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Employment Selection

Successful supported employment personnel will need to utilize a multitude of approaches to assist supported employment customers with the employment selection process. Most customers will need the assistance of an employment specialist to manage the screening, selection, and/or job modifications of competitive employment opportunities as he or she directs the employment process. Customers of supported employment will search for a full range of employment positions to include jobs that require post-secondary degrees, high school diplomas, and/or high school equivalency certificates. However, many individuals with significant disabilities will begin their employment careers by accessing entry level positions that do not have stringent hiring requirements. This will occur for many reasons such as: 1) there are a greater number of entry level positions, 2) customers need a pay check, and 3) positions are easily modified. However, the primary reason is that these positions offer work experience and an opportunity to build an employment resume.

In the past, supported employment personnel have been expected to analyze the

customer's needs, assess the job market, identify available job openings, determine specific work responsibilities, provide support, and then match customers to job openings. Rushing to fill employment openings has caused service providers to exclude customers from the decision making process. Employment specialists deciding what is good for a customer is not support, it is control disguised as service. These employment approaches have developed over time as a result of administrative conveniences or concerns. Examples of administrative conveniences would include: external quotas set by funding agents, internal quotas or program goals set by administrators, intervention dependent programs where funding is more lucrative after employment selection and before stabilization, and managers who lack supported employment knowledge or values. However, these approaches have never been best practices for employment selection which is designed to ensure satisfaction among persons with significant disabilities and the business community. The following is a list of possible explanations for programs rushing the employment selection process.

**REASONS SUPPORTED
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS RUSH
EMPLOYMENT SELECTION**

- External Quota Systems
- Internal Quota Systems
- Intervention Dependent Programs
- Lack of Supported Employment Knowledge
- Lack of Supported Employment Values

In today's highly competitive employment market, employment specialists and other supported employment personnel must have a strong knowledge base from which they can interpret information in a knowledgeable manner with the customer. This knowledge base must cover a vast array of topics ranging from person-centered planning approaches and assistive technology applications to labor market trends, and legislative rights and responsibilities. The table below presents a comprehensive list of topics that will be important to every employment specialist.

**EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST
KNOWLEDGE BASE**

- Person-Centered Planning Approaches
- Marketing Approaches
- Job Seeking Skills
- Job Interviewing Skills
- Job Analysis (Continued)

- Employment Trends
- Labor Market Information & Wage Data
- Business & Industry Needs
- Assistive Technology
- Compensatory Strategies
- Systematic Instruction
- Knowledge of Community Resources
- Legislative Rights and Responsibilities (ADA, Social Security, Worker Compensation, Fair Labor Standards Act, Vocational Rehabilitation Act)
- Career Counseling Techniques
- Coaching Techniques
- Facilitation Techniques
- Group & Interpersonal Dynamics

High quality employment selection will require employment specialists to draw upon their extensive knowledge base to assist the supported employment customer with employment selection. This will consist of gathering and analyzing detailed information regarding the customer profile (i.e. wants, needs, desires, abilities, interest etc.) and compare this information with employment opportunities. During this process employment specialists must remain positive, enthusiastic, and optimistic. It will be important to analyze specific job openings in terms of what the individual "can do" with the right supports and/or modifications. Employment specialists can not be deterred by negativism, complex work environments, or employment qualifications; rather,

they must rely upon their creativity and analytical skills.

There is no recipe, form, or computer program designed to make a perfect job match. However, an employment specialist can increase the likelihood of success by analyzing customer and business profile data, using good judgement, and by making accurate information available to the supported employment customer and her or his family so they can make an informed choice. There are various tools and procedures that employment specialists can use to increase customer success and satisfaction with a new job. The remaining portion of this chapter will share tools and practices for employment selection.

PARTNERSHIPS

Most supported employment organizations understand that the customers of their services are looking for the same general qualities in an employment situation as any person participating in the labor force. It will be important for these employment service organizations to: 1) facilitate the identification of multiple career options, 2) facilitate the identification of a geographic area for employment, and 3) assist with the employment selection process. Equally important is to draw upon strong organizational and personal values and goals to guide the employment selection process.

Vital to success will be customers and employment specialists developing relationships that are built upon trust and respect. Both need to clearly understand the ground rules, mission, goals, and constraints of their relationship. Typically, the ground rules and

goals will be conveyed, by both parties, many times throughout the process. The following table shares some tips for employment specialists to assist in improving communication with supported employment customers during the employment selection process.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

1. Consider the customer as a person.
2. Make every effort to understand what the customer is really saying.
3. Take time to listen and do not assume you know what is being said.
4. Be open-minded when customers express career goals and job preferences.
5. Keep your expectations high.
6. Believe that the customer knows his or her own capabilities
7. Be encouraging and supportive

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There is a strong connection between the employment selection process and long term employment success. Customers and employment specialists must establish positive partnerships with joint accountability for the outcomes that are achieved. Together they must plan and implement strategies that facilitate the identification of employment opportunities that meet the customer's employment desires. The following table presents partnership issues that must be addressed during the employment selection process.

PARTNERSHIP ISSUES DIRECTING EMPLOYMENT SELECTION

A. Preferences

- Interests
- Wishes
- Desires

B. Skills

- Talents
- Abilities
- Education

C. Experiences

- Employment
- Volunteer/Training
- Personal Development

D. Financial & Non-monetary Benefits

- Wages
- Health Insurance
- Vacation/Holiday/Personal

E. Work Conditions

- Hours/Schedule
- Job Duties
- Work Environment
- Supervision

UTILIZING CUSTOMER PROFILE INFORMATION

Often individuals who are seeking employment assistance from supported employment organizations, are individuals with no previous work experience or history. When this occurs it is difficult to understand how a customer can be assisted in identifying a career or job. The number of occupations or careers to choose from can be mind boggling. According to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, customers have a choice of over 20,000 occupations or careers. Therefore, it should

not be surprising that many individuals have no idea of a career goal when presented with the difficult question of selecting a career. However, there are many different tools and strategies that can be utilized to help with the employment selection process. During the customer profile phase, the employment specialist gathered information from a variety of sources that now must be thoroughly analyzed.

Career Goals

Chapter 3 discussed techniques for getting to know the customer and person-centered planning. These techniques will assist the employment specialist in developing a clear picture of an individual's wants, needs, and desires. It will be important to review these experiences and/or the plans that were developed as a result, to ensure that these data are guiding the employment selection process.

Situational Assessment

The situational assessment process, described in Chapter 3, provides the customer and employment specialist with information on occupational and environmental preferences. The data gained from this activity will provide information on a variety of environmental work factors to including noise, movement, people, space, and lighting. Situational assessment data will include information related to endurance, communication skills, general mobility, and orientation skills. This type of information can help the customer determine if he or she is interested in a particular career or occupation.

The situational assessment is most beneficial when it is completed prior to embarking on a job search.

Informational Interviewing

Often service providers utilize situational assessment strategies in an attempt to identify areas of interest for the customer. Another strategy that the employment specialist and customer should consider is informational interviewing. When conducting an informational interview, the customer and/or family member should identify favorite skills, subjects, hobbies, and other areas of interest. Once this is completed, the customer and employment specialist should identify jobs which may give the individual a chance to use the skills she or he enjoys. Next, the customer and employment specialist should begin to identify organizations where this type of work is conducted. Finally, it is helpful to find workers performing the work that is identified as a possible area of interest and provide an opportunity for the customer and/or employment specialist to interview employees. Some of the questions that should be asked during this interview are listed here.

- Question #1** How did you get into this type of work?
- Question #2** What do you like most about your work?
- Question #3** What do you like the least about your work?
- Question #4** Where else can I find people who do this same type of work?

Informational interviewing allows the customer to practice interviewing skills, explore career area interests, and become exposed

to work expectations for a specific position. This process can be a very effective technique to assist the customer in determining career interests. Informational interviews can be a major focus of the job development process.

Formal Records

It may be helpful to review formal records that were analyzed during the customer profile process, as described in chapter 3. Reviewing medical records are of particular importance, especially for customers who are on medication. For example, a side effect of a particular medication may make an individual extremely sensitive to heat. This is a very important factor for job selection. In addition, academic, vocational, and psychosocial records can reveal information that may have been overlooked. For example, these records could reveal information regarding a person's memory that will be important in job selection.



BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

While the customer profile information is important, it is equally valuable to review community business opportunities, as described in Chapters 2 and 4 of this manual. This will give both the customer and employment specialist information for directing the employment selection process. Identifying key business organizations and targeted positions will be important to keep the employment selection process as efficient as possible.

Community Labor Market Screening

The customer and the employment specialist will need to review the information that was collected during the community labor

market screening as described in Chapter 4 of this manual. The intent of the initial screening is to determine the general nature of the job market in the customer's community. Simply put, this allows the customer to become aware of careers and/or occupational options that are available to choose from within the targeted geographical area. In the past, this has typically been viewed as the responsibility of the supported employment provider. However, using a customer-driven approach the customer should be involved and assist with the analysis of community business opportunities.

Job Analysis

Chapter 4 of this manual presented the job analysis process as consisting of: 1) gathering general information about a business and a specific employer; 2) gathering information about the types of jobs available at the business; and 3) identifying specific job duties and skills related to a specific job. The information collected can be used by the customer to make decisions about a particular company and the jobs available within a business. All job analysis information should be carefully reviewed by both the employment specialist and the customer.

Job Restructuring

As presented in Chapter 4, there are some businesses, especially smaller companies, where work is distributed across employees by

reviewing the work that needs to be accomplished, the employees that are available, and the skills that needed to complete the task (Hagner & Dileo, 1993). A job created for a specific

individual is far more likely to meet an individual's needs. However, job restructuring holds many long term benefits for the business as well. The plan must hold benefits to both the potential employee as well as the employer.

The key to success with job restructuring is conducting an extensive job analysis. It will be up to the employment specialist and/or customer to present restructuring ideas to the employer (see Chapter 4). When conducting an analysis, it is helpful for the employment specialist to analyze the environment using the following process (Adapted from Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Ferrel, 1996).

ANALYZING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR JOB RESTRUCTURING

1. Listen to Employer Needs
2. Study Job Descriptions
3. Conduct Job Analysis
4. Observe Work Routines
5. Interview Employer
6. Interview Co-workers
7. Spend Time in Various Departments
8. Take Written Notes
9. Do a Work Culture Analysis
10. Determine Need(s)
11. Put Proposal Together
12. Discuss Proposal with Employer
13. Set Interview(s) or a Time for the Employer to Meet the Applicant

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OB OPENINGS

Using the results of the community labor market screening, contact employers who

have career or occupational options that are in line with those of interest to the customer. A rule of thumb when searching for employment is to first contact employers who have job openings. Then contact employers identified through the community labor market screening.

Application

Frequently the customer will be required to complete an employment application for a position. The employment specialist should become familiar with the customer's work history and background experiences to provide assistance and/or support in filling out a job application. Each item on the application should be answered, in a thorough manner. Often job applicants who have not completed all items on the application form are screened out of a job interview. Assisting the customer with the preparation of a resume which projects the job seeker as serious and businesslike in the job search process will assist with the application process. The following table presents some important points to remember during the application process.

APPLICATION PROCESS	
1. Gather necessary documentation and information (i.e work history, education, address, phone number, social security number, letters of recommendation).	(continued)

2. Review and revise resume to reflect skills and experience related to the specific job being sought.
3. Schedule a time to pick up/fill out the application.
4. Schedule a time for an interview.

Gather Necessary Documentation and Information.

Most of the information that will be important for completing a job application will be gathered during the initial phase of supported employment. It is important to re-view this information to be sure that it is current. The following table is a checklist of items that will be important for information gathering.

DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION FOR THE APPLICATION PROCESS	
1. work history	
2. career/employment goal	
3. education	
4. address	
5. phone number	
6. Social Security number	
7. picture identification	
8. birth certificate	
9. letters of recommendation	

Review and Revise Resume. A resume should be a short account of the individual's qualifications and experiences. However, it is better to have too much information initially. The employment specialist and customer can then customize the job seeker's resume for a specific job. When reviewing and

revising the functional resume it will be important to include areas presented below. The following table provides areas for analysis.

REVIEWING & REVISING THE RESUME FOR A SPECIFIC JOB

I. Career Objective

Does the job or career objective match the position?

Does the resume include why the job seeker wants the position?

- to learn new things
- to earn an income and be a productive citizen.
- to help others
- to be part of a team

II. Education

Does the resume include all educational experiences?

- schools
- training centers
- college courses
- other courses (leisure, etc.)

Does the resume highlight areas of education specific to the position?

III. Skills

Does the resume include all important skill areas?

- household chores
- tasks performed at home
- task performed at school
- task performed at church or other community locations
- remedial task such as using the telephone or operating electrical appliances

Does the resume include skills that are specific to the job opening?

(continued)

IV. Experience

Does the resume include a comprehensive list of important experiences.

- school work experience assignments such as the cafeteria or office
- volunteer experiences
- community experiences such as: child care or lawn care.

Does the resume have all updated information regarding work experiences?

- unpaid school experiences
- paid employment

V. Interests

Does the resume reflect job related areas of interest?

- hobbies
- music
- television: drama, mystery, comedy
- video games
- sports: list types
- animals
- gardening, flowers, plants
- talking to friends
- reading
- art

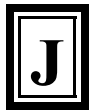
Does the resume tie these interest areas to the specific position?

IV. References

Does the resume include three personal references?

- someone that you have known for at least one year
- correct addresses
- telephone numbers

Have references been contacted for permission to use their name for the specific job opening?



JOB INTERVIEWING

Most applicants will have an interview as part of the hiring process. Interviews can be stressful situations. The interview process has three components that must be addressed:

- Component #1** preparation for the interview,
- Component #2** the interview, and
- Component #3** following the interview.

Preparation for the Interview

In some instances, the supported employment customer will want to participate in the interview by herself or himself. In other situations the customer may want the employment specialist to attend. Either way, interviewing should be considered an opportunity for the employer to determine if he or she wants to hire the interviewee; and an opportunity to for the interviewee to determine “Do I want to work here?”.

Applicants may require preparation for the interview. The customer and the employment specialist will need to review and determine: 1) The purpose of the interview; 2) Who will attend; 3) How they will get to and from the interview; 4) What the employer will want to know; 5) How to present the customer’s experience and qualifications; 6)What the applicant will want to ask; and 7) How to act in a businesslike manner.

The Interview

The job interview should be viewed as a chance to gather further information about the

organization, the employer, and work environment. It will be an opportunity for the employer and job seeker to answer several important questions. The following table presents a list of questions that employers are attempting to answer during the interview process.

EMPLOYER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Why does the applicant want to work here? ■ What can this applicant do for our business? ■ What kind of person is this applicant? ■ Why should I hire this person?

In addition, the job seeker must approach this situation as an opportunity to gain a better picture of the actual job opening. The job seeker will want to obtain answers to the questions in the table below.

JOB SEEKER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do I want to work for this employer? ■ Do I like this work environment? ■ How does this employer treat employees? ■ Will this job offer wages and benefits that match my needs?

Sometimes, interviews are part of a decision making process (the employer is

interviewing multiple candidates for the position) and other times it is a formality (the applicant will be hired, however, the employer wants to meet and discuss the job with them). In some situations the applicant and/or the employer may prefer that the interview be attended by the applicant only. In other situations, the applicant and/or the employer may want the employment specialist to participate.

Job Interview Case Study

Due to the severity of Mark's disability, the employment specialist and Mark decided that he would not be able to answer typical interview questions. The employment specialist prepared the employer for this by explaining Mark's method of communication. (e.g., He speaks in one to three word phrases. It is helpful to ask questions that require a "yes" or "no" response. If he is unsure of what you may be talking about, he may make a comment that is completely unrelated to the conversation.)

Mark's employment specialist accompanied him to the interview and assisted him throughout the process. Even though the employment specialist knew that Mark would not be able to answer many of the employer's questions, it was critical that he participate in the job interview process and to visit the potential site. During the interview the employment specialist was able to observe Mark's reactions to the employer, work environment, and potential job duties. Mark got very excited during the meeting and made many comments about things he saw in the hotel environment (e.g., radio, trees, car). When the manager asked him if he wanted to work, Mark enthusiastically said "yes!" and repeatedly asked the manager

"work?" throughout the interview.

Following the Interview

The applicant will want to set himself or herself apart from other applicants. After the interview, the customer (with the support and/or assistance of the employment specialist) should write a brief note to the employer (the person they interviewed with). The note should have something positive about the interview process and/or treatment. In addition, a note can be an opportunity to add anything that may not have been addressed at the interview.



NEGOTIATE EMPLOYMENT TERMS

At the point in time when an employer makes an offer of employment to an individual, he or she must make a decision on whether or not to accept the employment option. The employment specialist should assist the customer with this process. The decision should be based on the analysis of facts, knowledge, and data collected regarding the business and the specific job compared to the career and/or occupational goal identified by the customer. In essence, the task is to identify the consequences related to accepting or rejecting the position. The customer, with the support of the employment specialist, will need to determine the answers to several important questions.

EMPLOYMENT DECISION FACTORS

1. Do I want to work for this employer?
2. Do I want to be employed in this work environment?
3. Should I work full or part time?
4. Will my wages & benefits be sufficient?
5. How will my social security benefits be affected?
6. Will I have transportation to and from my job?

BEFORE THE FIRST DAY OF WORK

There are several activities that need to be coordinated by the employment specialist prior to a customer's first day of work. These activities are either directly or indirectly related to the new employee's job, his or her financial status, or work incentives for the business. Although some duties can be completed once the new employee begins work, it is imperative that the employment specialist ensures that the forms required by the business are completed, arrangements are made for transportation, and, if appropriate, the Work Opportunity Credit Pre-screening Notice and Certification Request is completed and signed on or before the day the job is offered. The following table presents several common activities that need to be completed with an explanation of each activity (Dymond, Inge, and Brooke, 1993).

ACTIVITIES TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO EMPLOYMENT

Business Forms

- Complete job application.
- Sign policy on company rules and conduct.
- Complete state and federal tax withholding forms.
- Sign for receipt of uniform

Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

- Job applicant furnishes information to the employer.
- Employer determines if applicant is a member of the target group.
- Employer completes the form.
- Submit form no later than 21 days after job applicant begins work.

Transportation

- Review transportation possibilities.
- Identify the best option.
- Arrange transportation schedule.
- Develop program for instruction.

Social Security Notification (SS)

- Write letter to Social Security Administration (SSA), include start date, position, hours, and wages.
- Submit letter, signed by SS recipient and/or family member, allowing SSA to release SS information to the employment specialist.

Social Security Work Incentives

- Review SSA Work Incentive Red Book.
- Contact SSA to determine Earned Income Exclusion.
- Calculate Trial Work Period if SSDI recipient.
- Be aware of Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA).
- Determine if new employee could benefit from a Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS).

(continued)

- Determine if new employee could benefit from an Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE).
- Complete paperwork for using SSA's Work Incentives

Employee Information

- Calculate potential changes in SSA benefits.
- Determine if budgeting assistance is needed using new income & SSA benefits.
- Review all paperwork related to Work Incentives.
- Review work progress data with employee and parent.

Agency Information

- Have employee/legal guardian sign release of information forms.
- Contact appropriate organizational members.
- Activities to Be Completed Prior to Employment

Case Study for Beginning a New Job

Submit Work Opportunity Credit Pre-screening Notice & Certification Request Form (WOTC). The WOTC, which replaces the Targeted Tax Credit (TJTC), provides a tax credit for employers who hire targeted groups including vocational rehabilitation referrals, qualified Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), veterans, ex-felons, food stamp recipients, and summer youth employees. The WOTC is elective, the employer can determine if they want their business to participate. Employers who choose to use the WOTC, must determine the applicant's eligibility by including the WOTC Pre-screening Notice and Certification request. In Mark's case, the employment specialist, with Mark's

approval, informed the employer that Mark was referred by the state vocational rehabilitation agency and therefore was eligible for for the tax credit. The employer was not aware of the WOTC program and requested more information. Mark's employment specialist provided the employer with a copy of the WOTC Pre-screening Notice and Certification request Form (IRS Form 8850), the accompanying general instructions for completion, and provided the employer with an explanation of the program.

The employment specialist explained that employers electing to use the WOTC may claim a credit of 35% of the first \$6,000 of wages paid to an employee during the first 12 months of employment. The maximum tax credit is \$2,100. For a qualified summer youth employee, an employer may take into account the first \$3,000 of wages for up to 90 days. The maximum credit for a qualified summer youth is \$1,050. Qualified employees must work for the employer for at least 180 days (20 days in the case of summer youth); or 400 hours (120 hours for summer youth). If a worker is employed less than the minimum required time, the employer cannot claim a credit. The Pre-screening Notice must be signed by the employer and employee on or before the day employment is offered. The completed form should be mailed to the State Employment Security Agency within 21 days. This agency will certify an individual's program eligibility for WOTC, and notify the employer, in writing, for tax credit filing purposes.

The Pre-screening Notice must contain information that the employee provides to the

employer. This information forms the basis of the employer's belief that the new employee is in the eligible target group. In Mark's case this was not a question because he was being served by the state vocational rehabilitation agency. The employer and Mark (the new employee) signed the completed WOTC Notice and Certification Request Form. The employment specialist provided the employer with an addressed stamped envelope to mail the important paper work. The employer asked the employment specialist to make sure the document was mailed. Mark's employment specialist immediately mailed the form to her contact at the Virginia Employment Commission.

Completed Form Required by the Business. A job application had been submitted for Mark when the employment specialist initially met with the manager, however, the hotel required each of its employees to complete various other forms. All employees were required to sign a form indicating that they had read and understood the employee rules of conduct. Since Mark was unable to understand or remember the rules, the form was signed by Mark, his mother, and the employment specialist, indicating a joint responsibility for making sure Mark adhered to the rules.

Each employee also was required to complete state and federal tax withholding forms. Mark's mother completed these forms with the help of the employment specialist, and co-signed her name with Mark, since she was the legal guardian and responsible for filing his taxes. The final document required by the

business consisted of a form indicating that

Mark had received a hotel uniform and was responsible for returning it at the completion of his employment. This form, again, was jointly signed by Mark, his mother, and the employment specialist.

Arrange for Transportation. Since Mark's mother had indicated that she would not be able to transport Mark to or from work, other arrangements needed to be made. The best, most reliable option was to use STAR, the specialized transportation service for people with disabilities in his county. Unfortunately, when the employment specialist called, STAR was booked with reservations during the times that Mark needed transportation. It was anticipated that openings would become available within the next month, so the job coach was advised to check on a weekly basis. In the meantime, the job coach would transport Mark to work each morning in her car, and the school would send a bus to pick him up. His schedule was coordinated with the existing bus run that picked up students from the school who were participating in community-based instruction. Mark's mother signed a permission form that allowed the job coach to transport Mark to work in her personal vehicle, as well as, one that allowed the school to transport him from work to school at the end of his shift. Since Mark finished work at 11:00 a.m., he returned to school until dismissal at 2:00 p.m.

Notify the Social Security Office of Employment. The Social Security Office must be notified in writing each time a person starts

working, stops working, or when there is a change in their monthly work earnings. These changes affect the amount of Social Security Income (SSI) an individual receives each month. They may also effect a person's eligibility to receive Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). Mark and his employment specialist used a form provided by the social security office to report his changes. She also submitted an "Authorization for Release of Information from the Social Security Administration", signed by Mark and his mother, so that she would have permission to talk directly with a social security representative about Mark's case.

Determine Appropriate Use of Social Security Work Incentives. One of the greatest fears many individuals with disabilities and their parents have is that they will lose their monthly SSI and/or SSDI checks, as well as their Medicare/Medicaid coverage, if the individual with a disability goes to work. This does not need to happen. The Social Security Administration provides several work incentives for SSI and SSDI recipients which can help them to keep their benefits while they work. Some of the work incentives apply to both SSI and SSDI, while others are specific to only one of the programs (SSI or SSDI). These work incentives are described below.

All individuals who receive SSI qualify for an **Earned Income Exclusion**. This incentive allows most recipients to keep a portion of their original monthly SSI benefit even after they start working. The amount of SSI they receive depends on the amount of

money they earn and whether they qualify for any other work incentives. Once the Social Security Office is notified of employment, the Earned Income Exclusion is automatically calculated when determining the recipient's new SSI benefit. It is not necessary to submit any additional paperwork to claim an earned income exclusion.

A special work incentive is also available for youth under age 22 who are employed while they are still enrolled in school. The **Student Earned Income Exclusion** allows an SSI recipient to exclude up to \$400 of earned income a month, with a maximum of \$1,620 a year. Like the Earned Income Exclusion, this work incentive helps an employee retain more of their original SSI check. This work incentive should also be automatically calculated by the Social Security Office.

SSI recipients who need additional financial resources in order to help them get or maintain employment may submit a **Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS)** (O'Mara, 1991; O'Mara, 1989). This work incentive enables an individual to set aside a portion of their earned income or unearned income (i.e. SSDI) in order to pay for services that will help them achieve their employment goal. A PASS can be written to cover almost anything that is determined work related. Some examples include specialized transportation, attendant care, uniforms, job coach services, and safety equipment. A PASS may be written at any time during a person's employment if it is a means for achieving self support. The Social Security Office suggests using the format in the following table when submitting a PASS.

PLAN FOR ACHIEVING SELF-SUPPORT

1. Name.
2. Social Security Number.
3. Date that the plan will begin.
4. List of expenses to meet work goal.
5. Amount of income that will be used to reach work goal.
6. Name of bank where savings will be kept.
7. Status of savings toward work goal.
8. Persons who will help in obtaining work goal.
9. Signature.
10. Date.

Individuals who receive SSDI will be effected by an incentive known as the Trial Work Period. Unlike SSI, where a person's benefits are decreased based on the amount of money they earn, SSDI recipients must be re-evaluated for SSDI eligibility following a nine month Trial Work Period. At the conclusion of the Trial Work Period, the case is reviewed to determine whether the person has reached "substantial gainful activity" (SGA). Cash benefits are terminated for all individuals who consistently earn more than SGA, however those individuals whose monthly earnings do not reach SGA continue to receive their full SSDI benefit.

Employees who are determined ineligible for SSDI following their nine month Trial Work Period qualify for an **Extended Period of Eligibility**. This work incentive provides

SSDI cash benefits to individuals during any months that they do not reach substantial gainful activity. The Extended Period of Eligibility is available for 36 months following the nine month Trial Work Period. In order to receive benefits during the extended period, the employee or job coach should notify the person's Social Security representative.

One of the main work incentives that can assist individuals receiving SSI, SSDI, or both, is the **Impairment-Related Work Expense (IRWE)**. An IRWE allows a person to deduct the cost of work-related expenses from their earnings before calculations are made to determine their SSI and/or SSDI benefit. In the case of SSI, filing an IRWE helps an individual retain more of their original SSI check. For SSDI recipients, an IRWE may help an employee keep their cash benefits. Since the cost of an impairment-related work expense is deducted from the person's monthly earnings before SSDI eligibility is considered, using an IRWE may reduce an employee's earnings below the substantial gainful activity level and allow him/her to keep his/her benefit.

An IRWE must be work expenses directly related to an individual's disability and paid for by the individual. The expense must be paid within the month the individual is working and not reimbursed by another source. An IRWE is not a written plan, it is a monthly report of expenditures used by the Social Security representative to calculate total countable income and determine continued eligibility or the amount of monthly cash payments. The Social Security Administration must have proof for every IRWE claimed by the worker with a disability. This includes: 1) name and address

of prescribing source (doctor, VR counselor); 2) impairment for which it is prescribed; and 3) receipts and canceled checks. Some of the expenses that may be reimbursed using an IRWE are presented in the following table.

IMPAIRMENT-RELATED WORK EXPENSES	
1.	Attendant care services: assistance in getting ready for work, going to and from work, a reader for the blind, an interpreter for the deaf, etc.
2.	Medical devices: wheelchair, dialysis equipment, respirators, pacemakers, pacers, etc.
3.	Prosthesis: artificial arm, hip, or leg.
4.	Work-related equipment: special typewriter, telecommunication devices, specially modified tools, braille devices, electronic visual aids, etc.
5.	Residential modifications: ramps, railings, doorways to get to and from work, work space in home for self-employment at home.
6.	Drugs and Medical Services: physical therapy, chemotherapy, anticonvulsant and antidepressant drugs, etc. (if regularly prescribed and necessary for controlling disabling conditions).
7.	Medial Supplies: catheters, face masks, bandages, elastic stockings, etc.
8.	Guide Dog: food and vet bills, etc.
9.	Transportation Cost: modification of vehicles, special transportation.

Keep New Employee and Family Members Informed about Changes in Social Security Using the Benefits Analysis Form.

Once information has been filed with the Social Security Office regarding a person's employment, it may take as long as two or three months before any changes are made in the employee's SSI check. After the changes are processed, the person will experience a substantial decrease in SSI to make up for the first few months that deductions were not made. Eventually, the SSI payment amount will even out to a predictable amount.

Many families depend on the money their child receives from SSI and may experience significant financial difficulty when the check is initially decreased. It is possible to prepare families for these changes by calculating the amount of SSI they can expect to receive when their child starts working. Once the amount is known, families can save the additional money they receive during the first couple of months (before the check is adjusted) and apply it to the month(s) when the check is initially decreased.

Keep Adult Service Agencies Informed. Mark's case manager was notified about his employment soon after he was offered the job. The case manager arranged to take Mark's mom over to see where he would be working, since she was not familiar with the hotel's location. The case manager also assisted the employment specialist by helping Mark's mother set aside money from his SSI checks during the first months of employment.

In addition, the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) was also contacted. A follow-up letter was sent to DRS counselor informing him of Mark's employment start date and a projection of how long initial training would take.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

There are many questions that arise during the employment selection process. This chapter has attempted to answer several of the process issues and concerns. The following section presents some of the most frequently asked employment selection questions and answers.

1. What is meant by qualified applicant?

ANSWER: This means the applicant must satisfy the employer's requirements for the job, such as education, employment experience, skills, or licenses. The applicant must be able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodations. An employer cannot refuse to hire an applicant because of a disability prevents the applicant from performing duties that are not essential to the job.

2. Should a disability be disclosed?

ANSWER: The ADA prohibits employers from making any inquiries as to the existence or nature of a disability prior to an offer of employment. Employers are not allowed to ask if an applicant has any disabilities or impairments which may affect their performance in the position for which a job application has been submitted. It is important to take the time to discuss with

the customer what she or he approves and disapproves of disclosing during employer marketing activities. Applicants can voluntarily disclose a disability to an employer. Once an applicant discloses her or his disability, the employer can follow-up with questions such as how the applicant would perform a specific job function.

3. What is a reasonable accommodation?

ANSWER: A reasonable accommodation is any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant to participate in the job application process, to perform essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities. Reasonable accommodations can include a large variety of arrangements and supports. The following table list possible reasonable accommodations examples.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

- providing or modifying equipment or devices
- job restructuring
- part-time or modified work schedules
- reassignment to a vacant position
- adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies
- providing readers and interpreters
- making the workplace readily accessible

4. Should a reasonable accommodations be

requested during the interview process?

ANSWER: Employers may ask about an applicant's ability to perform job-related functions and the need for reasonable accommodations. After an applicant has reviewed the position description and position requirements, it is permissible for the employer to inquire if the applicant is able to perform these tasks with or without an accommodation. If the applicant indicates he or she is able to perform the task with an accommodation, the employer may ask how it would be accomplished.

5. Can the employer require a medical examination as a condition for employment?

ANSWER: After a conditional job offer is made, an employer may require medical exams and make disability-related inquiries if this is done for all entering employees in that job category. However, the employer can not reject an applicant because of information about their disability revealed by the medical examination, unless the reasons for rejection are job-related and necessary for the conduct of the employer's business. Drug testing is not affected.

6. Who will provide reasonable accommodations?

ANSWER: Employers must reasonably accommodate the disabilities of qualified applicants or employees, unless undue hardship would result. If an applicant needs and/or wants a reasonable accommodation she or he must request it from the employer, however, the applicant is not required to identify a disability. Therefore, the focus of the conversation should center

on job functions which need an accommodation to complete the task. The applicant should be prepared to identify the specific accommodation that is needed.

7. What happens if after a few days I don't like the job?

ANSWER: The goal of employment is to locate a work environment that is satisfactory to the job seekers needs and desires. The new employee should discuss her or his dissatisfaction with the employment specialist and employer. In some instances, discussions with the employer can result in changes, such as job restructuring. It is also permissible to resign a position. However, the *old adage*, "the best time to look for a new job is while you are employed," is good advice. If a new employee wants a job change the employment specialist should work with the customer to establish a course of action for career development.

8. What if the employer decides to terminate an employee?

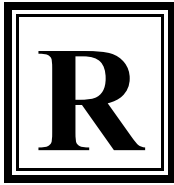
ANSWER: The employer can not fire an employee because of a disability. However, if the individual is not performing the essential duties of the job to the employer's standards, the employer may terminate his or her employee. Employers will fire employees who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of other employees in the workplace. In addition, employees who use illegal drugs are not protected from personnel actions based on their use of illegal drugs.

SUMMARY

Quality supported employment service

providers recognize that customers of supported employment services may need to take several jobs before settling on a particular

company or career. When an employment situation does not work out, the customer and the employment specialist must sit down to determine what has been learned from the situation. It will be important to use this information to help develop a plan of action for meeting career goals and securing a new job.



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