

Hiring the hearing impaired: Home Depot sets model program

Atlanta-based Home Depot recently completed a yearlong implementation of its Deaf2Work program in Minnesota, in collaboration with that state's employment department. The company hired 15 hearing-impaired workers and is poised to expand the program to other states.

Home Depot already tested the program in Georgia and has retained 48 of 65 people hired through that pilot project.

The company's also experimenting with using instant-messaging as a way for the hearing impaired to work in front-end positions, such as cashier and sales assistant. Some hearing-impaired sales associates also wear apron attachments that ask the customer to "Tap me on the shoulder and I'll be glad to help."

Tip: In a tightening labor market, it's a model worth copying: As studies repeatedly show, disabled workers have higher retention rates and better attendance than the general employee population.