

# Engaging Employers: From Strategy to Action

Innovations in Employment Supports

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NEXT-LEVEL WORKFORCE EDUCATION

## Business Language for Employment Support Professionals

**Employers don't speak clinical language.** When we use human services terminology, we create barriers, confusion, and can unintentionally highlight disability instead of ability. Speaking their language builds credibility, opens doors, and keeps the focus on what matters most: the right person for the job.

Translating Human Service language into Business language is critical for Job Developers because employers think in terms of **business needs, productivity, and value—not services, programs, or disabilities.**

Human Service Language	Business Language Translation	Why It Matters to Employers
<b><i>Describing a person seeking employment or one who is employed</i></b>		
“Client” / “Consumer” / “Individual we serve” / “I got a guy”	“Candidate” / “Job seeker” / “Applicant” / “Potential employee” / use their name”	Human service language sounds institutional and creates a provider-recipient dynamic. Employers hire candidates, not clients.
“SEMP person” / “My client” / “My caseload”	“Employee” / “Candidate pipeline” / use their name”	Program names mean nothing to a business. They refer to personnel as employees.
<b><i>Describing a group of people seeking, or in, a community vocational experience</i></b>		
“My person/people”, “Our guys”, “The clients” / “The consumers” / “The Individual”	“Future job seekers” / “Candidates for employment” / “Trainees”	Human service language sounds institutional and creates a provider-recipient dynamic. When we say “my/our” we imply ownership.
“They’re high-functioning” / “Low-functioning” / “They have limitations / they can’t...”	“They have strong communication skills” / “They excel at detail-oriented tasks / they can...” Use skills from the Job Development Plan	Describes actual skills and abilities relevant to work. Strength-based framing.
<b><i>Describing Supports &amp; Services</i></b>		
“Job coach” / “Job coaching”	“Coach” / “Coaching” / “Training specialist” / “Workplace trainer” / “Career coach” / “Employment Support Professional”	“Job coaching” sounds like remedial help; it implies deficiency. Normalize “support” as part of good training practices.

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<p><b>“Job Developer”</b></p>	<p><b>“Career advisor” / “Talent development specialist” / “Workforce partnership manager” / “Employment solutions consultant” / “Business engagement specialist”</b></p>	<p>“Job developer” can sound program-specific and generic, so in business settings it helps to frame the role in terms of talent strategy, partnerships, and outcomes.</p>
<p><b>“We provide long-term support for our clients” / “Extended/follow along services” / “Site visits”</b></p>	<p><b>“We help ensure successful onboarding and retention” / “Ongoing support for retention and development” / “Support to reduce turnover”</b></p>	<p>“Extended Services” is billing language. Employers care about retention. Focus discussion on the return of investment to the business.</p>
<p><b>“Intensive services” / “Intensive job coaching” / “Interventions”</b></p>	<p><b>“Coaching” “Training support or Reinforcement”</b></p>	<p>“Coaching” is business language. Coaching makes sense to us, and it makes sense to the business.</p>
<p><b>“I got [name] a job” / “Placement”</b></p>	<p><b>“[name] got a job” / “Hiring match” / “Staffing solution”</b></p>	<p>Show mutual benefit. Ownership of employment is the employees.</p>
<p><b>“We’re a Supported Employment Program”</b></p>	<p><b>“We’re a workforce development partner” / “We’re a recruiting and training resource” / “Employment and business services”</b></p>	<p>Position service as a business resource. Frame as a business collaboration.</p>
<p><b>“We provide case management” / “We advocate for the person”</b></p>	<p><b>“We stay connected to support retention”</b></p>	<p>Focus on job/task fit and retention. Employers care about retention.</p>
<p><b>“Accommodations” / “Reasonable Accommodations” / “Assistive technology” / “Devices”</b></p>	<p><b>“Workplace adjustments” / “Productivity supports”</b></p>	<p>There are 2 perspectives to look at:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For a <b>formal Accommodation Request</b>, follow HR directions to initiate the interactive process.</li> <li>2. For tweaks to environment, job tasks where a negotiation can take place, do not use “accommodation”, connect to productivity support.</li> </ol>
<p><b>“Job Shadowing”</b></p>	<p><b>“Workplace observation” / “Mentoring” / “Talent exploration Activity” / “Pre-employment Exposure” / “Career exploration placement” / “Job role familiarization”</b></p>	<p>A “job shadow” can sound informal, so translating it into business language helps it resonate with employers and stakeholders. The key is to frame it around value, outcomes, and workforce development.</p>

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<b>“Situational assessment”</b>	<b>“Employee preview” / “Job tryout” / “Vocational experience”</b>	Frame this as an opportunity for the potential employer to preview an applicant’s performance. In the instance of someone exploring work through CBPV, present as opportunity to
<b>“Customized employment”</b>	<b>“Customized workforce solution” / Task alignment model” / “Business-centered hiring approach” / “Productivity-focused job design” / Solutions based on a needs analysis of your business</b>	“Customized employment” can feel abstract to businesses, so the goal is to translate it into language they already use—efficiency, productivity, retention, and workforce strategy.
<b>“Job analysis”</b>	<b>“Job observation to determine the scope of this position”</b>	The language of “Job Analysis” may mean something entirely different to an employer than the intended activity.
<b>“Task analysis”</b>	<b>“Teaching/Training strategies” / “Coaching strategy”</b>	“Task analysis” can sound clinical, so in business settings it’s more effective to frame it around efficiency, workflow, and performance clarity. Use conversational language with the business to provide suggestions.
<b>“Discovery” / “Assessment” / “Vocational assessment”</b>	<b>“Talen insight process” / “Strengths-based talent profiling” / “Real-world performance assessment” / “Candidate alignment analysis”</b>	To make Discovery and vocational assessment resonate in business settings, translate them from service terms into talent evaluation, workforce alignment, and risk reduction language. The goal is to show how they improve hiring decisions and performance outcomes.
<b>General Language</b>		
<b>“Integrated work-setting” / “In the community” / “Competitive Integrated Employment”</b>	<b>“Employment”</b>	“Integrated” implies they have been segregated and may perpetuate stereotypes or support unconscious bias. This is not a discussion that needs to happen with the business.
<b>“Soft Skills”</b>	<b>“Skill needed for employment”</b>	Using the language of “soft skills” may unintentionally reinforces stereotypes.

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<b>“Disability” / Unnecessary medical disclosure</b>	<b>“[Name] is able to do..., and may need additional support with ...”</b>	Be cautious of unintentionally disclosing someone’s disability. Keep focusing on ability and performance.
<b>“Natural Supports”</b>	<b>“Co-worker”</b>	“Natural supports” often gets misunderstood in business settings, so the goal is to translate it into familiar concepts like team dynamics, onboarding, and workplace culture—not external services.
<b>“Functional limitations”</b>	<b>“Work task considerations” / “Job fit considerations”</b>	“Functional limitations” can feel deficit-focused and clinical. In business settings, it’s more effective to reframe it around job requirements, performance conditions, and productivity supports — without losing accuracy.
<b>“Fade / fading”</b>	<b>“Gradual transition to independence”</b>	“Fading Supports” is clinical language and may be confusing in a business. We want to balance the message that support will be available and provided as needed, but the intent is to transition to independence.

## Handling Common Employer Objections

<p>Most objections are <b>fear-based, not experience-based</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They fall into 3 categories:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Cost concerns</b></li> <li>○ <b>Performance concerns</b></li> <li>○ <b>Comfort/unknown concerns</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>When Handling Ojections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask clarifying questions</li> <li>• Share examples or success stories</li> <li>• Offer practical solutions instead of trying to “convince”</li> </ul>	
Common Objections	Possible underlying concerns / beliefs	Facts and discussion
<p><b>“It will cost too much to provide accommodations.”</b></p>	<p>Employers often assume accommodations will require equipment, building restructuring and are expensive.</p>	<p>In reality, most accommodations are low-cost or free (flexible scheduling, minor adjustments, task restructuring).</p>
<p><b>“Productivity will be lower.”</b></p>	<p>There’s a perception that employees with disabilities won’t meet performance expectations.</p>	<p>Research consistently shows productivity is comparable—and sometimes higher due to strong motivation and retention.</p> <p><b><i>“I understand why you might think this, but in my experience, I have noticed the opposite...”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“Supervision will take too much time.”</b></p>	<p>Employers may worry that the job seeker will need extra support or coaching, which will keep them from doing their work.</p>	<p>In many cases, initial onboarding may take slightly longer, but long-term supervision is no different.</p> <p><b><i>“As a job coach, I will support the onboarding process and will bridge the extra time during the learning process.”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“We’re concerned about safety or liability.”</b></p>	<p>Fear that the employee might get injured or create risk. Another related concern may be that workman’s compensation may increase due to work-related injury.</p>	<p>Data shows workers with disabilities have similar or lower safety incident rates. <b>Resource:</b> <a href="#">Disability: Dispelling the Myth</a></p>

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<p><b>“We can’t have a job coach in the work area due to liability issues / other concern”</b></p>	<p>This can be an especially challenging objection, as it is a deeply held belief in the business community. Concerns may be liability, confidentiality, or productivity.</p>	<p>A job coach can be considered a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). This should be addressed on a case-by-case bases, as there may be legitimate concerns, such as the case of confidentiality in a healthcare setting.</p> <p>Coaches can offer to complete any necessary HIPAA training the business requires.</p> <p>Coaches should secure a copy of their organizational liability insurance and present it to the employer to demonstrate they are covered by their employer.</p> <p>Offer alternative accommodations and engage in an interactive process to find alternative, effective accommodations.</p>
<p><b>“Customers or coworkers might be uncomfortable.”</b></p>	<p>Concern about workplace culture or customer reactions to someone with a disability.</p>	<p>This often reflects lack of exposure; inclusive workplaces typically see improved morale and culture.</p> <p><b><i>“It seems you may not have much experience with someone with a disability. Would it be helpful for you to see the job seeker in action through short term job assessment?”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“We don’t have the right jobs available.”</b></p>	<p>Employers may think roles must be customized or limited in skill.</p>	<p>This is often a signal that they haven’t explored job carving or task alignment.</p> <p><b><i>“It seems you may not have much experience with someone with a disability. Would it be helpful for you to see the job seeker in action through short term job assessment?”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“Communication will be difficult.”</b></p>	<p>This concern is especially related to individuals with speech, hearing, or cognitive disabilities.</p> <p>The belief that PWD are all poor communicators or unable to express their self.</p>	<p>With the right supports and strategies, communication barriers are very manageable.</p> <p><b><i>“I understand why you might think this; communication can pose a challenge if it is not a good job match. I would not recommend someone who would not be able to perform the tasks of this position.”</i></b></p>

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<p><b>“We don’t know how to support someone with a disability.”</b></p>	<p>Lack of knowledge creates hesitation.</p>	<p>Employers may fear “doing it wrong” or legal missteps.</p> <p><b><i>“I appreciate your honesty and that you are considering what might be difficult for you. One of the benefits of our services is that our supplemental coaching services are meant to support you too. I will be here to support the employee, but also to share my knowledge with managers and co-workers. I think you’ll find that onboarding the job seeker is no different than onboarding other employees.”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“I need people who will show up every day and on time.”</b></p>	<p>Assumptions that medical or support needs will interfere with work.</p> <p>The belief that PWD will have attendance issues higher than others due to their disability or not taking work seriously.</p>	<p>In practice, many employees with disabilities have strong attendance and loyalty.</p> <p><b><i>“We support over 100 people in employment, and while some are challenged with attendance, it’s not more than the general population.”</i></b></p>
<p><b>“The hiring process is too complicated.”</b></p>	<p>Concerns about paperwork, compliance, or accommodations during hiring.</p>	<p>This is often solved through guidance and partnership with employment programs.</p>
<p><b>“You need to submit an online application before I can talk”</b></p>	<p>This concern can arise due to manager inexperience or because managers are busy.</p>	<p>Support the job seeker to complete the application if necessary. Follow up with the manager afterward.</p> <p>Under the ADA, employers can require online applications for all candidates, but they must provide reasonable accommodations if a disability prevents someone from completing it.</p>
<p><b>“Everyone here must be able to do every job”</b></p>	<p>This refrain has been used by businesses for decades.</p> <p>The belief is that someone with a disability will only be able to perform a small scope of tasks.</p>	<p>Depending on the person and their abilities, it will affect how you speak to this concern.</p> <p><b><i>“I can see that you have many employees who are able to perform all functions of this business. Tell me about tasks that need to get done but are not, or what are tasks that could be done, which would free up others to complete higher skill tasks.”</i></b></p> <p><b><i>“The job seeker is qualified for this position and would be capable of learning all functions of this job. It might be helpful to scaffold mastering one task at a time.”</i></b></p>

# THE CONVERSATION FLOW

Use this flow to keep employer conversations simple, business-focused, and low-pressure.

## 1. Open with Value

Start with the employer's world, not a job opening.

- Workflow
- Staffing
- Retention

Try: "Where are teams feeling pressure?"

## 2. Ask to Learn

Use curiosity before offering ideas or solutions.

- Busy times
- Bottlenecks
- Tasks that pull staff away

Try: "Where does the work get backed up?"

## 3. Listen for Leverage

Notice clues that support may be helpful.

- Pressure points
- Workflow gaps
- Tasks piling up

Remember: not every opportunity starts as a posted job.

## 4. Align Support

Connect support to what matters to the employer.

- Reduce pressure
- Improve consistency
- Free up staff time

Try: "That may be an area where support could help."

## 5. Close Lightly

End with one small next step, not a heavy ask.

- Walkthrough
- Follow-up conversation
- Observe the workflow

Try: "Can we follow-up next week?"

**KEEP IT: Simple | Employer-centered | Conversational | Low-pressure**

# Conversation Planning Tool

Use this form to prepare for a low-pressure employer conversation.

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## Before the conversation

**Business name:**

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**Date / follow-up needed:**

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**What is already known about this business?**

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**Key message about your service/agency:**

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What should the employer understand about the support being offered, the role of the agency, or the reason for the conversation?

# Open with Value + Ask to Learn

Start with the employer's world, then use curiosity to understand the business.

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## 1. Opening with value

Write one sentence that connects to the employer's business needs.

**Opening sentence:**

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Possible focus areas: workflow • staffing • retention • productivity • busy times • daily pressure points

## 2. Questions to ask

Choose 2–3 questions that help you learn how the business operates.

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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# Listen for Leverage

Listen for clues that support may be helpful.

## 3. Possible things to listen for

Use this checklist during or after the conversation.

- Workflow gaps
- Staffing needs
- Busy times
- Turnover or retention concerns
- Tasks staff struggle to complete
- Tasks that pull staff from higher-priority work
- Opportunities not posted as jobs
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Conversation notes

**What stood out as useful or important?**

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# Align Support + Close Lightly

Connect possible support to what matters to the employer, then end with a small next step.

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## 4. Support alignment

What business need could support help address?

**Support could help with:**

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## 5. Light close / next step

- Ask for a walkthrough
- Ask for a follow-up conversation
- Ask to observe the workflow
- Ask who else would be helpful to speak with
- Suggest reconnecting later
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Follow-up and next steps:**

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