Research Request

Return on Investment on ERGs

FOCUS ON

DISABILITY

MAY 2016
Employee resource groups (ERGs) or business resource groups (BRGs) have proven positive impacts on business. How? Active ERGs are proof of engaged employees. Why is engagement important? A Gallup study found that managers that are engaged see an uptick of 48 percent profitability, 22 percent increase in productivity, 17 percent increase in customer engagement scores and 19 percent drop in turnover. Engaged employees benefit the economic health of any company.

A study by Mercer, “Ergs Come of Age: The Evolution of Employee Resource Groups,” reported that of companies that have ERGs 56 percent provide cultural insight, 19 percent participate in product development and 78 percent participate in community service. Also 76 percent of companies report rewards for ERG leaders in the form of opportunities for advancement and 59 percent offer non-financial rewards.

Disability ERGs tap into the third largest market segment in the United States – people with disabilities (PWD) have a greater consumer power than Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, Generation X and teens. In the US, Fifth Quadrant Analytics reported that the disability market represents $544 billion in annual disposable income. Even with the obvious PWD consumer power, only 25 percent of the S&P companies are making noticeable activity in the marketplace related to people with disabilities. Globally, companies can access a market of more than 1 billion people and annual disposable income of $1 trillion by understanding and focusing on the needs of customers with disabilities. If you include friends and family of people with disability the annual disposable income grows to $6.9 trillion.

Diversity Best Practices has been given access to the inner workings of disability focused ERGs that have submitted applications to the Above-and-Beyond Awards over the past two years. Below are summaries of the best practices of disability ERGs for KPMG, American Airlines, Cisco Systems, Barclays and Siemens Energy. Also best practices from non-disability focused ERGs from Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, PNC Financial Services Group, Inc., and Duke Energy are included to show strategies that could be applied.

**American Airlines - Abilities Employee Business Resource Group**

The Abilities EBRG’s Mission Statement reads: “Abilities supports American by creating a culture that welcomes people with differing abilities, exemplifies American Airlines as a disability-friendly employer, works to better serve our customers and colleagues with disabilities and helps improve the communities in which we work and live.” This statement is in direct alignment with the service-related business imperatives - focus on our customers' needs and wants - engage our team members - look to the future.

The **Cool to Fly American (ICTFA) program** is a grassroots effort planned and executed by the Abilities Employee Business Resource Group with other employee volunteers. The ICTFA program is designed to help acclimate children with autism and their families to the world of airline travel by simulating the entire airport experience.

- To date the Abilities EBRG has overseen nine ICTFA events, hosting over 300 families – that number continues to increase with events happening on a regular basis. Again, ICTFA events are solely run by employee volunteers but with oversight and encouragement from Senior Executives.
For example, each ICTF event includes the following elements (solely planned and carried out by Abilities EBRG members):

- Pre-event communications sent to participant families with guidance and involvement from local autism advocate groups. The communications include “what to expect” information such as how to navigate the selected airport, where to park, etc. Also, Abilities EBRG group members liaise between local media, the autism group and American’s Corporate Communication department on external communication around the event.
- Find and schedule volunteer airport employees to greet the families at airport ticket counters as if they were VIPs (and they are), providing special t-shirts to the family participants that both make the children feel special and help airport employees identify this very exceptional group of “passengers.”
- Find and schedule volunteer ticket agents to pass out Priority Verification cards to each passenger for their entrance to the security checkpoint.
- Liaise with local airport Transportation Security Administration (TSA) personnel to ensure they process the group through security as they would any passenger but take extra time to ensure the families and their children become familiar with the full security experience, taking off shoes, etc...
- Find and schedule volunteer gate agents to greet the families at a gate specially designated for the event where the participants wait for the boarding announcements made over the public address system at the gate.
- Abilities members accompany the ICTF participants onboard the ICTFA aircraft (taken out of our operation especially for the event) where the families are greeted by cockpit crew and flight attendants.
- Once aboard, Abilities members and other volunteers sit with the participant families while flight attendants conduct the standard pre-flight safety announcements followed by the captain’s welcome aboard and flight announcements, aircraft engines are then fired up and readied for a simulated take-off. On some occasions the aircraft actually “pushes back” from the gate and taxis – this is incumbent on the logistics of the operation at that airport on the day of the event.
- During flight, Abilities EBRG members encourage the children and their parents to ask questions of the flight crew and explore the aircraft.
- After deplaning, the Abilities EBRG treat the families to a festive debrief event with goody bags, gluten-free treats and a survey for the parents to complete. That feedback is used by the Abilities EBRG to improve upon the next “It’s Cool to Fly American” event.

- The Abilities EBRG was awarded the Disability BRG of Excellence award by Springboard Consulting because of their collaborative and inclusive efforts associated with ICTFA.
- The benefits of the ICTFA events for employees and customers alike are evident:
  - The airport employees, (agents, flight attendants, pilots, other volunteers) working with the families have a new appreciation for the challenges these families face and as a result are better able to serve these customers.
  - Our employee volunteer base has increased year over year as awareness of the event spreads, increasing employee awareness about those traveling with disabilities.
Among organizations that champion individuals with autism, American is known as an air carrier that works hard to serve those with special needs and shares this information with their constituents, increasing customers for American.

These events have had an impact on our employees at large, many of whom have children with autism, who have expressed their appreciation and pride that our Abilities EBRG has partnered with our company in this way. When employees see that we are focusing on improving service for customers with disabilities, they are more inclined to “self-identify” as individuals with disabilities. In turn, we have a more accurate picture of employee demographics, allowing us the opportunity to better serve our employees with disabilities.

Cisco Systems - Cisco Connected Disabilities Awareness Network (CDAN)

CDAN is a global Employee Resource Organization that has chapters and representation spanning across Asia Pacific, Europe, Emerging Markets, and the Americas.

- **Disability Matters Asia Pac Conference** took place at Cisco’s Bangalore, India campus. In addition to Cisco employees, there was strong representation from external companies, business leaders, partners and regional countries in the region. The event attracted news media in the region that included The New India Express, DNA India, Governance Now, and The Economic Times. More importantly, the event culminated in CDAN India chapter’s further commitment to increase awareness and education of disabilities within Cisco India as well as within their communities.

- Cisco assistive technologies such as WebEx, TelePresence and Cisco’s **fully accessible IP phones**, and also promotes these technologies internally to our employees as well as our external customers.

- To break down barriers for employees with disabilities, Akers initiated a conversation a few years ago with IT leadership to drive for accessibility within all our internal employee tools and applications. These include vacation tools, mobile applications and basic tools that employees use regularly. helping to ensure that accessibility is **permanently integrated into our IT product lifecycle from the start.** This means that going forward, all new enterprise tools and applications will include accessibility. Many of the web-based applications will align to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AAS requirements. The result is a new fully accessible web-based training module that was rolled out in fiscal year 2015 to over 60,000 employees across all functional organizations at Cisco.

- Cisco participates annually at the North Carolina State University General Huge Shelton Center where Cisco sponsors a table for military personnel from Fort Bragg. These military men and women are matched with leaders at the leadership forum. These **Warriors in Transition** (commonly known as Wounded Warriors) will attend the various seminars and workshops with the Cisco employees throughout the day. It is a great opportunity for these warriors to shadow the Cisco employees as well as share thoughts and ideas that might lead to leadership development, thought leadership, and networking opportunities.
While the event per se is not focused specifically on disability, some of these people suffer from the effects of various forms of physical and emotional injury from serving in the military and therefore benefit from assistance as they work through transitioning from military life back into civilian life.

**Barclays - Reach Networks**

The ‘**This is me**’ campaign was created and led by the Reach Disability Network. It is a colleague engagement and organizational change campaign. It features ‘real’ colleagues talking about their mental health in order to increase awareness and support for others for all aspects of mental health. To achieve this, the campaign’s strategy is based around a tiered architecture with three core components:

- Colleague engagement through internal social media/events/communications: ‘This Is Me’ featured colleagues talking about their own mental health but as part of the whole person. Impactful photography video/online content/resources engage colleagues and drive cultural change
- ‘Fix the basics’: Identification/remediation of issues relating to mental health e.g. HR policy/training/support mechanisms
- External commitment: Remove the stigma relating to mental health issues by signing the ‘Time to Change’ pledge/delivering our ‘Time to Change’ Action Plan.

The ‘This is me’ campaign was designed by colleagues with personal experience of mental ill health. They recorded their stories - on film and in writing. These authentic and personal accounts were then made available for all colleagues to watch, hear and read on the Barclays intranet, internal magazines, and via a poster/postcard cascade. The year-long communication plan kept visibility high, via awareness sessions designed for employees, for line managers, or for mixed audiences. Topics included personal mental health management, supporting team mental health and wellness and stress and resilience workshops. What were the results?

- From just 9 stories, the campaign grew organically, with now more than 75 personal stories being shared via the dedicated online platform.
- This portal has received >30000 visits since launch, showing how successful the campaign has been in building awareness of mental health at work. From its inception in the UK, the campaigns success means it is now being launched across South Africa and the US.
- Increased declaration rates: The most recent engagement survey saw 6% UK staff declaring a disability - the highest in our survey history. This helps us bring more dedicated focus to the issue of visible/ non-visible disabilities. The increased visibility/overt support has underscored our existing/sustained commitment to eliminating stigma attached to mental health.
- Reduced absence: Barclays sees a return on investment of £7 for every £1 spent on improving workplace practices in relation to.

Other Reach achievements include:

- Acting as internal consultants, working with HR to review policies including Reasonable Adjustments/Health and Safety/Recruitment etc
- Sharing their experiences at the ‘**Living in our Colleagues’ World** ‘sessions. Focusing on all aspects of disability, these experiential sessions increase disability confidence, thanks to an impactful blend of simulation equipment and personal stories.
• Hosted partnership sessions with charities such as Mind/Rethink Mental Illness/MHFA.
• Produced a Line Manager guide which is now available not only on the ‘This is me’ portal but is also used by ER Direct (Barclays Line Manager support helpline) In collaboration with Business Disability Forum (BDF), created video scenarios featuring two key issues frequently raised by line managers - how to have a conversation on mental health and how to have a conversation on reasonable adjustments for mental health.
• Partnered with the Bank Workers Charity on their 12-month Line Manager mental health training pilot. Feedback from the mid-term pulse check focus group done by CIPD includes
• Collaborated with Time to Change to deliver their flagship event on ‘Time to Change day’ at the Headquarters. The event included a pop-up cinema/personal pledge signing/conversations with Time to Change volunteers. Parallel events took place in Barclays regional sites including Jersey/Northampton/Radbrook with Reach/’This Is Me’ volunteers. Hosted ‘Reflections’ art gallery event with Mental Health First Aid England (CIC), involving art work created by people affected by mental health issues. > 100 internal/external guests attended.

Siemens Energy, Inc. - Disability Awareness and Support Network

The Siemens Energy Disability Awareness and Support Network (DASN) hosted “A Day in the Life” Wheelchair Experience during their annual Disability Awareness Day. The overall goal of the event at the Orlando Office was to have non-disabled employees experience navigating the campus in a wheelchair and understand what it is like to live and deal with a physical disability in the work environment. What where the end results?

• Greater empathy for those with mobility disabilities and increased awareness of some of the not so obvious commuting challenges on campus.
• Within the next several months, an additional sidewalk was added around one building so that those in wheelchairs or scooters would not have to go through the parking lot to get from one side to other.
• Uneven spots in existing sidewalks were repaired to prevent trips and falls by the able-bodied, and reduce the bumps felt by those in wheelchairs.
• Widening of walkways through the parking lot between buildings and new safety lines were added to further increase safety for all.
• Handicap parking was relocated and brought up to current standards and automatic door openers were installed adjacent to the parking with access now possible through wide glass doors previously used only for emergency exit.
• After only a few months since being installed, the doors have been utilized on average, approximately 360 times per month by 37 disabled users.
• There was a renewed emphasis on the Siemens initiatives, “Safety First” and “I am Safety” since there was:
  o Reduction in the risk of injuries to its employees. Furthermore, incidents such as trips and falls can potentially result in serious injuries, lost productivity, increased medical costs, or potential lawsuits. A conservative estimate that the cost of a single injury could be upwards of the same amount of the one-time cost of the improvements, the proactive step to mitigate potential future safety issues, rather than reacting once something happens, is a huge business benefit.
A strong message that Siemens cares about its employees and understands the issues and challenges experienced by individuals with disabilities.

**KPMG - Abilities In Motion (AIM)**

KPMG has a commitment to create a PWD talent pipeline, and establish a succession planning process for local office AIM chapter leaders and national AIM Advisory Board members.

- KPMG’s **Inspiring Change, Influencing Inclusion program** is a two-day leadership program for AIM members as well as members of our Veterans Network.
  - The inaugural Inspiring Change, Influencing Inclusion program attracted more than 60 participants representing 28 KPMG offices across the country. The program provided participants with the opportunity to explore their potential as leaders, build confidence, deepen their influencing skills, and expand their relationships within KPMG. Inspiring Change, Influencing Inclusion was designed to support the careers of our high-performing network members, and included veterans and military spouses, in addition to people with disabilities, those who are caregivers, and their allies.

- KPMG established the **AIM 1i5**, an advisory board comprised of emerging leaders who are PWD and caregivers; the AIM1i5 supports the strategic initiatives of the national AIM Advisory Board.
  - AIM 1i5 creates talent development opportunities for AIM members, and in particular, those who are viewed as high-potential and future leaders. The AIM Advisory Board oversees, guides, and mentors the AIM 1i5 leadership group as they execute activities that support AIM and the firm’s overall diversity and inclusion priorities. This unique opportunity enables its members to hone their leadership skills, interact with our partners, increase their visibility with firm leaders, and influence AIM’s strategy by shaping local and national programs.

**General ERG Best Practices**

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey - Latin American Cultural Organization

- LACO worked with sales to launch **a toll free help line 1-888-551-ALOSEGURO (1-888-551-2567)** which is staffed with bilingual representatives from Hola Doctor and who are trained to help Hispanics in everything related to the healthcare law as well as to guide them in the application process for acquiring health insurance. LACO members translated messages into the most commonly used Spanish dialect and tested the system to ensure it worked as intended. Another significant communication and marketing vehicle for the business is the company’s website. LACO was instrumental in the translation of the http://horizonblue.com site to create http://www.horizonazul.com. LACO worked with the team to ensure the site functioned as designed, and that the content was accurate and informative.
• HBCBS has more than doubled the number of Hispanic members in their health plans, which has had a direct positive impact to the company's bottom line. The increased presence in the community physically and through marketing/media has enhanced the brand as a company and an employer. In addition, LACO’s success with the sales and marketing team has sparked interest from the other affinity groups and they are looking for ways to engage the community in the way LACO has. Healthy competition is great for the business and employee morale.

PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. - Pittsburgh African American Employee Resource Business Group

• In 2015, the African American EBRG completed 45 Community Reinvestment Act credits, representing nearly 10 percent of the company’s CRA goal through financial literacy and home buyers’ educational programming.

• Throughout 2015, the African American EBRG completed 340 volunteer hours which garnered a $9,000 grant for the Heritage Center, a non-profit, early childhood development center. Over the years, the African American EBRG has accumulated 3,433 volunteer hours, which have resulted in $103,000 in grant monies that benefit its nonprofit childcare partners.

• The Pittsburgh African American EBRG sold 119 products and services to new and established customers through special outreach efforts coordinated by chapter members. During 2015, these efforts generated $2.8 million in revenue to PNC.

Duke Energy – Advocates for African Americans

• One of the signature annual programs is the African American Network (AAN) - Carolinas Scholarship Fund Gala, which retains the employee resource group’s former name.

• The Scholarship Program currently provides three, renewable $2,000 scholarships per year to students pursuing math, science, accounting and other energy related degrees at colleges and universities in North Carolina and South Carolina. The funds are managed through the Foundation for the Carolinas. To date, the event has raised $979,000 and about 80 students have received scholarships.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Employee resource groups are tools of engagement for an organization and sources of business innovation. The power of voluntary participation takes the form of passion. Employees whether it be for a disability, veteran or women’s ERG are invested in improving the workplace and community.

Employers who are attuned to disabled customer needs have the ability to broaden their customer base and deepens customer loyalty. Initiatives driven by employees improve employee retention, improve work environment policies, reduce costs in health risks and create product innovations.