Ergonomics can reduce or eliminate barriers

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1. Introduction
Many of the best people to enhance a business have a disability. The presentation will discuss case studies relating to several people with different disabilities, the barriers they experienced at various workplaces and the ergonomic strategies used to reduce or eliminate their barriers. The information during the presentation will enable the audience to understand that accommodating a person with a disability is possible.

2. Background
2.2 million Australians of working age (15 – 64 years) had a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Approximately only 54% of people with a disability were employed compared to 83% of people without a disability. In regards to the unemployed people with a disability, 19% were capable of working despite their disability. There was a $1.36 Billion dollar return to work benefit to the Australian economy to increase employment for people with a disability. An initiative of the Council of Australian Government identified a priority to increase access to employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with a disability (Department of Social Services, 2011).

People with a disability include four primary descriptions: 1/ Total or partial loss of person’s bodily or mental function, 2/ total or partial loss of a part of the body, 3/ presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness, and 4/ malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person’s body (ComLaw, 1992). Employers in Australia had a responsibility to consider reasonable adjustments for the worker when a person with a disability could perform the inherent requirements of the job (ComLaw, 1992). However, many employers struggled to know what options were available and therefore did not implement satisfactory workplace modifications that reduced or eliminated the barriers associated with a worker’s disability (Australian Human Resources Institute, 2011).

3. Findings
The Author had assisting workers with a disability and their employers consider and implement workplace adjustments that were reasonable and effective. Work places ranged from cities to regional towns to remote rural properties and encompassed a wide range of industries and work duties. Through thorough ergonomic assessments in conjunction with an understanding of an individual's disability and abilities, recommendations and solutions were made that had successfully permitted workers with a disability to maintain employment, and in many situations, increase their duties and opportunities. Areas where ergonomic intervention had assisted workers included mobility around a variety of work places, modification to the built environment and
vehicles, implementation of technology and development of specialised equipment designed for particular work duties in relation to worker's abilities (e.g., Photographs 1 – 4).

4. Discussion

Employment of a person with a disability is possible. The barriers experienced at various workplaces were reduced or eliminated thereby enabling people with a disability to participate in work.

Photograph 1. Touch-screen relocatable lift controller for Office Worker with Muscular Dystrophy.

Photograph 2. 4WD buggy modified for driving from wheelchair by Property Manager with Paraplegia.

Photograph 3. Adaptable Personal Access Crane used to transfer onto farm vehicles by Grazier with Spinal Injury.


References


