



UNDERSTANDING AND SELECTING AN EMPLOYMENT/ JOB COACHING AGENCY

There are many existing agencies that can provide support to employers by helping you to identify qualified candidates with disabilities, make accommodations, ensure productivity through assistance with on-site training, and improve retention through on-going support.

Those who work for these agencies may be called Job Coaches or Employment Specialists. Not only can they help you in recruiting and training new employees, but they can assist you with accommodation and training issues for those existing employees that have developed a disability.

Job coaching is a service which teaches, prepares, instructs, tutors and/or assists individuals with disabilities to perform work-related activities so he/she can be successful on their job. Job coaching includes (but is not limited to) on-site intervention and subsequent coordination of activities which contribute to job retention. Job coaching services are sought for a number of reasons including: barriers involving transportation; limitations or difficulties with interpersonal and communication skills; performance/production issues; and training support for new duties.

Job coaching is a “work-first” strategy which has proven successful for many individuals with disabilities. “Work-first” emphasizes prompt and effective job matching (between the applicant and the job), with the majority of support directed after the person starts work. Since the job coach is not intended to become a permanent resource to the workplace, job coaching should have an exit plan. Ideally, the job coach is to be unobtrusive and should facilitate the development of supports that are naturally found in the workplace.

There is no one size fits all approach, as job coaching will involve the expectations of the applicant and the employer, as well as job and workplace dynamics. The Job Coach is expected to complement, not to replace, existing orientation, training, and supervision from the employer.

Clear communication is essential between the employer and Job Coach. The Job Coach should initially quantify the employer’s performance expectations so that everyone can operate with clear objectives during the training/support process. Since the Job Coach will be aware of or learn about the employee’s skills, behaviors, and/or needed

accommodations, the Job Coach should be able to give the employer an idea of the length and intensity of the support they will provide. Both the employer and Job Coach should also agree upon the schedule when the Job Coach plans to be on-site for support and should determine when and how often they will talk about progress of the employee.

Below are some tips for selecting an employment/job coaching agency:

- **Check for expertise in your area.** The PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and professional organizations like the Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)... <http://www.paproviders.org/> ... have knowledge of most vocational organizations across the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania Business Leadership Network (PA BLN) ... www.blnofpa.orgcan also assist you with identifying agencies in your area and connecting you to businesses that have utilized their services.
- **Meet the agency.** It might be helpful to meet some management and the front line staff that would be working with your company. They should be able to provide you with data, references, and success stories to demonstrate their effectiveness.
- **Meet the persons that will be working directly with your company and employees.** Try to be regularly in touch with them. Make sure that you clearly share your expectations with them. Your expectations should include performance standards for employees, workplace policies/processes that employees AND the job coach must follow, and training that you require each employee to complete. Quality Job Coaches/Employment Specialists should automatically be requesting to see jobs being performed and learning duties.... before they refer applicants to your workplace.
- **Contact existing business clients for references.** The business-to-business discussion is the best way to get a reference.
- **Consider talking to a placed candidate.** Due to confidentiality, the agency will need to determine which candidates are willing to talk with you. Ask them about their job satisfaction and the agency treatment.
- **Ask how they are funded.** Often there is third party funding for agencies that support individuals with disabilities. On some occasions, however, eligibility requirements and timing of funding may not fit an employer's business need. In these cases, employers could consider contracting directly with the agency. Depending upon the need, it may be wise for you to start with paying for a brief assessment. The assessment of your need could then come with a quote of expected cost and expectations for payment of these costs.