



Greatest barrier to employment of people with disabilities – attitude

One of the great barriers to the employment of people with disabilities is not physical access to business premises – although that remains a major issue – it’s attitude.

That’s the view of Dr Jerry Gule, General Manager: HR & Transformation at Total South Africa and Chairman of South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D), an employer organisation that is committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace.

Dr Gule points out that the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 protects people with disabilities against unfair discrimination and entitles them to affirmative action measures. In addition, the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 and the Amendment Bill of 2011 make particular mention of people with disabilities.

Despite this, people with disabilities continue to experience disproportionately high unemployment levels in South Africa.

According to Dr Gule, fear, ignorance and stereotypes contribute to people with disabilities being unfairly discriminated against.

“Very often, that discrimination is not intentional but that doesn’t make it less discriminatory,” he adds.

Discrimination that prevents or hampers people with disabilities from taking their rightful place in the formal economy can range from setting employment criteria that excludes some people with disabilities – such as stressing that an employee must drive a car for a position where this may not strictly be necessary; to having premises that are inaccessible for wheelchairs and lack ablution facilities for people with disabilities.

“It is also not unusual to find employees with disabilities are kept in low status jobs and are less likely to be considered for promotion; they often receive inappropriate, inadequate or no training; and they often earn less than their able-bodied colleagues,” Dr Gule says.



South African **EMPLOYERS 4 DISABILITY**

“All of these issues can be addressed relatively easily with a change in attitude and a commitment to addressing these issues.”

Dr Gule says businesses need to carefully examine all their practices and identify barriers which prevent the employment of people with disabilities, or inadvertently discriminate against them once they join the organisation.

They should then develop an integrated framework around disability.

“However, probably the most important step is to break through the mental barriers to employment of people with disabilities; to obtain the buy-in from management and staff so as to ensure intellectual and practical commitment to the steps that need to be taken to make it work,” he concludes.

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About SAE4D

South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D) is a body constituted by employers who are committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace. The organisation was set up to share experience, develop best practices, confront and tackle prejudices that act as barriers to the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace, and form a common understanding of the challenges and solutions required to fully develop the potential of people with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to society and business.

SAE4D members are South African companies who are signatories to the Constitution of the SAE4D, its principles and values.

Current SAE4D members and supporters include: ABB; Absa; Anglo American; Barloworld; Bowman Gilfillan; Edcon; Ernst & Young; Eskom; Glenrand; KPMG; Lorimar; Nedbank; PPC; SAB and Total South Africa.

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