

## CASE STUDY: MARK WAFER, TIM HORTON'S



**2010**

**Toronto, Ontario**

Valarie and Mark Wafer opened their first Tim Hortons location in Scarborough, Ontario in 1995. The business grew quickly with new locations opening each year for the first five years. The business became more complex, with tough competition as it transitioned from a mom and pop style coffee shop to a cutting edge, high tech operation. Today it is a strong and vibrant company with 250 employees representing workers from

over 40 countries, every cultural and religious group, sexual orientation and most importantly, those who have a disability.

When the Wafer's realized their current staff could not keep up with the demands of a busy dining room, they sought out a new employee. The individual who applied, Clint, had Down Syndrome. Mark enlisted the help of Community Living Toronto, a large service agency that provided job coaches to help teach Clint how to do the job and how to take a bus to work. Once on board, Clint became one of the Wafer's best employees. He arrived early for work, had to be persuaded to take a break and had to be actively encouraged to go home after his shift ended.

The morale of the other workers increased as they tried to keep up with the loyalty that Clint displayed.

"The single most important decision Valarie and I made in the 20 years as Tim Horton's franchise owners was to include people with disabilities in meaningful and competitively paid positions throughout the operation. Our business today is stronger than ever, a direct result of hiring from this largely untapped labour of people with skills and education, motivation and work ethic but mostly unemployed only because they have a disability."

Mark Wafer

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### The Business Case for Hiring a Person with a Disability

As stores were added to the franchise, the Wafers added staff with intellectual disabilities, each one in a meaningful position and each one paid a real wage. They realized that the [workers with disabilities](#) were never late or sick, required no supervision, worked in a safer manner and never quit. Their turnover was basically zero. Mark realized there was a business case for employing people with disabilities - they were more productive and more innovative. Valarie and Mark opened their doors to applicants with all types of disabilities.

The result has been profound. One hundred and twenty-two employees with disabilities have worked in their restaurants. They've hired people with all types of disabilities including deaf, blind, physical, mental health, learning, intellectual, and episodic.

The Wafers recruit them for every company position as well as management. Today 46 of their 250 employees have a disability.

Mark believes that they have created a competitive edge over other QSR sector businesses:

- Their safety rating is exemplary and they have never filed a workplace injury claim for any worker with a disability.
- The absenteeism rate for the 46 employees with disabilities is 85% lower than employees without disabilities.
- The employee turnover rate is 38% versus an industry average of 100%. More compelling is the fact that the employee turnover rate for the non-disabled workers is only 55%, exactly half the norm.

“Studies show that employees who have a disability work 97 per cent safer, have attendance records 86 per cent greater, stay on the job up to 5 times longer, and increase morale so that non-disabled staff stay longer (huge win for me). Accommodations average \$500 but in most cases its zero and best of all productivity is 20 per cent higher. Why? Because the job is precious, it took a long time to get that job. I cannot buy the loyalty my disabled staff has for my company. What business would not want this?”

Mark Wafer

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### Championing the Inclusive Workplace

Being an inclusive employer has positively affected the bottom line. Valarie and Mark continue to employ the best workers they can find and many of those will be people who have a disability. The Wafers continue to encourage other businesses to adopt disability confidence and hire inclusively and to work closely with governments to ensure the right policies are in place to change attitudes and mindsets of companies that don't yet "get it."

"Change is happening – organizations such as Walgreen's have scaled up, led by the visionary Randy Lewis. Rich Donovan has proven the business case is real and tangible through his *Return on Disability Index*."

Mark is an outspoken and passionate advocate for the business case for hiring a person with a disability. He publishes regular articles and newsfeeds and is a keynote speaker across the globe on this issue. He is an active board member on the Federal Panel on Labour Market

Opportunities for Persons with

Disabilities, the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure Partnership Council, Canadian Business SensAbility, the Canadian Hearing Society and the Abilities Centre in Whitby. He has been recognized for his efforts with a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.



The Champions League Award recognizes employers who've made great progress in hiring people who have a disability, promoting the movement and making a commitment to continue it in the future.

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### For More Information

Hiring disabled workers is good for business (CBC Report 9:58 minutes)

[https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=ADEAAANZvIYBPhJaj7thIzYsG67mfb0Lq33BT90&authType=OPENLINK&authToken=vNxw&locale=en\\_US&srchid=547683761446061339370&srchindex=1&srchttotal=5&trk=vsrp\\_people\\_res\\_name&trkInfo=VSRPsearchId%3A547683761446061339370%2CVSRPtargetId%3A56213078%2CVSRPcmpt%3Aprimary%2CVSRPnm%3Atrue%2CauthType%3AOPENLINK](https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=ADEAAANZvIYBPhJaj7thIzYsG67mfb0Lq33BT90&authType=OPENLINK&authToken=vNxw&locale=en_US&srchid=547683761446061339370&srchindex=1&srchttotal=5&trk=vsrp_people_res_name&trkInfo=VSRPsearchId%3A547683761446061339370%2CVSRPtargetId%3A56213078%2CVSRPcmpt%3Aprimary%2CVSRPnm%3Atrue%2CauthType%3AOPENLINK)

Mark Wafer: Enabling the Disabled (Steve Paikin interview on TVO) (24 minutes)

[https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=ADEAAANZvIYBPhJaj7thIzYsG67mfb0Lq33BT90&authType=OPENLINK&authToken=vNxw&locale=en\\_US&srchid=547683761446059370734&srchindex=1&srchttotal=5&trk=vsrp\\_people\\_res\\_name&trkInfo=VSRPsearchId%3A547683761446059370734%2CVSRPtargetId%3A56213078%2CVSRPcmpt%3Aprimary%2CVSRPnm%3Atrue%2CauthType%3AOPENLINK](https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=ADEAAANZvIYBPhJaj7thIzYsG67mfb0Lq33BT90&authType=OPENLINK&authToken=vNxw&locale=en_US&srchid=547683761446059370734&srchindex=1&srchttotal=5&trk=vsrp_people_res_name&trkInfo=VSRPsearchId%3A547683761446059370734%2CVSRPtargetId%3A56213078%2CVSRPcmpt%3Aprimary%2CVSRPnm%3Atrue%2CauthType%3AOPENLINK)

Tim Hortons: Our twenty year journey of inclusion

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/tim-hortons-our-twenty-year-journey-inclusion-mark-wafer?trk=prof-post>