



New Study by Center for Social Development & Education Shows Consumers Support Businesses that Hire Employees with Disabilities

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American consumers are responding positively to companies they consider socially responsible, and increasingly count those that hire disabled workers among that group, according to a national public survey conducted by UMass Boston's Center for Social Development & Education in collaboration with the America's Strength Foundation and published in the January issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (Vol. 24, Issue 1, IOS Press). It is one of the first studies to examine the attitudes of consumers toward companies that hire people with disabilities.

Titled, "A national survey of consumer attitudes toward companies that hire people with disabilities," the study reports overwhelmingly positive attitudes among consumers toward socially responsible companies, and in particular toward those that hire individuals with disabilities. Specifically, 92 percent of consumers surveyed felt more favorable toward companies that hire individuals with disabilities and 87 percent said they would prefer to give their business to such companies. Among those surveyed, hiring people with disabilities ranked third behind offering health insurance to all employees and protecting the environment as an indicator of a company's commitment to social justice.

"The uniqueness of this research is its focus on the consumer," said Dr. Gary Siperstein, director of the Center for Social Development & Education and lead author of the study. "In business, consumer interests drive corporate decision making. With this study, we've been able to demonstrate that the majority of consumers favor companies who hire individuals with disabilities. Companies who respond to these findings will not only help individuals with disabilities lead more fulfilling and productive lives through employment, they will also improve the company's brand image."

Participants in the study were 803 adults randomly selected across the continental U.S. Most respondents drew upon personal experience in their answers, as 75 percent reported that they had either worked directly with someone with a disability and/or received services as a customer by a person with a disability. Ninety-one percent of those with a disabled coworker said that the job performance of his/her coworker was "very good" or "good." Ninety-eight percent of those who had been served by a disabled worker were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the services they received.

"Employers across the U.S. are finding that there are many business benefits associated with the employment of people with disabilities and the marketing of products and services to customers with disabilities," says Katherine McCary, president of U.S. Business Leadership Network. "People with disabilities have much to contribute, and businesses are taking notice by proactively and successfully including disability as a diversity strategy."

“Hiring individuals with disabilities is, in fact, good for business,” says CT Hill, chairman, president & CEO of SunTrust Banks Mid-Atlantic, whose company is a member of the U.S. Business Leadership Network. “The return on investment to SunTrust can be measured in several ways. One, it helps our diversity initiatives, building a strong workforce; two, it helps us to develop products and services, expanding our customer base; and three, it enables us to reach out to our entire community. It’s good for our shareholders and it’s good for business.”

The study was conducted in collaboration with America’s Strength Foundation and The Gallup Organization with assistance from the Center for Survey Research.

About the Center for Social Development & Education (CSDE)

Founded in 1976, the Center for Social Development & Education is a multidisciplinary, multi-service institute seeking to improve the quality of life of children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities. The Center provides the educational community with the support it needs to meet the increasing challenges of providing for children and adolescents who are at risk, both academically and socially. The rigorous research conducted by CSDE informs practice, guides the design and development of professional development activities, and is used in the formulation and evaluation of policies at the state and national levels.

For thirty years, the Center for Social Development & Education has been a leader in the study of attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Members of the CSDE staff have conducted studies on the attitudes of youth and adults across the U.S. and internationally. Their findings have been featured in numerous media outlets, including NPR, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

About the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*

The *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* provides a forum for discussion and dissemination of information about the major areas that constitute vocational rehabilitation. Periodically, issues are directed either to specific themes such as long-term care or different disability groups such as those with psychiatric impairment. The *Journal's* primary aim is to publish rehabilitation articles that have immediate application for helping rehabilitation counselors, psychologists and other professionals in providing direct services to people with disabilities.

The *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* is associated with APSE, The Network on Employment (www.apse.org) and published by IOS Press (www.iospress.com).

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