

**Interview with Elaine Katz**

**Vice President of Programs and Special Initiatives**

**Kessler Foundation**

**Co-author of the NTAR Leadership Center Issue Brief: “Collaborating and Coordinating with Employers”**

**[Announcer]** This podcast is presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities through employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation, and transformation.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Welcome to “Research in Brief,” a feature podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I’m your host, Laurie Harrington. The success of any effort to help people with disabilities move to employment is contingent on the active participation of employers. Sustainable and fruitful partnerships between disability employment program and employers, however, has historically been challenging. Elaine Katz is the Vice President of Grant Programs and Special Initiatives at the Kessler Foundation Program Center, a division of the Kessler Foundation in New Jersey. She is joining us today to talk about her recent NTAR Leadership Center Issue Brief on “Collaborating and Coordinating with Employers.” Thank you, Elaine, for being here today.

**[Elaine Katz]** Thank you, Laurie, for having me.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Elaine, can you just tell us, do you think service providers are moving in the direction of being demand driven and meeting the needs of employers?

**[Elaine Katz]** I think the world is starting to change for social service agencies and for those organizations that are working with employers to try to understand their needs. Many conferences and educational forums are starting to focus on training employees, training individuals that are going to be looking for employment in the sectors and the people skills that are needed to meet the needs of business. No longer are the days and the adage of hiring the handicapped true. These days, jobs really need to focus on the skills that they need to do the job.

**[Laurie Harrington]** In your research brief, you talk about successful partnering when organizations recognize the operational needs of employers. How can service provider organizations get their “foot in the door” with employers to understand their workforce needs?

**[Elaine Katz]** The economy is really in an ideal time to approach businesses about internships and short-term work experiences. With many layoffs and the shortage of workers, employers can use the extra help and may need or look at unpaid workers or stipend-based workers, or even volunteer workers. The media is full of stories that talk about able-bodied college students and others who have been laid off from jobs looking at these kinds of positions, which are now seen very favorable compared to in the past where it may be frowned upon to take an internship as an unpaid type of position. But these days, those types of positions can get you in the door of a business, can allow you to get some real business experience, and may even end up with a job.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Given the more intense competition for jobs among workers with greater experience, do you think making the business case for hiring workers with disabilities is still the best strategy or should agencies try a different approach?

**[Elaine Katz]** Well I think it's clear that the rules have changed in the job-hunting game and that nonprofits need to pay attention to labor market information, such as what sectors may be hiring. And right now health sector and green jobs continue to do well even in this downturn economy. Businesses may not want to take a risk to employ an employee that does not exactly fit their job needs. So what they have to do is make sure that the nonprofit can relate to the business, can quickly react to job openings, to be able to make sure that the person that they're working with and the company that's offering the job are a good match.

**[Laurie Harrington]** Thank you, Elaine. I have been talking today with the Kessler Foundation's Elaine Katz about the relationship between disability employment efforts and employers and the importance of partnerships and collaborations with the business community. This is Laurie Harrington for "Research in Brief" for the NTAR Leadership Center. For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities, visit [www.ntarcenter.org](http://www.ntarcenter.org).

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