

Press release

Workforce Holdings Limited
Reg No: 2006/018145/06
Share Code: WKF | ISIN: ZAE000087847

QUNU WORKFORCE ADDRESSES DISABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Tendai Khumalo, MD of Qunu Workforce

Wednesday, 6 September 2017: The Seventeenth Commission of Employment Equity report released recently highlighted the lack of progress in the transformation of South Africa's workplace, but there has been little mention of disability in the commentary that has followed. Tendai Khumalo, MD of Qunu Workforce, a Workforce Holdings company, which provides disability solutions for corporates and government explains that while there is well defined legislation with specific percentages and incentives around the employment, training and support of people with disabilities in both the private and government sectors, the appetite to comply is extremely weak.

Khumalo explains, "The Employment Equity Act states that at least 3% of the workforce should be employees with disabilities. The national disability prevalence rate in South Africa is around 7,5%, but it could be higher because of under-reporting. Their employment remains one of the major employment equity challenges that South Africa needs to tackle.

"While corporates are heavily penalised for not meeting B-BBEE scorecard targets, there are limited consequences, if any, for the public service for not achieving these. State owned entities generally don't get anywhere near the 3% employment target. Government employers should be leading by example and they are not," says Khumalo, who became disabled in 2003.

"There are many misconceptions and multiple definitions of disability in the workplace. The few with disabilities that are fortunate to have employment opportunities and access to training still have to jump through hoops and navigate mindsets and lack of knowledge around this topic. This may lead to further discrimination and undermining their competence."

Khumalo explains South Africa's policies and regulations are well set out in the Employment Equity Act and Codes of Good Practice on disability are comprehensive. Companies are well incentivised to train and employ disabled people through the Broad-based Codes for Black Economic Empowerment, and SA is a signatory to the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). "It looks good on paper, but are not where we should be when it comes to bringing disabled people into the mainstream and focusing on their ability and what they can contribute."

There is a tendency to view toilets, ramps, lifts, parking bays or modified work environments as successful indicators of embracing disability. "The true measure of diversity is not only linked to the physical environment but to the extent to which people with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream work environment and society at large.

"A paradigm shift is needed regarding the job roles typically ear-marked for persons with disabilities. There is a tendency to link contact centre jobs, admin roles and menial back-office jobs to people with disabilities with no career path and defined growth plans.

"There are also corporates that would rather pay the penalty than take on what they consider to be the 'disability problem'. We believe that the cost of fines could be better used to begin the journey of learning and gain insight into disability and how it can benefit the organisation. An awareness programme and meaningful dialogue with and about disability in the workplace helps break down misconceptions.

"Companies which have welcomed staff with disabilities have seen that these individuals are driven to succeed, inspire others with their tenacity and improve the morale and culture of the organisation they work for."

Khumalo adds that companies are aware of their responsibility to create a non-discriminatory environment for people with a disability but they don't know how to do this.

"Disability is not inability and mindsets have to shift towards what a person with a disability can do rather than what they can't do. Guide dogs, hearing aids, wheelchairs and other assistive devices do not make a person disabled - they enable and improve the quality of life for the disabled. It is the environment and perceptions that prevent people with disabilities being the best they can be and doing their jobs well."

Khumalo adds that one of most debilitating challenges that disabled people face is the lack of adequate public transport to and from work or training opportunities. "The current bus rapid transport system in Johannesburg which was designed to cater for the disabled was very noble - however if the first mile (home to station) and the last mile (station to workplace) is not taken into consideration, how is a person with a physical disability supposed to get to the bus rank?"

Qunu Workforce helps businesses to source, hire and train people with disabilities, transforming their lives and adding value to the business including improving the company's B-BBEE scorecard.

According to the Employment Equity Act in South Africa, people with disabilities have a long-term or recurring physical, including sensory, or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospect of entry into or advancement in employment.

-ENDS-

About Qunu Workforce

Qunu Workforce works with employers in the private and public sectors to help them meet the requirements of the Employment Equity Act that states that at least 3% of the workforce are employees with disabilities. It supports companies to attain universal access for disabled employees and remove barriers that prevent the full integration of disabled people. Qunu is the enterprise development business of Workforce Holdings which owns 51% of the company.

www.qunuworkforce.co.za