

## DD Podcast: From the Director's Desk 15

### Transcript

**Heike Johns:**

Welcome to this month's edition of From the Director's Desk with Val Huhn, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities. I'm Heike Johns, Learning and Development Coordinator for the division, and your host for this podcast. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and this year the state of Missouri has an exciting new initiative to help people with disabilities obtain competitive integrated employment. On September 19th, Governor Parson issued executive order 1916, announcing the commencement of Missouri as a model employer. Val, what is Missouri as a model employer?

**Val Huhn:**

Missouri as a model employer is actually a national initiative that Governor Parson made Missouri become a part of. We did that as part of the Talent for Tomorrow, Best in the Midwest process because one of Governor Parson's initiatives is workforce development. We know that Missouri employers are facing labor shortages. We know that a gap exists between the percentage of Missourians with disabilities who want to be employed, and those who are actually employed. We know that if we can make the state of Missouri a model employer, and create a system that we can share with other employers, we can get more people with disabilities into the workforce. We also know that people in the workforce with disabilities do make for a better bottom line for both the state of Missouri and our employers.

**Heike Johns:**

What type of activities can we expect?

**Val Huhn:**

There's going to be a lot of public outreach videos. First, those are going to be shared within the state of Missouri employment system, so all of our executive agencies will have an opportunity to view these videos to understand the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. There will also be training that will occur for both the HR directors and the hiring managers on how to recruit and retain employees with disabilities. There'll be training on disability etiquette, and the value of having a diverse workforce, and how to create supportive workforces. We're also going to be having job fairs so that we can connect job seekers with hiring managers. Our initial talent showcase is going to occur on October 10th at one o'clock in the Capitol Rotunda.

**Heike Johns:**

So what can be done at the local levels to help support?

**Val Huhn:**

We really need help finding those job seekers. We know they're out there, but we need to be able to connect them to the employers. Typically, especially in the Division of Developmental Disabilities, we have job coaches and job developers that go out and do that. So this is just another avenue for that. So we want to make sure those folks understand that this avenue at first is going to exist in central Missouri, but then we're going to push it out state.

We need their help getting those pipeline of job seekers with disabilities in there. We want people to help discuss employment in all of your meetings, your planning meetings, your board meetings, all of that. We want people talking about people with disabilities accessing competitive employment. We also will help to dispel the myths about working while people are receiving different benefits. So the Division of Developmental Disabilities and I know vocational rehab both have benefits planners. Those benefits planners exist so that people understand how they can work and keep their benefits, because we want to make sure people can keep the benefits they really do need in order to have successful lives.

Please take an opportunity to partner with state agencies and private businesses in your local communities to help build workforce solutions. That includes maybe tailoring jobs a little bit differently, and getting the word out about what skills you really need so that those who know the people that want to work can help get the right people connected to the right jobs.

**Heike Johns:**

So if people want additional information or technical assistance, where can they get that?

**Val Huhn:**

You can start by contacting your local regional office and request assistance from our Employment First specialists there. We have four Employment First specialists that are located throughout the state that can help coordinate and collaborate with all of our workforce partners today.

Our employment first specialists can also assist with knowing which employment service may be best suited for an individual. They can give support coordinators strategies to assist with career planning. They help bust myths, and they also help with our benefits planning, which again, is really, really important. We want everybody to know, if you want a job, let us help you find a job. That's what Missouri as a model employer is kind of designed to do, both from the employee side and the employer side. We know employers need employees. We know that we've got people that want jobs, and we can help make those connections.

**Heike Johns:**

Thank you so much for being in the studio today with us and for sharing additional information about Missouri as a model employer.