



Inclusive Hiring

Michael's Story and Pearls of Wisdom

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INTERACTIVE NETWORK

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Intro...

When I was 23 years old, my brother who was 26 at the time, already a veteran, had a tragic accident that left him with a permanent brain injury. He had fallen 80 feet out of a tree. He overcame being in a coma, learning how to read, write, walk and talk all over again. Being involved, personally, and observing my brother, Michael, conquer the unique and insurmountable struggles involved in his recovery taught me many life lessons. As I watched him struggle through the years, trying to become employed and stay employed, it impacted me deeply.

It provided me with a fuel that lit my fire to help others. The power of exemplifying respect and sincere listening are two required skills. Michael is an amazing person and a great inspiration to all those who have the honor of interacting with him. My desire, is to help employers develop a deeper passion for helping those with a disability find gainful employment based on their skills, not their disability. Taking every candidate into equal consideration based on their skills and ability to complete the requirements for each position is something I strive to inject into every hiring team I connect with. Statistics show that employees with a disability are extremely committed, punctual and they rarely call in sick! This is an authentic description of Michael's work ethic, personal ethical compass and desire to do well on his job.



I invested a lot of time thinking, what is the best way to extract information to share with everyone on inclusive hiring practices in order *to make an impact?* Interviewing others came to mind. That spurred the idea of asking 7 experienced and respected professionals in Talent Acquisition (TA) and Human Resources (HR) what their practices are. Here are their "Pearls of Wisdom".



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Sourcing candidates with a disability:

What would you consider the most important factors of the sourcing process for niche candidates?

Sourcing niche candidates can prove to be a challenging but rewarding experience. My unique challenge, or dilemma, is the ability to source, recruit and determine if my potential candidate fits into my required niche status. Our focus is that all candidates are treated equally and respectfully. As recruiters, when offering hiring priority to niche candidates we have limited resources. A few main priorities are the opportunity to develop a relationship with our candidate, determine their interest level in our job opportunity, determine if they are qualified and if they fit into our niche status requirement. This may require some probing questions on our part such as asking the potential candidate if they will require reasonable accommodations in-order to be able to perform their job successfully. I find in most cases candidates are a bit protective over this information out of fear they won't move forward with an interview or they will experience some form of discrimination. I found that sharing our mission and vision with candidates truly helps them have the confidence and build trust with us here at Pearl. Sharing that Pearl Interactive Network specializes in recruiting veterans and individuals with disabilities tends to put the candidates at ease. It enhances trust, respect and a sense of equality. This genuine conversation seems to put my potential candidates at ease and more times than not a deeper relationship is built with the candidates. Which is the main point. Build relationships through trust, respect and equality with all candidates.

Justine Fowler, Recruitment and HR Specialist

The application experience for candidates with a disability:

What are the issues to be considered during the application process? What are some pointers you can offer?

The online job application experience for a niche candidate may be frustrating and difficult, particularly for those using assistive technology (a screen reader). Although the situation is improving due to the ADA refresh last year, many systems were not originally designed with niche candidates in mind and are therefore difficult to navigate using a keyboard. A brief **Overview of Survey Statistics** from a 2015 PEAT (Partners in Accessible Technology) webinar found the following: 46% of candidates rated their last online application experience as difficult to impossible. Of the 46%, 9% were unable to complete the job application. And 24% required assistance in completing the application. As you see from the statistics, the number of niche candidates as a result may be significantly lower than those not facing these challenges. So how do you ensure your information will be represented in the pool of candidates? A few suggestions when applying using assistive technology: If using JAWS, at the top of the page, use insert+f1 to get an overview summary of what is on the page, links, form fields, check boxes, etc. This will help give you an idea of the types of items you will be dealing with. Have your resume and cover letter saved in an easily accessible folder in .docx or .pdf and ready to upload as some systems may time out. The same for any important information you may need such as work history, dates, etc., so you can easily copy and paste into the appropriate fields. In the event you are unable to complete the online application, please do contact a recruiter or human resources representative and identify your issue. A company who truly values diversity will be willing to assist you in the process.

Lillian Schwinn, Talent Acquisition Specialist



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Interview experience for candidates with a disability:

What do you feel the most important areas are in the interview experience for a niche candidate? Both phone and onsite from their perspective? Accommodations? How they are treated?

I feel the most important areas in the interview experience for a niche candidate, would be similar if not the same for any candidate. And that's to first and foremost properly convey and/or demonstrate their ability to perform the requirements of the position while determining if the company they're interviewing with is the best match for their cultural and career desires. When preparing to schedule or interview an applicant (on-site or virtually) who has identified as having a physical disability, it is important and thoughtful to ask if he or she would require any specific accommodation to complete the interview and proceed accordingly. If the challenge is not of an obvious physical nature, I'd take that into consideration to adapt my interviewing techniques to meet their individual need if I find that necessary. But my intention is to always ensure my interviewees are in a comfortable setting where they can express and be themselves. My focus is on the person I'm interviewing, not the disability and I think that's the approach that any individual would prefer from a potential employer.

LaTonya Simmons, Talent Acquisition Consultant





People aren't just our passion, it's what makes us a top-performing program management and staffing solutions company.

Decision experience for a candidate with a disability:

During the decision-making process what are some of the important factors to keep in mind from the candidate perspective, from the TA perspective, and how the interviewers would handle the decision-making process?

As a candidate making an important decision around employment some consideration factors can include asking questions such as:

- Does this opportunity meet the requirements of what is important to me as a next step in my career or new job?
- What are those requirements? Pay? Culture? Type of work? Benefits? Career progression?
- Do I fit the culture of this organization?

From the TA perspective, and how the interviewers would handle the decision-making process I would suggest considering the following:

- Is this person skilled for the role?
- Does this person fit our culture?
- Are we prepared to onboard and train this new hire?
- Have any reasonable accommodations been shared with us from the candidate/employee and have we accommodated?

Tarah Ziogas, VP, Human Resources



Communication and closing the loop with a candidate with a disability:

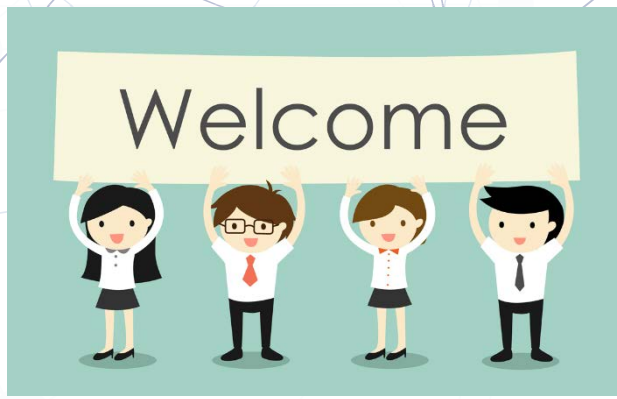
How would you communicate the decision? How would you communicate during the decision process? In closing the loop, whether the candidate was hired or not, how would you communicate with them? What factors within "communication" are important?

For all candidates in the Pearl hiring experience, regular communication is key in keeping a candidate apprised of their status in the process. It is what should be common courtesy, and it is what sets Pearl apart from a lot of other companies. I think continuity of care is another great way to describe the flow of the process. If a recruiter lets me know the preferred method of communication for a candidate (for any reason), then I use that method for keeping the candidate informed of our hiring decisions. I feel it is important to let a candidate know where they stand, regardless of the hiring decision. And, if there is feedback on what that person can do to improve their skills for the future, I have found that is helpful to the candidate and often appreciated.

Julie Ricks, Human Resource Manager

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The onboarding experience for a candidate with a disability:

How would you handle the onboarding process with a niche candidate? (Person with a disability). Would you have additional considerations? If so, what would they be and how would you handle / communicate them?

During the onboarding process, Human Resources communicates with candidates to ensure that all candidates have the ability to successfully onboard. Pearl Interactive Network, Inc. provides reasonable accommodations for candidates that have known physical or mental limitations. For example, for candidates who have visual limitations, we offer accessible onboarding documents that provide candidates technical assistance in reading orientation documents. For candidates needing abbreviated sessions due to mental limitations, we modify the orientation to meet the needs of their time restraints. For candidates with hearing impairments, we provide a transcript of the orientation. Overall, we take into consideration that all candidates and new employees are treated with respect. Our goal is to have every new hire feel welcome, accommodated and invited on to the team.

Kenya Frazier, Human Resource Generalist



Ongoing support and next steps of experience working with candidates with a disability:

From an HR perspective AND from the candidates' perspective how would you insure their first week, first month, first six months went smoothly? What kind of follow-up and/or communication would need to take place?



Working for a company whose mission is as altruistic as Pearl's is an eye-opening and inspiring experience. Human resources labor has become quite standardized over the years, yet the diverse aspects of the employees Pearl aspires to hire are anything but "standard". For Pearl, these niche employees we refer to are generally veterans and individuals with disabilities.

When working in an HR capacity with individuals who are disabled or veterans, it is important to be sensitive to their diversity while also treating them as you would any other employee. The fine line can be difficult to establish from time to time; however, it helps to keep in mind that these employees are here because they want to work, they just need a little help to be able to meet all the rigors of the job. And that is where HR can help.

On the first day of work, we ensure all trainees are notified of how to reach out to HR. We have trained all supervisors and training staff to look out for specific actions and/or comments that may indicate a need for an accommodation. Around the beginning of the second week of training, HR goes back into the training room to discuss important benefit information and do a check-up to see how the trainees are faring. Within the first and second weeks, if a trainee expresses a need for a medical accommodation, we give them the paperwork necessary to determine if they are eligible for an accommodation per the Americans with Disabilities Act. During this interactive process, HR determines what their condition is, how it affects work, and how we can reasonably accommodate this person to relieve them of distress when on the job.

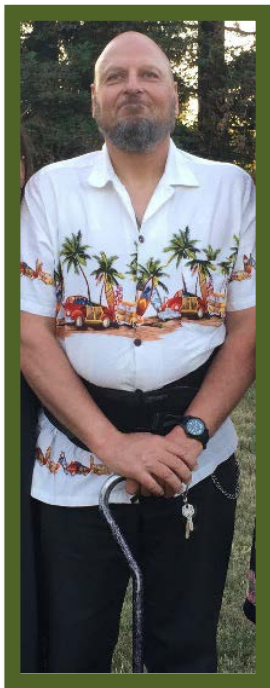
Following training, the employee is with their supervisor and is given all the resources to assist them in adequately performing the functions of their job. Our company's culture promotes effective communication amongst employees. This philosophy is instilled in the employees by their supervisor – so if a niche employee is having issues, they know to contact their supervisor or HR for assistance. Our supervisors also have mandatory one-on-ones with their employees and are required to host team meetings periodically. If a niche employee has any concerns, that would be the ideal time for them to discuss them with the supervisor.

Jared Mink, Human Resource Generalist



Meet Michael!

- ✓ *Humble, loving person with high ethics and compassion for others*
- ✓ *Excellent father to his son, Timothy (age 15)*
- ✓ *10 Certifications in Welding*
- ✓ *Veteran of the U.S. Army Reserves*
- ✓ *Hard worker*
- ✓ *Speaks to high school students about brain injuries*



Closing:

What type of TA / HR team would you want to be a part of?!

In closing, there is an overall theme to treat every individual with respect and equality. To build trust and relationships equally with all candidates and employees. This is exactly what Michael needed. It was extremely difficult to find. Niche hiring and helping companies meet OFCCP requirements does not have to be a daunting experience. In fact, those of us in HR and Talent Acquisition that truly have a passion for what we do find it to be exhilarating and we embrace the challenges. The word that comes to mind is dignity. We (all of us within the HR / TA area) have the power to help a person rise-up or fall. Our industry, over the past 5 years, has truly adopted a sense of sharing, caring and helping one another grow. My hope for all is that we don't look at our hiring practice as though we "have to meet our requirements" for OFCCP. My hope is that we adopt a sincere practice of treating EVERY candidate with dignity, fairness, respect and equal opportunity. Michael has been blessed with a wonderful son, Timothy and an employer who exemplifies their mission of employing those with a disability. What type of HR/TA team would you rather be a part of?



Blog hosted by:
Michelle Vance, Talent Acquisition Consultant
Pearl Interactive Network, Inc.

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To all the contributors: *Justine Fowler, Lillian Schwinn, LaTonya Simmons, Tarah Ziogas, Julie Ricks, Kenya Frazier and Jared Mink*
~Thank You~

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