



# Autism in Big Business



Employment is a core feature of living a productive and fulfilling adult life. Motivation, competitive skills and hard work can help adults achieve this goal. While these attributes may be in an individual's control, the other part of the equation is not – the decisions of employers.

The unemployment rate for individuals with autism is estimated to be as high as 85%. Adults with autism have been a virtually untapped labor pool due to the lack of understanding and awareness on the part of employers of the employment skills that many of them possess. The majority of this community has skills and potential to succeed in the competitive job market, but employers are only beginning to understand the value they can bring to the work environment.

Over the past year, the Autism Speaks Adult Services department has reviewed corporate reports, company diversity and inclusion policies and employment diversity events and reached out to companies that reported promising policies to positively impact employment of the autism community. This report summarizes the current role that the autism community plays in the labor market, as well as the companies that have incorporated hiring policies that increase diversity and inclusion of adults with autism.

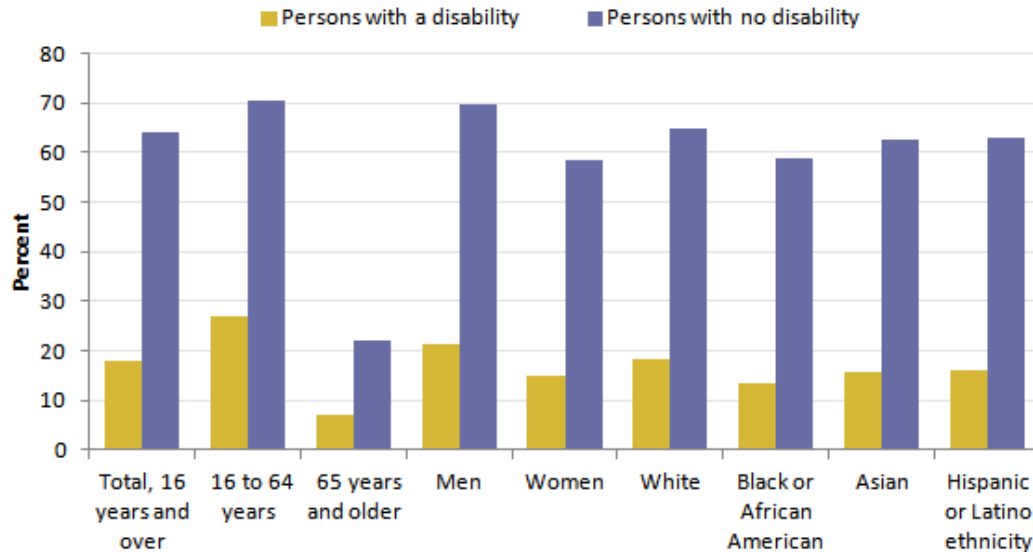


## **Adults with Autism and Developmental Disabilities in the Competitive Workforce**

Of the 54 million Americans living with disabilities, only 20 percent are employed or seeking employment, compared to almost 70 percent of Americans without a disability.

([www.disabilityfunders.org](http://www.disabilityfunders.org))

### Employment-population ratio by disability status, age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2012 annual averages



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

A more focused government leadership effort over the past several years has influenced employers to review and implement policies and practices that encourage the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities. In his role as Chair of the National Governors Association (NGA) for 2012-13, Delaware Governor Jack Markell launched [A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities](#), an initiative that created a blueprint for advancing employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. In addition, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) was the Senate author of the landmark [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) and is the Chairman of the [Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions \(HELP\) Committee](#). In July 2012, the HELP Committee held a series of bipartisan hearings in Congress to explore the low employment participation rate of people with disabilities, resulting in the [High Expectations: Transforming the American Workforce as the ADA Generation Comes of Age](#) report. Both Senator Harkin and Governor Markell have made engaging more people with disabilities in the competitive labor force a hallmark of their policy efforts.

Another development that has generated increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities has been the [Employment First](#) initiative. Employment First is a concept created to facilitate the full inclusion of people with the most significant disabilities in the workplace and community put into action by the [Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#) that states can adopt.

As federal and state efforts forge ahead, private corporations have also explored ways to increase their disability recruitment and hiring efforts. Partnering with groups like the [U.S. Business Leadership Network \(USBLN\)](#) and other supported employment agencies, several best practices have emerged. Implementing ongoing supports for employees with disabilities,

focusing on disability as diversity and modifying on-board activities that include non-traditional interviews and extended training periods are indications of a disability-friendly employer.

Below is a list of steps employers can take to ensure that individuals with disabilities are included in their recruiting efforts so that they can capitalize on their strengths and skills:

- Including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
- Creating partnerships with disability-related advocacy organizations
- Contacting career centers at colleges and universities when vacancies arise
- Posting job announcements in disability-related publications, websites and job fairs
- Establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities

Of all of the efforts and campaigns that promote recruiting and hiring adults with autism and other developmental disabilities,

leading by example is one of the most effective ways to affect change in the competitive labor market. For several reasons, it can be challenging to identify companies that are truly working to create greater opportunities for employment of people with disabilities. In this report, we have highlighted companies that have made



systematic efforts to lead the field in hiring adults with disabilities through their diversity and inclusion policies and cooperation in that responded to our requests to highlight their efforts. The below companies were identified through researching various employment initiatives, research articles, media outlets and anecdotal information from stakeholders. Some companies listed have specific programs for adults with autism, while others have more general programs for diversity and inclusion that include people with autism. Individuals and corporations are writing new success stories every day and some of them are featured here.

This is not an exhaustive list, but serves as the beginning of an ever-growing catalog of companies that recognize the value of employees with autism and other developmental disabilities. Excerpts are included from each company's disability and inclusion policy.

## AMC Theatres



The AMC FOCUS Program provides individuals affected by disabilities with access to opportunities for competitive employment, wages and benefits side-by-side with other associates in our theatres. FOCUS stands for Furthering Opportunities, Cultivating Untapped Strengths. In addition, AMC's Sensory Friendly Films program was selected as an honoree for the 2011 Disability Matters Awards. The Company was recognized in the Marketplace category as an organization that dedicates important resources and services to the special needs community to help drive independence for people with disabilities. Learn more [here](#).

## Cisco



For Cisco, building an inclusive and diverse organization is an ongoing and essential business imperative. We truly believe it is our responsibility to empower our teams, eliminate biases and create an environment where everyone feels welcomed, valued, respected and heard. A commitment to inclusion and diversity (I&D) makes us a better company, a better global competitor and a better corporate citizen. Our diversity creates more opportunities for a wider range of different ideas. Out of these, the most innovative solutions arise—every time. Learn more [here](#).

## CVS Caremark



Each and every day, CVS Caremark serves millions of customers of all ages and from countless walks of life. In order for our businesses to thrive, it's vital to have a workforce that reflects our customers, as well as the communities they live in. As a pharmacy innovation company, we pride ourselves on having a workforce as diverse as our patients, customers and communities, and providing an environment that empowers all of our colleagues, regardless of their differences. Learn more [here](#).

## Ernst & Young LLP



At EY, diversity and inclusiveness are for and about every one of us. Diversity is no longer defined just by race or gender. It encompasses the whole human experience — age, culture, education, personality, skills, life experiences and many other attributes. But having diversity is only half the equation. Inclusiveness makes the diverse mix work. It helps us unleash the true power of our global organization. It's about celebrating differences so that talented people from any background can rise to their potential and provide exceptional client service. Learn more [here](#).

## Freddie Mac



At Freddie Mac, there is an inclusive culture that empowers employees to contribute in exciting ways and to learn, grow and maximize their potential. Embracing all of our similarities and differences and creating a culture where every employee is valued for their contribution. The unique perspectives, talents, ideas and work styles that come from our various life experiences and cultural backgrounds help make our innovative, creative and flexible. Our diversity helps us understand the communities we serve and enriches our own personal and professional development. Learn more [here](#).

## The Home Depot



At The Home Depot, our ability to understand, embrace and operate in a multicultural world, where we serve a diverse array of customers, is critical to our success. In order to remain competitive, our workforce must mirror the diversity of the world we operate in. To serve our customers, we must know our customers. To know our customers, we must reflect our customers. The greater the diversity of our people, the greater our ability to serve our customers. In addition, the organization advocates for full access to social, recreational and employment opportunities for associates and customers with challenges or disabilities. Learn more [here](#).

## Microsoft



At Microsoft, our mission is to enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential. Microsoft recognizes and values the capabilities and contributions of all people—including those with disabilities. We are a more successful company because of our efforts to recruit and employ top quality people including those who happen to have disabilities. And we recognize that our employees with disabilities make an added contribution by helping us reach a broader market for our products. Learn more [here](#).

## Outback Steakhouse



At the heart of Outback Steakhouse is a solid foundation built upon the uniqueness of our people. We believe in the sanctity of the individual, the value of diversity and in treating people with kindness, respect and understanding. We draw our collective strength from the special kind of energy that comes when people from diverse backgrounds work together towards one common goal. We recognize that talent, ambition and "the just right" attitude are qualities found in people of every race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, marital status and disability. Learn more [here](#).



## Procter and Gamble



Diversity & Inclusion is deeply rooted in our company's Purpose, Values & Principles. P&G brings together individuals from different backgrounds, culture, and thinking styles providing remarkably different talents, perspectives and experiences. Through our focus on understanding each individual's skills, passions and our fundamental commonalities, we enable behaviors that lead to a culture of innovation. P&G is dedicated to a supportive and encouraging environment that celebrates and values individuality in order to inspire each P&Ger to bring his and her personal best. The mission of Diversity & Inclusion at P&G is Everyone Valued, Everyone Included, Everyone Performing at Their Peak™. Learn more [here](#).

## Target



At Target, we recognize that each of us is unique and that our differences are our greatest strength. These differences are reflected in how we see the world, think and learn, approach work and relate to others. Inclusion is about creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and respected. It means that all individuals enjoy a sense of belonging and level of support that allows us to do our best work. Fostering an inclusive culture is a core value that's integrated into every aspect of our business. By fostering an inclusive culture, we enable all of our team members to leverage their unique talents and high performance standards to drive innovation and success. Learn more [here](#).

## Walgreens



Walgreens has taken the lead and is seen as a national model for how to include people with autism and other developmental disabilities in the workforce. Broadening the workforce by employing people with disabilities is not just a nice gesture, it makes good business sense. Walgreens found that with the right mix of training, technology and awareness, their newest generation of distribution centers employing people with disabilities runs more efficiently and productively than older counterparts. Through training and experiential opportunities for its management team, the company showed that people with disabilities can be successful in highly competitive environments. Learn more [here](#).

## Large Businesses and Employment in the Media

### Computer Aid, Inc.

In 2013, [Computer Aid, Inc.](#) announced a national partnership with [Specialisterne](#) to employ individuals with autism in technology jobs. CAI plans to employ over 3% of its consultant workforce with people who have autism in technology roles in software testing, data quality assurance, programming, data mining and data entry, before the end of 2015. Learn more from news.delaware.gov [here](#).

### OfficeMax

In 2013, OfficeMax joined forces with Aspire of Illinois, Kessler Foundation, the Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (APSE), the REhabilitaiton Institute of Chicago and Illinoi Division of Rehabilitation Services in launching Aspire CareerLink, a work training facility in Hillside, Ill. for people with disabilities. The partnership, facilitated through a two-year grand from Kessler Foundation will utilize a real world work environment and specialized curriculum to train employees for meaningful careers within OfficeMax's distribution and retail centers. Read more from wsj.com [here](#).

### SAP

German Business Software Company SAP announced in 2013 that they would start employing people with autism as software testers, programmers and data quality assurance specialists across the world. SAP promised that 1 percent of its 65,000 strong workforce would be people with autism by 2020. SAP has also teamed up with Denmark's Specialisterne. Learn more from CNBC [here](#).

### TIAA-CREF

Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association and College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF) has a Fruits of Employment Program dedicated to hiring employees with autism. The program's mission is to create tools and processes that can enable workers with disabilities to become a reliable labor source for its farmland investments. Learn more from workforce.com [here](#).

*Please note this is a fluid document that we are constantly updating. If you are aware of any large businesses with initiatives dedicated to employing adults with autism or other developmental disabilities, we would love to hear from you! Email us at [adultservices@autismspeaks.org](mailto:adultservices@autismspeaks.org).*

**Autism Speaks thanks QBE for their generous support of  
the organization's employment initiatives.**

