What Employers Should Know
About Learning Disabilities

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability (LD) is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to process information. Every person with a learning disability is unique and has a different combination and degree of difficulties. These difficulties are manifested in the acquisition and use of one or more of the following areas of processing information: listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities.

Learning disabilities occur irrespective of race, culture or class.

People with LD possess average or above average intelligence levels, and often have varying areas of ability, or "a weakness within a sea of strengths." They tend to be creative, persistent, loyal, and good problem-solvers, often achieving a high degree of success in the workplace when the disability is accommodated and their strengths are utilized to the fullest.

Successful people who have LD include William "Bill" Hewlett (Hewlett-Packard), Charles Schwab (Charles Schwab Foundation), Sir Richard Branson (Virgin enterprises), Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA), Paul Orfalea, (Kinko's), John T. Chambers (Cisco Systems), Ted Turner (TBS), and Bill Gates (Microsoft).

What should employers know about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

The ADA is a federal civil rights law that was passed in 1990. Its purpose is to protect people with disabilities from discrimination in employment and other areas of life. Title I of the ADA prohibits discrimination in employment and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. This includes employers with 15 or more employees, employment agencies, labor organizations, and joint labor-management committees. For more information about the ADA, see the *ADA Handbook* at http://askjan.org/media/adahandbook/handbook.html. For a copy of Title I of the ADA, see http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/ada.html.

What are "reasonable accommodations" and how much do they cost?

In relation to the ADA, a reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodations also include adjustments to ensure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.

Data collected by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) suggest that more than half of all accommodations cost nothing. Furthermore, JAN's statistics show that most employers report financial benefits from providing accommodations due to reduced costs in terms of insurance and training new employees and increased worker productivity.

Tax Incentives

Tax incentives are available to help employers implement workplace accommodations. Additional funding is available through several organizations. Read Jan's publication on tax incentives at http://askjan.org/media/tax.html and visit its funding inks at http://askjan.org/links/Funding/GeneralInfo.html for additional information.

What are typical workplace accommodations for people with learning disabilities?

Employees with learning disabilities may experience various types of limitations, just as they also have various areas of strengths. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with learning disabilities need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. Furthermore, there are many free or inexpensive assistive technologies available to provide effective accommodations for many employees with LD. For more on assistive technology ideas, go to http://ldaamerica.org/pdf/publications/LDA-Flier_Assistive-Technologies.pdf

The following is only a sample of the accommodation possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

Sample LD Accommodations for the Workplace

- Use screen-reading software, which highlights and reads aloud the information on a computer screen.
- Allow employees to give verbal, rather than written, responses or provide speech-to-text software.
- Allow employees to organize their workspace as best fits their strengths and ideas for organization.
- Color-code materials, folders, labels, etc.
- Promote the use of calendars and schedulers that provide digital reminders of meetings, deadlines, upcoming tasks, etc.
- Provide checklists for tasks.
- Use flowcharts to describe steps of complicated processes.
- Allow the use of a voice-activated recorder to record verbal instructions.
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks with specific goals.
- Teach the employee to "learn the ropes" by initially providing a job mentor.
- Allow the use of a calculator or a talking calculator if needed.
- Provide additional training time on new tasks or processes.

Revised June 2013