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Training a Dedicated Workforce: Dr. Philip H. Levy and YAI



Imagine hiring from an agency that consistently produces conscientious workers who are cheerful, loyal and get the job done. It's a small business owner's dream.

Manhattan-based YAI/National Institute for People with Disabilities Network has been training such employees for years.

The organization serves the developmentally disabled throughout

New York City, counties such as Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester and Rockland, as well as in New Jersey and Puerto Rico. "We start working with people at birth to provide early intervention and preschool programs," says Dr. Phillip H. Levy, YAI's president. "We serve them throughout their lifetime."

Among the programs YAI provides: residential services, primary health care, family support services, home health care and recreation programs. The organization's 5,500 employees make up the nation's largest nonprofit serving people with learning and developmental disabilities.

But what makes YAI noteworthy for small businesses is its unique job training and support programs. "We have two clients — the person with the disability and the business," he says. "We're not about charity, we're providing fully trained employees."

The training begins with learning work readiness and inter-

viewing skills, then progresses to an internship. Once a worker is placed in a full-time job, he or she is paired with a YAI-provided "job coach," who is a college graduate. The job coach makes sure the worker is able to perform all the duties of the position. The coach monitors the worker's performance and gradually withdraws when the worker is ready to handle the job alone. But, YAI never stops overseeing the worker. The organization monitors performance on a monthly basis, and can come in and retrain the worker if the job changes or the worker gets a promotion. If there's a problem with a worker, YAI takes the responsibility of talking with the employee, and, if necessary, finding him another job. "We have a partnership with small businesses and we never allow any problems to become that of the employers," says Levy.

Levy, a clinical psychologist, has been involved with YAI for 36 years. He first became involved with the group while still a student and then ran YAI's recreational program. At the time Levy started, the organization had three employees; it now has about 5,500. Helping him grow YAI over the years has been his brother, Joel Levy, YAI's chief executive officer.

Perhaps the highest compliment comes from Larry Zogby of Manhattan's RDS Delivery Services. Nearly half the company's 100 workers are developmentally disabled and many come from YAI. "The workers we have from YAI are hard workers, they come to work early, stay late, and they don't have any attitude problems," says Zogby. "We've cut our turnover in half. It just makes good business sense." □