how to set up his computer with Braille output.

In some cases, however, more detailed planning is required. In these situations the Shewhart cycle (plan, do, check, act) should be used:

Plan — The individual and the supervisor first locate a problem. For example, suppose an individual who was very small in stature is hired as a mail clerk. The tasks required of the employee include sorting of incoming mail into individual boxes at a sorting station, carrying the sorted mail to the appropriate work station in the building and returning with any outgoing mail. The problem is that the individual cannot reach the high-est box in the sorting station.

The employee and the supervisor then find a way to resolve the situation. In this case, they decide to have the employee stand on a stool.

Do — The accommodation is implemented. In this case, the supervisor hap-

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Job Accommodation Ideas

A fact sheet is available from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities that describes job accommodation problems with proposed low-cost solutions. Write Dale S. Brown, President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1331 F Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004.

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' Job Accommodation Network

Provides information on job accommodation, including free consultation on particular issues. Also provides information about complying with Americans with Disabilities Act. They serve as central clearinghouse of basic information and will refer people to other organizations as necessary. Call 1-800-526-7234 or 1-800-232-9675.

pens to have a stool in the mail room and gives it to the employee.

Check — See if the accommodation works. If the employee is able to produce well without negative impact on other aspects of the organization, it works. In this case, however, the supervisor realizes it is a safety hazard.

Act — Because of the safety problems, the supervisor goes through the cycle a second time. This time, she decides to ask the mail room staff, who have

formed a total quality team to improve their operations for suggestions. They generate options. They decide to install a platform, which places the boxes in easy reach of the worker. In this example, it will be assumed that the accommodation works. When an accommodation works, it must be institutionalized so that future supervisors use it as well. The institutionalization is most important when the accommodation involves changes in policies, procedures and schedules.

Interestingly enough, such an accommodation was actually made (although the process was not known to the author) and the cost was \$150.

In the planning process, the following three areas can be changed:

The work station — The entire work station, from tools used by the employee to the entire area, such as the lunchroom and rest rooms, should be reviewed and made accessible. For example, a person with an eye disorder may require the purchase of an antiglare screen.

Work distribution — The supervisor may assign a minor duty to a coworker or have two workers exchange jobs. For example, secretaries that are deaf are excused from answering the telephone.

Communication process — The supervisor needs to know how the employee gets information best. Memorandum or written instructions might be read to a dyslexic or blind employee. An employee with a mild hearing impairment might prefer written instructions.

Quality management principles can be used throughout the process of job accommodation. The person with a disability can be treated as an internal customer. And, like all employees, when they are fully empowered to do their jobs, their productivity will grow.

There are many situations where a job accommodation for an employee with a disability has led to an improvement for the entire work force. A voice-activated computer was bought for an employee who had quadriplegia. Other employees, watching him work, wanted them, and the department bought voice activated computers for the entire staff! Productivity increased. Another example involved a person with one arm who cut microfiche. A paper cutter was designed for him. Every time he was on break, the other employees "borrowed" his paper cutter. Finally, it was manufactured for all people on the production line.

Job accommodation is more than a legal obligation — it is part of the TQM obligation that companies have to continuously improve their product and work force. Through TQM, it can be assured that people with disabilities are fully productive members of their working teams.

Dale S. Brown is a program manager for the work environment and technology committee at the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, where she has worked since 1979. She has written one book and more than 200 articles. In addition, she co-chairs her agency's TQM team.

Carol —

This is an article
by my friend Dale
Braun. She has an
appointment to see
you soon.

Thanks!

Patsy Fordyce

6-22-93

Put in meeting folder.

Empowerment Through Peer Counseling

Dale S. Brown

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

As a volunteer in the self-help movement for people with disabilities, I have expended substantial time and effort counseling and assisting people who have disabilities. My experience, extending over twelve years, has led me to believe that peer counseling and building close relationships are key to personal empowerment. And that personal empowerment is the key to political empowerment.

What is personal empowerment? Personal empowerment is the ability to choose one's actions. A personally-empowered individual thinks and behaves as if he or she is capable, despite the negative messages about disability that are woven into our society. These negative messages not only affect the external environment of the individual who is disabled, but are often internalized. Frequently, the individual accepts as truth what he or she has experienced or has been told. This

tendency of minority groups to accept negative stereotyping about themselves is often referred to as *internalized oppression*.

External oppression refers to both barriers and beliefs. An example of such barriers is an environment that disempowers or a system that strips people of their dignity. "Beliefs" refer to generally accepted tenets of society that imply that people with disabilities are somehow "less able" than people who are not disabled.

Internalized oppression occurs when an individual comes to accept these stereotypical beliefs as truths and acts upon them. For example, one negative belief held by society is that people with disabilities are not capable of

working. As a consequence, people with disabilities might not try to find work. Or they may feel "grateful" to be given the chance to work. An individual who feels grateful might feel uncomfortable in asking for reasonable accommodations to enable him or her to perform at peak levels.

It is rare that an individual can throw off a lifetime of negative stereotyping in an instant without appropriate support from others. People who have received large doses of negative feedback from others or have experienced a traumatic event need to share their experiences and feelings before they are ready to tackle the next challenge. Unexpressed emotions tend to interfere with clear thinking and rational



Photo Courtesy of Counseling Group



Photo Courtesy of Counseling Group

actions. An individual who becomes disabled from an accident often needs to grieve over his or her loss before becoming motivated to begin rehabilitation. Listening to an individual express those feelings is a powerful form of support that anyone can do. It is particularly important for people who have experienced the negative effects of society's attitudes towards disability.

Peer Counseling Techniques

During the 1960s and 1970s, two trends converged: the development of self-help groups and the use of peer helpers in educational settings. During the 1980s, as funding levels dropped for human services programs, peer counseling was frequently used as a cost-effective alternative to traditional services. The disability movement picked up on these trends, and during the early 1980s, many community-based independent living centers developed peer counseling programs. Additionally, community-based disability support and advocacy groups widely disseminated peer counseling techniques.

My work in the field of learning disabilities was on the cutting edge of that process. Leaders in the self-help and advocacy movements found that they were overwhelmed by people who

wished to talk to them about their problems. We found that until people were able to "tell their stories," they could not empower themselves to take the next step in self-improvement or community work. However, it became clear that they needed to help each other, rather than to rely solely on professional support. We set up peer support groups and workshops to teach people to listen to each other. Hundreds of support groups and numerous peer counseling relationships were formed during the 1980s and are continuing today. Here are some of the most important peer counseling techniques:

- Listen well. Let the individual tell you the entire story.

When he or she stops, ask open-ended questions such as:

"Tell me more. What happened next? How did you feel? What did you want to say?"

- Look at the person with respect and approval. Your voice and eyes should show interest and the wish to hear more. On the telephone, say "Yes," and "Go on," occasionally so that your conversational partner knows you are listening.
- Resist the temptation to interrupt with a story of your own. It is important to ignore your own feelings and concentrate on the person who is speaking.

Your friendly listening creates the atmosphere that enables the individual to empower himself or herself.

- Encourage the expression of emotions. Until the individual is able to express anger and hurt, it is difficult for him or her to make a rational choice or decision.
- Ask questions that connect the present difficulties with similar problems in the past. For example, a college student has a problem with a professor. The professor may have given him or her a bad grade, have been unwilling to make a necessary accommodation, or simply hadn't had time to assist the student. The student feels powerless and unwilling to talk to the professor. Or he or she discusses the situation defiantly. The peer counselor can help by asking the student for information such as:

"Did this happen before? How did you feel?"

"When was the first time you experienced this?"

Perhaps the student has brought past negative experiences with parents or teachers to the current situation. The peer counselor might ask, "How is this situation different from the past situation?" Sorting out today's experience from yesterday's experiences is helpful.

- State the truth and bring out the positive reality. For example, many people with learning disabilities feel they are stupid. It's important to tell the individual how smart he or she really is and encourage thinking of examples to prove it. The individual who feels "grateful to have a job" needs to understand his or her own worth. Perhaps the employer is the one who should feel "grateful" to have the individual with a disability on staff.

Obtaining "Counseling" for Yourself

Most people find listening to others a deeply satisfying experience. A husband listened to his wife for ten minutes without interruption during a "listening skills" workshop exercise.

"I never knew how eloquent she was," he told the participants. Many people with disabilities, able-bodied allies, and family members all agree that they learn more about their peers from five minutes of listening than they did in years of meetings with professionals.

However, listening can be hard work. Particularly if their problems remind you of your own, it can lead to early burnout.

It is important, therefore, to find equal time for yourself. Find someone with whom you can talk about your own difficulties. Express yourself. Think aloud. If they cannot listen well, find someone who can.

Support Groups

An easy way to organize people for personal empowerment is to hold regular meetings of support groups. Support groups come in many formats: learning from experts, "twelve step" groups, discussions, and group therapy sessions. Each organization that encourages support groups has its own policies and counseling techniques. Many support groups are freestanding, that is, developed by a community member who wants to organize people who share similar problems.

A support group can be organized by anyone, a volunteer or a professional, a person with or without a disability. The format requires no agenda, no work, and limited planning time on the part of the leader. Keep the group

small (ten or less) and follow these steps:

- Ask everyone to share some good news, preferably something that has nothing to do with the issue of disability that brought the group together.
- Divide the amount of time remaining in the session by the number of people in attendance. Subtract two minutes. Give each person that amount of time to answer an open-ended question such as:

"What is it like for you to teach children with disabilities in your classroom?"

"What was it like growing up with a disability?"

"What is the key issue facing you right now? How are you planning to tackle this issue?"

- Each group should select a "chief listener" whose job it is to ask open ended questions and encourage expression of emotions. Toward the end of each individual's "turn," the chief listener should turn the speaker's attention away from his or her problems. This can be done through small talk or a discussion of daily activities.
- Most groups have some sort of closing in which each person talks briefly. Each group member might want to set a goal for next week or talk about something that he or she enjoyed about today's session.

These groups can become quite intense and, as trust develops, people share deeply of themselves. For this

reason, everyone must agree to confidentiality.

Individual peer support that people can give to each other, formalized peer support where two people meet and share time, and support groups all have the same goal—enabling people to express their experiences and feelings. This gets rid of negative emotion and leaves room for positive action. Empowerment is more than a political term; it is the process of taking charge of one's life. This empowerment happens more easily if peers support each other through listening.

Often, a personally-empowered individual will realize that many of his or her problems are caused by societal forces. This realization enables that person to stop internalizing blame, to want to become active in the community, to challenge discrimination, or to help others. Then they begin the process away from personal empowerment to political empowerment. †

This article does not necessarily reflect the official position of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

Reference

- Ackridge, R. (1986). Peer-provided rehabilitative services, in E.L. Pan, S.S. Newman, T.E. Backer & C.L. Vash, *Annual Review of Rehabilitation* (pp. 1-38). New York: Springer Publishing Company.