Strategies for Maintaining Performance On Tasks

Using Natural Supports

From the start of the job, supervisors and co-workers should be involved as actively as possible in training, brainstorming solutions to problems, and providing support. As the job stabilizes, an employee's supervisor or co-workers can be asked to take over specific ongoing support functions. Some support needs are not very different from the help workers give each other all the time.

Using Natural Reinforcers

There are naturally occurring reinforcers available at the site, which can be used or enhanced to help maintain an individual's performance on the job.

Some natural reinforcers are:

• Praise from a co-worker or supervisor

• Bonuses or commissions

• Employee of the Month certificates

Self-Management

Self-management techniques are strategies or devices that allow an individual to improve or maintain his/her own performance without the intervention of an employment specialist.

Because the employee is in charge of self-management procedures, they can be more consistent than procedures controlled by an employment specialist, a supervisor or a co-worker who may miss an occurrence or not be around. Self-management also increases an individual's awareness of his/her own behavior. There are **five common techniques** for self-management.

Self-Management Techniques:

•   **Self-Prompting:** Pictures, lists, sample assemblies, taped instructions, and similar procedures allow an individual to "look up" the cue for a new task or check to see the way something is supposed to look without the help of an employment specialist.

•   **Self-Reinforcement:** An individual can give a reinforcement after some correct behavior he/she has set as a goal, such as an extra snack from the vending machine at 2:00 PM on days where the individual has gone a certain amount of time without wandering

away from his/her work area. Reinforcement can be self-administered, self-selected—choosing what it will be— or both.

- **Self-Monitoring:** An individual can learn to record his/her own behavior, as a means of monitoring it. For example, checking off completed boxes of work on a sheet of paper or filling in a bar graph.

- **Self-Instruction:** An individual can employ strategies to teach him/herself how to do a particular task; for example, examining what the completed job looks like, watching how other people do a task, thinking of several alternatives if something doesn't work, and so forth. These procedures are described in suggested readings at the end of the chapter.

- **Self-Elicited Feedback:** An individual can initiate a request to the supervisor or co-worker to check completed work or progress towards a goal. "Is that the right way?", "Was I too loud this morning?", and similar requests put the employee in charge of getting accurate feedback.

Sometimes employees need particular help with tasks that repeat in cycles and need to be done in a certain amount of time or to reach a certain quota. Several types of cue adaptations are helpful in these situations. These strategies help the worker manage his/her own work performance.

Sustaining Performance on Repeating Tasks:
- **Production Grids:** Charts or pictures an employee can use to check off or fill in a space every time a specified amount of work is completed. Bar graphs work well.

- **Counters:** An employee can "click" a new number after each work cycle to reach a total.

- **Picture or Tactile Cues:** Completed work can be placed in compartments or in a certain arrangement to reach a goal (this high, over to this piece of tape, to fill this box, etc.)

Changing Tasks and Managing Time:
- **Schedules/Job Duty Book:** Pictures or photographs or a verbal list can convey each step of an operation, arranged on a chart or in a small book. Different days can be color-coded to match the days on a similarly coded calendar.

- **Timer or Watch Alarm:** Can be set to announce when it's time to start or stop an operation.

- **Pre-taped Instructions:** Instructions can be audio taped and

played to an individual at the correct intervals using a pocket tape recorder and headphones.

Utilizing Self-Management to Teach Independence on the Job
For self-management to be effective the employee has to feel that the goal is important, since the motivation is internal and the individual is on the "honor system" in carrying it out. Also, the techniques themselves have to be taught, with provisions for fading, until the person can use them independently. Below are some guidelines for assessing the need for training in using self-management techniques.

Step 1: Identify skill / behavior to be targeted through evaluation

Step 2: Verify through observation

Step 3: Establish a range of acceptable behavior

Step 4: Assess work environment for naturally occurring cues and reinforcers, encourage/promote utilization

Step 5: Select self-management procedure

Step 6: Teach self-management skills, withdraw external support

Step 7: Evaluate effects of self-management