



UPS DELIVERS THE “SECRET SAUCE” FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION

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UPS Delivers the “secret sauce” for Disability Inclusion

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What does successful workplace inclusion for people with disabilities look like? An innovative program at Worldport, UPS's main air sorting hub in Louisville, Kentucky, is game-changing, reframing disability inclusion not only as social responsibility but also as a means of meeting strategic business needs.

The UPS Transitional Learning Center (TLC) is a cooperative effort between UPS and the [Coalition for Workforce Diversity](#) (via [Options Unlimited, Inc.](#)) to allow people with disabilities - who are sourced through the Coalition - to experience UPS jobs through hands-on training. Recognized as the 2016 “Large Employer of the Year” by the [Association of People Supporting Employment First](#), UPS Worldport and its Transitional Learning Center are playing an important role in advancing innovative solutions for connecting people with disabilities to meaningful employment. The TLC offers a two-week, pre-employment training program that is staffed and operated by UPS training supervisors as well as Options Unlimited job coaches. The two-week program uses both classroom training and a simulated work environment to teach participants about job responsibilities, safety procedures, and soft skills. The TLC program includes a full simulation of the Worldport package handling facility, providing participants with invaluable hands-on practice. Through the TLC, UPS has developed the “secret sauce” for sustainable success in hiring, retaining, and supporting employees with disabilities. The recipe consists of four simple ingredients - **culture, collaboration, curriculum, and company ROI.**

Culture

The Worldport culture of inclusion stems from a foundation of teamwork and integrity that permeates all business practices. With a culture that supports and celebrates all team members, people with disabilities are poised for success. The TLC has been instrumental in building on this culture of inclusion, and curating inclusive practices for people with disabilities through leadership support, training, and, above all, passion.

Leadership

From idea to execution, the creation of the TLC would not have been possible without clear and dedicated support from UPS Worldport leadership. The program took approximately two years to build, and management teams at all levels of the organization show a strong sense of pride in what they have been able to accomplish. As Training Manager Todd Coffey said, “It all starts with good people – we know we are bringing quality people onto the Worldport team through the TLC. We are working collaboratively to move in the same direction – toward big impact on our culture and our company.”



Training

The training team at Worldport recognizes that disability awareness and inclusion topics are new to many employees, and the team places an emphasis on making disability inclusion a cornerstone of the training curriculum. All supervisors and quality trainers receive enhanced disability inclusion modules as part of their initial training, as well as annual refresher training. In addition, the TLC staff has built the foundation for an organically evolving web of natural supports for TLC participants and graduates – support systems that become woven into the fabric of everyday life at UPS Worldport.

Passion

The passion and commitment that the TLC staff have for this program is contagious. Being chosen as a front line supervisor for the TLC is a competitive process, and those who are chosen are deeply committed to creating a valuable experience and successful outcomes for all participants of the program.

TLC Front Line Supervisor Jennifer Bahan joined the TLC team in September 2014. Her commitment to the program and to its participants is unflagging, and she continually looks for ways to improve the experience. Bahan says, “I am constantly thinking of the best ways to teach the trainees how to do things so that they understand what they need to do. I think about it all the time.”

The incredible passion that emanates from the TLC and its staff paves the way for open conversations about disabilities across UPS Worldport, inspiring a grassroots cultural shift that is noticeable even after only one year of TLC operations.

Collaboration

Seamless internal and external coordination create a strong but flexible structure for the TLC to achieve success and continued growth in achieving the goal of placing 100+ employees in UPS jobs per year.

Internal

The UPS team believes in the quality of training that the TLC provides, and works to incorporate lessons learned and best practices between general onboarding training and TLC training. Critical to the success of this collaboration is a cross-cutting leadership structure that drives seamless integration of the TLC into the general Worldport training program. Because the training manager of the TLC is also a training manager for Worldport onboarding at-large, he is able to build a bridge between the two programs and facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices. With this structure in place, TLC staff are able to remain involved in the onboarding process for TLC graduates as they transition to UPS employment. Staff members continue to support TLC graduates as they transition into the workplace by providing information to the graduates’ new supervisors on learning needs and working style. Just as importantly, TLC graduates are able to return to future TLC classes to share their experiences and become mentors to current TLC participants. This structure also allows



for non-TLC training supervisors to easily jump in and assist with TLC training sessions when needed, and understand how the TLC aligns with the onboarding process.

External

The TLC is a cooperative effort between UPS and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, which is managed through Options Unlimited, Inc. The Coalition for Workforce Diversity is a network of employers, service providers (organizations that provide supports for people with disabilities to promote employment and independence), and resources that are committed to supporting people with disabilities focusing on employment opportunities. The success that the TLC has seen in sourcing candidates is predicated on the ability to have a streamlined system for identifying and vetting potential candidates – a service that Options Unlimited, Inc. provides on behalf of the Coalition for Workforce Diversity. Options Unlimited provides a full-time employee who is embedded in TLC operations to recruit, train, and support participants – she is the primary contact for Coalition agencies to connect with the TLC, and for TLC staff to connect with Coalition agencies. Additionally, this strong collaboration with the Coalition provides a pathway for direct employment for candidates with disabilities who choose not to participate in the TLC pre-employment process. Phil Donahue, a retired UPS Human Resources manager and now a project manager with Options Unlimited, said of the partnership, “...we have been able to ‘connect the dots’ between job seekers and employers who are strategically increasing workforce diversity. At the same time, we’re helping to meet the ever-challenging staffing needs of UPS’s operations.”

Curriculum

In developing and updating the TLC curriculum, the team maintains a focus on exemplifying adult learning principles and organically developing natural supports and self-sufficiency. For each element of the curriculum, the team builds opportunities for all types of learners to engage with the content and practice concepts in a simulated work environment. Trainees are given the opportunity to “hear it, see it, do it, feel it” with each topic – creating points of connection and understanding for all learner types. In addition, the curriculum provides opportunities for both classroom and hands-on simulation training every day to further meet the needs and learning styles of each participant.

For many TLC trainees, this experience is their first foray into an employment opportunity. As such, the TLC staff identified early on a need to incorporate a focus on “soft skills” – topics such as interviewing tips, dos and don’ts for engaging with your supervisor, etc. A part-time Options Unlimited employee works alongside the UPS TLC team to teach the soft skills components that have been built into the program. In addition, TLC staff start each day with an icebreaker activity to foster teamwork and encourage collaboration. Having the opportunity to learn and practice interpersonal elements of the workforce provides an important foundation for the participants as they enter the UPS employment process.

Repetition is the name of the game at the TLC – to ensure retention and help participants practice important concepts, TLC training supervisors build repetition into the curriculum as much as possible. Participants are encouraged to play an active role in the repetition process by leading reviews of information from previous sessions and supporting their peers in repeating and remembering important concepts.



Company Return on Investment

The TLC has played a critical role in advancing the focus of disability inclusion from social responsibility to also include meeting strategic business needs. Data from the TLC program shows a clear reduction in turnover, and the TLC provides a steady pipeline of dedicated and trained employees entering UPS. The TLC team is committed to tracking and analyzing outcome data, and aligning outcomes with the broader strategic hiring and onboarding goals of UPS at-large. As of September, 2016, UPS had hired 121 TLC participants. The 2016 retention rate for TLC-trained employees is 83 percent, significantly higher than the retention rate for the total employee population.

Perhaps most impressive is the TLC team's commitment to continuous improvement – team members constantly ask themselves and others what they can be doing better. The humility and genuine dedication of this team is impressive – and it shows in the success of the program and the outcomes it has achieved. The TLC not only has opened the door to employment opportunities for many people with disabilities, but it has fostered an environment where people with disabilities can be both productive and successful.

