

Promising Practice: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

1. Please tell us about the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) initiative to employ people with disabilities within your company.

In 2004 BCBSMA started an annual practice of organizing a Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) to further support our commitment to creating a workplace for people with all abilities. Each year we form a cross-functional committee of associates representing internal business areas across the company. Our DMD Committee is responsible for developing a meaningful, motivational and activity packed day for job ready candidates.

We consistently partnered with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and Resource Partnership to attract job ready applicants to attend a day session which provided an overview of our company and our commitment to creating a diverse workplace, a panel discussion which included BCBSMA associates with disabilities, Discovery Center and informational interviewing with on-site recruiters. Additionally we have partnered with Alan Muir, Executive Director of Career Opportunities for Student with Disabilities and coordinator of Disability Services at the University of Tennessee, who has attended several DMDs as our key note speaker. Alan discussed topics such as self advocacy, networking, motivational tips, navigating the job market and disclosure.

The committee was responsible for organizing, planning and preparing prior to the event. We partnered with the outside agencies to review resumes in advance and compare them to open positions in order to start the recruitment process and engage our candidates early on. During our last DMD in July 2008, we collected all resumes and identified open position in advance so that candidates could meet with a recruiter the day of the event to discuss the position, roles and responsibilities and skill sets and qualifications.

We have experienced success in hiring one to two candidates from several DMD sessions. Additionally candidates have consistently shared feedback declaring the day to be motivational and energizing. Often times, candidates were able to develop a rapport with a leader which led to mentoring relationships.

2. What motivated BCBSMA to implement this practice?

To attract qualified employees, BCBSMA reached out to people with disabilities in our community and hosted our first DMD on Wednesday, November 10, 2004. We scheduled a full day of activities, including: a BCBSMA overview/history, a mentoring overview, a panel discussion of associates who have disabilities, our new orientation and recruitment film (at the time) "Blue Beginnings," an Outdoor Exploration presentation, a Member Service tour, and an exploration of career opportunities at BCBSMA.

Based on the positive feedback from attendees, the following quotes were shared, "The day was a great success. We were able to showcase BCBSMA as an employer of choice that offers a comfortable and successful workplace for people with disabilities." "The company is committed to a diverse workforce, one that is representative of the diversity in our communities." "We plan to work with our HR Partners again and have more events like this in the future to attract new and talented associates who can help our company."

3. What has the response been from BCBSMA employees, customers and managers?

Leaders and associates have praised the company's role in supporting DMD year after year. The featured presentations, panel discussions, and workshops are all designed to help job seekers of all abilities learn about possible careers at BCBSMA and provide hiring managers the opportunity to recruit from a diverse candidate pool.

4. Have these practices had an impact on the success of BCBSMA?

BCBSMA has experienced a positive impact as this practice has allowed us to attract and hire highly qualified individuals of all abilities for specific jobs. Additionally we formed collaborative partnerships with rehabilitation and referral agencies which provide us with job ready applicants who are motivated and eager to join the workforce.

5. What recommendations would you have for other employers in terms of recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities or in creating a more inclusive work place?

Reach within your organization and ask them what type of recruitment strategies they would want to have in place. It is also beneficial to partner with employers, rehabilitation and referral agencies and people with disabilities to collaborate on finding job placement for qualified individuals.

6. Please feel free to add anything we may have missed in respect to BCBSMA and employing people with disabilities.

As a not-for-profit, leading company in our market, we have two clear purposes. First and foremost, we are driven by our desire to run a successful health care business, bringing quality health care and superior service to our members. Second, at our core, is an ongoing commitment to the communities we serve. Linked to these dual purposes is our belief in the importance of diversity, as key to achieving our business goals and in alignment with our corporate values. When we speak of diversity at BCBSMA, we include diversity of thought, opinion, religion, background, experience and sexual orientation, as well as the physical aspects of race, gender, age, and disability.

Recognizing that our diversity efforts are ongoing and long-term our diversity strategy will be integrated into our business strategy aimed at improving the company's overall performance over time. We will reach out to a diverse community of members, providers, accounts, and brokers; recruit, train and develop a workforce of diverse associates; partner with diverse suppliers and vendors; and support the many communities, in which we live and work.

For more information on this promising practice, contact Patty Kaplinger, Senior Manger of Service Business Partners at BCBSMA at Patty.Kaplinger@bcbsma.com or (617) 246-8579.