

Natural Supports and Fading

Background Information

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Job Coaching and Facilitating Natural Supports

The first few days (and weeks) at work are a critical time for developing work and social relationships with others on the job. This is true of not only people with disabilities, but anyone starting a new job. These social connections not only make work a more enjoyable place to be, but are essential for learning job tasks, obtaining needed assistance from other employees and figuring out the formal and informal rules and culture that help a new employee to “fit in” and be accepted in the workplace. For this to happen, the individual’s supervisor and other co-workers need to be involved (as they are with other new employees) in the initial orientation and training.

In some cases, it will be very important for the job coach to be on the work site initially (and perhaps for an extended period of time). However, what role the job coach plays varies from job to job and from individual to individual. There are many activities that must occur during an individual’s orientation to the company and it is the job coach’s responsibility to make sure that they happen. However, this doesn’t mean the job coach has to, or should be, the primary person providing the orientation. In many ways, it is more challenging for job coaches to facilitate and support the company in orienting and training the individual than it is to do the orientation and training themselves. To assure that the individual is socially as well as physically integrated into the workplace, the extra effort is both necessary and worthwhile.

When an individual begins a job, it is important to assist him or her with developing natural supports and social connections immediately, in order to take full advantage of the formal and informal training and support the individual will receive from the supervisor and co-workers. Tapping into these “natural” supports is an important part of the process of the job coach fading from the workplace.

The role of the job coach can either help the process of developing natural supports or prevent them from occurring as they should. Some potential factors which may prevent natural supports from happening are as follows:

- The job coach serving as member of a pair when employees are paired up on jobs
- A job whose arrangement of duties or physical location are too isolating or rigid
- Supervisors, co-workers, and the individual relying on the job coach to solve problems.

Beginning on the first day of the job, the employment experience needs to be as similar as possible for the individual as it is for other employees, with the use of natural supports beginning on the first day of the job. In some early supported employment programs, the job coach was responsible for orienting the individual to the workplace, teaching tasks, monitoring work quality, supervising and providing social and emotional supports. Then, once the individual learned the job, the job coach would start to “fade” from the job site. It was at this time that the job coach would try to figure out how to help the worker develop social connections and natural supports. This approach isolates the individual from the typical orientation and training procedures, as well as from the typical social routines of the other employees. Research and experience have shown that if integration of the person with a disability into the workplace using available supports does not begin to occur when the individual starts the job, it is very difficult to “make it happen” when it is time for the job coach to fade. Therefore, when job coaching an individual, an approach must be used that allows for a wide range of supports to be tapped into from day one, for the individual to become trained in a particular job and to become connected and socially included in the workplace.

Assessing Work Culture

How support is provided both formally and informally varies among businesses depending on type of

company, personalities, economic and cultural climate, etc. For a job coach to help a worker with disabilities develop supports and social connections in the workplace, he or she must get to know how people interact, how people connect with each other for work and social purposes, and what does and does not “fit in”. Here are some basic guidelines for job coaches in assessing work culture:

- **Read the informal culture:** What rules are followed and what aren't? How social are people at work? Who are the “real leaders” or people looked at with authority? How much “deviation from the norm” is tolerated or even embraced? Do people socialize outside the workplace?
- **Identify patterns over time:** Make observations of the work culture over time and look for common themes. What's really valued and important within this work culture? Who really “fits in”? Why?
- **Look at food and drink customs:** What are the customs and rules around meal periods? How about break periods? Do people drink coffee and bring in food?
- **Look for gathering places:** Where do people “hang out” during work? How about after work?
- **Look for shared equipment:** Do people share “tools”? This can include items typically thought of as tools, as well as such items as copy machines, computers, fax machines, etc.
- **Identify social customs:** Are there birthday parties and other celebrations? Do people contribute towards gifts? Does the workplace have holiday parties and summer picnics?

As the job coach assesses the workplace culture, they need to be helping the worker with a disability to participate in that culture. This includes such things as helping them invite a co-worker to lunch or joining the daily lunch crowd, bringing in food for break, going out after work with co-workers, etc. Help the worker with a disability to learn greetings, co-workers' names, and topics and proper interactions for small talk. Help the person with a disability know when to offer assistance to a co-worker. The job coach's role is to facilitate the worker's participation in these rituals, but not to participate in these rituals with the worker. The more the worker with a disability can initiate his/her participation in these rituals on his/her own (with possible “behind-the-scenes” encouragement from the job coach), the better.

Guidelines for Developing Natural Supports and Social Inclusion

Using a natural supports approach does not mean there is no need for job coaches, or that staff will not spend time training and supporting workers on the job. It does mean that staff will now have the additional responsibilities to identify and facilitate natural supports, assist in developing social connections, and serve as a resource and support to supervisors and co-workers.

Below is a checklist of areas that employers and co-workers can be involved in with the worker with disabilities. It does not need to be an either/or situation (i.e., either the employer is totally responsible or the job coach is totally responsible). For each area, you need to consider the employer's knowledge, experience, and resources; and consider the preferences of the worker with disabilities in determining the roles that you, the employer, and others (co-workers, family, and friends) will play in supporting him/her.

- **Introductions and Orientation:** Unless there is great discomfort on the part of the employer or worker, this can, and should, be done by the employer.
- **Training and Support:** This will often be a shared function with the need to negotiate with the employer how you both can work together to provide training and support in a way that promotes the value and the social inclusion of the worker.
- **Work Assignments:** Assigning and evaluating work should be done by the employer from the start. If the job coach assumes responsibility for this, investment in the employee, appreciation for progress made, and eventual transfer of these functions by the employer may be problematic.

- **Performance Evaluation:** The worker with a disability should be subject to the same formal and informal performance evaluation procedures as other employees. The job coach should become aware of what these procedures are, and possibly provide a supportive role in their implementation if requested by the employer. The job coach should never do the evaluation for the employer, and with the possible exception of enclave situations, should not provide feedback to be used in the evaluation.
- **Inclusion in Company Activities:** Job coaches are outsiders and may not be aware of the extent of formal (and especially informal) social and other activities.
- **Transportation:** Besides formal transportation like reduced public transportation fares or shuttle services, there may be a “culture” of workers carpooling or sharing rides.
- **Job Modification and Problem Solving:** Supervisors and co-workers who are familiar with the work can often be one of the best resources for job accommodations. Involving the employer (and co-workers) early on in this can help them feel competent to deal with the worker with disabilities and prevent them from building unnecessary dependence on the job coach.
- **Communication with Agency:** The format this takes needs to be mutually agreed upon with the employer, co-workers, and the worker with disabilities with the ultimate responsibility for assuring that communication happens with the job coach.

Examples of Natural Supports

Below are some examples of natural support strategies that have been developed to support workers with disabilities. These strategies are based on the type of supports that workers with and without disabilities receive on and off their jobs.

- Worker gets to work by car pooling with co-workers
- Co-worker orients and trains worker
- Co-worker cues break and lunch times
- Supervisor sets up work area
- Co-worker assists with paperwork
- Cashier provides assistance with making change
- Security guard assists with using the time clock
- Supervisor and co-worker reinforce productivity and quality
- Workers do tasks together
- Employee health assists with monitoring medication
- Co-worker offers advice about relationship problems

Co-workers as Trainers

- **If possible, observe the co-worker's training style with other employees**
- **Give the worker some basic training skills and suggestions**
- **Provide opportunities for feedback and support to the co-worker**
- **Show co-workers how to measure progress**
- **Be available to back-up or supplement co-worker training**
- **Reinforce the use of good training techniques**

- **It is important that the co-worker trainer(s) and the worker have compatible personalities and styles**
- **This includes information about the worker's preferred learning style**
- **As employers and co-workers take on more responsibility for training and supporting the worker, the job coach's role becomes more of a consultant and support to the "supporters"**
- **Involving the co-worker as trainer does not preclude the job coach from providing direct training when the demands, comfort level or skills required go beyond what the co-worker can or will do**

In many ways, using a natural supports strategy increases the initial work for the job coach. However, if the long-term goal is to develop positive and lasting connections between the worker with a disability and others in the workplace, it will be work worth doing. In addition, the job coach needs to act as a role model and public relations specialist to encourage involvement with the worker with disabilities and provide support and reinforcement for supervisors and co-workers. Some of the expansion of the job coach's role to develop natural supports and social connections will include making the following activities a priority:

- Develop relationship with the employer with clarity about the job coach's role
- Model interactions with the worker for supervisor and co-workers
- Highlight the worker's strengths and interests
- Reinforce positive interactions between the worker and co-workers
- Seek out common interests and experiences between the worker with disabilities and co-workers
- Give practical advice to supervisor and co-workers regarding the worker
- Teach worker conversational skills
- Utilize natural tools (i.e., food, coffee, etc.) for interactions

Promoting natural supports and social inclusion means changing the role the job coach plays with people with disabilities, employers, families, and the community from that of being the primary trainer and supporter to consultant and facilitator.

Job Coach Instructional and Support Techniques

Many people with severe disabilities will need a variety of modifications and supports on the job site to assist them in learning the job and reaching the level of independence they desire. Several approaches can be used to establish a comfortable “fit” between an individual and the requirements of a job. Adapting work tasks, modifying the work site, and using rehabilitation technology are all techniques that can be used. In addition, skill training can assist a worker to learn a new task by systematically arranging the ways in which information is presented, and feedback is given. The goal of training is to have the worker perform the duties correctly and in response to the natural cues and reinforcers that exist on the job.

Job Site Training: Skill Acquisition

Core Training Rules

Rule #1: Be creative! Good job training is about creativity. You need to think flexibly in wild and atypical ways, and you need to consider all of the information available to you. Be sure to think about information from several different perspectives.

Rule #2: Keep trying! There’s always something else to do. Don’t ever give up. If you feel stuck, go back to looking for different angles.

Rule #3: Be systematic! Haphazard training, where information is presented differently each time and consequences don’t occur for specific performance criteria, is a waste of time for you and the worker. Once you have developed your training plan, stick with it. The **consistency** with which you use procedures is what makes them effective. Don’t provide careful prompts one day and then be casual the next. Also, if you are not careful, especially in the early stages of learning, a worker may learn errors as part of the task.

Rule #4: Consider the individual! Everyone learns a little differently and has different preferences. Training approaches are **individual**. How you approach training needs to reflect the learning style of the individual worker.

Rule #5: Spread training responsibilities! When only one individual conducts training, subtle dependencies can develop that are hard to overcome. Personnel at the employment site should be involved in training as they are with all new employees. The employment specialist should not do all of the training.

It is assumed that the employer and co-workers will be involved in training the worker, with support and intervention provided by the employment specialist as needed. The principles and techniques described for use by employment specialists are equally applicable for use by supervisors and co-workers, and can even be used in training all employees, not just employees with disabilities.

Task Analysis

Task analysis is the process of breaking a job down into manageable (and teachable) components. Every task, simple or complex, can be broken down into as many components and sub components as necessary.

The employment specialist must first decide which method for completing the task is the best one for an individual worker. The best task analysis for a specific job may be very different for two different workers. Choosing the best task analysis requires balancing **efficiency, speed, the energy** required to perform the task, and **simplicity** (or how easy the sequence of steps is to learn). The best task analysis maximizes all of these factors, although in practice, you often make decisions about which factor is most important.

Developing a Task Analysis

In writing a task analysis, each step should result in an observable behavior. The “size” of steps depends on the individual. Avoid making them too small to be manageable. Start with fewer steps, and then expand the task analysis as needed based on performance. Write steps in the words you would use in training the person. The level of detail and breakdown of the steps will depend on the prior experience, skills and training needs of the individual worker. For example, filling a bottle with cleaning fluid could be a 1 step or 6-10 step task, depending on the individual. Also, remember the “Dead Person’s Rule”: If a dead person can do it, it’s not an observable behavior!

Task Analysis Steps

- Observe proficient co-workers performing the task
- Record each step in sequence
- Use this task analysis to perform the activity yourself if necessary
- Modify the task analysis by adding or deleting steps based on performance of the job
- Give the list of steps to the supervisor and/or a co-worker for review
- Identify the natural cues for each step of the task analysis
- Observing more than one co-worker may help to identify useful variations in task strategies
- This may be needed when the employment specialist is not familiar with the task, the steps are confusing, and/or further breakdown of the task is required

Identifying Natural Cues

What causes you to wake up in the morning? Natural cues are the environmental clues that inform you what to do next. Our goal as trainers is to identify and emphasize natural cues that will guide the person’s behavior in performing his/her job.

When the materials at the job site are in a certain arrangement, the worker should immediately know what to do next. At work, natural cues may include obvious things such as the horn of the lunch truck (a cue to wrap up work and take a break), the sight of trays coming into a dishroom on a conveyor belt (a cue to break them down into piles), or the buzz a shrink wrap machine makes when it has completed its cycle (a cue to lift the bar and remove the item being wrapped).

A variety of natural cues exist in the environment for any one task. The worker only needs to attend to one consistently available cue to perform a task effectively. You will want to choose the cue(s) that you highlight in training based on the person’s preferences and learning style (i.e.,

visual, auditory, physical). It is very important to identify natural cues in order to develop independence from continual trainer prompting.

Natural cues are built into every step of a task analysis. Each step produces the natural cue for the next step in the task. The power of a chain is in the relationship between natural cues and steps.

Providing Effective Prompts

Now that you know what the task is, how do you let the person know what he/she needs to do? The second step (after completing a task analysis) of designing an instructional plan is to decide how assistance and information will be provided to the worker. This process is referred to as **prompting and fading**. Prompts are the additional assistance you provide that allows the worker to perform the task correctly. Fading refers to the process of gradually eliminating those prompts so that the worker responds to the natural cues embedded in the task and the environment.

The effective use of prompting helps ensure that a consistent sequence of steps are presented to the worker and that natural cues are highlighted. It helps us be systematic in the information we give to a worker by not giving too little information, and also by not giving too much information. Make sure you use the same prompts consistently during training. Consistent prompts:

- Dramatically increase the speed with which a worker will learn a new task.
- Ensure the task is learned correctly with minimal errors or extra movements the first time.
- Minimize the frustration a person experiences by being constantly corrected when making errors.

Two rules guide the selection and use of prompts:

- **Individuals learn and process information differently.** You should select prompts that work for the specific individual you are teaching based on that person's learning style and preferences. Some individuals respond well to verbal information, while others will be distracted if you talk to them while they are performing a task. Similarly, some learners may respond well to physical guidance, while others resist physical contact.
- **Always use the least amount of assistance, or the least intrusive prompt possible.** Remember that your goal is to fade the assistance as quickly as possible. Arrange prompts into an ordered sequence from the least intrusive (least assistance) to most intrusive (most assistance).

Highlighting Environmental Cues

When you are training through the use of verbal prompts, the worker is using your prompts to structure what they do. For example, typical verbal prompts may include:

- “Turn it around” “Where did you put that yesterday?” “Does that look clean enough?”
“Push harder” “Try another way” “Now do another one”

Once prompts are mostly words, phrases or gestures, we can:

1. Give prompts in bunches rather than one at a time. For example: “Finish cleaning the mirror then when you’re done, go to the supply cart and get the soap.” Eventually, finishing the mirror itself becomes the cue for getting the soap. Over time “bunches” of steps can grow bigger.
2. Point out, in your prompt, what it is that the person should be attending to. For example, “See how full the bag is? When it’s **that** full (pointing to the spot) tie it up, don’t put more in.”
3. Stand physically further from the employee in between prompts.
4. Delay giving prompts to correct an error for several extra seconds, especially when the individual will eventually get to the point where they will realize that something is wrong.
5. Give prompts that are shorter or contain less information. For example, replace “Now tape the top shut” with “What comes next?”
6. If possible, switch trainers so the individual doesn’t become dependent on the prompts a trainer may be giving without even realizing it.

We refer to prompts as **artificial cues** in order to distinguish them from the **natural cues** that are part of the task. Artificial cues are pieces of additional information that will not be present once the task is learned. As such they are dangerous, because if a learner becomes too dependent on them, or pays closer attention to them than to the natural cues, it will be difficult to fade your involvement as a trainer. Prompts provided by a natural source such as a co-worker, and which are not a burden to that person, may never have to fade. This is one advantage of recruiting job site staff to do some or all of the training.

Another source of natural cues are in the work environment itself. Eventually we can reach a point where most cues a person needs are in the setting and the task itself. Here are some examples of a trainer prompt and the environmental cue that eventually replaces it.

Trainer Prompts and Environmental Cues

<u>Trainer Prompt:</u>	<u>Environmental Cue:</u>
“Take out the trash”	Trash can is full
“That customer needs a refill”	Coffee cup almost empty
“It’s time for your break”	Co-workers going to break room

After you’ve used these six strategies, if there is any remaining dependence on prompts from a trainer, you should consider one or some combination of the following additional strategies including altering the environment, changing the task, adding natural reinforcers or supports, and helping the person learn the skills to provide the cues themselves. Some examples of these are:

7. Develop pictures or lists and pair prompts with these so that the employee learns to get the information they need from the list or the pictures.

8. Physically adapt the equipment or work area for better cues. For example, use a piece of tape to show where things go, or a sample assembly completed to show how the finished product should look.
9. Have a co-worker remind someone when to go or return from a break, or switch to the next task.
10. Have the supervisor or co-worker offer some encouragement during a less desirable task.

Even though these last four strategies are “artificial,” they don’t need the continual presence of the employment specialist, so fading from the work site is possible.

Effective Teaching Techniques Summary

Below is a summary of the key points one needs to remember to be most effective in providing systematic skill training:

- 1. Wait for Attention** - ignore off task behavior
- 2. Give Minimal Assistance** – a) be effective; b) fade quickly
- 3. Give Immediate Reinforcement** – a) clear and consistent; b) fade to natural sources
- 4. Provide Error Correction** – a) immediate and consistently; b) return to prior step;
c) provide minimal attention

Alternative Teaching Strategies

Least prompting is only one of several commonly used teaching strategies. The range of strategies available to you is limited only by your creativity. Any teaching strategy can be modified by altering one of the primary components of the strategy. Consider modifying any of the following components:

- The order in which the task is taught and how much of the task is taught at once (front chaining, backward chaining, whole task chaining)
- The level of detail of the steps (break the task into smaller steps)
- The prompts being used
- The scheduling of prompts (e.g., for least prompts, the time gap between prompts; other strategies use different decision rules for when a prompt is used, e.g., time delay, most prompts)
- The scheduling and choice of a reinforcer
- The fading strategy being used
- The overall design of the task (redesigning the task so that it is simpler or providing assistive devices)

Strategies for Maintaining Performance On Tasks

Using Natural Supports

As previously noted, from the start of the job, supervisors and co-workers should be involved as actively as possible in training, brainstorming solutions to problems, and providing support. As the job stabilizes, an employee's supervisor or co-workers can be asked to take over specific ongoing support functions. Some support needs are not very different from the help workers give each other all the time.

Using Natural Reinforcers

There are naturally occurring reinforcers available at the site which can be used or enhanced to help maintain an individual's performance on the job.

Some natural reinforcers are:

- Praise from a co-worker or supervisor
- Bonuses or commissions
- Employee of the Month certificates

Self-Management

Self-management techniques are strategies or devices that allow an individual to improve or maintain his/her own performance without the intervention of an employment specialist.

Because the employee is in charge of self-management procedures, they can be more consistent than procedures controlled by an employment specialist, a supervisor or a co-worker who may miss an occurrence or not be around. Self-management also increases an individual's awareness of his/her own behavior. There are **five common techniques** for self-management.

Self-Management Techniques:

- **Self-Prompting:** Pictures, lists, sample assemblies, taped instructions, and similar procedures allow an individual to “look up” the cue for a new task or check to see the way something is supposed to look without the help of an employment specialist.
- **Self-Reinforcement:** An individual can give a reinforcement after some correct behavior he/she has set as a goal, such as an extra snack from the vending machine at 2:00 PM on days where the individual has gone a certain amount of time without wandering away from his/her work area. Reinforcement can be self-administered, self-selected—choosing what it will be—or both.
- **Self-Monitoring:** An individual can learn to record his/her own behavior, as a means of monitoring it. For example, checking off completed boxes of work on a sheet of paper or filling in a bar graph.
- **Self-Instruction:** An individual can employ strategies to teach him/herself how to do a particular task; for example, examining what the completed job looks like, watching how other people do a task, thinking of several alternatives if something doesn't work, and so forth. These procedures are described in suggested readings at the end of the chapter.
- **Self-Elicited Feedback:** An individual can initiate a request to the supervisor or co-worker to check completed work or progress towards a goal. “Is that the right way?”, “Was I too loud this morning?”, and similar requests put the employee in charge of getting accurate feedback.

Sometimes employees need particular help with tasks that repeat in cycles and need to be done in a certain amount of time or to reach a certain quota. Several types of cue adaptations are helpful in these situations. These strategies help the worker manage his/her own work performance.

Sustaining Performance on Repeating Tasks:

- **Production Grids:** Charts or pictures an employee can use to check off or fill in a space every time a specified amount of work is completed. Bar graphs work well.
- **Counters:** An employee can “click” a new number after each work cycle to reach a total.
- **Picture or Tactile Cues:** Completed work can be placed in compartments or in a certain arrangement to reach a goal (this high, over to this piece of tape, to fill this box, etc.)

Changing Tasks and Managing Time:

- **Schedules/Job Duty Book:** Pictures or photographs or a verbal list can convey each step of an operation, arranged on a chart or in a small book. Different days can be color-coded to match the days on a similarly coded calendar.
- **Timer or Watch Alarm:** Can be set to announce when it’s time to start or stop an operation.
- **Pre-taped Instructions:** Instructions can be audio taped and played to an individual at the correct intervals using a pocket tape recorder and headphones.

Utilizing Self-Management to Teach Independence on the Job

For self-management to be effective the employee has to feel that the goal is important, since the motivation is internal and the individual is on the “honor system” in carrying it out. Also, the techniques themselves have to be taught, with provisions for fading, until the person can use them independently. Below are some guidelines for assessing the need for training in using self-management techniques.

Step 1: Identify skill / behavior to be targeted through evaluation

Step 2: Verify through observation

Step 3: Establish a range of acceptable behavior

Step 4: Assess work environment for naturally occurring cues and reinforcers, encourage/promote utilization

Step 5: Select self-management procedure

Step 6: Teach self-management skills, withdraw external support

Step 7: Evaluate effects of self-management

Task Adaptations, Work Site Modifications and Rehabilitation Technology

Adaptations have been used extensively for people with physical disabilities, with the primary focus on removing physical barriers (e.g., ramps) or adaptations for computers. However,

adaptations can also help people with psychiatric, developmental and other disabilities access jobs and improve productivity. Most adaptations cost relatively little (less than \$50) and use ordinary, “off-the-shelf” equipment. Many adaptations also save time and labor for all of the employees in a company or work area. The key is to be creative and willing to experiment.

Examples of each kind of adaptation are listed below. Some are disability-specific (such as talking elevators), but most adaptations benefit the general population as well. For example, ramps make it easier for delivery personnel and parents with children in carriages.

Structural Adaptations:

Changing the building, layout, climate or other systemic changes

- Ramps
- Rearranging rooms
- Talking elevators
- Blinking alarms
- Lighting
- Lowering or raising shelves
- Adjustable desks and tables
- Enlarging work areas
- Reducing distractions
- Ventilation

Adaptive Equipment:

Using both ordinary and specialized devices to aid in mobility, communication and task completion

- Reminder notes
- Computer adaptations (hardware & software)
- Charts/pictures
- Carrying bag
- Notebooks
- Extended arm
- Telephone headsets
- Tacky finger
- Electric stapler
- Ruler or guide
- TTY
- Name stamp

Job Redesign/Job Restructuring:

Modifying job tasks, hours, method of completion and division of labor

- Shorten or change hours
- Lengthen break time
- Swapping tasks
- Revising task schedule
- Doing tasks with co-workers
- Job sharing
- Simplifying job
- Altering training process or time frame

Virtually every company accommodates jobs to individual worker preferences and needs. Some accommodations are made formally by the company, like flexible schedules to accommodate child care. Others are made less formally by individuals or groups of workers, such as lifting heavy items for a worker who is older or pregnant. Most people with and without disabilities require some adaptations/modifications to be fully successful at work. The difference may be a matter of the degree of modifications needed, how much has to be done before the person starts (as opposed to later, as a person settles into a job) and how much the employer has to be involved in the required changes.

Guiding Principles of Task and Environmental Adaptation

When developed properly, environmental adaptations overcome barriers that interfere with maximal job productivity or participation by employees with disabilities. However, poorly designed adaptations can stigmatize the worker, waste money, and even make a job more difficult. Adaptations to a work site should:

- Meet an identified need
- Fit into the work environment
- Have employee and employer acceptance
- Be economically feasible

The goal of all assistance offered is improved quality of life through success in integrated employment. In considering what strategy or combination of strategies to use, how independent a worker can be should **not** be the overriding determinant. Rather, our aim is inclusion of the worker into the work setting.

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), accommodation is now more than a rehabilitation strategy; it is a legal mandate to which employers must comply both in hiring and making employment decisions regarding workers with disabilities. Job coaches have a great deal to offer to employers in helping develop and implement reasonable accommodation strategies.

Supporting people with severe disabilities in community employment requires looking beyond apparent barriers and bringing in fresh ideas and perspectives. The best ideas for low cost, low tech. adaptations can come from people who know the worker and people who know the work. Some of the people who can help in brainstorming solutions are:

- Workers with disabilities (they have a lifetime of accommodation strategies)
- Employers
- Co-workers, especially people already doing the job
- Family/residential staff who live with the person
- Rehabilitation staff and school personnel who have direct experience adapting tasks for the worker
- Occupational therapists

Summary

This section has reviewed a variety of strategies and approaches to training individuals on the work site. The basic approach of training is one of building individual skills, adapting the environment, and/or providing external supports. Environmental adaptations often can be simple and inexpensive modifications within the work site; however, they must be well integrated into the work site and not serve to highlight the differences of the individual with a disability from other workers in the work place. In addition to adaptations within the work site, specific skill training strategies, such as task analysis and the use of natural cues, can assist the individual with disabilities in performing the required task in the job.

