



trained in how the real world works," he explains. "So they may have two days for a specific job and they have to accomplish it. I find that they do, because they care about the business, because they know that we are working at this together."

Kocsy has created some true believers in his staff. Before coming to work at the Panda as a receptionist, Beáta Bory, who is recovering from mental illness, was unable to work for seven years. "I never thought I'd be able to work again," she explains, "but when I was contacted by an agency that tries to place the disabled I thought 'why not?' I phoned them and had two interviews. I was offered a job here as a receptionist and I live only five minutes away." Today, Bory works four days a week, even on weekends, and says she's enjoying booking rooms, supervising some staff and communicating with guests. She admits that sometimes she needs help from the boss when guests have to pay by credit card, but Kocsy is happy to oblige.

### LONG WAY TO GO

Kocsy is something of a pioneer in employing people with disabilities in Hungary. According to Hungary's National Federation of Disabled Persons' Associations (MEOSZ), the employment of those with "changed working abilities" is being promoted by the government. In addition to subsidies covering salaries, funding is also available for things like making workplaces accessible for the disabled or sign-language interpretation.

MEOSZ contends that Hungarian enterprises can also capitalize on the diversity in staff resulting from the employment of disabled people, which can result in a real competitive advantage

## Employing disabled people can result in a real competitive advantage.

for businesses. But it seems the country has a long way to go because, other than the Panda, only a handful of companies appear to be taking this on, including CIB, Nexton, T-Mobile, and IBM. Official statistics confirm this: in Hungary (and Central Europe) only 10% of the disabled are employed, compared to 40-50% in Western Europe.

MEOSZ's Julia Bernáth believes that, according to the examples of multinationals operating in Hungary, employing people with disabilities can be integrated into companies' corporate social responsibility plans to the benefit of all involved. "The

reputation of a company is promoted not only through direct marketing, but also if it becomes widely known that the company employs people with changed working abilities," she explains.

Bernáth cites the Americans with Disabilities' Act (ADA) in the US, which came into force in 1993, as a good example. "This Act is a model to the European Disability Movement which has been struggling for many years to implement such a model here on our continent as well. Therefore, we would be grateful if US companies would set good examples to other companies, both in Hungary and in other European countries."

Meanwhile, as the Hotel Panda is fully equipped with wheelchair access to accommodate both its employees and guests, Kocsy believes it's a real competitive advantage. "There's a scarcity of resources on the market for disabled guests and we have more experience with this, specifically because of our staff – we know better what is necessary." In terms of marketing the Panda Hotel, Kocsy says he's not using his staff's uniqueness as a selling point. "We're not advertising this – sometimes it surprises guests. One guest who came for dental surgery was shocked, but most foreign guests find this perfectly understandable." ★