

The Employment Specialist's Tool Box

As a job coach, you're not just a trainer--you're a workplace consultant. You're always figuring out how an employee with a disability can succeed on the job, without constantly relying on you for training or direction.

To help you with this, we've collected a number of strategies for your job-coaching toolbox. You'll notice that direct training is only one of these tools. In fact, training should be used only after you've tried out the other, more natural strategies listed here. With these in your toolbox, you can thrive in your true role as a workplace consultant.

1. Direct Training: Explicitly instructing an employee with a disability on how to perform the tasks of their job.

2. Systematic Instruction: Breaking a job task down into smaller steps that the person can understand. Then you can lead them systematically through these steps, always providing instruction the same way. Through repetition, the individual masters the steps of the task. A person's workday routine can also be broken down this way.

3. Assistance with Meeting Production Goals: Directly assisting the employee to perform their job tasks, so that they can meet the requirements and achieve the production goals of their job. This does not mean doing the job for the individual. It means helping the employee to increase their production, accuracy, and speed.

4. Assistive Technology: Devices that assist a person with a disability in completing the tasks of their job. This includes low-tech and high-tech devices. One low-tech device is a head pointer that allows a person with limited use of their hands to use a computer keyboard. An example of a high-tech device is a voice-input computer.

5. Positive Rewards: Rewards for proper completion of a task. Can include items that already exist within the workplace, such as break, lunch, paycheck, end of the workday, and time off. You can also use other rewards, such as buying the worker a soda, stopping on the way home for coffee, or taking them someplace they enjoy after work.

6. Natural Supports: Supports that are part of a person's life, and that don't come from professionals. Some examples: having a co-worker (rather than you) provide instruction and assistance to the employee with a disability, or take them to lunch; having the employee participate in the typical training program for new hires; having them carpool with co-workers (rather than agency staff providing transportation).

7. Employer Training: Providing training to co-workers, supervisors, and others on how to work with, assist, and supervise the employee with a disability, and how to provide for their support needs.

8. Self-Maintenance Techniques: Methods used by a worker with a disability so that they complete the tasks of a job without assistance. Examples include check-off lists, picture

books (with pictures of the individual performing various job tasks), and production grids.

9. Paid Co-Worker Support: Providing funds directly to the employer to have co-workers (rather than you) assist the person with a disability.

10. Natural Cues: Items or events that already exist in the workplace, and that show that it's time to perform the next step of a task. Examples include the light on a copy machine that indicates a job is complete, or all co-workers leaving an area, indicating it is time for break.

11. Additional Cues: Providing more cues that don't readily exist within the work environment, so that the employee knows the next step of a task. Examples include putting lines on containers with tape or dots, indicating which supplies need to be filled, or which parts go together; or setting the employee's watch alarm, so they know when it's time to go home.

12. Reasonable Accommodations: Changing work routines or work settings to accommodate the needs of the employee with a disability. Reasonable accommodations are required of employers under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Examples: installing a ramp for a person who uses a wheelchair, rearranging a work station so that items are easily accessible, reassigning certain non-essential tasks to other staff, and modifying work schedules.

Some of the factors considered under the ADA are the cost of the accommodation, the resources of the employer, and the impact the accommodation will have on the workplace. For more information, see the Job Accommodation Network's Reasonable Accommodation page.