

Introduction to the Special Issue

Job Development

I am honored to have the opportunity to guest edit this special issue of JVR. The topic of this issue is of particular interest to me as it has been my professional focus over the past twenty-five years in the field of special education and vocational rehabilitation – job development. I began my career as a high school special education teacher (before the legislation mandating transition planning!). My students, all of whom were labeled “significantly disabled” – whatever that really meant – spent their last four years of high school working in the community. By the time they graduated high school, they had better resumes than their peers without disabilities. I developed business relationships in my community that have been maintained to this day.

It is important to note that I did not make these business connections alone. I collaborated with our high school business teacher, Mr. Sanders, who was responsible for working with the business community to obtain work study opportunities for students “without significant disabilities.” At first when I explained my plan to Mr. Sanders, he was not sure it would work. My plan was simple. Mr. Sanders and I would meet with employers about their needs and then determine which students best met those needs. Mr. Sanders was kind enough to indulge this new teacher and I began attending business events with him. We met with employers and I learned how to interact on a “business level”. As we worked with the local employers, many times the students in my class were a better fit due to scheduling, skills, or the type of work culture in the business. Our collaborative efforts worked so well that

the business community began calling us for work experience students!

This experience made me realize that job development is really all about making connections and developing relationships with employers, and finding out how we can help meet their needs. Our role as job developers must expand beyond the borders of vocational rehabilitation. The most critical element in job development is bridging the gap between the business community and vocational rehabilitation. We must step out of our comfort zone and enter the world of business.

In this issue, we feature articles from professionals in the field that describe job development from a variety of perspectives. I wish to thank my colleagues: Dr. Dedra Hafner, Dr. Richard Luecking, Patrick Young, James Emmett and Celane McWhorter who took the time to share their knowledge and expertise. Special thanks goes to Dr. Paul Wehman, Editor of the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, for his patience while providing me with the opportunity to assemble this issue.

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