

Job and Employer Development

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As professional people, we have an obligation to inform those around us concerning this social-centered field in which we work. It is one of the most important ways in which we can serve our community. In every way possible, we should try to make clear that disability is a normal part of our civilization (Obermann, 1960, p. 6).

Employer Perceptions of Hiring People with Disabilities

In the past, job developers for individuals with disabilities depended on the benevolent dispositions of employers to get their clients hired (Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1995). Wuenschel and Brady (1959) believed that employers had to be enticed into hiring individuals with disabilities through the mastery of persuasive language by placement specialists. Employers, according to Wuenschel and Brady, were emotionally resistant to hiring individuals with disabilities because they had definite prejudices and misunderstandings about disability. Obermann (1960), in realizing that handicaps were socially imposed, felt it was imperative to promote the principle that it is ability rather than disability that measures the value of an individual. By presenting the value of the whole person, Michaels (1989) was certain that placement personnel could relieve employers' anxieties about working with employees with disabilities.

Employer perceptions and concerns about hiring people with disabilities are related to their overall personnel needs. A comparative analysis of public sector vocational/technical training practices and the private sector revealed the following employer preferences regarding new employees: (a) competence in basic skills; (b) potential for retraining; and (c) good attitudes over great aptitudes (Williams, 1990). In their survey of employers' issues, Gilbride, Stensrud, and Connolly (1992) found that employers were primarily concerned with the matters of job restructuring, accommodations, and establishing a good person-job fit.

In addition to finding that financial incentives do little to encourage employment of people with disabilities, Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold, and Hoff (1998) concluded that employers perceived true incentives as getting a good employee, getting good consultation and support, and doing the right thing based on personal values. Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, VanderHart, and Fishback (1996) found employee dedication to be the supported employment benefit ranked highest by employers.

Approaches to Job and Employer Development

Although employers are growing increasingly receptive to working with diverse populations (Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1995), there is still much work to be done in the area of disability employment. For example, a 1987 Harris survey of 921 companies found that only 43 percent employed a person with a disability, although top management, department heads, and equal employment officers rated their performance from good to excellent (Burkhalter & Curtis, 1989). To address this unemployment crisis of people with disabilities, it is imperative that employment professionals

mobilize many community resources, as well as develop close relationships with other placement specialists and public and private employment agencies (Wuenschel & Brady, 1959; Nietupski, Verstegen, & Petty, 1995).

Some of the turbulence in job development stems from disagreement concerning who should actually be called the customers of rehabilitation- clients, employers, or both. Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold, and Hoff (1998) defined the customer as: “the person whose needs must be satisfied as a goal of the process and whose needs take precedence over others in the process” (p. 37); therefore, they concluded that the primary customer served by the rehabilitation practitioner should be the client. However, Michaels (1989) suggested “... a two-pronged approach ...in which the employer, as well as the individual with disabilities is targeted for direct intervention”(p. 69). Since effective job development involves brokering an exchange process, providing services to both job seekers and employers is imperative (Hagner & DiLeo, 1993, Bissonnette, 1994). Employer-centered approaches to job development are dependent on acceptance of a two-client rehabilitation model.

There are basically two approaches to employer development: an applicant focus and an employer focus (Bissonnette, 1994). An applicant focus involves developing opportunities for each client on an individual basis. An employer focus, on the other hand, involves responding to businesses by matching their needs with the client’s skills and abilities. Bissonnette notes that most job developers approach their work from a combination of these angles, both of which can result in employment for people with disabilities, as well as satisfied employers.

Dave Molinaro, a pioneer in marketing and job development during the 1980s, introduced the employer-service approach as an alternative to contacting employers solely on behalf of individual client placements. The employer-service approach is “a process by which a rehabilitation representative develops a sustained and reciprocal relationship with an employer” (Molinaro & Spitznagel, 1984, p. 9). Features of an employer-service (or business account) relationship include trust, mutual benefit, and personal service. Relationships are built based on providing services to employers, rather than approaching employers with a hat-in-hand approach (Molinaro & Spitznagel, 1984; Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1994; Bissonnette, 1994).

Learning about the specific needs of employers is essential in the development of jobs and employer relationships. “Until we know more about the individual employer, we can not begin to respond to his or her needs. We can only guess each employer’s questions, speculate about his or her needs and the services relevant to each business. Trying to answer those questions before an employer assessment is like a doctor prescribing medical treatment before examining or diagnosing the problem” (Bissonnette, 1994, p. 151). The two-fold purpose of an employer assessment is to have a clearer understanding of what the placement practitioner can offer the employer, as well as what opportunities will be available from the employer’s organization.

Cold call models and referral models are the two commonly used methods for arranging face-to-face contact with employers to assess their needs and offer employment services (Nietupski, Verstegen, & Petty, 1995). Cold calls refer to direct contacts to employers with whom the job developer has no prior connection. The cold call model is generally used when a job developer has few connections in a business targeted for contact. The cold call model allows for a high volume of business with minimal up-front effort. In the referral model, contacts to businesses are made through third-party

advocates. The credibility added to the process by the advocates, makes the referral model a highly respected and effective way of doing business.

Marrone Gandolfo, Gold, and Hoff, (1998) described needs, features, and benefits as the essential elements of an employer-centered approach to job development. A need is an issue, situation, or problem which requires a solution. A feature is what a product (or person) consists of, and a benefit is what is gained as a result of that feature. Once an employer's needs are identified, a job developer can use client-specific features and benefits to address them. The features and benefits of the job developer's (and his/her agency's) services should also be clearly understood. For example, a feature such as expertise in occupational training may translate into a benefit of reduced training costs for the employer.

Like with any successful business venture, it is imperative that the job developer and his/her agency deal with employers with courtesy, responsiveness, and professionalism (Marrone Gandolfo, Gold, & Hoff 1998). In other words, a trusting relationship must be established with an employer that is viewed as mutually beneficial (Bissonnette, 1994). Trust, Bissonnette explains, is cultivated from long-standing relationships in which job developers: (a) provide information openly about their services; (b) encourage employers to talk with other employers with whom they have worked; (c) learn about and understand the employers' organizations; and, (d) are "absolutely clear and specific" (p. 213) about what is wanted and expected from the employer.

Through job analysis and individual assessment, rehabilitation professionals have recently been successful in placing individuals with disabilities in employment by either recommending a completely new position (job creation), or by combining existing tasks done partially by others into a new position (job carving) (Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold, & Hoff, 1998). Bissonnette (1994) suggested that in reality all non-traditional approaches to job development involve job creation. "The art of the job developer is to see connections between people and the opportunities they offer business for increased growth and prosperity" (Bissonnette, 1994, p. 43).

Serving as Employer Consultants

Gilbride, Stensrud, and Connolly (1992) proclaimed that the new challenge in facilitating jobs for people with disabilities would be for practitioners to provide comprehensive, rehabilitation-related consultation services to employers. In order to successfully integrate individuals with disabilities in the workforce, employers need information on recruiting, hiring, accommodating, and supervising workers with disabilities (Michaels, 1989). One way offering consultation services can meet the human resource needs of employers is by introducing people with disabilities as a new labor market (Gilbride & Stensrud, 1992).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which stimulated employer interest in disabilities, also resulted in an increased need for consultation services from rehabilitation employment specialists. The actual impact of the ADA on hiring practices is unclear because most of the litigation has centered around the job retention and promotion issues of currently employed (or recently terminated) individuals (Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold, & Hoff, 1998). Although the purpose of the ADA is to promote employment of people with disabilities in the workplace, the interviewing restrictions imposed on employers may have limited the ways they learn about disabilities (Chima,

1998). Discrimination against people with disabilities will naturally decrease as employers gain knowledge through their work and consultation with rehabilitation professionals.

In addition to eliminating myths and stereotypes, the role of the ADA consultant involves serving as an accommodation resource (Satcher, 1992). According to Michaels (1989), the modifications employers need to make fall into three basic categories: (1) environmental; (2) equipment; and (3) procedural. Although employers may be somewhat familiar with removing architectural barriers and providing assistive devices, procedural alterations such as task restructuring, call for expertise on the part of rehabilitation professionals. Examples of common procedural accommodations cited by Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold, & Hoff (1998), include providing specifications of tasks in writing, giving frequent feedback, and applying flexible schedules.

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