

Disabled vs. Uniquely Abled? A Huge Opportunity for A&D Companies

"The three people provided to Hawker Pacific Aerospace by the Exceptional Children's Foundation (ECF) have been doing a great job assisting the Quality Department with the reduction of the maintenance records scanning backlog. They quickly review each document for errors and sort the documents into ready-to-scan packages. Through the efforts of the ECF team, Hawker is well on its way to becoming a greener, more efficient operation."

- Jim Meszaros, Quality Manager, Hawker Pacific Aerospace

How did these people end up at Hawker? What are the unique benefits they brought to Hawker, taxpayers and themselves?

The human body is incredible. Often, when one capability is impaired, other capabilities improve. For example, individuals who have lost the ability to hear often have increased visual and tactile acuity.

Because the words we use shape how and what we see, when looking through the lens of the word "disabled," we tend to see what's missing or what's wrong. We miss seeing how people are "uniquely abled", we miss seeing their unique capabilities.

Many individuals on the autism spectrum have exceptional talents in digital media, e.g., post processing, creating titling, animation, and website implementation. Errors that most of us would miss, such as, a slightly wrong font or spacing, etc., are glaringly obvious to many of these individuals.

In 2013, the Aerospace & Defense Forum in collaboration with the Exceptional Children's Foundation (ECF) (don't let the name throw you, they provide services for children and adults – the entire continuum of life), began to explore what possibilities would appear if ECF adult clients were viewed through the lens of "uniquely-abled." What were they particularly good at? How might these talents be useful to A&D companies?

The answer to the first question was that many were good at repetitive work with clear instructions, work which could not be done solely by a machine (human intervention is required), where they are mostly working as an individual.

When we asked A&D companies whether such talents would be useful, we received a resounding "Yes." For example, Hawker generates about 5 feet of paper for every landing gear they refurbish. To date, this paper has been stored in over 1,000 file cabinets. Hawker received permission from the FAA to scan all these paper files into the cloud to reduce storage costs and improve access. This work was ideal for ECF adult clients.

Everyone benefited by this Hawker-ECF partnership. Direct benefits to Hawker include filling a hard-to-fill job (most of us would go crazy feeding paper into a scanner all day), having necessary tasks done at a very reasonable cost and with high quality, and receiving tax-benefits. In addition Hawker gets

recognition for hiring adults with developmental disabilities who have unique abilities, and is receives the services of a full-time on-site job coach until the new employees are fully incorporated into the company. The community benefits because six individuals (Hawker hired three more after the first three worked out so well) who may have received welfare and non-profit support are now taxpayers. And those six people now have the pride, motivation, and full benefits of working for a respected aerospace firm.

Other A&D companies have similar tasks that need to be performed, often associated with paperwork and repetitive testing, that could be accomplished by the uniquely-abled, thus freeing up other employees to do the work in which they specialize.

See the opportunity? Would you like your company to become involved and reap the benefits? What jobs at your company could be done by employees with these unique abilities (often repetitious with a clear objectives, working alone) currently being done by higher-skilled (and higher-paid) employees, e.g., scanning QC paperwork, or highly repetitious tasks for which you can't hire anyone?

If this is something that could be of benefit to your company, contact Ivan Rosenberg (irosenberg@AerospaceDefenseForum.org or 818-505-9915) and he will put you in touch with the right people (the equivalent of ECF) in your area.

Disabled? I don't think so. Really, uniquely-abled. We just need to give them the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do to benefit our industry.