**Chapter One**

**Thinking Outside the Box Store:**

***An Introduction to Customized Employment***

**by**

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**And**

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**Introduction: What’s customized about it?**

This is the question we must answer when using the term Customized Employment (CE), because while other approaches (e.g. placement, supported employment, competitive employment) all share similarities, there are significant differences in the customized employment approach to achieving community employment.

Because CE is predicated on a “negotiation” between the job seeker (or his/her representative) and the employer, the means of getting the job differs from the traditional approach of applying, interviewing, orienting, and working. The negotiation is not just about salary and hours, the negotiation is the very process itself, often beginning with only the potential of a job but no formal position opening.

This curriculum details the most commonly used tools for achieving CE. These pages contain the details for conducting Discovery, using informational interviews, assembling the Lists of Twenty, designing portfolios, initiating interest-based negotiations, and using an economic development approach to circumventing the labor market. Many of these processes are unique and proprietary, while others are commonsense approaches adapted from supported employment. As this material is applied in the field, modifications and adaptations to meet local conditions are required, and encouraged, because flexibility is the root of innovation. Caution should be taken in thinking, however, that there are shortcuts. ***Customized Employment is the shortcut***; the fastest way devised so far for assisting individuals with significant disabilities in attaining employment of choice.

Interestingly, over the past decade of introducing CE approaches, outcomes vary. In some cases, CE results in brand new jobs with duties not previously assigned to individuals in a company (e.g. job creation). In other cases, the CE process led to modification of existing jobs (e.g. job carving). Sometimes CE approaches resulted in foregoing wage employment altogether (e.g. self employment). And sometimes, CE processes circumvented the traditional comparative hiring steps resulting in attainment of an unmodified existing job (e.g. competitive employment/placement). Regardless, the strategies herein represent the authors’ experiences and sometimes novel, but always evolving, tactics.

**Setting the Stage for Change**

Approximately 30% of adults served in developmental disability programs across Canada can expect to find meaningful employment in their communities. Changing this reality of under and unemployment endured by people with significant disabilities, requires changes in our approach to employment services. In British Columbia, these changes are being pioneered by progressive community rehabilitation agencies, by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, through the advocacy of the Association for Community Living, through the policy initiatives of Community Living BC, the energetic folks at Self Advocate Net, Community Futures, and others.

Many community rehabilitation agencies adopted supported employment, and lately microenterprise development, attempting to address the unemployment and under-employment rate. However, people entering day programs seldom permanently leave for real work of choice in their communities. Regardless of disability type, be it developmental, psychiatric, brain injury, sensory, or physical, no particular group of people with disabilities is flourishing in the employment arena. Despite the ever increasing funding for disability-related programs and the additional layers of enabling legislation, the overall unemployment rate remains at unacceptable levels.

The past twenty years witnessed the success of supported employment (SE) techniques, with many individuals now in community jobs. These workers were once considered too disabled for employment, but providing on-going workplace and personal supports, coupled with proper job matches and worksite training, eroded the prejudices of rehabilitation professionals and employers. Before the advent of SE, funding for community rehabilitation programs serving individuals with significant disabilities focused mainly on services in day activity centers and sheltered workshops. These programs included sheltered work settings that performed a variety of assembly and hand-work tasks drawn from contracts with businesses. Instead of seeking jobs for people with disabilities, it was, and still is, largely believed that people with disabilities need such intensive training and support that having them remain in segregated settings surrounded by staff is the best approach to habilitation.

Today, these practices are changing. Many professionals, employers, special educators, policy makers, families, and job seekers with disabilities recognize that everyone is ready to work; everyone can work; and indeed, it is the obligation of all citizens to work and contribute to the greater community. The myth that one must be close to perfect before entering the work world is crumbling with the realization that employers accept a broad range of employees, train them to their standards, offer varying degrees of support along the way, and create options for employees who generate profits thereby creating money for wages.

**Exercise: Write down your first 3 jobs. Pair up with another classroom participant. Discuss these questions: Did you answer a want-ad to find/get the job? What was the benefit you brought to the employer? Did you receive any informal or formal training? Describe the supervision you received. What did you learn from your employer, co-workers and the work experience in general? Would you hire your younger self today if you were that employer? Discuss.**

**The Labor Market**

People with disabilities and job developers face the challenges of the labor market daily. Competitive employment approaches to choosing, getting, and keeping a job, while generally accepted, are largely ineffective and ill advised for people with complex disabilities. Common employment readiness programs still emphasize perfecting one’s public behavior, grooming and hygiene improvement, development of resumes and interview skills, and other preparatory steps. And while these approaches work sometimes for some job seekers, they largely fail people with disabilities. Supported employment best-practices sought to alleviate the most challenging aspects of the competitive job market by introducing person-centered planning strategies; by assuming that everyone can work and that the concept of work readiness ignores the work world’s broad acceptance of a range of worksite behaviors and skills; by providing for worksite coaching and training; by emphasizing the particular qualities and talents of each job seeker and individualizing the employment process; and by seeking a match between the worker’s desires and the employer’s needs.

However, most employment specialists still rely on traditional methods of identifying employment opportunities. These strategies include searching out openings in the want-ads of local newspapers, networking with Human Resource managers, attending Chamber of Commerce events, and sitting on local job development boards where members share job leads. Regardless, the Labor Market rejects most employment candidates with disabilities. Even during the last economic boom period, the employment rate stood still for people with disabilities. The so-called Labor Market has almost no impact on the employment rate of people with significant disabilities. Much of the disability service system isolates people from the social and economic life of communities; erects buildings and programs that reinforce the idea that people with disabilities are doing fine; and fosters stereotypes through charitable events, as well as segregated recreation programs, that makes people the objects of pity. The Labor Market is pliable and accessible, and good job development techniques reduce the stigma induced by the on-going clienthood of people with disabilities.

A note on terminology: the authors are using the terms job developer and employment specialist interchangeably for the reader’s convenience. However, in practice we find that having job developers responsible only for the negotiation of jobs sometimes leads to problems of consistency when responsibility for worksite training is transferred to the employment specialist. Having an employment specialist take the lead on Discovery, job match, placement, and worksite support improves consistency for all stakeholders and reduces problems that can contribute to job loss.

**Big Sign Syndrome**

Customized Employment is meant to be a truly individualized approach to creating opportunity: opportunity for both the worker, who develops a career over time, and for the employer, who profits from the contributions of the worker. When job searches are individualized, the focus narrows on enhancing and capitalizing on the personal genius of the job seeker. As such, the need to seek out existing job descriptions fades and job creation rises to the forefront of employment specialist duties. Job creation demands creativity and strong negotiation skills, hence the term Customized Employment. Because CE circumvents traditional hiring systems, it is best to seek out the myriad small businesses where formal hiring practices, job descriptions, and layers of bureaucracy are scarce, and bottom-line decision-making by the owner or manager is rapid and honest.

Small business in Canada creates more jobs than big industry, and according to the Canadian Government, 98% of these businesses employ less than 100 employees, with the vast majority having significantly fewer than 100 employees. This means the employment candidate and employment specialist have fewer barriers to overcome when seeking to speak directly to the hiring decision maker. The western provinces lead in the establishment of small companies, while self-employment nationwide is the fastest growing career option for Canadians aged 15 to 24, and from 55 and older. Neighborhood businesses, often hidden from view, with narrow niches, are prime targets for job seekers with disabilities.

**Big Business Attraction**

Job developers celebrate the accomplishment of finding jobs in large, prestigious corporations. Those who work with the big companies find that success means multiple placements once a relationship is nurtured with the Vice President for Human Resources. It is true that these companies have good jobs for people. It also means significant time and effort getting past the gatekeepers, competing with 100 other applicants for a job, and it also means that even after a job is secured changes in managers, something very common in big business, can bring a change in corporate culture on the local level that results in folks with significant disabilities losing their jobs or receiving reduced hours and opportunities. Still, the seductiveness of landing a dozen jobs scattered throughout a factory, or more likely a retail outlet, with just one major sales call is too hard for most to resist. And having a few big, corporate references on an employment specialist’s vita is a quick means of personal career advancement.

Experience shows that working with big companies yields significant opportunities for people with disabilities. In the early 1990s in Colorado, co-author Cary Griffin and our team at the Center for Technical Assistance and Training (CTAT), along with the state rehabilitation agency, and the U.S. Department of Labor, established the prototype for what would become the Business Leadership Network (BLN). At their monthly meetings, this group of employers was actively involved in meeting job seekers, using their personal and professional networks, and creating employment throughout their professional and social networks. With Dave Hammis taking the lead on a daily basis, these members of the BLN, many from very large corporations, helped find work for about 50 people with significant disabilities in one year. Interestingly, the small business members were just as active as the others, but the complications in creating employment were significantly reduced. Sometimes in seeking the status of a corporate account, employment specialists may be creating more work than necessary.

Looking for jobs in big companies makes sense. Cultivating relationships with HR people is one important aspect of identifying opportunities for employment that often results in long-term employment. But, it is just one part of the job development equation.

Driving through the commercial district in almost any community reveals many of the same box stores. The home improvement company, the department store, the grocery warehouse, the discount store, the fast food chains are all there. And while these companies are happy to employ people with disabilities in entry-level positions, they can also be the toughest to customize with. Larger enterprises have standardized approaches; HR people and attorneys develop their job descriptions at a distant corporate headquarters; and when they advertise positions available, dozens of applicants converge for the same job opportunity. The competitiveness of this job market, the slothful movement of the corporate office in approving a local job modification that accommodates an applicant with a disability, and the dead-end nature of common part-time positions must be a consideration for job seekers and employment specialists alike.

Also, many of these box store giants are largely retail in nature. These outfits have simplified the process of selling so much that the complexity and skill has been laundered out, leaving a shell of a job for entry-level workers who unpack boxes, stock shelves, and perhaps direct customers to certain sections of the store. Without complexity wages stay low, there is little growth in career-advancing skills, and there is high turnover of co-workers resulting in weak natural job site support.

In a recent job development seminar, one of the authors was reminded by dozens of employment specialists working in a community of 6 million people on the West Coast of the U.S. that HR staff complain regularly that human services agency staff are continually knocking on their doors, looking for jobs. These developers suffer from Big Sign Syndrome. That is, they drive the town’s commercial area, pulling into every corporate chain store, seeking jobs-in-a-box; neatly packaged through a routine application and interview process, sealed with a written job description. Over the course of the year, every rehabilitation agency, school, and other job-seeking agencies visit each store numerous times. Of course, the small businesses, many hidden from view and requiring a networking effort to crack open, remain unsolicited even though they often have no set application method, they hire based on word-of-mouth, and written job descriptions are a rarity.

**The Small Business Imperative**

Getting out of the box store may be the most obvious fix for Big Sign Syndrome. But, getting into the back room at a small company requires a social/work network and negotiation skills. Those are easy enough to develop of course, and involve at least a few of these items:

1. Using the agency Board of Directors member to get a lunch or an informational interview with small business owners they know and who might have employment opportunities related to the interests of a job seeker;
2. Joining a Service Club (the Lions, Rotary, the Chamber) and getting to know the owners and managers of local business and industry;
3. Recording the key relationships of others in the agency to identify staff family and friends who own or work for local businesses, and who can provide an in for the job seeker and employment specialist;
4. Accumulating the same relationship information using families and consumers to identify in which local companies they spend their money for goods and services, and what family members either own businesses themselves or can serve as the entrée into businesses they frequent or work for;
5. Identifying the suppliers of the many goods and services the rehabilitation agency buys and enlisting them as employers or as advocates connecting to other potential employers in their networks.

Having identified smaller employers who may fit the employment needs of specific consumers is just one step in thinking outside the box store though. Because many small businesses are under-capitalized and surviving on limited profit margins, a job creation approach is sometimes required to attract employers. Breaking the cycle of dead-end employment for people with disabilities mandates a creative re-thinking of positions and opportunities. The typical work reality for people with the most significant disabilities is part-time, minimum wage jobs. One successful approach the authors used for years now is Resource Ownership, discussed in more detail later. This approach recognizes that a small business might sell more goods, better satisfy customers, or increase market share by adding a person with particular talents or technology. For instance, an office products and services shop owner we worked with overheard customers complaining that they could not get color copies anywhere in the small town. The owner simply could not afford a new copier. But, a young man at the sheltered workshop, known for his lifelong devotion to making copies with almost every dime he earned, through a customized employment project and other funding dollars, was able to purchase the machine and create a new position within the company, making copies and performing other related tasks. This mutually beneficial approach helped a local entrepreneur and created a career opportunity based on an individual’s work skills, his commonly performed tasks, and his interests. Furthermore, happy customers mean more business, which means higher profits.

In this case, the color copy machine is the same lever that a college degree or a carpentry certificate represents for other job seekers. Having exploitable resources, whether it be a specific set of valued skills or a color copy machine that boosts customer satisfaction at the local copy shop, is critical to creating jobs. Resource Ownership is simply the concept of acquiring materials, equipment, or skills that an employer uses to make a profit. For instance, many people spend $50,000 or more on a college degree, and that degree is a symbol of exploitable resources. Employers know they can profit from a graduate’s knowledge so people with degrees get hired and earn substantially higher wages than those without. Concretely stated, the graduate gives the employer that degree in trade for a salary. The same occurs when a truck driver who owns a tractor-trailer applies for a job. Without the truck, the individual faces under-employment in a lower paying trucking job where employer is forced to provide the equipment. People need exploitable resources to secure good jobs, and by putting the means of production in the hands of people with disabilities, they become more employable, and less susceptible to lay-offs.

Large companies, of course, can afford the equipment they need, and using this means of job creation in big companies ends in a bureaucratic nightmare. Small business is the preferred place for Resource Ownership because the employment specialist and job seeker are likely dealing with the owner or manager, and there are few, if any, layers of approval to navigate. A small business owner can also see immediate results in the bottom-line by adding valuable products or services, and employers tell us that they enjoy creating jobs for people. Giving back to the community by employing one’s neighbors is one of the rewards of owning a business.

**CE: The Next Technology**

Supported Employment has produced outstanding results, but these outcomes recently plateaued, leaving individuals with the most complex disabilities outside the work arena. The lessons learned from SE are important and include:

Individuals can and want to work;

Individuals can learn and grow through experience in paid employment;

Support in job development and worksite training stabilizes employment;

Individuals with real work report higher quality of life and greater economic participation in their communities.

The next iteration of employment strategy, CE, builds on these lessons and augments the technology with an emphasis on:

Creative person-centered evaluation of the job seeker’s skills, talents and interests;

A focus on non-comparative means for getting employment;

The use of an economic development strategy to proactively create employment opportunities;

A focus on smaller, more person-friendly businesses as the focus of job development efforts;

Engaging successful employers in giving career advice and guidance during the career planning process;

Recognizing that there are unlimited ways to make a living;

Understanding that there is an ecological fit for everyone in our diverse communities, no matter how geographically isolated or small, no matter how large and cosmopolitan.

CE relies on the same guiding values base as SE which include:

Zero Exclusion

All people, regardless of complexity or type of disability, have the right to live, work, and recreate in the integrated settings of their chosen community.

Partial Participation

All people have skills or partial skills they perform and enjoy using. It is our job to see that this "spark" of personal genius is utilized to begin the development of real work and/or civic involvement.

Zero Instructional Inference

For many people with disabilities, the best place to learn is in environments where their skills will be utilized. Therefore, the use of developmental continuum and earning the right to a job or a social activity is eliminated based upon the solid evidence that preparatory training has little validity. Segregated settings are not necessary, and are indeed a detriment to teaching and learning.

Mutuality

We must at all times attribute thinking and feeling to all people regardless of level or type of disability. Services should not be proposed that individuals with disabilities or anyone else find undesirable or irrelevant.

Interdependence

All people rely upon a social network that buoys them in daily life and through times of personal crisis. People with disabilities typically have limited social networks and few friends. The opportunity to participate and exhibit competence in a variety of settings with non-disabled citizens is critical to the establishment of such relationships.

**Exercise: Pair up. Discuss ways in which you and your agency promote and demonstrate affiliation with these core values. Use concrete examples of how alignment with these values is demonstrated, not simply talked about (e.g. there’s a budget line for self-advocacy investment; the Board Chair employs people with disabilities in her company; you personally coach an integrated intramural sports team). Report back to the class on current best practices and what you and your agency need to do to better align with and demonstrate these values.**

**CE Critical Concerns**

Customized Employment (CE) has been adopted in communities across the nation and numerous questions and concerns are being raised as this evolving employment strategy expands.

The principal hallmarks and activities of CE include:

Identifying specific job duties or employer expectations that are negotiated with employers;

Targeting individualized job goals to negotiate based on the skills, talents, and interests of the employment seeker;

Meeting the unique needs of the employment seeker andthe discrete, emerging needs of the employer;

Starting with the individual as the source of information for exploring potential employment options;

Offering representation, as needed, for employment seekers to assist in negotiating with employers;

Occurring in integrated, non-congregate environments in the community or in a business alongside people who do not have disabilities;

Resulting in pay at at least the prevailing wage;

Creating employment through self-employment and microenterprise;

Facilitating an amalgam of supports and funding sources.

Making Customized Employment work raises numerous questions, both unique and anticipated. The following is a sampling of the common questions about CE, and some brief responses:

*Is Customized Employment just a new name for Supported Employment?*

CE is a refinement of supported employment, but varies in important ways. Supported Employment often reacts to the Labor Market. The job search process is largely driven by what jobs are available, advertised, or easy to find in that community or region. In CE, the employment seeker’s profile is developed through Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) without consideration of what might be available for work in the community. In essence, the first step is getting to know the employment seeker without the prejudice of “appropriate work” or “realistic goals.” Once the person is known, then a career plan guides vocational exploration. In other words, employment situations are sought that match the profile of the individual, and negotiations follow that mesh the desires of the employment seeker with those of the employer. The existence of a Labor Market mindset tends to drive the kinds of jobs sought for people with disabilities under a Supported Employment model, hence the high proportion of entry-level retail food service, custodial, and other high turnover jobs. There is nothing inherently wrong with these jobs, but they have largely been based on availability, not personal preference.

Further, Supported Employment makes allowances for congregate or group settings such as Mobile Crews and Enclaves. CE is specifically individualized, resulting in one-person one-job, or one-person one-business. And, as noted, CE includes business ownership as an important career option.

*How does one get to know the employment seeker?*

The most widely used process is called Discovery, a process that relies on the work of several groups including Employment for All, Griffin-Hammis Associates, the Transition projects at the Rural Institute in Montana, et al. Discovery is not planning, it is an assessment process that seeks to answer the questions “Who is this person?” “What are the ideal conditions of employment?” and “Where does this career make sense?” using information collected through conversation and observation, not testing. The process most often starts at home, includes an inventory of the surrounding neighborhood, and expands to places where both skills and interests can be explored through informational interviews, paid work experiences, or engagement in work and social activities where the individual can be observed performing tasks that may be beneficial to an employer. One vital point to remember during Discovery is that the CE team, employment specialist, employment seeker, family member and whoever else is involved, is not looking for employment; the outcome should be a reflection of the complexity of all human lives. In other words, there should be multiple employment directions revealed, not a job description, but rather vocational themes and a revealing of skills, which are used to create employment in the community. Discovery is covered in chapter two.

*Isn’t Customized Employment too expensive?*

While there is no definitive cost data on this emerging technique, preliminary analyses from over 20 U.S. CE projects, and anecdotal time and effort reports from Employment for All, Griffin-Hammis, the Institute for Community Inclusion and other sources indicate that CE is on par with supported employment regarding costs. This may be because the job development strategies are more effective even though assessment and profile development stages can sometimes take longer. This question also raises another: Too expensive for whom?

Approximately 70% of adults with developmental disabilities in Canada remain unemployed, the unemployment rate for individuals with psychiatric disabilities is worse, and people with physical disabilities rank high in the unemployment figures as well. The tremendous expense of building day programs across the Provinces, maintaining specialized segregated transportation systems, and all the other associated parallel services has not delivered gainful employment, adequate training for employment, or social inclusion. CE can be accomplished for those needing such an intensive approach by blending funding, engaging families in support, and starting early in schools with the expectation of work both before and after graduation. Examples to date do not reveal extraordinary costs at all. In fact, it can be effectively demonstrated that using one year’s typical day program funding can easily fund wage employment or business ownership for an individual with significant disabilities.

*Is Customized Employment about helping people find their Dream Job?*

People with disabilities, just like everyone else, live complex lives. The more exposure we have to ideas, tasks, diverse environments, people, and activities, the more interests and skills we develop. Believing that any one of us has only one dream job is quite limiting when careers are considered. The process recommended herein broadens our thinking by requiring the identification of no fewer than three overarching vocational themes. This allows for creativity and innovation and forces teams to look for complexity and options, rather than for one single answer to an employment problem. Focusing in on a dream job is too limiting. CE reveals themes in people’s lives and invites combining interests to create new and diverse career options.

*CE sounds creative, but what about today’s Labor Market?*

Over the past decade the economy has been both good and bad. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities, however, remains largely unchanged. In fact, the labor market has almost no impact on the employment rate of people with disabilities. What does have an impact is the will of leadership at all levels to make employment a priority. The money exists, the technology and techniques exist, and the employment opportunities exist.

CE is significantly different from competitive employment. CE recognizes that employers are always hiring. That is, there is always room in a company for people who match the culture and values of the company, and who perform work that ultimately produces a profit. Without profit there are no jobs, so matching people with duties that create revenue overshadows the power of job descriptions that historically screen out people with significant disabilities. In essence CE demands that we focus on utilizing the existing skills of individuals, while growing new ones in real work environments (where the rest of us learned our skills), and realigning our efforts using the principles of economic development and job creation as the antidote to reacting to the demands of a fluctuating labor market.

**Final Thoughts to Kick-Start CE**

**Exercise: Read the following pages and select one of the topics concerning CE presented here. Assemble with 4 or 5 others in class interested in this same topic; discuss the points; report out on how these approaches will change the way you do your job in the future, and how your organization may need to change to support job seekers.**

In his recent book, Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell determines that successful careers depend on two fundamental elements:

1. Starting out in a supportive environment, and
2. Acquiring skills through repeated application and refinement

Gladwell notes that Microsoft CEO Bill Gates grew up in a family that supported continuous learning, and he had easy access to some of the first computers in the country where he could practice and learn. The Beatles landed their first real work in the strip clubs of Berlin where they had to perform grueling 8-hour shifts. Playing ceaselessly for years made them incredibly good musicians. For our purposes, the lesson here is that interests are important, but that skills mastery determines an individual’s degree of success.

Recent employment practices, based in person-centered planning, have not proven overly successful. The focus of many person-centered approaches is the listing and cultivation of interests. However, interests devoid of related skills makes meaningful and lasting employment a tough goal to achieve.

It is true that strong interests motivate learning, but past assessment approaches reveal serious weaknesses in eliciting unique personal desires. Typical among the interests listed for people are: animals, coffee drinking, music, movies, etc. These are bland at best, and certainly universal likes among human beings. The Discovery process, however, illuminates interests, accompanying tasks, and skills that have specific application in businesses.

While several groups have proprietary Discovery processes (e.g. Griffin-Hammis Associates, Marc Gold Associates, The Rural Institute, et al.) all share the premise that employment derives from the creation of profit; profit is generated by producing goods or services of value to customers; and production requires the performance of skills-based tasks. Again, while interests may help us find a career direction, instruction, application of skills, and mastery play an often-overlooked role in securing solid employment.

**Steps to Discovering Personal Genius**

Discovery stages the job development efforts to follow by answering some basic questions about the job seeker. The process typically begins where the individual lives, with listening sessions with friends and family where professionals should maintain silence except when prompting conversation. We recommend a simple: “tell me about your son,” when doing the initial home visit with a family. This discussion is not an interview or interrogation; there’s no checklist or script. The conversation goes where it needs to go and is not interrupted until all that needs to be said has been spoken. Generally there is time for follow up and clarification. Some rules for conducting Discovery include:

1. **Start with the person’s home and those he or she is closest to.** Explore the rooms of the home for clues about interests, skills and tasks performed. Explore competency levels as well as the surrounding neighborhood for employment or work-experience opportunities, transportation resources, and places to learn new skills.
2. **Don’t simply go to places of interest; participate.** In other words, plan activities that demonstrate the skills and tasks the individual can perform, wants to learn, and has an interest in learning.
3. **Seek to establish at least three over-riding vocational themes in the individual’s life.** These are not job descriptions, such as “wants to refuel airplanes.” Instead, think more broadly; in this case think aviation. This leads to a richer series of activities in relevant environments. Someone interested in refueling airplanes may simply be grasping at the one job they’ve seen or that someone has told them they might be able to do. By exploring the broader field of aviation, using both Informational Interviews and short work-experiences, a world of possible tasks and environments is opened.
4. **Develop a solid profile statement capturing the essence of the person**, their predominant skills, and the three areas of vocational relevance.
5. **Make Discovery a project**. That is, manage it with a start and finish date. Customized Employment is not about getting a dream job. CE sees a job as the beginning of the rehabilitation process, not the end. Therefore, starting with a job that matches existing or quickly learned skills, in an environment that matches the individual’s profile is the target for now. We are finding that precise focus on an individual by a team should result in adequate Discovery that takes 20 to 60 hours over an 8-week period.

**Job Development**

Searching for work begins as Discovery ends. Some rules for this economy that utilize the CE approach include:

1. **CE relies on negotiated job tasks that mutually benefit the employee and the employer**. By approaching specific employers who have task needs matching the job seeker’s talents, a match is more easily determined.
2. **Understand that employers are always hiring!** They are hiring people who fit their company and who can generate their paychecks through profits.
3. **If filling out applications and going through interviews is anything more than a formality to make Human Resources happy, then it’s not customized**. CE circumvents these traditional comparative processes that screen people with disabilities out. There is nothing inherently bad about these processes for people who can survive them; but many people with disabilities are immediately screened out. Again, CE is based on negotiation, not the traditional employment process.
4. **For each of the three vocational themes, construct a non-duplicative list of Twenty Places *where the career makes sense*.** In other words, list 20 specific places of employment in the community, accessible to the person, where people with similar skills and interests work. There is nothing magical about the number 20, but 5 or 10 is just too easy, and creativity in employment, along with complexity, comes after the obvious employers are listed.
5. **Use Informational Interviews to gather advice for the individual’s career plan**. By asking for advice, and a tour of the company, the tasks are revealed and if a match seems possible, job development can be introduced. Informational interviews should not be used as a bait and switch technique, but they often reveal needs employers have as well as opportunities for a business-within-a-business. Also, Resource Ownership possibilities can be determined through the informational interviewing process, wherein the individual brings specific tools or technology with them that make them more employable, in the same way a college grad brings their diploma or a mechanic brings their tools to a job.
6. **Stay away from retail**. In this economy, retail is tough. And, regardless, retail has been stripped of much of its complexity. Complexity in work tasks often means more stable work, an abundance of natural supports via co-workers and equipment or technology, and higher earnings potential. Of course, it also means more rigorous use of systematic instruction by Employment Specialists.
7. **Seek out small businesses**. The economic engine that drives Canada and creates the most jobs is its estimated two million small businesses. They are often hidden from view, with few employees. Use social capital and networking to get inside.
8. **People come together over shared interests**. Therefore, having an opportunity to meet with a small business manager or owner who shares the interests of the job seeker make the negotiation easier. As noted of course, interests are not enough, there must also be the potential for learning the requisite skills of the job, but the presence of shared interests is the foundation of all human relationships. And, employment is as much a personal relationship as marriage.
9. **There are unlimited ways to make a living in the world**; therefore, thinking in terms of job descriptions and job openings is pointless. Most of us only knew the 5 or 6 job descriptions promoted by our Guidance Counselor: teacher, nurse, firefighter, police officer, and lawyer. For people with disabilities that list became: janitor, dishwasher, paper shredder, grocery bagger, and recycler. CE represents an unrestrained economic development approach to infinite job creation and restructuring. Negotiate with employers while highlighting skills that match their customers’ needs instead of looking for stereotypical openings.

**Conclusion**

It’s a tough employment market out there. But then, it’s always been tough for people with disabilities. Go where the career makes sense, emphasize tasks and skills, and negotiate for mutual benefit.

**Resources**

This curriculum draws heavily on the experiences of Griffin-Hammis Associates in implementing CE with its many and varied customers. In our work we find that learning from others, reading extensively, and experimentation are essential elements to progress. We offer the following short list of resources at the beginning of this curriculum, instead of at the end, in hopes that readers will immediately sample this information and grow from it.

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