

## CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT—POST-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

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This Grab & Go Practice Brief is part of a series helping students, parents, teachers, and job developers create customized employment for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### INTRODUCTION

Once a student has been hired and is now an employee of the company, the first days of employment are critical for developing relationships with coworkers. These relationships will help ensure that the new employee is fully included in the workplace. This is the final step in the customized employment model.

### MODELS OF SUPPORT

In the early days of supported employment, a job coach was responsible for all the job training and supervision, monitoring the work quality and, in some cases, even completing the student's work. Once the employee had learned the job, the coach would start to "fade" from the job site. This approach tended to isolate the employee from the typical orientation and training procedures, and limited the opportunities to develop relationships with coworkers.

A newer model of job support is one in which the coach serves as a workplace consultant who promotes the employee's independence at the job while the training and supervision are done primarily by the supervisor and fellow coworkers. This more inclusive model replaces the expectation that the individual needs to rely heavily on specialized assistance from an outside agency.

For individuals with significant needs, it could be necessary for the coach to be at the business for an extended period of time. In these situations the coach must balance what is natural in the environment with the extra support that is required to enable the person to learn the job. However from day 1, **the coach should always be looking to identify and take advantage of the supports that are available to all employees.** These supports help the person to perform their job and feel more socially included. They may be naturally generated in the

workplace or facilitated by the coach.

Examples could include:

- Human Resources personnel assist the employee in completing new hire forms.
- A coworker orients and trains the new employee.
- A coworker sets up employee's work area at start of the day.
- The supervisor meets daily with the employee to review progress and to go over their to-do list.
- A coworker reminds the employee when it is break and lunch time.
- The receptionist assists the employee with using the time clock.
- The employee carools with other co-workers.

### PRIOR TO DAY 1

Prior to the new employee starting their job, the coach should meet with the employer to go over any last-minute details and to review the plan of support. Ask the employer about the activities for the first day: What will be covered in the new employee orientation? What is the required dress code? Who will be training the new employee?

All this information should be shared with the student (and their family) prior to starting work, which will help calm nerves and answer any questions.

### ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

On the first day, allow plenty of time to arrive at the job. Ideally, the new employee should go through the same orientation and training procedures as any other new hire. Part of this would include meeting their coworkers. Make sure the individual brings the necessary IDs to complete any employment forms.

### SUPPORTING JOB TRAINING

Develop a clear understanding with the employer as to how you can both work together to provide training and support in a way that maximizes the opportunities for the employee to be included.

If a coworker has been assigned to train the new employee, you can provide advice on their learning style or model appropriate teaching strategies. It may



also help to consult with the employer on practical styles of supervision that work for the individual.

Other supports should be put in place from the start that will make it possible for the employee to perform their job duties. For example:

- Have a coworker be the go-to person if there is a question and to check on the employee's work.
- Develop a color-coding system for files, projects, or activities.
- Create an employee directory with photos or nametags to help remember coworkers' faces and names.
- Make a schedule (written, visual, or audio) on a smartphone or tablet that can guide the employee through their sequence of tasks.
- Set an alarm on their cell phone to remind the employee to move on to the next task or to take a break.

Several free apps can be used on a phone or tablet to help the employee achieve greater autonomy at the job and lessen their dependency on paid supports (e.g. Google Calendar).

## WORKPLACE CULTURE

Workplace culture refers to the overall personality of a company and its work environment. As a coach, you should always be assessing the workplace culture and helping the employee to participate in it. This could include helping them to invite a coworker to have lunch, ensuring the employee is invited to the workplace coffee hour, participating in birthday celebrations, and going out after work with coworkers.

## WORKPLACE EVALUATION

It is important that the employee participate in regular job evaluations, like any other new worker. An additional method to assess the student's job performance is by using the Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP). This is a great way to engage the employer in the evaluation process, and to identify and evaluate soft skills (e.g. punctuality, communication with coworkers, ability to work in a team) as well as specific job skills, and work goals.

Another way to measure the employee's work performance is to develop a task analysis. This process breaks a job into more manageable (and teachable) components by listing the steps in sequence that are necessary to complete the task. This is the foundation for a systematic training approach and is more commonly used if the coach is assisting in the job training.

By using these assessment tools it is easy to see where the employee needs support. Work with the employee's supervisor to identify strategies to address these areas. Your presence at the job site will be determined to a large extent on how your role was defined in the initial meetings with the employer. How much time you spend there will depend on a number of factors, including:

- Employee performance
- Needs of supervisor and coworkers
- Inclusion of the employee into the workplace culture
- Having a plan for ongoing support

## ONGOING SUPPORT

Keeping in contact with the employee and employer is important to ensure long-term job success. Once the employee can perform the job, develop a plan that includes visiting the business on a regular basis. Work with the supervisor to handle situations that may arise. For example, your role may be to consult with a coworker if the employee is assigned a new task, or to facilitate a meeting between the supervisor and the employee if there is a disciplinary issue. Initially, these visits will be more frequent, but they should lessen over time.

## CONCLUSION

From the start, be clear as to what your role as coach will be in supporting the employee. Having a good relationship with the employer makes it easier for you to be seen as a facilitator, educator, and advisor. Developing a solid plan of support will help ensure the employee's long-term job success.

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