

Employers & Tomorrow's Workplace Heroes

Melisa Lewis credits training programs like The Able Trust's High School High Tech program for helping her achieve her dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Melisa Lewis wanted a career in health care – and she wasn't about to let her auditory processing deficit and hearing loss keep her from achieving her dream. The education, internships, and career training she received as a student in The Able Trust's High School High Tech program in Gainesville prepared Melisa to attend and graduate Magna Cum Laude from the University of Central Florida College of Nursing.

A year into her first job as an R.N., Melisa was named her hospital's Neuroscience Floor Rookie of the Year. Today, Melisa works in an intensive care unit in Palm Coast.

One in five Floridians have some sort of visible or hidden disability. Workers like Melisa are making a difference in Florida's economy. Businesses that focus on abilities, not disabilities, make it possible for every talented Floridian to realize their potential.

FRONTLINE SHIFTS TO THE WORKPLACE

During this spring's Coronavirus / COVID-19 outbreak, society applauded heroes like first responders and health care workers, retail clerks, municipal employees, and other essential service providers.

As the economy moves toward recovery, our next heroes will be employers re-opening their doors, as well as those with disabilities who are eager to help drive the engines of commerce.

Emerging from the pandemic, many employers will see Floridians with disabilities as the workforce of choice. Workers with disabilities are flexible problem-solvers who refuse to let barriers stand in their way.

Employers that embrace inclusion of those with disabilities welcome a vast pool of talented applicants. They make their businesses more accessible to customers with disabilities as well, says JR Harding, a faculty member of the Florida State University College of Business and long-time advocate for people with disabilities.

As the workplace evolves with restructured jobs, remote work, and adaptive technology, Floridians with disabilities can be ideal talent for the 21st Century.

"From a business standpoint, it's all about the economics," Harding says. "A business owner would never leave 20% of their customers on the sidelines. So why do that with the workforce?"

PLAN TODAY FOR INCLUSIVE HIRING

The Americans with Disabilities Act this month celebrates 30 years of protecting the civil rights and preventing discrimination of those with disabilities. While progress has been made integrating into the workforce talented individuals with both visible and hidden disabilities, much more work is needed.

Employers who welcome applicants with disabilities have been among those fostering the greatest change. Now, it's time to recommit to inclusion and to build upon the investments and progress made pre-pandemic.

Consider these hiring tips from The Able Trust:

Focus on abilities, not perceived barriers.

Workers with disabilities are loyal and flexible problem-solvers. Commitment to and by their employers means many have longer-than-average job tenure.

Review your hiring and recruiting practices now.

Evaluate how open and welcoming you are to the best talent, especially those with differing abilities.

Create accommodations.

Creating a workplace for those with disabilities needn't cost much; workers with disabilities can even help redesign tasks to match their capabilities and get the job done.

Secure support for hiring and assistive technologies.

Vocational rehab support, including agencies and counselors already in your community, as well as tax credits and grants, can assist and reimburse employers with everything from hiring to training to accommodations.

THE ABLE TRUST helps the helpers. Our business leadership network and resource guides help businesses remove barriers and engage all of Florida's talent pool. Our charitable giving and legacy vehicles support those that want to educate, empower, and employ Floridians with disabilities. To find out more about how you can enhance your business impact or join our business leadership network, contact us at 850-224-4493.

For more tips on how your business can engage the best talent, including those with differing abilities, download AbleTrust.org/HiringTips.

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