

ILL TREATMENT OF STAFF WITH DISABILITY AT WORK PLACE

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Primary Reader: Directors, Programme Managers, Heads of Departments, & Administrators in both Government and Non Government organisations.

Message: Creating a friendly environment for persons with disabilities at work place.

Introduction

According to the Uganda Population and Housing Census Report (2002), 4 out of every 25 persons in Uganda are persons with disabilities. Generally, PWDs are vulnerable by virtue of their impairment and negative societal attitudes arising from fear, ignorance, superstitions, neglect and lack of awareness. As a result they receive less education, skills training and medical attention, which reduces their employment opportunities. With limited skills characteristic of most PWDs, accessing employment is a major challenge. Most potential employers do not give chance to PWDs to compete for employment even where they have the necessary qualifications and experience.

Both Government and non organisations in Uganda create employment opportunities which also benefit persons with disabilities in the formal sector that range from Health, Education, Transport to Communication and Agricultural services to mention a few. However observations show that in some organisations employees with disabilities are sometimes ill treated due to negative attitudes. This has been partly attributed to myth and lack of appropriate knowledge about disability. Such an environment makes it a little cumbersome for persons with disabilities to maximise their potential and attain career prosperity. It should be noted that Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, developed the National Disability policy which among other aspects promotes employment of PWDs and aims at reduction of societal negative attitudes. Additionally the government of Uganda has put in place other mechanisms like the National Disability council to improve and enhance access of services to PWDs. However PWDs continue to experience unfriendly treatment at work place. This article therefore shows how PWDs are stigmatized at work place in the formal employment sector and proposes possible solutions.

How Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) ill-treated at Work place

The following are some of ways how PWDs are stigmatised at work place:

- **Nick naming**

Like in every community, even at work place persons with disabilities are nick named by some staff. They are called names *'like what to do, total failure'* to mention a few. This de-humanises them and to some extent de-motivates them to give in their best. It creates an environment that is not secure for them to comfortably to concrete on their assigned roles because these nick names sometimes are abusive.

- **Poor communication**

It has been observed that some staff develop fear due to the severity of the impairment, they become rude, and even reach an extent of shouting at PWDs when giving them instructions. As a result their needs are poorly communicated and don't get the deserved attention.

- **Insulted and Abused.**

Due to the stigmatisation associated with disability, some staff with disabilities are treated as *'secondary citizens'*. They abuse and insult them when they come to seek for some technical support to perfect their work. It is alleged that some think they are *'cursed and doomed'* thus associate them with evil.

- **Treated last**

Finally at some work places, PWDs are served last because, their interests are not always taken as priority and at times some staff think their conditions (disabilities) are contiguous. This mind set does not only stagnate their careers, but also limits their ability to socialise at work place.

- **Non – recognition of contributions.**

During departmental / Staff meetings in some organisations views of PWDs are not taken into account. They are dispersed creating a feeling that such ideas seem irrelevant despite having strong points. This sometimes leads PWDs to become passive in meetings yet have good ideas.

How to avert above situation

In order to create a friendly environment for PWDs at work place, the writer proposes the following strategies:

- Lobbying for the mainstreaming of disability concerns at work place
- Counselling staff without disabilities so that they can accommodate PWDs and appreciate their uniqueness.
- Organising Disability sensitisation forums for all staff
As a strategy to create awareness to all staff at workplace, forums where different aspects on disability are shared can be initiated so that staff gets facts about disability. This will help to change attitudes in the long run.
- Revisiting National Disability policies plans and guidelines to steer organisational direction in handling disability related aspects. .
- Finally promote some staff with disability to leadership positions, so that they actively participate in decision making and as well promoting interests of other staff with disabilities.

Conclusion

For persons with disabilities (PWDs) to flourish and fully maximise their full potentials at work place, attitudes of staff need to change. This will positively contribute to creating a fulfilling environment for PWDs to work and at the same time contribute to the realisation of an inclusive society.

References

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