

## ***VEWAA Ninth National Forum***

Session F-4 Friday March 26, 1999

3:30 - 5:00

Excerpts from:

### **Successful Partnerships**

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Disability Services Administrator

Crestar Bank

### ***Who is Crestar Bank?***

#### **In Brief:**

Crestar Financial Corporation is a regional banking corporation with headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Crestar serves locations in Virginia, Maryland and Washington DC, plus selected markets nationally with over 612 banking locations and 662 ATMS.

To learn more about Crestar Bank please visit our website at [www.crestar.com](http://www.crestar.com).

### ***A commitment to individuals with disabilities.***

Crestar's role in the disability arena is twofold:

First, we are the "Lead Company" in the state of Virginia for the **Business Leadership Network (BLN)**, a national program working to increase employment opportunities of individuals with disabilities.

Second, Crestar also, provides accessible products and services for customers with disabilities.

### ***How did Crestar become involved in working with people with disabilities?***

In 1990 with the enactment of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) the private sector was mandated to increase accessibility to facilities, products, services and employment to individuals with disabilities. While Crestar moved swiftly to insure we were in compliance with the ADA we began to realize there was a large piece missing in our endeavors to be accessible ----- and that was lack of quality customer service for individuals with disabilities.

As Crestar facilities were becoming more accessible and we began to see an increase in individuals with varying disabilities visiting our branch locations it became obvious that our customer service staff was not fully equipped with the knowledge, understanding and awareness of the needs of customers with disabilities. Our first strategic move was to enter into a relationship with our state rehabilitation office – The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (otherwise known as DRS).

### ***The 'Private Sector':***

Even though the ADA has been around for nine years the private sector is just beginning to understand and realize the potential of individuals with disabilities. Managers, Human

Resource Staff , and even CEO's are beginning to realize that people with disabilities are not a group of individuals that need our pity. The ADA has assisted greatly in changing this view on a national level. And this changing view has obviously spilled over into Corporate America. Individuals with disabilities are proving over and over again that they are not defined by their disability but their ABILITIES.

Local rehabilitation offices obviously play a very large and important role in changing this perception. You are our single – direct link to applicants with disabilities. The applicants you send us is what will continue to change our view of working with and employing individuals with disabilities.

***Vocational Rehabilitation's Role:***

The name of the game is employment! The private sector has jobs that need to be filled and vocational rehabilitation offices have applicants we are looking for employment. It would appear this match is too obvious – but remember working with people with disabilities is still new to the private sector and we need some guidance on how to make this relationship work.

**BE PATIENT – THINGS WON'T CHANGE OVER NIGHT.** Trying anything new and different takes time – so don't lose your patience. Meet as many people as you can within each company, attend chamber meetings, enroll in as many organizations as you can that will enable you to run into and meet private sector employers. The most crucial role of a vocational rehabilitation counselor is to send your employers candidates who are job ready AND qualified. Nothing will close the door to future job opportunities then sending an applicant who is unskilled or not job ready.

***The fruits of our labor: Everybody Wins!***

Most importantly create, design, borrow, or join well recognized programs that increase employment of people with disabilities. Employment programs that offer an opportunity for recognition are key in obtaining participation from your local employers. Publicity, awards ceremonies, best practice honors are all big motivators for private corporations. The reason for this is it gives corporations recognition in their community and helps set them apart from their competitors. Plus, it gives you, the vocational rehabilitation office the chance to work more closely with private industry and this can benefit you not only through placements but you will probably find that corporations will begin to offer their services for speaking engagements, seminars and training of your staff and applicants.

Crestar Bank is involved in a national program called the **Business Leadership Network (BLN)**. The BLN is a program that is run by the President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities (PCEPD).

The BLN is a wonderful program and enables companies to get involved in a national program, on a local level. This truly is the beauty of the program. Each state has a lead company that steps up to the plate to spearhead the initiative among local and statewide employers. Each state BLN is designed by your employers and the communities in which they operate. There is no structure set in stone – you and your network of employers are

able to create how your BLN will work. The BLN works as a business to business led initiative supported by a strong partnership with vocational rehabilitation offices. Again, the private sector has jobs—and vocational rehabilitation offices has the applicants.

***How does the Virginia BLN work?***

The BLN is a statewide program. However, during our first year we (Crestar) decided to run the BLN out of Richmond where our headquarters is located. Crestar wanted to establish a solid partnership with DRS, create opportunities for success stories and work out any kinks in the program. So, when Crestar was ready for expansion, the BLN would be effective throughout our state and for the corporations committing to the BLN.

*Our first step* at Crestar (as the “Lead Company”) was to begin reviewing hiring and recruiting to make sure these practices were including individuals with disabilities. Some areas we had overlooked were as simple as sending our job postings to the Department of Rehabilitative Services, or contacting the Disabled Student Service Representatives when we were on campus doing recruiting. *Second*, was to publicly announce our mission of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to challenge other companies to join us.

*Third*, and most importantly was to introduce other employers to rehabilitation services and encourage a partnership with this agency. We consistently invite the rehabilitation staff members to all networking meetings. This enables them to answer questions about accommodations, accessibility, screening of applicants, training of HR staff – and more.

This format has proven to be successful for both the employers in the BLN and the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services. Crestar, the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the VBLN recently celebrated its first anniversary! During, our first year we recruited over 50 companies and put close to 100 individuals with disabilities to work. Forty-three (43) of those individuals were employed by Crestar Bank! And it is important to note that all of these individuals came to us and our network members from—The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services.

In June of this year we will begin our statewide expansion of the BLN -- and you can count on the fact that we will continue to rely heavily on our vocational rehabilitation staff. Crestar Bank is looking forward to another exciting year as the “Lead Company” for the Virginia Business Leadership Network.

To learn more about the Business Leadership Network or to get information on how to start a BLN in your state write or call:

*The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities*

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