

## Book Review

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***The way to work: How to facilitate work experiences for youth in transition***, Richard G. Lueking (Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, USA), 2009, ISBN: 978-1-55766-898-1, Paperback, 248 pp., \$34.95.

Some choose the direct route; others the scenic; a few find themselves navigating unplanned detours. Some drive their own vehicles; a few carpool, and still others enlist alternative modes to get where they want to go. Whatever route is taken; whatever mode is used, *The Way to Work: How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition* by Rich Luecking (2009) provides a guidebook of practical, how-to strategies and ideas for transition personnel providing work-based learning experiences for youth with disabilities. The author, like a skillful travel planner, grounds the book's two defining themes, "work is good" and "work is one of the biggest contributors to the quality of life for people with disabilities" in field research that is cited throughout. Transition personnel will find this book an invaluable tool in ensuring every student leaves public education with a way and a means to an adult employment outcome.

Throughout the book, a variety of examples are used to illustrate a strategy or idea described. The author presents a refreshing perspective where none of the case examples use labels to describe the student. Instead, examples are given to show how to individualize the work experience that will be personally meaningful and provide valuable information for the future. The first chapter describes the benefits of student work experiences and the roles and responsibilities of the partners—students, families, school personnel, and employers – in realizing these benefits. The foundation is now laid for the discovery of the book's practical, ready-to-use ideas and strategies for practitioners and its user-friendly forms (to be copied for direct use or readily adapted for individual schools or districts) by which they can direct their efforts. For the content presented in each chapter, the author includes a "Learning Lab" designed to help with its implementation.

The author presents to the reader an easy-to-understand conceptual model for establishing and monitoring quality work experiences that is based on years of research, practice, and experiences. The goal is to provide transition personnel with a framework for organizing successful work experiences that promote individualization and effectiveness while ensuring

quality. The reader, however, will soon see that beyond this goal the chapter content and accompanying forms have broader applicability about which the author does not write. For example, as relates to:

1. Communication. The easy-to-follow model can relate to family members what is meant by "work-based learning" and what is involved in its provision. It could reveal for family members at what stage of the process their input will be critical; how to support the student throughout the process, and what to expect along the way. The model could further provide an easily-followed communication tool for building-level and/or district-level administrators to use to help reinforce the value of work-based services and justify budget allocations.
2. New employee orientation to roles and responsibilities. When a new staff member takes on the responsibility for work-based learning, there is often a period of uncertainty regarding expectations and responsibilities. This model clearly illustrates the process and helps new staff begin their job responsibilities. It can reduce or eliminate wasted time trying to "figure out what to do". The sample forms such as the personal profiles, work experience/job search plan, employer contacts, work experience agreement, worksite checklist, evaluations, etc. provide for a new or even tenured transition specialist to have what is necessary to develop a quality program or revise and improve one that is established.
3. Accountability. Accountability is no stranger to the education world. Building-level administrators are often challenged with supervision responsibility for personnel providing work-based learning or work experiences and are outside of the building most of the day. Some administrators admit they "just aren't sure what these folks do" and struggle when it is time to complete a performance appraisal for transition personnel. Used in combination with program evaluation data,

this model allows administrators to understand the responsibilities and specific competencies for performance appraisal purposes and set clear expectations for future performance. Many of the forms provided in this book can be used for dual documentation purposes—the student’s IEP and the work of the transition personnel.

Laying the groundwork for transition planning requires a series of formal and informal transition assessments. In the most recent reauthorization of IDEA [1], it states that measurable postsecondary goals must be developed and based on age-appropriate transition assessments. The purpose of transition assessments is to identify a student’s strengths, preferences, interests and needs. Based on the principles of person-centered planning and self-determination, the author describes and presents examples of a Positive Personal Profile. The Profile can be viewed as a way of “taking inventory” of the formal and informal assessments that help plan work experiences and add to the inventory of information based on work experiences. What educators will readily see is how the Positive Personal Profile can be slightly adapted for use with all students, whether they are going directly into the workforce or taking the postsecondary education route to work.

Building on the principles of self-determination and the personal profile, the author addresses an area that is often neglected with youth, especially those with hidden disabilities, the “when and if” of disability disclosure. Readily admitting disclosure is a personal decision, the author examines its possible advantages and disadvantages and provides issues for consideration such as when, how, what and to whom to disclose. A practice disclosure script is included as well as a questionnaire that enables students to learn more about themselves and their disability.

Most transition personnel obtain their position after spending time in the classroom. The classroom teaching experience equips them with many teaching methods and skills as well as content specific information (e.g., English, Math, Social Studies, Life skills). Knowing how to teach reading, math, and science, teachers report,

does not equate to knowing how to find and recruit employers. Acquiring this body of knowledge can be a daunting task. Learning to communicate in the language of business with employers additionally requires a unique set of skills to the knowledge base. The author does an excellent job of providing strategies that include addressing employer expectations, using employer-familiar phraseology, designing workplace accommodations, and connecting with job mentors. Finally, the author gives specific strategies for working with families and connecting with adult agencies to enhance work experiences.

The final chapter rightly focuses on the hallmarks of experiences and services that lead to quality employment outcomes. This book is an invaluable guide-tool for travel planners assisting students in reaching destination “adult employment” via work-based learning experiences. It introduces the reader to relevant research, policies and practices and supplements with examples, forms and checklists. This book is more effective than any GPS (Global Positioning Device) could be in assessing if a program or a person is on the right road and traveling in the right direction. Neither it, however, nor a GPS can provide an arrival time for the ultimate destination: quality employment outcomes for all students. There is still much road yet to travel.

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## Reference

- [1] Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.* (2004).