

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

### Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact

Annually Updated Research Findings Address the Costs and Benefits of Job Accommodations  
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A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

## Preface

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# JAN'S ACCOMMODATION AND COMPLIANCE SERIES

## Introduction

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act and newly released regulations from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission refocused attention on workplace accommodations by broadening the definition of disability; more coverage means more employees will likely be entitled to workplace accommodations. This increased attention has some employers concerned about the costs of providing job accommodations. However, a study conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), shows that workplace accommodations not only are low cost, but also positively impact the workplace in many ways.

The JAN study has been on-going since 2004. JAN, in partnership with the University of Iowa's Law, Health Policy, and Disability Center (LHPDC), interviewed 1,182 employers between January 2004 and December 2006. In addition, JAN, in partnership with the West Virginia University School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS), interviewed 603 employers between June 28, 2008, and July 31, 2011. Employers in the JAN study represented a range of industry sectors and sizes and contacted JAN for information about workplace accommodations, the ADA, or both. Approximately eight weeks after their initial contact, the employers were asked a series of questions about the situation they discussed with JAN and the quality of the services JAN provided.

The study results consistently showed that the benefits employers receive from making workplace accommodations far outweigh the low cost. Employers reported that providing accommodations resulted in such benefits as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation and training costs, and improving company diversity. These benefits were obtained with little investment. The employers in the study reported that a high percentage (56%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost only \$500.

And to top off these positive results about the cost and benefits of workplace accommodation, the employers in the study also reported that JAN understood their needs and provided information that met their needs. In addition, 99% of employers stated that they would use JAN services again for assistance with workplace accommodations.

What is the bottom line? Workplace accommodations are low cost and high impact, and JAN can help employers make them, free of charge.

## Findings

### **Finding #1: Employers want to provide accommodations so they can retain valued and qualified employees.**

Of the employers who called JAN for accommodation information and solutions, most were doing so to retain or promote (82%) a current employee. On average (including those persons who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company about seven years, with an average wage of about \$14 for those paid by the hour, or an average annual salary of about \$49,500. In addition, the individuals tended to be fairly well-educated, with 45% having a college degree or higher.

### **Finding #2: Most employers report no cost or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.**

Of the employers who gave cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 314 out of 559 (56%) said the accommodations needed by employees cost absolutely nothing. Another 212 (38%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 24 (4%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (2%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs; however, too few of these employers provided cost data to report with accuracy. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the typical one-time expenditure by employers was \$500. When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, employers typically answered around \$343.

### **Finding #3: Employers report accommodations are effective.**

Employers who had implemented accommodations by the time they were interviewed were asked to rank the effectiveness of the accommodations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely effective. Of those responding, 76% reported the accommodations were either very effective or extremely effective.

### **Finding #4: Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.**

Employers who made accommodations for employees with disabilities reported multiple benefits as a result. The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were: (1) the accommodation allowed the company to retain a qualified employee, (2) the accommodation increased the worker's productivity, and (3) the accommodation eliminated the costs of training a new employee.

The most widely mentioned indirect benefits employers received were: (1) the accommodation ultimately improved interactions with co-workers, (2) the accommodation increased overall company morale, and (3) the accommodation increased overall company productivity. The following table gives the percentage of employers who reported experiencing direct and indirect benefits as a result of having made an accommodation.

<b>Direct Benefits</b>		<b>%</b>
Retained a valued employee		89%
Increased the employee's productivity		71%
Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee		60%
Increased the employee's attendance		53%
Increased diversity of the company		43%
Saved workers' compensation or other insurance costs		39%
Hired a qualified person with a disability		13%
Promoted an employee		10%
<b>Indirect Benefits</b>		
Improved interactions with co-workers		68%
Increased overall company morale		63%
Increased overall company productivity		59%
Improved interactions with customers		47%
Increased workplace safety		45%
Increased overall company attendance		39%
Increased profitability		32%
Increased customer base		18%

**Finding #5: Employers find JAN helpful during the accommodation process.**

Ninety-eight percent of employers found that JAN understood their needs. In addition, 93% of employers stated that the information JAN sent them met their needs. Overall 99% of employers stated they would use JAN again.

## Situations and Solutions

Data from the past year provide insight into successful situations and solutions from various employment settings and stages, including a wide sampling of industries and business sizes.

**Situation:** An administrative support person had difficulty standing for long periods due to a foot impairment that caused foot pain. He worked for a bank that had a dress code policy requiring dress shoes and standing throughout the day.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the company modified the dress code policy to allow the employee to wear tennis shoes, preferably dark in color.

**Reported benefit:** The modified dress code policy increased professionalism and made employees more comfortable while they were performing certain work tasks.

**Reported cost:** \$0.

**Situation:** An applicant for a construction job with a local government was deaf and needed to communicate effectively during the interview and hiring process.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the company hired an interpreter.

**Reported benefit:** The employer was able to meet its requirement for being an equal opportunity employer.

**Reported cost:** \$100.

**Situation:** An engineer with a back condition worked for a federal agency and was required to perform tasks and attend meetings in a seated position.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the employer purchased an ergonomically designed knee chair and moved her parking space closer to the workplace.

**Reported benefit:** The employer stated that by making these accommodations, the employee was still able to work and remain an important part of the team.

**Reported cost:** \$200.

**Situation:** An aircraft service technician with a shoulder impairment had limitations in lifting, pushing, pulling, and reaching. He was required to lift and manipulate heavy hoses over his head.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the employer rearranged the worksite so that he could do the job with existing equipment.

**Reported benefit:** The employer stated that a great employee who was great at his job was retained.

**Reported cost:** \$300.

**Situation:** A manager for an educational services company had back surgery, which resulted in a back condition and speech impairment. He had difficulty sitting, running weekly meetings, and communicating with others due to the combination of pain and weak speech.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the employer purchased an articulating keyboard tray and ergonomic chair to limit the pain from his back condition. The employer also purchased a voice amplifier and communication software to improve his ability to communicate.

**Reported benefit:** The employer stated that the employee and his supervisor were very happy with the outcome, and the organization's management was glad to be in compliance with the ADA.

**Reported cost:** \$5,000.

**Situation:** A warehouse worker for a pharmaceutical company had a phobia of small spaces. Because of her claustrophobia, removing materials from refrigerated areas caused her significant stress and resulted in panic attacks.

**Solution:** As a reasonable accommodation, the employer moved her workstation to an area that was more spacious.

**Reported benefit:** The employer stated that the new work area completely alleviated her problems.

**Reported cost:** \$0.

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