

**Interview with Joseph Carbone
President and Chief Executive Officer
The Workplace Inc.**

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities to employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation and change.

[Laurie Harrington] Welcome to “Research in Brief,” a featured podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I'm your host, Laurie Harrington. Employees with disabilities are productive, dependable, committed and loyal, when given appropriate opportunities. If the individual skills match the employer's needs, hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense. Yet despite the national data and numerous success stories of employers that have hired people with disabilities in Southwestern Connecticut and West Chester Putnam Counties in New York, significant gaps in services and challenges remain when it comes to employment for people with disabilities in preparing the future workforce. Joseph Carbone is the President and Chief Executive Officer for the Workplace Inc., an innovative workforce development board which helps people prepare for careers and develops the workforce for employers in Southwestern Connecticut. The Workplace Inc. serves more than 22 thousand people in 200 businesses a year in a 20 town region bridging Fairfield and New Haven Counties. Joe is a champion for regional workforce and economic development initiatives and emphasizes creating value added through broader collaboration, ensuring that the system invests its resources to serve new constituencies and to create an enduring impact. The Workplace Inc. has been the co-team leader of the NTAR leadership's center work in Connecticut, in partnership with the governor's southwest office. Welcome to our podcast, Joe. First, the Workplace Inc. has just released a new research report on people with disabilities called *The Hidden Workforce*. Can you share with us some of the report's key findings?

[Joe Carbone] Yeah I think lets begin by saying that the name of the report, *The Hidden Workforce*, I think says a lot about the content of the report. It's very clear to us that there is a substantial group of folks with disabilities that are part of our community and much to our surprise about 60 percent of the folks with disabilities in our region are actually employed. And I think that may account for, that may be the result of the fact that the rate of people with college degrees or at least high school degrees in the region is generally higher than elsewhere but that number of people employed I think is a statement that we are doing some things that are certainly good. I think we've got a culture in the region, and that came across very clear in the report, where businesses, beyond the notion of being a good corporate citizen, feel a sense that they respect the work of people with disabilities and what is clearly popping up is that they are reliable, they take their work seriously. They don't miss much work and what they can do well or what they can do best is as good or better than anyone who does not have a disability. So having said that I will tell you that I think we need to, it was clear that the culture of business in our region was a very, very positive thing in our favor. We also saw that for those who were not employed, the notion of a system of transportation was a major barrier for a lot of folks from being unemployed to being employed and I think with that there was the clear indication that

we've got to be a lot more active working with the states of Connecticut and New York to make sure there's adequate funding available to support the kind of a system that would enable people to get to work everyday and then to get back home and of course the actual accommodations that they may need. The last item that I think was kind of important to us is that there is a sort of misconception as what accommodations cost. Many business leaders felt that they couldn't afford to be accommodating and when you get down to the real particulars of what it does cost, per person, I think you begin to get businesses to think very, very differently. So what was clear to us was that a major job for the workplace and for our partner as a result of the information in this report, we've got to be that sort of advocate for awareness. The more businesses learn about what's really involved and what the benefits can be, the more you can get businesses to listen and take it seriously.

[Laurie Harrington] How important is it for workforce investment boards, like the Workplace Inc., to collaborate and partner with federal and state and local agencies to promote the employment of people with disabilities?

[Joe Carbone] I think it's extremely important thing for workforce boards to do and I say that because workforce boards act as a receiver of federal money under the Workforce Investment Act, to really provide the doorway to the workforce system in each region, which is often called the one stops. They are run through the workforce investment boards and that's where really the rubber meets the road in our business and where people with disabilities can access information and services that can really help them. So A, workforce investment boards receive money to support a system that can be accommodating to people with disabilities. Those with disabilities are a part of a list of special populations of folks that need to be considered when you prepare budgets and work plans in all regions of this nation. And I think an important role that workforce boards need to play is that we are a voice and a convener in regions about workforce development and all of its component parts. So in terms of promoting the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and bringing about the kind of accommodations that are needed, that's a responsibility that workforce boards have that they must be active in. Let me give you one more point on this which is, the one stop centers, in our case in Southwestern Connecticut and I think let me include for the time being here, West Chester County, New York, probably 50 to 60 thousand people a year come through those doors and are serviced. We've got our centers so that they can accommodate people with disabilities so really almost you know regardless of whatever your disability may be, we've got the adaptive technology on sight so that you can traverse the American workforce system. You can do what others do in terms of searching for employment or career opportunities or other ways outside of employment that you can be helped that would be a positive movement towards being successful in one's career. That's done at the one stop level. So with that infrastructure within the grasp of workforce investment boards, they need to be in the forefront of advancing the interest of people with disabilities.

[Laurie Harrington] Has the NTAR Leadership Center initiative contributed to improve partnerships in collaboration?

[Joe Carbone] With respect to NTAR, I think this was kind of a blessing to us. That governor of our state and her designee, in fact chairs our local group, it brought her and all of the state departments that come with the state of Connecticut, to the table at very high levels of

administration to develop a plan to talk about what we do, talk about what others do better, getting all kinds of info on real best practices and how we as a state can be far more responsive than we have been to people with disabilities. So NTAR, because it involved in the very beginning the governors of the three states that are involved in it, I think it brought a level of clout to the process of being more serviceable to people with disabilities, that we did not have before. So it's very, very important that the workforce boards be involved in NTAR and how it helped us. And we were blessed with NTAR in getting our governor, Governor Rell to get her top commissioners and many others and appointing her executive aid in Bridgeport to be the chair of the committee to undertake this task.

[Laurie Harrington] Given the nations dismally high unemployment rates, how can the Workplace Inc. and other workforce investment boards, encourage employers to include people with disabilities as part of the talent pipeline when they start hiring again?

[Joe Carbone] Well I think that as part of an effort to create a sense of awareness as to what the facts are, never mind what the perceptions are but what are the facts about hiring people with disabilities? Workforce investment boards can really serve to enlighten businesses and to sort of make a little twist here in the culture to not approach businesses from the standpoint of being a good corporate citizen but truly looking at how folks with disabilities can affect the bottom line. And I say that because what we do know now is that as part of informing businesses you can talk about tax credits that are available for hiring people with disabilities, you can talk about the fact that many already have insurance under Medicare or Medicaid or other programs, you can talk about the fact that the track record of people with disabilities in terms of the cost of recruitment, cost of retention, their ability to sort of grow with the job, is as good, if not better, then people without disabilities. You can also develop another point, that the public regards businesses that have a good policy towards hiring people with disabilities extremely favorably and that people are more inclined to be supportive of companies that do in fact manifest a culture towards people with disabilities that is favorable. And we've got data; we've got all sorts of information that can be supportive of that. So I think that to you know fully respond to this question, we can be really the entity that provides the real facts here. I think if you read the report and I'm not sure if it was as clear as it could have been or it should have been, the notion of folks having a misconception about what was involved with hiring people with disabilities, I think has over the years has been a major impediment towards advancing their interest and the more in fact people find out, the more we're able to do things. So even in a bad economy like this one, when you can approach business from the standpoint of not just being that corporate citizen but bottom line and maybe it means they have to make some adjustments in the way in which they handle their human resource programs, the way that they actually construct a job so that it's much more focused and kind of specialized and people can do more of what they do best as opposed to other things that may be more of a challenge. I think you begin to talk their language and you take it out of the realm of, let me do something nice to it's in my interest to in fact be part of this.

[Laurie Harrington] We've heard about the world according to Joe, can you share with us your personal vision for the nations workforce development system?

[Joe Carbone] Yeah, I think that one of things that's gonna be a fallout from this recession and it's clearly a recession that's unlike the previous seven or eight that we have had, is that

businesses are by and large going to change the way in which they do business with respect to their human resource operations. I think it's going to become much more focused and tailored towards really creating jobs around responsibilities so as to get the optimum top result from every person that's doing anything. I think that's going to play to the interest of people with disabilities because every report that we look at, everything that we can give to business indicates, give somebody more to do of what they can do best and you benefit and they benefit. So to the extent that that is part of what results because what's gonna happen here post recession is that the notion of competitiveness is gonna get tighter, doing more for less is going to be much more prevalent than it's ever been before. The days of business as usual are over and there's gonna have to be new techniques, new approaches. I think it's gonna work to the interest of people with disabilities because I think you're gonna see virtually every job tailored down to a precision point so that people do what they truly can do best. Now why is it important? Because it will enable us to get to the point of a person's abilities and not their disabilities. Everybody will be looked upon not for what else may be a barrier to them in their life but the particular task we have before us. This is what we want and let's measure candidates on the basis of what they can do. I think you're gonna see that and I think it's going to make its way through every aspect of our economy and our business groups. And when it does, people with disabilities have to be readied, able and prepared to be a competitor in that process. So I think what's in store for us, those in the workforce system, is to make sure we have a system that can bring people to a level or a platform whereby they can be competitive in that kind of an environment. This may be an opportunity that we have never had before so we need to take full advantage of it, making sure folks with disabilities are ready for it and then as business after business moves more and more to establish programs of this sort or human resource operation of this type, I think we can watch that person after person will find that doors are gonna open that have never been opened before.

[Laurie Harrington] Thank you, Joseph Carbone, for speaking with us today. I have been talking today with Joseph Carbone, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Workplace Inc. in Southwestern Connecticut, about how workforce investment boards can best serve people with disabilities. This is Laurie Harrington for research and brief with the NTAR Leadership Center.

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