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Introduction

Supported employment has grown significantly over the last decade or more. We have a lot to celebrate. Compared to sheltered employment, supported employment has offered individuals with disabilities opportunities and choice to perform meaningful work in integrated settings, higher wages, social interactions with people without disabilities, community participation, and enhanced quality of life (Wehman and Kregel, 1995). We also continue to learn a great deal about support technologies such as assistive technology, compensatory strategies, and natural supports. There is an increased focus on programs using principles of total quality management to enhance customer-driven services by providing quality services and outcomes.

As we celebrate our success we must also acknowledge that we still have a great deal to learn. Issues such as conversion of segregated settings, conflict in policy and legislation, funding mechanisms, and serving the underrepresented individuals continue to be unresolved (Mank, 1994, Wehman and Kregel, 1995). Issues such as these will take state and local agencies to join forces and collectively work with consumers and family members to make changes. In addition, supported employment participants have raised the concern and/or dissatisfaction with the lack of career choice, low wages and benefits, limited social interactions and relationships, and employment retention. A number of variables (e.g. rural vs. urban) can impact on each of these outcomes. However, if we are going to provide quality services to individuals with disabilities and ensure satisfaction, then the personnel providing these services must be well-trained and competent to meet the expectations and demands required of

the customer. Second, if we truly are attempting to serve the most severe disabilities or those individuals identified as underrepresented in supported employment (e.g. people with autism, cerebral palsy, severe mental retardation) then the need for competent personnel is critical.

The intent and organization of this special issue was to focus on the role of direct line service providers, specifically employment specialists and other personnel who directly impact on the quality of services provided to supported employment participants. As supported employment continues to evolve so does the role of the employment specialist. No matter how the roles change, one common element stays the same. It is the employment specialist who plays a critical role in facilitating meaningful employment outcomes and social relationships in the workplace for people with severe disabilities. Given the average employment specialist has been in his or her position for fewer than 18 months with minimal training (Everson, 1991), new personnel require training on the values, philosophy and competencies needed to provide quality supported employment services. Whether the employment specialist assists employers and coworkers to train and support or directly teaches the supported employee on the job site, each of the articles emphasize skills in the areas of person-centered planning or approaches, choicemaking, assessment, job development techniques, systematic instruction and collaboration necessary for supported employment personnel to acquire.

In the first article Jane Everson brings her work in person-centered planning and supported employment with Denny Reid, who we welcome

into the supported employment arena and appreciate his contributions to the literature of working with individuals with the most severe/profound disabilities, to lay the foundation for providing supported employment services. Everson and Reid present a person-centered approach to determining employment preferences for individuals with truly the most severe disabilities by integrating choice and preferences into the vocational assessment and job development techniques within supported employment activities. The authors call our attention to individuals who continue to be underrepresented in supported employment but who need the greatest support needs to access and benefit from employment opportunities.

Dave Test and Wendy Wood revisit 'Rocket Scientist' (1995) to describe roles and skills needed by employment specialists during job training and support. The authors focus on the roles of the employment specialist as a consultant and a technician and the competencies needed to ensure quality training and support for individuals with severe disabilities in integrated employment settings. As Test and Wood give a nice overview of the 'how to' of systematic instruction with references for a more in-depth study, Dan Steere presents how to assess the impact of instruction in the third article. Steere describes eight dimensions across which to assess the success of systematic instructional procedures. Steere provides a case study to demonstrate practical strategies for measuring change in relation to the eight dimensions. This article goes beyond measurement of skill acquisition and incorporates the quantitative and qualitative measures of social interactions such as choice, changes in social networks, and opinions of others regarding the success of instruction.

The recurring themes of choice, customer satisfaction, and quality services is presented in the article by Katty Inge and George Tilson by identifying and selecting supports within the workplace for employees with severe disabilities. The authors challenge the field of supported employment to end the 'discussion' over natural supports and focus our energies on not how the support is given (e.g. natural) but to determine if the support is effective and is the customer satisfied.

Examples and strategies are provided to demonstrate the various types of supports used in the workplace.

Keith Storey and Jennifer Garff present an empirical study to evaluate the effectiveness of social skills instruction and natural support strategies to increase the social integration of an employee with severe disabilities. Again, unemployment specialists must acquire the necessary skills to teach support employees both task and social skills to enhance integration.

Whether your an employee with a severe disability or an employment specialist out on a job site, everyone needs some level of support. M.V. Morton and her colleagues from Montana describe a collaborative relationship between the rehabilitation counselor and the employment specialist. The authors discuss how rehabilitation counselors should be viewed more than just a funding source, but as an asset to obtaining timely and meaningful employment outcomes by working closely with the employment specialist. Effective communication skills and trust are identified as key components in developing collaborative relationships. An interview by the first author with a rehabilitation counselor and an employment specialist shows how a collaboration approach can benefit all.

It is proper that this issue concludes with an article by Tom Fish, Margo Izzo, Katina Karoulis and Bruce Growick describing a cross-agency team approach to prepare supported employment personnel. Each local team is comprised of consumers/family members and representatives from education, rehabilitation, mental retardation/developmental disabilities and mental health agencies, giving each member of the team a clearer understanding of the various roles and responsibilities throughout the employment process. The curriculum brings together several of the themes described from the other articles in this issue. A description of course topics, individual and team assignments, and evaluation forms are included for easy replication. The outcome data on the impact on consumers as well as their local level efforts demonstrates what can happen when direct line providers work collaboratively to enhance employment

A critical factor in the successful delivery of quality supported employment services is the quality of direct line personnel. Consumers and family members expect committed, competent professionals who have the knowledge and skills to facilitate meaningful employment opportunities and social relationships. Professionals should expect no less.

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