

Chapter 4: Career Tracks: Placing Skilled College Students and Graduates with Disabilities through Partnerships between Employers, Colleges and Universities, and Intermediaries

Profiled in this chapter:

- Emerging Leaders and the National Business and Disability Council
- Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
- Lime Connect

Based on recent data, the employment rate for college graduates without disabilities is 89.9%. For college graduates with disabilities, the rate is 50.6%.⁵²

Increasingly, employers are interested in tapping into the underutilized talent pool of college graduates with disabilities and are collaborating with intermediary organizations. The three initiatives profiled in this chapter illustrate the ways in which companies can access these skilled graduates and ways in which college students and graduates can connect with employers interested in them.

Postsecondary students with disabilities must know the nature of true perseverance if they are to enter the job market successfully and benefit from a strong start to their careers. Various studies show that college students with disabilities must find a way to meet specific qualifications of a desired job,⁵³ as well as demonstrate transferable skills such as communication, troubleshooting, decision making, leadership, and problem solving. They will have to determine whether they will need accommodations to help them succeed in their jobs. Work-based learning and mentoring experiences are critical to helping students with disabilities explore different accommodations, as well as provide opportunities to practice disclosing their disabilities and requesting accommodations from employers.⁵⁴ Naturally, they also provide the contacts and networking that create employment opportunities.

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Paige Marcus, a student at the University of Michigan, participated in the Emerging Leaders program, the first case study in this chapter. She wrote of her experience, “The experiences I’ve had have been invaluable in preparing me for a full-time career. My supervisor is great and is providing an outlet for me to develop my analytical, communication, and general business skills. The Emerging Leaders Program has really opened the door for me, for which I am eternally grateful!” People with disabilities at every educational level cope with preconceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes among employers, managers, and co-workers. College students such as Ms. Marcus and graduates with disabilities have navigated a number of barriers in their journey to self-sufficiency and employment. Most of these individuals have learned in high school and childhood that they will have to think further ahead, think faster, and multitask more than their peers to keep up with the demands of school and activities. The race is rarely a fair start, but in the words of one observer, “Perseverance is not a long race. It is many short races one after another.”

The profiles in this chapter demonstrate how academic and career goals can be achieved by organizations with corporate institutional partnerships and a strong tradition of understanding corporate hiring practices. The Emerging Leaders and Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD) programs deliver on the core challenge of *lowering barriers* for students with disabilities to desirable internships, employer relationships, interviews, and mentoring. Emerging Leaders showcases a “best-in-class” internship experience that many employers are studying. COSD’s Career Gateway Web site and full-service Student Summits provide universities, corporations, and college students with disabilities with opportunities for information sharing and facilitate the employment of college students with disabilities.

Lime Connect’s approach is “inclusive, inspirational, dynamic and cutting-edge,” in the words of one corporate partner. This nonprofit has discarded the language and assumptions of traditional disability approaches, and brings verve and contemporary marketing approaches to “rebranding” the professional with disabilities. Lime Connect’s founder is famous for saying about people with disabilities, “Kill the current brand with quality. Get the message out that people with disabilities can and will deliver.”⁵⁵ The specialized recruitment, experiential learning, job shadowing, and work-based learning experiences seen in these case studies are all good market-driven models for increasing employment for college students and graduates with disabilities.

Experiencing the Difference: Emerging Leaders and the National Business and Disability Council

Introduction

In August 2009, Suzanne Robitaille posted on her blog:

Internships are a cornerstone of a student's college experience, but only a few programs exist to place students with disabilities. One notable front-runner is Emerging Leaders, which finds and places qualified college and graduate students with disabilities into paid summer internships throughout Corporate America.

In 2009, more than 100 students competed for internships at MetLife, CIT, JPMorgan Chase, Mutual of America, Booz Allen Hamilton, Lockheed Martin, and Shell...As part of the application process, students had to have a minimum 3.0 GPA and submit an essay on how living with a disability has had an impact on their lives.

At a recent gathering at MetLife in New York City, the Class of 2009 shared their experiences and heard from the program's benefactors. The students had just completed a rigorous two-day leadership development conference in New York, with facilitators from L'Oreal, MetLife, Prudential, and UBS.

"Only half of disabled college graduates secure employment, and they are often underemployed — working at jobs for which they are overqualified, unrelated to their degrees, or in temporary or part-time jobs," says Edmund Cortez, President of Just One Break, the organization that runs the Emerging Leaders program. "We're working to change that," he adds.⁵⁶

This profile shows how Emerging Leaders (<http://www.emerging-leaders.com>) partners with businesses to help them access talented, career-minded college students with disabilities. This competitive program provides paid summer internships for highly qualified undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities at major employers throughout the United States. Booz Allen Hamilton founded Emerging Leaders in 2001 and transitioned its management to the National Business and Disability Council (NBDC) in 2005. NBDC, a membership organization of major private- and public-sector employers nationwide, is a program of Just One Break, Inc. (JOB), founded in 1947 by Orin Lehman, Howard Rusk, Bernard Baruch, and Eleanor Roosevelt to bring together returning veterans with disabilities and proactive employers seeking qualified workers. JOB is part of the Abilities! family of services, a

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nonprofit organization that operates a wide variety of disability-related programs with local, national, and international reach.

In addition to their paid internships, Emerging Leaders interns participate in a three-day leadership development conference focusing on strengthening work-related skills and strategies for effectively managing disabilities in the workplace. The culmination of the conference consists of Emerging Leaders presenting case study findings to an audience of new and prospective corporate partners, Emerging Leaders alumni, members of the media, facilitators, and NBDC staff.

While simultaneously learning about and modeling values of teamwork, respect, and professionalism, the class of 2009 incorporated numerous ideas and diverse perspectives in their case studies. Working collaboratively in small groups, students were able to practice patience and active listening while recognizing the contributions of others. The intern group found in its exercise many trends that illuminate this profile:

- People with disabilities are a diverse population as disabilities are universal;
- People with disabilities are the single largest minority group in the world;
- This population is a virtually untapped resource and its members are often underemployed, despite their capabilities;
- Internally, companies can focus on an accessible physical work environment and help with a culture change/cultural climate; and
- Appealing to people with disabilities as part of the workforce creates a diverse and competent employee base.

One intern remarked during the conference, “What I learned was that people with disabilities are ‘normal,’ fun, smart, and amazing, which others will discover once they learn to look past the disability. We are just as, if not more, capable, with just an extra challenge to overcome to spice up life a bit. I know all of us had a great time, and we wish that we could relive that weekend again.”

How the Initiative Works

Since its creation, the quality of Emerging Leaders interns and the program have driven steady growth, both in terms of the number of students placed and in the number of companies offering internships.

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Emerging Leaders interns have been successfully placed at Barclays Capital, Bloomberg, Booz Allen Hamilton, CVS, JPMorgan Chase, Lehman Brothers, Liz Claiborne, Lockheed Martin, MetLife, Mutual of America, and Shell.

By 2005, Booz Allen Hamilton recognized the limitations of internally managing the program, and transitioned the Emerging Leaders program management to NBDC in order to facilitate further program growth and offer opportunities for as many deserving students as possible. Meredith DeDona of Booz Allen Hamilton described the decision to work with NBDC as an obvious one. Not only was NBDC already screening students for internships, Booz Allen Hamilton had been a longstanding member. NBDC's ready-made network of business partners, with numerous contacts with institutions of higher education, and natural connections, would ensure the future health of the initiative. These were unique areas of expertise for NBDC, more so than for Booz Allen Hamilton.

The mission of Emerging Leaders under NBDC is to partner with businesses to help them find outstanding young talent while also considering diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices. Internships are recognized as an important feature of career development for all students, and it is particularly important for students with disabilities who are less likely than the average student to have this type of experience.

NBDC reaches out to corporate partners to develop internship sites for qualified students and to member schools to market the program to students. A deadline is set each year for applicants to the Summer Internship Program. Emerging Leaders staff review and process applications as they are submitted, conducting telephone interviews with applicants. Then, based on the students' interests and geographical preferences, Emerging Leaders provides applicant information to corporate partners. Once an offer is made and accepted, Emerging Leaders provides support prior to, during, and following the internship for both the intern and the employer, including information and technical assistance to the corporate partner on the issues of disability etiquette, reasonable accommodation, and integration of an individual with a disability into the work team.

The corporate partner has responsibilities as well. The partner must complete a template that provides a profile of internship opportunities, participate in a review of pre-screened applicant résumés, and conduct telephone or in-person interviews with potential interns. The underlying commitment is that the partner must provide internship opportunities. The partner makes internship offers to appropriate applicants, provides interns with reasonable accommodations, and pays interns consistent with compensation to other interns. The partner must also allow interns to participate in a three-day Leadership Development Conference. There is no requirement to hire a specific number of interns, but to make a good faith effort to consider those interns with whom there are appropriate matches.

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“The quality of the young people participating in the Emerging Leaders program is unsurpassed. Their character and fortitude are truly inspirational. These talented young people have had an opportunity to network and develop their business skills, while the company has benefited from their significant contributions.”

Felipe Botero, Vice President, Technology and Operations, MetLife

In addition to funding Emerging Leaders, Booz Allen Hamilton is a primary corporate partner. Hiring teams are designated at the front end of the hiring process to design and oversee intern activities, and care is paid to ensuring that experiences are meaningful. Interns at Booz Allen Hamilton are encouraged to participate in numerous events and to network with other interns and internship programs.

In 2009, interns attended an American Association of Persons with Disabilities reception for the 19th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Meredith DeDonna of Booz Allen Hamilton noted that “the goal is to help students increase their network of supports and help each of the other programs to continue to flourish.” As mentioned earlier, interns participate in an annual three-day leadership development conference focused on strengthening work-related skills and strategies for effectively managing disabilities in the workplace. Presenters include professionals in the area of disability supports, corporate partners, and alumni.

Funding for Emerging Leaders

When Booz Allen Hamilton transitioned management of Emerging Leaders to NBDC, a three-year grant was established from 2006 to 2008 that included decreasing levels of support throughout the duration of the contract. Booz Allen Hamilton expected that NBDC would seek other sources of funding to replace its own. As a nonprofit entity, NBDC could secure grants and other funding sources that would not have been available to a business. The agreement was established through a collaborative process in which Booz Allen Hamilton examined program goals, and talked to NBDC about its expectations and what was realistic. At the same time, Booz Allen Hamilton set targets that would push NBDC beyond just maintaining the program. This was an opportunity to advance the program both in terms of revenue sources and participation, which is exactly what occurred. Booz Allen Hamilton has continued to fund NBDC since 2008, with additional funding from The UPS Foundation, Lockheed Martin, and other firms, as well as the MENTOR Charitable Network. The Johnson Scholarship Foundation also funded a special outreach effort to the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

2010 Emerging Leaders Program Application

Note: This internship program is specifically designed for undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities. To qualify for application, you must:

- Self-identify as a person with a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended
- Have completed a minimum of 60 college/university-level credits
- Maintain at least a 3.0 GPA (some participating employers require higher)
- Maintain student status the semester following your internship (graduating seniors immediately continuing on the graduate-level study may also apply)
- Have U.S. citizenship or be a documented individual legally authorized to work in the United States.

See full application at <http://www.emerging-leaders.com/studentsHowToApply.htm>

Satisfying Outcomes from the Partnership

Emerging Leaders is getting results, and growing every year. Between 2001 and 2009, the program placed 105 students in internships, and 19 interns ultimately accepted jobs at nine corporate partners. The program feedback has been consistently strong, with 100% of the corporate sponsors indicating that the intern had a very successful job experience in 2008, and all noting that they would consider hiring their intern if they had a future vacancy. Of the alumni surveyed in 2008, nearly 9 in 10 agreed that the internship experiences helped them to clarify their career objectives. More than 90% of the alumni who responded to the survey were employed at least part time.⁵⁷

Meredith DeDona of Booz Allen Hamilton said, “You can see exponential growth on all fronts.” Some student interns at Booz Allen Hamilton have extended their internships, and nine have moved into paid employment. Upon review of the program, Sean Cruse at the Research and Evaluation Center of Abilities noted, “Consistently, the data shows that the Emerging Leaders program is successful for both interns and corporate sponsors. The program gives students insight to their personal career objectives and provides them with a network of contacts for continued personal and professional development; further, the most recent study found that the majority of intern respondents were employed a year after the program. Additionally corporate sponsors benefit from participating in Emerging Leaders by realizing that individuals with disabilities are truly effective and productive employees.”

Conclusion

High employer and student satisfaction, as well as the growing placement and hiring rates, indicate that the Emerging Leaders model represents an effective strategy for helping companies access students with disabilities and for addressing the high unemployment and underemployment rates of college graduates with disabilities. Internships are an important part of career development for all students, and Emerging Leaders shows that extending this experience to students with disabilities results in positive outcomes.

The following are implications of the success of the Emerging Leaders program for the *Ready and Able* findings:

- **Employers respond to a business case for employing people with disabilities**

Booz Allen Hamilton and the other corporate partners support Emerging Leaders and participate in its activities to access talent to meet their workforce needs. These companies view college students with disabilities as an untapped resource.

- **Innovative collaborations with and between workforce-supplying organizations enable employer efforts to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities**

Emerging Leaders coordinates outreach through college and university partners to recruit qualified students with disabilities and coordinates training, supports, and internships. It prepares students for careers with the corporate partners. Emerging Leaders also provides technical assistance to the corporate partners on disability issues. These efforts encourage employers to hire college graduates with disabilities.

- **Collaborations ensure that workers are qualified and productive**

The Emerging Leaders internships and training experiences such as the leadership development conferences prepare students with disabilities to be quality employees. The paid internships also give the corporate partners the opportunity to view a student in the workplace before making a decision to hire permanently. The corporate partners have concluded that Emerging Leaders results in productive employees.

- **Successful collaborations nurture and reward continuous leadership**

Booz Allen Hamilton took the lead on establishing Emerging Leaders and continues to be a primary supporter of the program. This leadership has resulted in a successful model that has created a pipeline of quality employees for all of the corporate partners. It has also created new opportunities for college students with disabilities for professional careers.

Gateways and Summits: Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

Introduction

Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD) is a national association comprising over 600 colleges and universities and nearly 500 national employers, housed at the main campus of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. The authors of this report note COSD's success in promoting stronger coordination between career and disability services on campuses in order to ensure the recruitment of qualified college graduates with disabilities. As a national coordinating office, it provides the "standards and practices" that can be effectively adopted across a spectrum of higher education institutions.

COSD's standards and guidance have improved success rates in job search for hundreds of college graduates, thus improving employment rates and job satisfaction. As its Web site states, "COSD's mission is to improve the employment rate of college students and recent graduates with disabilities on a national basis."⁵⁸

The process of developing COSD began in 1998, as Alan Muir met with Dr. Robert Greenberg, Director of Career Services at the University of Tennessee at that time. Dr. Greenberg believed his office was not effectively supporting students with disabilities in career development and preparation. He was instrumental in Alan Muir being hired as a Coordinator of Disability Services, with the purpose of identifying a method of providing better service to students with disabilities. Muir came to the position after a 16-year career at Chase Manhattan Bank and came with a keen understanding of the business community. Through a small grant from Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation, Mr. Muir initiated research to identify promising practices in career services for students with disabilities nationwide. The results of this research found no model programs as such but did find elements that he combined into a comprehensive program at the University of Tennessee.

Mr. Muir also surveyed major national corporations to find initiatives to recruit and hire college graduates with disabilities. The results of this survey indicated that companies were uncertain about how to recruit college graduates with disabilities and wanted assistance from universities. Based on the results of the research, he began the development of a "loose consortium" of university career offices and major corporations dedicated to improving the employment rate of college graduates with disabilities. Activities of the consortium, including its first annual meeting, were funded through contributions from partners.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provided a four-year grant to develop a formal structure for COSD. This included the creation of an Executive Director position that was filled by Alan Muir. This provided the organization

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with capacity to promote innovative programs across the nation and, most importantly, to recruit and grow the network of participants. Mr. Muir also established rich working relationships with other related organizations such as the Association of Higher Education and Disability, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, and the U.S. Business Leadership Network. Since the ODEP grant funding ended in 2005, COSD has relied on corporate and foundation funding to support its programs and growth.

Partnership Gateway Allows Résumé Postings, Access to Employers, and Jobs

The COSD office is the hub of activities for the network. The organization routinely disseminates information on best practices in career planning for students with disabilities and fosters information sharing among the disability and career services offices at participating colleges and universities. Mr. Muir and a COSD staff member are also available to provide technical assistance by phone or by making presentations at college campuses. The COSD office is also a valued point of contact for corporations for information pertaining to the recruitment of college students and graduates with disabilities. Jody Hestand, Diversity Recruiter for Walmart, said that Alan Muir has a business background and understands corporations' needs. Katherine McCrary, Vice President of SunTrust Bank, said that COSD's efforts to foster collaboration between career service and disability service offices has helped to facilitate corporate recruitment of college students with disabilities. COSD's Career Gateway Web site and Full Access Student Summits provide universities, corporations, and college students with disabilities with opportunities for information sharing, and facilitate the employment of college students with disabilities.

Career Gateway is a Web site exchange designed for college students with disabilities to post their résumés and for employers to post job and internship openings. Accessed through the COSD Web site, it serves as a primary vehicle for employers to reach out to college students with disabilities. It also identifies employers that are specifically including students with disabilities in their recruitment efforts. Susann Heft-Sears, a Disability Specialist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, believes this latter point is important. She said that many students with disabilities are apprehensive about the reception they will receive when applying for a job, and indicated that students are "reassured that companies posting jobs on Career Gateway are interested in hiring people with disabilities."

Corporate diversity efforts increasingly include recruitment of people with disabilities. Katherine McCrary, Vice President of SunTrust Bank, said that COSD is a great resource for corporate university outreach coordinators in their disability recruitment efforts.

"At SunTrust, we post jobs on the Gateway," says Ms. McCrary, "and the Gateway also directs students to our Web site to learn more about our commitment to employing people with disabilities." Similarly, Jody Hestand said that Walmart "posts job openings and solicits qualified candidates throughout the year from the COSD Career Gateway system for both internships and full-time positions."

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Career Gateway provides the companies in the COSD network with access to qualified college graduates nationwide. The COSD Web site states, “For employers, COSD Career Gateway is a vital pipeline for their future workforce.”⁶⁰ A Full Access Summit brings together up to 60 college students or graduates with disabilities and representatives of national and regional employers for networking and information sharing. COSD emphasizes that the summits are not career fairs. Rather, the summits operate to make students more comfortable when talking with employers, and to help educate employers about college students and recent graduates with disabilities. They also encourage employers to include students with disabilities when developing corporate diversity recruitment plans.⁶¹ One recent summit was sponsored by corporations in the COSD network.

Lockheed Martin is a sponsor of the summits, according to Jerry Kirby of the company’s University Relations office. Mr. Kirby notes that many university students with disabilities feel intimidated at generic career fairs and believe that the summits provide a comfortable alternative for career exploration. Jody Hestand confirms that Walmart was also a recent sponsor of the summits. She sees them as valuable to the company in providing a “small venue” for dialogue with students with disabilities, networking, and identifying talent. She noted that students with disabilities often do not realize their value to meeting an employer’s bottom line. The summits help build student confidence in this regard.

Annual Conference

COSD holds a national conference each year. The conference brings together staff from university career and disability service offices, representatives from corporations, and students with disabilities. The conference is planned by a committee of representatives from the universities. Barbara Batson, Director of the Career Development Center at the University of Arkansas, is on the annual conference planning committee. She said that the conference has content and networking opportunities that support career planning for students with disabilities. The conference agenda includes presentations on disability issues and employer best practices as well as student-led discussion groups. Jerry Kirby said that the conference provides a valuable opportunity for discussion between corporations and career service offices regarding recruiting strategies for students with disabilities, and the COSD national conference “really helps us with recruiting.”

The COSD network continues to add both university and corporate participants. It is also developing a web portal offering state-of-the-art information and strategies to assist university career services professionals to effectively serve students and recent graduates with disabilities. COSD plans to expand the portal as part of the development of a COSD research institute that would include corresponding information and strategies for disability services staff and corporations.

Among the sponsors of COSD’s 2009 annual conference were: American Airlines, AT&T, Bank of America, Dow, Ernst & Young, Exxon Mobil, Lockheed Martin, Medtronic, Merck, Microsoft, Nordstrom, P&G, Shell Oil Co., SunTrust, and Walmart.⁶²

Outcomes from the Partnership

COSD is not yet able to produce data on the number of students and recent graduates who obtain employment through its activities. According to Alan Muir, the Career Gateway process is a resource for students and employers and there is no obligation on the part of either to report on contacts that occur based on the information posted. He noted, however, that the organization is considering evaluative research possibilities that would provide information on the number of students who are hired and the effectiveness of its programs in general.

COSD gathers feedback from university representatives confirming that COSD is a valued resource in its efforts to support students and recent graduates with career planning. Barbara Batson of the University of Arkansas recounts a student with a disability who was hired by NASA as an example of the benefits of COSD activities. She said that the University of Arkansas' participation in the COSD partnership is confirmation to its students that "the university is serious about supporting students with disabilities." Susann Heft-Sears of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign told of a student who was hired by Dow through COSD activities. She said that COSD assists the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in refining and improving its techniques in pursuit of its goal of "providing strategic career planning for all of its students."

Employer representatives also lauded COSD as a resource for recruiting qualified employees with disabilities. Jody Hestand said, "COSD is instrumental in increasing Walmart's knowledge, connections, and relationships with persons with disabilities, agencies, programs, and subject matter experts. This adds value to our recruiting and retention of diverse talent as our company continues to grow and serve our global customer base." Katherine McCrary said, "SunTrust wouldn't have connections on campus with regard to students with disabilities without COSD." She said she would recommend COSD to every employer. SunTrust has had nothing but positive results. Jerry Kirby agreed, saying that COSD "has been very good for Lockheed Martin."

Meriah Nichols, Transitions Program Coordinator at the University of California at Berkeley, said she "loves" COSD. "COSD is a convenient one-stop shop," Nichols said. "As program coordinators, we can connect with others that do what we do, we can connect with those that will hire our students, we can learn about new resources and best practices, and we can refer our students to the Career Gateway for jobs and internships!"

Conclusion

The success of COSD has important implications related to the *Ready and Able* findings as follows:

- **Employers respond to a business case for employing people with disabilities**

Corporate representatives see COSD as adding value to their recruitment and retention of diverse talent. Employers view COSD as a key to recruiting educated employees that bring talent to their companies and contribute to their company's bottom line.

- **Innovative collaborations with and between workforce-supplying organizations enable employer efforts to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities**

COSD serves as the hub and point of contact for collaborating universities and employers throughout the nation. Employers are enthusiastic about recruiting students with disabilities when provided with supports from the COSD partnership. Prior to COSD, employers did not know how to reach students with disabilities who frequently do not participate in mainstream career fairs. COSD is a single point of contact for employers for information about the recruitment of students with disabilities nationwide and its Career Gateway network gives employers easy access to the résumés of students with disabilities seeking employment. By coordinating career services offices from many colleges and universities, the COSD partnership facilitates employers meeting their workforce needs through the recruitment of college students with disabilities.

- **Collaborations ensure that workers are qualified and productive**

The COSD partnership fosters improved practices in preparing college students with disabilities to enter the workforce. As a partnership with 600 colleges and universities throughout the United States, COSD has increased the body of knowledge nationally on career planning for students with disabilities. Its dissemination of information on best practices and its efforts to integrate the work of university disability services and career offices has resulted in students with disabilities who have clear career goals and are better prepared to engage employers.

- **Successful collaborations nurture and reward continuous leadership**

Strong leadership and a coordinating entity result in successful partnerships. The COSD partnership has over 1,100 university and employer participants. An important element in its success is a single entity that coordinates activities and disseminates information to a broad network of participants. The organization also has benefited from strong leadership from Alan Muir who has passionate support from both the employer and university participants.

Fearless Partnering: Lime Connect

Introduction

Lime Connect, founded in 2006, is a nonprofit organization that works primarily to connect undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students with disabilities to major “best-in-class” companies with which it partners. Bank of America, Merrill Lynch, and PepsiCo are Lime’s founding partners; Target Corporation is a leading partner; and Goldman Sachs and Google are partners. Lime is also active in Canada and has additional corporate partners there. Lime has developed relationships on 28 university campuses in the United States and 7 in Canada to attract top talent for its partner companies, which want to hire the best person for the job, regardless of disability. All of Lime’s partner companies have made a clear commitment to disability as a dimension of diversity within their workforces and customer bases. Corporate partners are working with Lime to source talented students with disabilities for full-time, internship, and co-op opportunities. Some of the partners provide scholarships for outstanding students with disabilities; in the United States, there are Google Lime scholarships for students with disabilities. Lime’s mission is “to add demonstrated value to the global corporate community by unlocking economic potential through employment of people with disabilities.”⁶³ Lime hosts networking events designed to connect undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students with disabilities to best-in-class companies in the United States and Canada. These companies can be found on the Lime Connect Web site, <http://www.limeconnect.com>.

Susan Lang, President and CEO of Lime, said that talented students with any type of disability — visible or invisible — are encouraged to attend Lime’s networking events. Ms. Lang said, “We simply serve as a broker of the supply and demand of talented people with disabilities, and make that connection. Lime puts talent first and disability second. Partnering with Lime is about being smart — finding top talent that happens to have a disability — not about being nice.”⁶⁴

Background

Lime Connect was founded by Rich Donovan, a Columbia University MBA and former member of Merrill Lynch’s proprietary trading team, who has cerebral palsy. While at Merrill Lynch, he was instrumental in influencing the company to fully include disability in the company’s overall diversity strategy. He has been called a “reluctant activist”⁶⁵ in that he did not always think of himself as a role model and inspiration to other people with disabilities.

He experienced a change in attitude in 2004 after agreeing to participate in a forum on corporate outreach and people with disabilities sponsored by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and he subsequently founded Morris Street Partners, which became Lime Connect in 2006. In founding Lime, his philosophy was that people with disabilities are an untapped pool of valuable talent, and that people with disabilities should

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have the same opportunities as everyone else. He has told audiences that the current “brand” for people with disabilities is “rooted in medical terms and do-gooder expressions of pity, is so negative, it’s radioactive. Nobody wants to come near it.” His approach with Lime is to “kill the current brand with quality. Get the message out that people with disabilities can and will deliver.”⁶⁶ The name “Lime” is meant to communicate a fresh approach.

How Lime Works

Lime’s primary activity is diversity recruiting. Through Lime Connect networking events, partner companies meet qualified candidates with disabilities that they would probably not meet otherwise. While a student at York University in Toronto, Rich Donovan realized that a lot of talented people were intimidated by the corporate recruitment process because of their disabilities.⁶⁷ In fact, many students with disabilities would not attend the corporate recruitment sessions. After graduation, talented students would sometimes be underemployed, would join family businesses, or might continue their studies in academia. The Lime Connect approach encourages students to become acquainted with best-in-class companies and to see themselves as competitive with everyone else based on their talent.

“When I think of Lime, I think inclusive, inspirational, dynamic, and cutting-edge. You connect us to a huge population of students and professionals whom we would not otherwise have been able to meet.”

Corporate partner

“Lime has demonstrated an aggressive philosophy as it relates to identifying career opportunities for people with disabilities. Lime has also exhibited unusual leadership in developing relationships with top-notch employers who are breaking boundaries by attracting top employees from every walk of life to their companies.”

Campus partner

“I was extended an offer to be a summer analyst at Goldman and I’ve decided to take it! I’m really excited about this opportunity and I want to thank you for your unwavering support and guidance throughout the recruiting process.”

Senior, Georgetown University (subsequently received a full-time offer)

“Without Lime, I would definitely not be where I am today. Lime connected me to recruiters on a more personal level, an opportunity I would not have had anywhere else. My experience greatly enhanced my relationships with Lime’s partners and led to an amazing summer at Google. I was hesitant at first, but I’m so glad I checked out Lime when they came to campus!”

Junior, University of Pennsylvania

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Partner companies are interested in considering students with disabilities for all types of positions, including technical, accounting, finance, sales, marketing, public relations, retail store management, supply-chain management, logistics, account management, analytical jobs, and others.

Lime hosts events targeted to students with disabilities and recruits heavily through college disability service and career service offices as well as other targeted avenues. Consistent with the skills sought by partner companies, Lime recruits through computer science departments and MBA programs. The company Web site is upbeat and also serves as a recruitment vehicle. The Web site includes tips for success at Lime campus recruitment events and answers to frequently asked questions. One of the most common questions is from students with “invisible” disabilities asking whether they can attend an event if they have not previously disclosed their disability. In its 2009 recruitment season, Lime utilized students and alumni as Lime Campus Ambassadors who spread the word on campus about Lime’s work and served as mentors to other students with disabilities. One of these ambassadors is Daniel Lipsitz, a student at Columbia University, who said that the Lime Connect event “eliminates concerns about disability disclosures that so often arise when a person with a disability is being considered for a job. This allows our clients to go forth into the recruitment process without fear of being discriminated against.”⁶⁸

During the fall of 2009, Lime conducted nine networking events in the United States at which Bank of America/Merrill Lynch, PepsiCo, Target, Goldman Sachs, and Google met students from a number of universities. The schedule included stops in Austin, Washington, D.C., New York, Silicon Valley, Philadelphia, Chicago, Minnesota, and others. Company representatives who attended these events were positive about meeting qualified students with disabilities and about getting the message out that they *want* qualified people with disabilities in their workforces.

At the networking events, Susan Lang moderates a discussion with a panel comprised of representatives of partner companies. Company representatives describe their companies, including their major business lines, products or services, locations, types of jobs, and “day in the life” company culture. They discuss available internships as well as full-time opportunities. They talk about what they look for in successful candidates. Following this, students interact with company representatives — both recruiters and business people — in an informal setting. It did not resemble a “job fair.” There are no tables and no lines. Students are often able to speak with company representatives one-on-one. The networking events vary in size from 20 students for a single university new to the process to 100 students in New York and Chicago.

Branching Out

Lime is hoping to expand its network of partners to other industries, including pharmaceuticals, consulting firms, accounting firms, and other high-tech industries. Lime would like to be able to offer a more diverse set of opportunities for students with disabilities,

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which would have the potential to draw larger numbers of candidates. Lime has also been reaching out to additional colleges and universities for the networking events, which gives partner companies access to more qualified students with disabilities.

In response to requests from the partner companies, Lime will return to four cities to conduct workshops that will help students with disabilities be better prepared to negotiate the corporate recruitment process.

Lime is considering a hiring initiative for experienced candidates with disabilities in targeted geographic markets. Successfully piloted in New York in May 2008, this effort would be a way for partner companies to find top experienced talent. Lime is also working on a “Global Corporate Standard” that will serve as a guidebook for any company of any size, anywhere in the world, on how to source, recruit, develop, and market to individuals with disabilities. The guidebook is being developed by corporate partner experts in both disability employment and standard development.

Key Partnerships

Rich Donovan’s basic idea in founding Lime was that corporate America should recruit and give qualified people with disabilities the same type of opportunities that Merrill Lynch already had in place for other underrepresented populations. Lime’s first corporate champion was Tom Wilson, head of talent sourcing and recruiting for Merrill Lynch, who fully supported the premise behind Lime from the start. Merrill Lynch was Lime Connect’s first partner. PepsiCo was next. Ron Parker, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at PepsiCo, said it isn’t just a good will gesture; rather, “there’s a business case for hiring people with disabilities. This is a market we need to, and want to, tap into as much as we can.”⁶⁹

Introductions were made to other companies through business-to-business networking. Someone from PepsiCo made the connection to someone at Target, one of PepsiCo’s major partners. Networking resulted in interest from Google. Bank of America became involved with Lime when Merrill Lynch became part of the company. Some people who previously worked at Merrill Lynch now work for other companies and have spread the word about Lime to their new employers. Susan Lang said that as Lime gains in experience and contacts, the “sales cycle” is getting shorter.

Lime’s corporate partners contribute a flat dollar amount to the organization, depending on the level of partnership. The founding partners, Bank of America/Merrill Lynch and PepsiCo, contribute the largest amount, followed by Target. All three serve on Lime Connect’s Board of Directors. Goldman Sachs and Google are partners and also contribute a given amount. Other organizations, such as the Kessler Foundation, have supported Lime Connect, and Lime continues to seek foundation funding.

Tom Wilson serves as Chair of Lime’s Board. The staff is small, and consists of Susan Lang, President and CEO; Emily DePury, Director of Campus and Recruiter Relations; and Pat Holt, Executive Vice President.

Conclusion

All of Lime's partner companies are committed to disability as diversity in their workforces. The main question is how best to accomplish this. They find value in their relationship with Lime Connect such that they are excited about attending networking events with students recruited by Lime and contribute financial support to the organization. Lime is effective and targeted in its recruitment and, according to the companies that participate in networking events, is able to deliver qualified candidates for its partner companies to consider. In its relatively short history, Lime Connect has been successful in partnering with several major corporations to make special efforts to recruit college students with disabilities. Some of these students have been successful in obtaining internships and full-time positions with these companies. Most begin as interns. One partner company described the interns as the pipeline to full-time employment after graduation. The companies are looking for qualified interns and appear to be more than willing to employ students with disabilities.

Lime Connect serves as a viable resource for corporations looking to recruit college graduates with disabilities. Its success has important implications related to the *Ready and Able* findings as follows:

- **Employers respond to a business case for employing people with disabilities**

Employers see Lime Connect as a key to recruiting educated employees that bring talent to their companies and contribute to their companies' bottom line. Business-to-business networking reinforces the case for students, graduates, and experienced workers with disabilities as "a secret weapon" in the war for talent.

- **Innovative collaborations with and between workforce-supplying organizations enable employer efforts to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities**

Lime Connect plays an innovative intermediary role between its corporate supporters and a network of colleges and universities. Lime Connect's efforts facilitate its corporate supporters to identify and hire qualified college graduates with disabilities.

- **Collaborations ensure that workers are qualified and productive**

Lime Connect is trusted by employers and its students perform well in their corporate settings. Lime Connect's leadership, marketing, and awareness all communicate that they "get it." For Lime Connect, hiring people with disabilities is all about being smart, not about being nice.

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■ **Successful collaborations nurture and reward continuous leadership**

Lime Connect is highly respected by its corporate partners for its fearless mission to “rebrand” people with disabilities as an untapped source of talent and strategic advantage. The crisis in the financial system has had an impact on some of Lime’s major clients. Merrill Lynch suspended hiring for a period of time, and Goldman Sachs slowed its hiring. As of the writing of this report, all partner companies are hiring, and students are getting jobs through connections made by Lime. Leaders of early partner companies, such as Merrill Lynch, have drawn in additional partner companies, all of which are looking to identify the best talent.

Lime’s more ambitious objective is “to attain employment parity as measured by the workforce composition of Standard and Poor’s 500 firms reflecting 3% employees with disabilities by the year 2016.”⁷⁰ Lime’s activities are directed toward this goal, but measurement is a challenge. Time, effort, the state of the economy, and the availability of data to measure accomplishment will determine whether it can be accomplished.