

A niche in hiring worth pursuing

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After years of struggling, Vancouver businesses are hiring again. Companies that survived the recession have become leaner and are looking to meet multiple goals when they post a job or seek a staffing solution. I want to share a growing trend among Vancouver businesses, where they are taking new approaches to maximize labor hours, streamline workflow, energize team morale and achieve company goals by hiring a person with a disability.

Ryonet, 2012 VBJ Business Growth Award winner and national screen printing supplier, found a creative solution as it was pulling out of recession blues by hiring through a nonprofit that helps businesses recruit, train and retain employees with disabilities.

When Ryonet initially learned of supported employment, the company was skeptical because it was such a new concept for them. However, after they met with the nonprofit, they learned how to create customized job descriptions that combine several tasks to maximize work flow. The idea prompted the company to look at their operations in a new framework. They saw tasks that could be consolidated to increase productivity in their warehouse operations and weekly screen printing classes.

"We realized at that point we had need for less than 10 hours of this type of work per week, but the agency came back with a pre-screened applicant with the abilities and hourly flexibility to meet our needs," said Lori Nelson of Ryonet. "This partnership saved us money and time recruiting and screening, and created a solution that improved our operations. Additionally, we had help training the new employee and continue to receive ongoing support to make sure he is successful and has opportunities for growth."

There are several other local examples of businesses that have been able to fill niche staffing needs and realize other benefits by integrating their workforce. From PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center to Pioneer Feed in Ridgefield, businesses in all industries have partnered with specialized employment agencies to recruit, train and retain employees with disabilities.

According to a national survey conducted by the University of Massachusetts and the America's Strength Foundation, 92 percent of the American public view companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not. With 20 percent of the population experiencing a disability, businesses are also recognizing people with disabilities and their families as a consumer base, working to create workplaces that reflect the community where they market their products and services.

For Ryonet, hiring someone with a disability not only reflected the company's values, but it also made business sense. And as business increases, Ryonet is looking to recruit another employee with a disability.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and I encourage you to explore how supported employment could benefit your company. Rethink how you approach your next hire and you may discover a solution that helps you achieve multiple company goals.

For more information about Trillium Employment Services, contact Wendy Taliaferro at wendy@trillium.org, or head to our website at www.trillium.org.