

BEST BUDDIES



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The mission of Best Buddies is to establish a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



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Ready to Work

by TAMMY MOLOY
Best Buddies Kentucky

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Businesses everywhere are struggling and only the strong will survive. This "survival of the fittest" mentality is wreaking havoc on employee morale, making company loyalty a thing of the past, hampering quality, and stopping innovation in its tracks.

Ironically, these qualities are just what it takes to edge out the competition in a down economy. Therefore, the company who manages to resurrect these traits of success will rise from the ashes when this economic turmoil is over.

Good advice. But how exactly can this resurrection take place? How do you build this workforce of loyal, dedicated, happy, innovative people? Where are these perfect employees in these stressful times?

They are actually right under your nose. And these potential employees are available. As a matter of fact, there is an 80% unemployment rate for this demographic segment I will reveal to you, and this astronomical unemployment rate is due less to the individual's ability and desire to work and more to the lack of opportunity they are offered.

This workforce is the most overlooked segment of the American population, and it is time to take a look. It is time your business reaped the benefits of employee loyalty as never seen before; of increased employee retention rates and decreased absenteeism; and of improved worker morale and productivity. As a bonus, this population has a well-deserved reputation for innovation and by hiring these people, your company will most likely enjoy a "good corporate citizen" label in the press.

So who makes up this tremendous workforce? People with disabilities.

According to Nadine Vogel in her book, "Dive In," people with disabilities make up



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Best Buddies Challenge.

the largest minority in the world. This group includes people with blindness, deafness, Down syndrome, autism, learning disorders, and other disabilities. Vogel states that there are more Americans with disabilities than there are Canadians, with or without disabilities.

If you aren't sold yet, here are some facts about employing people with disabilities:

- The IRS offers tax credits and deductions for businesses that employ people with disabilities.
- Survey results show that 92% of US consumers regard businesses that hire people with disabilities more favorably than businesses that do not.
- The US Census reports that people with disabilities and their associates represent \$1 trillion in discretionary spending, and statistics show that consumers like to buy from someone like themselves.
- It is a study-confirmed fact that absentee rates are lower for people with disabilities, and people with disabilities are more likely to stay with an employer than their non-disabled peers.*

How do I get started? How do I find people with disabilities to hire? Funny you should ask.

Best Buddies International (BBI) offers a Jobs Program. BBI integrates people with IDD into the workforce via supported employment. The program helps individuals with IDD attain and maintain jobs of their own choosing by providing ongoing support and training while Best Buddies' staff works directly with the employer to insure success. The program's goal is two-fold: to create a community in which the corporate environment offers people with IDD opportunities for employment and to provide training to individuals with IDD once they secure a job.

Best Buddies Kentucky would like to offer the Jobs program as well, but will need your help. Best Buddies believes in a "funding first, expansion second" philosophy as a fiscally responsible 501(c)(3) organization. Locally we must raise the funding for the Jobs program before we are able to offer it in Kentucky.

To have a business partner like Best Buddies enables companies to try something new with experts who have a vested interest in making sure their new employees succeed. Best Buddies can also help current employees with disability awareness training to insure peer understanding as companies diversify their workforce.

Please contact Tammy Moloy if your company may be interested in partnering with Best Buddies Kentucky to bring the Jobs Program to Kentucky. But whether you call Best Buddies and partner with them or not, adding people with disabilities to your workforce is a win for everyone. You increase your company's bottom line, and you enrich the lives of thousands of individuals who strongly desire to be a part of the community in which they live.

Remember, only the strong survive, and people with disabilities are strong and ready to work.

*Nadine Vogel, Dive In. New York: Paramount Market Publishing, Inc., 2009, 2.

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