



Texas Beacons
of Excellence

A Partnership Led by:



Q & A: Everyone Can Work! Some Things to Think About!

Introduction

Competitive integrated employment (CIE) has not been the work outcome for many people with significant disabilities. One belief is that they have intensive support needs that can only be met in specialized settings and programs. Another belief is that people with significant disabilities have to learn skills before they can get a job. In addition, there are reported barriers to CIE including difficulty identifying businesses that will hire workers with significant disabilities, limited transportation, limited funding, and a fear of losing benefits.

Something to Think About:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2020) reported that people who receive subminimum wages do not differ from those with the same disabilities earning competitive wages in integrated settings.

These questions are commonly posed about people with significant disabilities related to CIE.

Question: *People with significant disabilities in my agency do not qualify for most of the jobs in my community. How are they able to work?*

Answer: One barrier to finding a job is how the job search is conducted. A typical way to look for jobs is to search for open positions using classified ads, postings on job boards or Internet sites. However, people with significant disabilities may not be able to complete all the job duties found in existing positions. This is probably one of the reasons they have not been hired. They are being compared to other job applicants without disabilities. Employment specialists and job seekers may become discouraged when they cannot find jobs using traditional approaches. This might reinforce the belief that people with significant disabilities are not “qualified applicants” for CIE positions. An approach that has been successful is to negotiate positions based on the strengths and interests of a specific job seeker while also meeting the needs of a business. Negotiation can be a job development strategy for supported employment or customized employment services. Interviews and observations are used to uncover the business’s unmet

labor needs. Businesses to visit are identified based on the interests and abilities of a specific job seeker. Then, as unmet needs are identified through interviews and observations, the employment specialist can negotiate a job that matches the person's abilities and interests. This addresses the barrier of a job seeker not being qualified for existing job descriptions. In other words, the approach results in a negotiated position for which the individual with a significant disability is qualified. It is a win-win for the business and for the job seeker.

Something to Think About:

Benefits to the business:

- Increased workplace efficiency
- Increased productivity
- Improvement in the organization of work tasks
- Efficient use of employee skills and abilities
- Tasks get completed that were not getting done
- The company may save money

Benefits to the job seeker:

- A job earning at least minimum wage
- A job that matches the person's interests & work goals
- A production rate that is consistent with the worker's skills
- Efficient use of the person's skills and abilities
- Community integration and participation

Question: *In my agency, people with significant disabilities need constant supervision and instructions to complete the work assigned to them. Please explain how an individual with intensive support needs can become independent in a community job?*

Answer: Many people with significant disabilities have never learned to be independent, since staff provides continuous supervision and assistance. They will wait to be told what to do as well as how to do it. Sometimes, even the presence of staff becomes the cue to work. When staff step away, the individual stops working. The agency staff then believe that people with significant disabilities cannot be independent in a community job. Learned dependence can carry over to a competitive job. The employment specialist or job coach must be aware of how their instruction promotes reliance on staff. It is important to involve workers with disabilities and assist them in becoming *independent* of prompts and supervision. For instance, a worker could use a pre-set alarm on his or her watch to know when it is time to take a break. Another example may be the person who uses picture prompts or a video on a cell phone or iPad to complete a job duty. Finding ways to reduce supervision and decrease prompting promotes independence. Like all employees, the person with a disability will learn new skills once on-the-job.

Something to Think About:

Competitive integrated employment can increase the skills and independence of people with disabilities when compared to people who remain in segregated settings and programs.

Question: *How can I convince an employer that hiring a person with a disability is a good idea?*

Answer: The employment specialist must listen to employers and to their job seekers! Listen and keep listening! It's vital to really understand what employers are saying and their points of view. The same is true of people with disabilities who want to work! This shows respect and good intentions, and will make an employer and the job seeker feel valued.

In the process, the employment specialist can learn more about a company's needs and what may be holding them back from hiring workers with disabilities. "Reading" employers and learning about their concerns will be important to success. Employment specialists should become familiar with typical employer concerns and be able to address those concerns. For example, the employer may be wondering, "Will this cost my company money? Will this agency deliver what they are promising? Will the person be able to do the job?" Pointing out that businesses have successfully hired workers with disabilities may address these concerns. Ask employers who have worked with the agency if their names can be used as references. Discuss possible accommodations with the job seeker before meeting with the business along with what information is to be disclosed to the employer. Know how you are going to represent the person's strengths and interests so that the employer does not have questions regarding the individual's ability to do the job while it is being negotiated. Be ready and able to describe how the job seeker will be a valued employee to the company!

For more information, please consider the following resources:

Taylor, J., Avellone, L., Brooke, V., Wehman, P., Inge, K., Schall, C., & Iwanaga, K. (2022). The impact of competitive integrated employment on economic, psychological, and physical health outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (2022) *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35, 448-459.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12974>

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Subminimum Wages (2020). *Impacts on the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities*. <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2020/2020-09-17-Subminimum-Wages-Report.pdf>

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