

In Tight Labor Market, Calls Centers Find Secret Weapon: Home-Based Agents with Disabilities

As the unemployment rate drops to 3.9%, a quality and cost effective solution has been found for a shrinking workforce through individuals with disabilities.

BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, October 23, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When Erin Blunt and Jack Sands founded a company in 2000 to handle membership and emergency roadside service calls nationwide for auto clubs like AAA, they envisioned a business model using work-at-home agents. But the two entrepreneurs, who lived in Ohio, couldn't find enough call center agents locally who wanted to work from home, especially between the hours of 5 and 9 PM, peak time for the type of calls they were fielding.

Then a colleague told Blunt about [National Telecommuting Institute \(NTI\)](#)

in Boston, MA. The non-profit offered just what Blunt needed for her upstart company: a nationwide group of individuals with disabilities happy to work from home, who liked talking to customers, and were fine with odd hours and part-time shifts. NTI works exclusively with

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Erin Blunt of VForce

Americans with disabilities who want or need to work from home. “NTI turned out to be the answer,” Blunt says. “Their agents perform as well as any I've used, and the turnover is lower than other remote workforces. NTI even handles our payroll and other HR tasks—they're a very good deal.” Blunt began using the at-home agents with disabilities almost immediately and has continued to do so. Today her company, [VForce](#), employs almost 50 NTI agents and is planning on adding 20 more over the coming months. Having agents across the country means when a snowstorm hits Ohio and local agents are inundated with service calls or can't get to work because of road

conditions, NTI agents are still available because they work from home in unaffected states.

Workers with disabilities benefit from NTI's services as well. Tammy Crawford was a customer service supervisor with Delta Airlines for 13 years before being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and needing to leave her job with Delta. She discovered NTI, found it was a great fit, and has been working as an agent now for ten years. Currently, she works the 10am-2pm shift for VForce, helping AAA members from her home in Florida. “The mid-day shift is perfect for me,” she says.



Alan Hubbard, COO of NTI discusses next steps with Director of eMentoring Lynda Gardner

"The supervisors are really good, and I love helping customers. I like having co-workers, and I even like paying taxes again! I am so glad I discovered NTI." Crawford's delight in being able to work-at-home despite her disability is typical of successful at-home agents.

Because NTI wants the companies they partner with to be successful, they provide free, online training to make sure potential at-home agents have the skills they need. Individuals with disabilities who have completed the comprehensive three-day training have ended up with jobs at Amazon, Sykes, the IRS and Fortune 500 companies across the nation. More than 1000 individuals with disabilities a month sign up for training, and NTI hopes that

number will increase as more learn of the free service to Americans and veterans with disabilities. People interested in training are responsible for providing their own hardware, but for those who don't have a home computer, training can be done at a local library, employment center, or vocational rehabilitation office. "We attract people who would normally be overqualified but are glad to get this work. Veterans, nurses, teachers, store managers, even programmers—a disability can happen to anyone," says Alan Hubbard, NTI's Chief Operating Officer. "Our clients tell us the NTI agents have a maturity that customers really respond to." Once NTI agents find work-at-home jobs that fit their needs, they rarely job hop. A typical turnover rate among agents assigned to an NTI contract is 8%, vs. a call center industry average of 33%. Agents love the work and employers love the loyalty. The end result is that workers with disabilities are increasingly able to find and maintain financial independence and the companies that employ them save on training and other costs of high turnover.

NTI hopes the current labor squeeze helps it place more individuals with disabilities. The non-profit currently has hundreds of trained agents ready to go at a moment's notice and wants call centers to know it! "Our clients find us through word of mouth," Hubbard says. "That's a great testimonial, but we could help a lot more people find jobs if more call centers knew about us. The irony is, for companies willing to go remote, we're a bargain with no downside. Our agents perform well and they're loyal. Customers will never see or hear a disability—though they might sense more patient service. But that's a good thing."

Blunt agrees. "When you think about it, almost everyone either has a disability or knows someone who does," she says. "Bad luck shouldn't mean you can't work if you want to. We're proud to help NTI demonstrate that."

Employers interested in hiring NTI agents should contact Alan Hubbard, COO, at ahubbard@nticentral.org, or visit www.nticentral.org. And for Americans with disabilities on SSI/SSDI who want to work at home, call 877-248-8912.

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About NTI: National Telecommuting Institute (NTI) is a 501 (c)(3) not for profit organization with headquarters in Boston, MA. It has been supporting Americans with disabilities since 1995. NTI provides training and job placement in work-at-home positions across the United States. NTI pioneered staffing virtual call centers with Americans with Disabilities, including Disabled Veterans, who work from home.



NTI, work at home agent, Randall Love, conducting his day-to-day activities.

About VForce: VForce is a virtual call center utilizing at-home agents combined with the industry's most robust and advanced technology. We formed VForce Auto Club Renewals to exclusively service AAA Clubs across the country and developed a state-of-the-art expired membership renewal program that is decreasing operating costs and increasing AAA's ability to build more profitable customer relationships.

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