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When Existing Jobs Don't Fit: A Guide to Job Creation

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When Existing Jobs Don't Fit: A Guide to Job Creation

Abstract

[Excerpt] Successful job development for people with disabilities is about meeting the specific and often unique needs of each job seeker. Job creation is a way to modify or restructure existing jobs or bring together a combination of job tasks that fill the work needs of an employer while capitalizing on the skills and strengths of workers with significant disabilities.

Although there are various approaches to creating jobs, the implementation steps and overall goals and outcomes are the same. One approach is to develop a new position (one that did not previously exist), such as a mail delivery clerk at a business where personnel used to pick up their own mail at a central location. Another strategy involves selecting certain duties from one or more existing jobs and combining them into a separate position (for instance, a worker is hired in an office to support only copying and filing needs).

Keywords

job creation, disability, strategies, employment, labor market

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WHEN EXISTING JOBS DON'T FIT: A GUIDE TO JOB CREATION

By COLLEEN CONDON, LARA ENEIN-DONOVAN, MARIANNE GILMORE, & MELANIE JORDAN

JOB CREATION: WHAT IS IT?

Successful job development for people with disabilities is about meeting the specific and often unique needs of each job seeker. Job creation is a way to modify or restructure existing jobs or bring together a combination of job tasks that fill the work needs of an employer while capitalizing on the skills and strengths of workers with significant disabilities.

Although there are various approaches to creating jobs, the implementation steps and overall goals and outcomes are the same. One approach is to develop a new position (one that did not previously exist), such as a mail delivery clerk at a business where personnel used to pick up their own mail at a central location. Another strategy involves selecting certain duties from one or more existing jobs and combining them into a separate position (for instance, a worker is hired in an office to support only copying and filing needs).

IN THIS BRIEF, YOU WILL LEARN TO:

- Assess when it is appropriate to use job creation techniques as an alternative to more conventional job development and marketing
- Gather efficient and appropriate information you need in order to identify job creation opportunities
- Approach employers confidently to pitch and negotiate job creation ideas
- Use a customized, systematic planning process to implement job creation when assisting job seekers to gain employment

WHO IS IT FOR?

People with more severe disabilities have often been excluded from community employment because, even with training and ongoing supports, they have been unable to successfully complete the complex variety of responsibilities associated with existing jobs. Job creation is for individuals who present the employment specialist with a higher level of challenge. This technique is appropriate for job seekers with a severity of disability such that their physical, cognitive, or emotional capacity seriously limits their potential to perform typical jobs.

Perhaps a job seeker is not able to multitask, needs a highly structured environment to succeed at a job, or can sustain work activity for only one hour at a time. It is our duty as employment specialists to do all that we can to facilitate an opportunity for everyone who wants to work.

Job creation works well and can make a meaningful difference for those who truly need such a specialized effort. But be aware that this is not a quick fix for "hard to place" job seekers. Creating a job is very labor-intensive and takes lots of time, energy, and commitment. In some cases it can take up to a year to plan, investigate, and secure a created employment situation.

WHEN DO YOU DO IT?

Job creation can be implemented at any point during the job search process. In some situations all other avenues have been exhausted.

As the employment specialist you have turned over every stone and talked to nearly everyone within a 50-mile radius of the individual's home. Ultimately, it is safe to conclude that there are no jobs available that fit the individual's skills, abilities, and interests.

In other cases, from the first phases of job development it becomes apparent that the individual will need a very unique employment situation to be successful. The individual may have very limited skills and abilities and be unable to perform the duties in most of the positions that are open, even with extensive supports. Job creation will open up more opportunities, in less time, for the job seeker.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

Successfully using job creation to open employment opportunities for job seekers with more severe disabilities requires more than just good employer relationships. It requires thoroughly getting to know the desires, skills, and attributes of the person with a disability (through career planning) and getting to know the employer's workforce needs beyond existing job descriptions. Remember that even in tough economic times involving layoffs, job creation can be a reasonable economic strategy for employers to fill specific needs.

FIVE KEY COMPONENTS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING A JOB:

1. DEVELOP A JOB SEEKER PROFILE
2. ASSEMBLE A BRAINSTORMING GROUP
3. GATHER INFORMATION FROM BUSINESSES
4. GENERATE A LIST OF POSSIBLE JOBS AND/OR TASKS
5. NEGOTIATE WITH THE EMPLOYER

DEVELOP A JOB SEEKER PROFILE

1. Sometimes it can be difficult to develop a profile of a person due to the severity of their disability. The employment specialist may have to use a variety of methods to get a clear idea of what the individual might want to do. This can be done by:

- Sitting down with the job seeker and asking questions
- Modifying the types of questions from open-ended to more concrete until you get the desired information
- Observing the job seeker in a variety of situations
- Talking with people who know the job seeker well
- Reviewing case notes or annual meeting plans that relate to employment
- Using alternative communication modes such as videos, pictures, storytelling, photographs, illustrations, etc.

When beginning to create a job for someone, employment specialists need to look beyond the basic questions that they would usually ask every job seeker (such as dreams, activities, likes, and dislikes at home, work, school, daytime activities, and recreation). Some additional questions that may be helpful to ask include:

- What kind of environment does the job seeker enjoy/fit in?
- Are there specific personality types that this individual is most comfortable with or fits in well with?
- Are there any accommodation/support needs?
 - If yes, what is already available?
 - What needs to be explored further?
- Where has the job seeker been happiest?
- Where has the job seeker experienced success?
- Where has the job seeker not experienced success?

With all these questions, don't forget to ask "why."

ASSEMBLE A BRAINSTORMING GROUP

2. In almost every case it can be helpful to involve other people in the process. Along with the job seeker, significant individuals in the person's life (friends, family, other professionals, community members, etc.) make a great brainstorming group. Try to include people with a variety of perspectives and from different aspects of the community—business people, community leaders, and the like. This brainstorming group can be facilitated as a large group, in individual meetings, in person, over the phone, or by email. Each job seeker will have his/her own idea about how to make this work for them, and that needs to be respected.

Brainstorming groups can help by:

- Expanding the pool of resources
- Granting access to personal networks and referrals
- Providing multiple perspectives
- Contributing ideas
- Providing emotional support
- Lending technical expertise
- Sharing personal experiences

Once a basic profile of the individual has been developed, the next step is to look at possible work environments that might be a good setting for the job seeker. Many times when employment specialists create a job, the work environment is just as-if not more-important than the actual tasks that the individual is going to do. Some people will find success in a noisy, social environment, while others may do better in a quiet office space where they have very little contact with others.

At this point the employment specialist should develop a list of at least four criteria for a work environment that would be a good match for the job seeker. Sometimes the answer to this is not obvious and the employment specialist will need to use some creative strategies to generate more information such as:

- Situational assessments
- Volunteer jobs
- Job tours

Once you have generated sufficient information concerning work environment preferences, use the brainstorming group to identify types of businesses that would potentially be a good match for the person. If necessary, expand on these ideas by talking to other individuals outside the group. Then it is time to begin to identify network connections to those businesses. Begin by asking "Who do we know who works in, or has a connection to, the types of businesses that were generated during the brainstorming process?" Use the brainstorming group as the starting point for identifying these network connections, but also talk to anybody else who might be helpful (other agency personnel, businesspeople, etc.).

GATHER INFORMATION FROM BUSINESSES



Using the ideas and network connections identified above, go to these businesses and investigate potential opportunities for the job seeker. Doing this should entail observation as well as talking to employees, managers, customers, and anyone else who may be a useful source of information. Some of the questions to ask and observations to make include:

- What are the variety of tasks that are necessary for the business to operate?
- When is the company busiest: each day, during the week, during the year?
- Are there tasks that could be done more efficiently or more often?
- Are there tasks that aren't getting done because no one has the time?
- Are there tasks that take employees away from their more critical job duties? (their areas of expertise or "real" jobs)
- Does the employer have employees working overtime?

What Is Situational Assessment?

Many job seekers with limited work experience simply do not know what kind of job might suit them or what kind of on-the-job support they might need. A situational assessment is an opportunity to perform real work in a real work environment on a short-term basis. Typically, an employment specialist works with a job seeker for a few hours or days on a job site that matches the job seeker's career goals. In short, situational assessment is an assessment that uses actual employment and community settings.

Situational assessment

- Can determine:
 - Work preferences
 - Task skills and abilities
 - Social skills and abilities
- Can be used two ways:
 - As a major component of the assessment process prior to job development
 - As a job "tryout" prior to the hiring process
- Is also known as:
 - Job sampling
 - On-the-job assessment
 - Behavioral assessment
 - Environmental assessment

Job Creation Ideas

- Run your own coffee or sandwich/soda business within a company
- Carve out a data entry position from an administrative staff position
- Create a mail delivery service at a company that does not offer this to their employees
- Add a greeter position at YMCAs, health clubs, and other companies
- Complete just the vacuuming part of a cleaning job
- Copy or shred confidential information at a university or hospital
- Put together promotional packets for a marketing company
- Work in the stock room at a retail store on shipment days
- Break down boxes at a liquor store or warehouse
- Price items at a retail store

- If the business and employees could have help with anything, what would it be?
- What is the biggest challenge the business faces in its day-to-day operations?
- What are the areas for growth or potential growth for the business?
- Are there tasks for which the employer typically uses temporary or student employees?
- Are there services the business would like to offer or could offer that are not in place presently?
- What kind of work atmosphere and culture does the company have?

GENERATE A LIST OF POSSIBLE JOBS AND/OR TASKS

4.

From the information developed in the above steps, put together a list of tasks, jobs, and/or areas where the job seeker could

potentially meet an employer need. Some job seekers may have only one specific task that they could do for an employer, such as putting together pizza boxes or delivering faxes. Other job seekers might have a list of potential tasks that they would like to do for an employer, and they are looking for the right employer where they can use some or all of these skills. Be cautious not to create jobs that further devalue people with disabilities by physically separating them from other workers or by having them perform tasks that are considered bothersome, dangerous, or unpleasant.

At this time you should start to consider any accommodation needs that might be helpful to ensure the individual's success. Remember that accommodations can be high-tech, low-tech, or no-tech. Most accommodations cost less than \$500, and many can be arranged with no money at all. For some job seekers you will already know what they need in order to succeed in the workplace, such as photographs of the tasks to be completed or a wheelchair-accessible environment. For others you will know that they will need assistance with, say, organizational skills, but you may not know exactly what will be most helpful for them until a job begins.

Karly - Saving Her Employer Money

Karly is a 22-year-old woman with a significant learning disability that greatly affects her ability to read, write, and interact socially. In high school she completed a basic numerical data entry class and found that with some simple accommodations and organizational strategies she was good at the task. When she first met with her employment specialist Leo, she explained that she wanted a job doing only numerical data entry. At first Leo was not sure he could find such a position since most employers insist that their employees multitask.

Leo, Karly, and Karly's mother sat down and talked about all the aspects of a job that were important to her and what would make for a successful employment experience. At the meeting they came up with a list. Karly wanted to work:

- Three to four hours a day in the afternoons since she had a hard time getting to places on time in the morning
- In a place where people would be direct with Karly so she would not have to interpret subtle social cues
- With one supervisor whom she could go to with questions
- In a casual atmosphere where she could wear jeans
- Where she could use headphones to drown out background noise

One day Karly mentioned her love of racing cars to Leo. Leo then wondered about working at an auto mechanic shop, and Karly loved the idea. Leo went to the shop where he got his car fixed and spoke with the owner about how things worked there and what types of jobs he usually hired for. He also spoke with two of the mechanics and found out that at the end of the day they usually spent one to two hours inputting data into their computer system for all the work they accomplished that day. Both mechanics mentioned how much they disliked doing this part of the job and said they thought it was a waste of time.

A light bulb went off in Leo's head. Leo put together a proposal for the owner outlining what Karly could do for him. In it he included the fact that the owner paid the mechanics between \$22-34 an hour to do the data entry when they could be working on cars and bringing in \$50 - \$60 an hour in labor charges. Karly would be willing to do the data entry for three hours each day at \$9 an hour, a savings of \$13-\$25 an hour for the owner. The owner was intrigued but still hesitant about the idea. Leo suggested that they have Karly try out the job for two months to see how it worked out, and the owner agreed.

Since Karly had done data entry in school, she knew some of the basic accommodations she needed, such as a stand to put the data entry information sheets on, a highlighter to keep her place on the sheets, headphones to help her concentrate, a larger font on the data entry forms, and one person who gave her tasks that needed to be done. Leo helped her get all of these accommodations together before her first day of work. After two months the employer was so pleased with Karly's work that he gave her a raise and increased her hours.

Lessons learned:

- Look for a work culture that the job seeker will fit into and enjoy
- Find ways to save money for employers
- Start with "trying out" the position for a set period of time

Noah—Person-Centered Brainstorming Works

Noah is a 23-year-old man with significant developmental and physical disabilities. He is able to get around in a motorized wheelchair with a slight touch of his left hand. Noah's employment specialist, Kelly, talked to him about having a person-centered career planning meeting where he would call the shots. He decided to try it and invited his two best friends, his parents, his vocational rehabilitation counselor, and Kelly to the meeting. The discussion focused on Noah's abilities and capabilities rather than what he couldn't do.

Noah wanted a job where he could socialize with others, work part-time, and be no more than 30 minutes from his home. Noah mentioned that he enjoyed going to the local mall very much and felt like this would be an ideal place to try. Since Noah said that he wanted a job where he could move around and meet a lot of people, Kelly suggested the idea of delivering food.

The idea was to create a delivery service with one of the restaurants in the mall. First a survey was conducted with retail workers at the mall to ascertain whether they would pay more for a delivery service and which restaurant they would like delivery from. The results of the survey found that 60% of retail workers from the three largest stores in the mall would pay more for a delivery service. The retail personnel had only 30 minutes for lunch, and a delivery service would allow them more time to relax and eat. The restaurant of choice was identified and a proposal presented to the manager.

The manager was able to sell the idea to the restaurant's owners, and Noah was hired. His job entailed going around in the mornings to get coffee and muffin orders, delivering those items, and then getting and delivering lunch orders midday. This job satisfied Noah's need to be with others and have a job where he was moving around, and it increased the employer's business.

Lessons learned:

- Always have the job seeker be the one in the "driver's seat" as far as what direction they want their career to go
- Include what is important to the job seeker when planning the job
- Look for what is not happening in businesses
- Be professional with the business personnel and speak their language

NEGOTIATE WITH THE EMPLOYER

5.

Once a job creation target has been identified, it is time to negotiate with the employer concerning a possible position for the individual. If necessary, use such tools as situational assessment, short-term job tryout, temporary employment, etc. as part of the negotiation process. Each time you negotiate a created job with an employer you may need to use a different approach. For some employers you might need to develop a formal, written proposal that includes what the job seeker will be doing, the pay and hours involved, and why it is a good idea for the employer to hire them.

The key to negotiating with the employer is mutual benefit. The modified or created job must be able to be done successfully by the worker (with support) and must meet an employment need of the company.

For the employer, some of the benefits of job creation include:

- Increasing current workforce effectiveness and efficiency
 - ➔ *A law firm hires someone to take care of the conference rooms so the paralegals can spend more of their time working on cases.*
- Filling gaps in the current workforce
 - ➔ *A biochemical company hires someone to recycle samples from the chemicals that were not getting recycled before.*
- Reducing costly or inefficient temporary help and overtime wages
 - ➔ *A car dealership hires a person to mail out reminders to customers for oil changes and other scheduled maintenance instead of paying the office staff overtime to do it.*
- Increasing customer satisfaction
 - ➔ *An amusement park hires someone to sit by the entrance handing out maps of the park and directing visitors to the ride they want to go on first.*

Successful job creation can be a refreshing and satisfying experience for everyone involved. It also presents a great opportunity to build a close relationship with employers who can then serve as a reference and referral source to others!

JOB DEVELOPMENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

- **Beyond Traditional Job Development: The Art of Creating Opportunity.** Denise Bissonnette, Milt Wright & Associates, Inc., 1994.
- **Job Carving: A Guide for Job Developers and Employment Specialists.** Cary Griffin, From Wehman, P. (Ed.), *Life Beyond the Classroom* (3rd ed.). Brookes Publishing, 2001.
- **Job Carving: Finding Goodness of Fit. The Training Connection Series for Employment Specialists.** Cary Griffin & Dave Hammis. *A Collection of Articles on Supported Employment and Self-Employment from The Job Training & Placement Report.*
- **Demystifying Job Development: Field-Based Approaches to Job Development for People with Disabilities.** David Hoff, Cecilia Gandolfo, Marty Gold, & Melanie Jordan. 2000, TRN, Inc.
- **You Can't Go It Alone.** Bob Niemiec, *Training Connection*, November 2003. *Using Job Carving in Job Development.* John Nietupski & Susan Hamre-Nietupski, *TRN InfoLines*, Vol 12, No. 6., July/Aug. 2001.

ICI PUBLICATIONS (AVAILABLE AT WWW.COMMUNITYINCLUSION.ORG)

- **More Than Just a Job: Person-Centered Career Planning** *Institute Brief*, October, 2003, #IB16
- **Starting with Me: A Guide to Person-Centered Planning for Job Seekers.** *Tools for Inclusion*, July 2002, #TO14
- **Job Accommodation.** *Institute Brief*, January 2003, #IB5
- **Personal Networks and Creative Supports: Promoting Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Physical and Cognitive Disabilities.** *Institute Brief*, December 1991, #IB3.

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JOB CREATION: A PROCESS

STEP 1: Develop a Profile of the Job Seeker

It is important to develop a comprehensive profile of the job seeker as a first step in the process. Below are just some of the questions that should be included when developing a profile. With all of these questions, don't forget to ask "why?"

- What is your dream job?
- What is important to you in a job?
- What jobs have you done in the past?
- What was the best job you ever had?
 - >What did you like the most about that job?
- What was the worst job you ever had?
 - >What did you like the least about that job?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What do you do on the weekends?
- What do you do with your friends and family?
- What do you do to help out around the house (chores)?
 - >Which is your favorite chore to do?
 - >Which chore do you hate?
- What subjects or classes did you like in school?
 - >What did you like about them?
- What subjects or classes did you not like in school?
 - >What did you not like about them?
- Are there specific personality types you are most comfortable with or fit in well with?

- What kind of environment do you enjoy/fit in?
 - >Casual or formal?
 - >Quiet or noisy?
 - >Many people or few people?
- Do you have any known accommodation/support needs?
 - >If yes, what is already available?
 - >What needs to be further explored?
- Where have you been the happiest?
- Where have you been the least happy?
- Where have you experienced success?
- Where have you not experienced success?

STEP 2: Assemble a Brainstorming Group

It can be helpful to involve other people in the process and put together a brainstorming group. The main questions that you are trying to answer include what type of environment the job seeker will most likely succeed in, what tasks they can do for an employer, and ideas about employers to contact. Below are questions to ask:

- When you think of _____, what type of place do you see him/her working in?
 - >Casual? Professional? Social? Busy? Quiet?
- What tasks do you see _____ doing at a job?
- What types of jobs or chores have you known _____ to do in the past?
- What do you think is important to keep in mind when looking for a job for _____?

- Can you think of any types of businesses that might be a good match for _____?
- Do you know anyone who works in _____ [type of business]?

→ Can I use your name when I contact them?

STEP 3: Gather Information from Businesses

Using the ideas generated from steps 1 and 2, visit businesses that may be a match. Try to arrange a tour to get a good feel for the business, and meet with a variety of people there. Some questions to ask and observations to make include:

- What are the variety of tasks that are necessary for your business to operate?
- When is the company busiest: each day, during the week, during the year?
- Are there tasks that could be done more efficiently or more often?
- Are there tasks not getting done because no one has the time?
- Are there tasks that take employees away from their more critical job duties? (their areas of expertise or "real" jobs)
- Do you have employees working overtime?
- Are there tasks that you typically use temporary or student employees for?
- If you could have help with anything, what would it be?
- If your employees could have help with anything, what do you think it would be?
- What is the biggest challenge the business faces in its day-to-day operations?
- What are the areas for growth or potential growth for the business?
- Where would you like to see the business in five years? Ten years?

- Are there services the business would like to offer or could offer that are not in place presently?
- What are the work atmosphere and culture like here?

STEP 4: Generate a List of Possible Jobs/Tasks

Put together a list of tasks, jobs, and areas where the job seeker could potentially meet an employer need.

Possible tasks that _____ can do for an employer include:

Accommodations that _____ may need to do these tasks include:

STEP 5: Negotiate with the Employer

Make a plan for how to negotiate with the employer. Remember, the key to negotiation with any employer is mutual benefit. The employer must see how doing this is going to help their business.

Will creating this job help the employer:

- Increase current workforce effectiveness and efficiency?
- Fill gaps in the current workplace?
- Reduce costly or inefficient temporary help and overtime wages?
- Increase customer satisfaction?

Make sure that you are able to explain to the employer in basic enough terms how this created job is going to benefit them so they can explain it to anyone who needs to approve the position.

Details of Your Negotiation Strategy: