

Foundations for Vocational Success

Series 1

Innovations in Employment Supports

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COMMIT TO

AVOID

[illegible]

Write your name next to 3 words that you think describe you.

Strengths	
Many interests	
Fun-loving	
Perceptive	
Flexible	
Carefree	
Enthusiastic	
Persistent	
Spontaneous	
Determined	
Leader	
Creative	
Good debater	
Risk-taker	
Negotiator	
Cautious	
Dramatic	
Self-directed	
Eager	
Nonconformist	
Articulate	
Stable	
Analytical	
Organized	
Quiet	
Detail-oriented	
Logical	
Sensitive	
Imaginative	

Look at the list and now focus on the words on the right. Those are deficit-based words, vs the asset-based words on page 1. Our language matters!!

Strengths	Liability/Weakness
Many interests	Short attention span
Fun-loving	Irresponsible
Perceptive	Distractible
Flexible	Unpredictable
Carefree	Impulsive
Enthusiastic	Loud
Persistent	Stubborn
Spontaneous	Poor planner
Determined	Willful
Leader	Bossy
Creative	Disorganized
Good debater	Argumentative
Risk-taker	Tests limits
Negotiator	Manipulative
Cautious	Anxious
Dramatic	Explosive
Self-directed	Disobedient
Eager	Impatient
Nonconformist	Rebellious
Articulate	Talks too much
Stable	Boring
Analytical	Critical
Organized	Rigid
Quiet	Aloof
Detail-oriented	Picky
Logical	Arrogant
Sensitive	Overreacts
Imaginative	Undisciplined



Knowing When to Look Deeper

Guiding Questions for Job Coaches When Teaching and Training Are Not Working

When a person is not learning a task as expected, the goal is not to assume they cannot do the job. The job coach should pause, observe, ask questions, and look for patterns that may suggest a functional limitation, a need for different supports, or a need for more information.

1 Additional Questions to Ask



About the Task

- What part of the task is difficult: remembering, understanding, sequencing, pace, or accuracy?
- Can the person do any part of the task successfully? Under what conditions?
- Does the difficulty happen every time, or only with certain steps?
- Has the task been taught in more than one way?



About the Environment

- Does noise, activity, lighting, or distractions affect performance?
- Is the pace of the workplace making learning harder?
- Does performance improve in a quieter or more structured setting?



About Communication and Learning

- Does the person understand verbal directions, or do they need visual or written cues?
- Do they need more time to process information before responding or acting?
- Would modeling, repetition, or a checklist help?



About the Person's Experience

- Is the person anxious, overwhelmed, tired, or frustrated?
- Have there been recent changes in health, medication, sleep, transportation, or routine?
- What has worked well for this person in the past?



About Support Needs

- Is this a training issue, or does the person need an accommodation or different support strategy?
- Who else may have helpful insight: the person, family, supervisor, care manager, or clinical team?
- What should be documented so patterns can be reviewed?

2 What to Listen For in the Answers

- ✓ Patterns across time, tasks, or environments
- ✓ Signs that the person knows what to do but cannot do it consistently
- ✓ Indicators that the current teaching approach is not a match
- ✓ Clues that additional support, accommodation, or consultation may be needed

 **Coach Notes / Observations**



Knowing When to Look Deeper

What to Try Next and Resources to Consider

Once a job coach notices patterns that may point to a functional limitation, the next step is to try targeted supports, observe the results, and collaborate with others as needed. The goal is to match the support to the person's needs while maintaining high expectations and dignity.

1 Based on the Answers, What Might the Job Coach Try Next?

If the answers suggest...	The coach might try...	Helpful resources / supports
The person is having trouble understanding directions or task steps	Break the task into smaller steps; model the task; use pictures, written cues, or color coding; check for understanding	Visual schedules, task analysis, supervisor input, speech/language support if needed
The person forgets steps or loses track of what to do next	Use a checklist, cue card, phone reminder, or repeated practice; reduce how much information is given at one time	Memory aids, assistive technology, natural supports, family input with consent
The person works too slowly, tires easily, or cannot maintain pace	Review whether the pace is realistic; build speed gradually; schedule breaks; simplify setup; identify which part of the task slows them down	Supervisor collaboration, ergonomic supports, OT/PT consultation, medical follow-up if appropriate
The person becomes overwhelmed, distracted, anxious, or dysregulated	Reduce distractions; preview changes; provide structure and reassurance; create calming routines; offer brief breaks	Quiet workspace options, behavioral supports, counseling or mental health supports, sensory strategies
The person struggles with workplace communication or social expectations	Role-play interactions; script key phrases; teach hidden workplace rules explicitly; identify trusted coworkers as natural supports	Supervisor feedback, social scripts, peer mentors, speech/language or behavioral support
The person has physical, motor, or sensory barriers	Adjust tools or positioning; slow down the teaching pace; explore accommodations; observe whether the issue is related to hearing, vision, fine motor, or mobility	Assistive technology, OT/PT, medical providers, ADA accommodations, rehabilitation professionals

2 Resources to Consider When a Functional Limitation May Be Present

- The person's own input and preferences
- Supervisor and coworker feedback
- Family or guardian input, when appropriate and with consent
- Care manager, service coordinator, or vocational counselor
- Occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech/language services
- Behavioral or mental health supports
- Assistive technology or accommodation specialists
- Medical providers when health or medication may be affecting performance
- The person's Discovery information, Job Development Plan, or other service records

3 Remember

- Do not assume lack of motivation when something else may be affecting performance
- Use asset-based, person-centered language
- Try one or two targeted supports, then observe and document what changes
- Collaborate early when the person may need accommodation or specialized support

 **Possible Next Steps for This Person**

Support to try first: _____

Who to consult: _____

What to observe next: _____

Follow-up date: _____

Scenario Processing Activity

Read each scenario, discuss what may be affecting performance, and identify possible next steps and collaboration.

1. He Just Isn't Getting It

Scenario:

Marcus recently started stocking shelves at a grocery store. He knows where most products belong, but he sometimes forgets to rotate older products forward and does not consistently face the labels.

His coach has reminded him several times and has started saying, "Marcus just doesn't pay attention to details." The coach then often fixes the shelf after Marcus moves on rather than having Marcus review his work.

Discussion: What are some next steps you can take as an ESP to support Marcus and his job?

Things to consider:

1. What do you notice? (language used, fact or assumption)

2. What questions might you ask to get information needed for next steps?

3. What might you try or adjust in preparation for your next steps?

4. Who could you collaborate with for additional ideas or support?

Notes / Next Steps:

2. He Can Do It... Sometimes

Scenario:

David works in a retail store folding and returning clothing to displays. During quieter periods, his work is accurate and he completes the task with very little assistance.

When the store becomes busy, with customers talking, music playing, and coworkers moving around him, he begins putting merchandise in the wrong locations.

David's coach responds by standing closer and giving David more verbal directions, but David becomes frustrated and makes even more mistakes.

Discussion: How can you support David and the business as the ESP?

Things to consider:

1. What do you notice? (successes, language, patterns)

2. What questions might you ask and who can you ask questions, to gather information needed for next steps?

3. What might you try or adjust in preparation for your next steps?

4. Who could you collaborate with for additional ideas or support?

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Notes / Next Steps:

4. “Try Harder” Just Isn’t Working

Scenario:

Elena works in the dish room of a restaurant. She understands the dishwashing routine, knows which racks to use, and can explain the process, but she has difficulty gripping wet dishes and reaching the upper portion of the dish rack.

Elena’s coach has repeatedly demonstrated the correct technique and reminds her to “slow down and hold onto it carefully,” but Elena continues to struggle and has dropped several dishes.

The coach feels they should increase coaching hours so they can help Elena with the tasks.

Discussion: What are some steps to support Elena with her tasks and gaining her independence in the job?

Things to consider:

1. What do you notice? (Successes, Teaching vs learning styles, patterns, who can help?)

2. What questions might you ask and who can you ask questions, to gather information needed for next steps?

3. What might you try or adjust in preparation for your next steps?

4. Who could you collaborate with for additional ideas or support?

Notes / Next Steps:
