



Job Site Training: Best Practices for the Employment Specialist

Introduction

Supported employment has a multitude of steps and processes but the ultimate goal is to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment. Competitive and integrated is defined as a customer with a disability gaining a community job where they work alongside and interact with coworkers without disabilities. They have to be making at least minimum wage and be receiving equal pay to coworkers completing similar job tasks. Once a customer has found a job that meets the criteria for competitive integrated employment and aligns with their interests and skills, the employment specialist will work with the customer during the 'job site training' phase of supported employment. Job site training includes teaching an individual how to do the job they were hired for while implementing supports to increase independence and reduce the amount of assistance needed from the employment specialist. It's important for an employment specialist to implement best practices during job site training so that their customer becomes an independent and successful employee!

Job Site Training – The Employment Specialist's Role

The employment specialist's responsibilities can include; (a). assisting the new hire with a company's onboarding process, (b). assisting the new hire in learning their job tasks, (c). putting strategies and supports in place to increase the new hire's independence, (d). creating awareness for the new hire related to natural cues in the work environment, and (e). building natural supports within the work setting. The ultimate goal of an employment specialist during the job site training phase of supported employment is to increase a new hire's independence so that the employment specialist can fade their presence and support.

Onboarding

Each company's onboarding process looks different. The onboarding process is full of pertinent information regarding company policies, procedures and mandatory trainings. An employment specialist should expect to be a part of the new hire's onboarding process. It can not only help the employment specialist understand the business's regulations and protocol, but also help the employment specialist understand the overall culture of the business. This is information that should be discussed with the new hire. It is also a good time to ensure that the customer understands their role within the business and the different responsibilities that make up their job tasks.

Teaching Job Tasks

Job site training is very much what it sounds like...teaching job tasks at a work site. This process needs to be tailored to the unique needs of each individual. The individual may know how to complete some of their job tasks already but need support when learning other job tasks. This is typical of anyone starting a new job! It is the responsibility of the employment specialist to help figure out which tasks they need help with and how best to provide that help. An employment specialist must strike a balance between teaching these tasks while also promoting independence.

Strategies and Supports for Success

There are numerous strategies that an employment specialist can use to teach job tasks while also increasing independence. First, job tasks can be taught using prompts, which include helping, showing, or telling a person how to complete a task. You will only want to give the amount of help necessary using what is known as “least-to-most” prompts. This is an evidence-based practice that teaches a skill using less assistance before providing more assistance. This strategy will make sure the individual completes as many tasks as they can on their own. Second, a task analysis can be used to make big tasks more manageable to learn. A task analysis is a data collection tool that breaks down large tasks into smaller, more actionable steps. The employment specialist can use a task analysis to track the prompts being used to teach a job task. Then, an employment specialist can see how much help they have provided for a certain task and if the individual is beginning to learn to complete the task with less assistance. Creating a task analysis for new job duties is often a great starting point when providing on-the-job training. Third, a visual support is a tool that can help an individual complete their job more independently by acting as cues or reminders to do different tasks. Employment specialists should make different visual supports specifically for the individuals using the tool. Visual supports can include picture schedules, checklists, social cue cards, cell phone apps, visual alarms or timers, or videos. There are also non-visual supports an employment specialist can provide on-the-job. An employment specialist might develop supports that assist with transportation to work, time management skills, assistive technology, or environmental arrangements that promote success at work. Fourth, an employment specialist can make sure there are naturally occurring cues in the work setting. A natural cue is something that already exists in the workplace that signals existing employees to complete a task or move on to a different task. An employment specialist can teach a new hire to use these supports the same way as other employees do to complete job tasks. While these cues may be ‘natural’ to many people, some individuals with disabilities may need help identifying these cues that already exist in the workplace. Lastly, natural supports exist in all work settings. This is a coworker or other employee that can provide assistance in the work environment by answering questions or teaching a skill that they would teach to other colleagues. An employment specialist should help identify natural cues and supports in the work setting. However, an employment specialist is not considered a natural

support in the workplace because their role is to eventually fade from the work site and they are not an employee of the business.

Fading Support

As a customer learns their job duties, it is important that the employment specialist begins to reduce their presence and support. The employment specialist can begin to fade support by decreasing the amount of physical space between themselves and the individual they are supporting at the job site. Then, the employment specialist can begin to come to the job site less frequently. Fading can often be calculated using the percentage of time that you are supporting the individual at their job. Day one is typically 100% coverage. As the individual's independence increases, the employment specialist will decrease their presence. If an employment specialist is having a difficult time reducing their presence or support, they need to reassess how effective the support strategies have been in helping the individual learn to do the job independently. The employment specialist may need to change their teaching tools. Fading support does not have to happen all at once or as a uniform process. Rather, fading support also can include the employment specialist being present for more difficult tasks but leaving the job site once the customer has completed that step. Overall, the most important part of this process is that support is only faded when the individual shows they are ready for reduced assistance by demonstrating their ability to do job tasks on their own.

Summary

It is important for employment specialists to provide high quality job site training. An employment specialist should understand effective teaching tools to help an individual learn new job tasks but also know when to reduce support so the individual can thrive on their own in the job setting. When job site training is done well, an individual with a disability can be highly successful in competitive integrated employment.

Key Terms

- Prompting
- Task Analysis
- Visual Support
- Natural Supports
- Fading