

## People with disabilities an untapped employment pool

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One challenge for small business is finding, hiring and retaining energetic, dedicated and skilled workers.

As the economy of B.C. and Vancouver Island continues to boom, quality employees are becoming a more elusive commodity. However, there is a group of potential employees that the vast majority of businesses have yet to look at - people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are willing and able to work and now, according to a B.C. Chamber of Commerce survey, businesses across the province are ready to hire people with disabilities.

The survey, conducted from Oct. 18-27, found that 69 per cent of respondents said they would consider hiring a person with a disability, while 79 per cent of the survey respondents agreed with the statement: "Persons with a disability represent a qualified, but largely untapped pool of potential job applicants."

"Businesses across every sector and region of the province are facing a critical shortage of skilled workers", said John Winter, president and CEO of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce.

"Employers are increasingly looking for new sources of talented and skilled workers. This survey clearly shows that employers recognize that people with disabilities represent one of the most significant pools of capable workers that are not in a position to currently contribute to the economy to the degree their skills warrant."

According to the provincial government, there are currently 300,000 working-age people with disabilities in British Columbia.

Thirty-four thousand have college diplomas, 30,000 have trade certificates, and 28,000 have university degrees - yet they only have a 44 per cent employment rate.

It is also expected that B.C. businesses will need to fill one million new job openings by 2015.

According to the Chamber survey, fewer than 25 per cent of respondents expressed concern over worker performance, quality of production or costs of modifying workspace or equipment.

Only nine per cent of those taking part in the survey said they would not consider hiring a person with a

disability.

Most importantly, many businesses indicated that no person with a disability had ever applied.

There are services to help employers and people with disabilities connect. Triumph Vocational Services assists people with disabilities to discover their employment choices and also works with employers who want to expand their hiring options.

"While programs such as Triumph already exist to bridge this gap, the importance of providing the support and preparation needed for people with disabilities to reach their full employment potential cannot be overstated," said Winter.

To date, Triumph has provided service to more than 5,900 clients, helped clients attain more than 1,800 workforce placements and has become Canada's leading provider of vocational services for persons with disabilities. For more information, please visit [www.triumphvocational.com](http://www.triumphvocational.com).

The provincial government is also encouraging business to hire people with disabilities.

The Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities is inviting communities and industry sectors to join the 10 by 10 Challenge to increase employment for persons with disabilities in British Columbia by 10 per cent by the year 2010.

"Many people with disabilities have tremendous talent and skill to offer to their communities and local economies," said Employment and Income Assistance Minister Claude Richmond

To learn more about the 10 by 10 Challenge, please visit [www.eia.gov.bc.ca/epwd/10by10/index.htm](http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/epwd/10by10/index.htm).

Most importantly, when looking to people to support your business and help it grow, remember that those with disabilities may have the skills, talent and dedication that you are looking for.

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