

**Introducing the
Individualized Employment Portfolio
for Job Development Representation
by People
with Significant Support Needs**

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Based on the work of Michael Callahan

*in Callahan, M. & Garner, J. B. (1997). Keys to the Workplace. Paul Brookes Publishing:
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Introduction to the Employment Portfolio

Over the last 20 years, supported employment has proven to be a successful means to employment for thousands of people. However, the number of people with severe physical and communication disabilities who are employed because of supported employment remains low, less than 10% (Wehman, 1995). Data have shown it takes more time and a different approach to employers to successfully facilitate employment for people with severe multiple disabilities (Mast, West, Johnson, 1996). People who have severe disabilities, including physical and communication disabilities, encounter an additional barrier to employment in that they have difficulty representing themselves and have a greater likelihood of needing assistance with their individualized representation (Callahan & Garner, 1997).

McLoughlin, Garner, and Callahan, in Getting Employed, Staying Employed (Paul Brooks, 1987) address the need for various presentation materials for job development in the following way:

Presentation materials for employment projects have typically consisted of slides of people at work. Although slides can be part of good presentation materials, they have limited use. It is not appropriate to walk into an initial meeting with an employer with a truckload of projectors, screens, and slide trays. However, certain slides that have been chosen because of their quality or message can be made into 8" x 10" photographs and used to develop a visual aid for initial meetings with employers.

The theory of the portfolio is that a customized visual presentation on behalf of a person, will assist either the job developer or the person themselves, as they speak with employers. This prototype Portfolio was test marketed with employers throughout the country. This new product can be used by people with severe and multiple disabilities, including physical and communication disabilities, and their representatives, as appropriate, in order to assist such individuals in securing employment.

People who are actively involved facilitating job development for people with disabilities, frequently look for ways to assist them during their presentations to employers. Whether it is an outline for a presentation, a better method for explaining what they are doing, or ways to describe the people they are representing, job developers are always looking for ways to help them be more successful. We believe that a **Presentation Portfolio** will assist job developers with the flow of their presentations in describing what they do and in assisting the employer to have positive images of persons with significant disabilities working in a variety of jobs.

The Portfolio incorporates language that describes the role of an agency in securing employment for a specific individual. It describes the phases and steps used in supported employment and includes photographs of people at work that illustrate these steps. The photographs depict people being supported by job coaches, co-workers, and supervisors. They represent people in negotiated jobs, in carved jobs, and in created jobs, providing examples of successful job placements. The pictures give an employer a visual description of people in several jobs, assisting them in being able to picture a person in their own work place. Finally, it includes pictures and narrative of a specific person, illustrating what might be used

when representing an individual during an employer call.

A Perspective on Supported Employment

The Portfolio is based on a perspective of supported employment that is centered on individualized discovery and representation.

In 1987, UCP began a three-year project directed by Mike Callahan that successfully demonstrated that people with severe and multiple disabilities could be employed. The project relied heavily on the perspective that successful jobs come from identifying the choices and skills of the individual, then matching those with the needs of an employer. The project became the foundation for consecutive employment-related projects awarded to UCP and Mike Callahan up to the current year. The experience and discoveries of each project led to questions that resulted in a new project, each one strengthening the belief and practice that we must discover each person's unique contributions, preferences, and conditions for employment if we are to successfully facilitate a job for them.

Discovery allows a complete description of a person to emerge. Like a paint by number picture, a complete picture has many colors and shades. Discovery lets us identify the many colors and shades that make up a person. It begins with the person and allows us to find possibilities because it doesn't measure or compare.

The Vocational Profile is a tool for discovery that is tightly focused on employment. In all of the employment-related projects, the Vocational Profile has proven successful and is a key to success in the field of employment for people with severe and multiple disabilities.

The Vocational Profile Meeting takes the information discovered during the Profile and creates a plan for employment that lists jobs and job tasks that correspond to the person's contributions, preferences, and conditions for employment. These are then matched with specific employers in the community. This list directs the job development.

Integral to the success of the Portfolio and the Vocational Profile is that agencies using these tools share the perspective of individualized discovery and representation, and have assumed that discovery and individualized planning based on discovery is completed for each individual the agency serves in supported employment. Whether you use the tools of the Vocational Profile and Profile Meeting or other similar tools, the fact that discovery and planning are completed is what is important.

Individualized discovery and planning results in individualized job development, job development that starts with the person. Armed with the information learned during discovery and planning, a job developer seeks to contact only those employers who have jobs that reflect the person's list of potential jobs, job tasks, and preferred employers. This differs from labor market strategies that start with the employer or the concept of supported employment and look at jobs from the perspective of a job description.

How people are represented to employers frequently makes the difference in whether a person has a job or not. The Portfolio was developed as a tool that will assist applicants and job developers as they make employer contacts.

The employment process is one that includes a sequence of events that begins with

a discovery process (i.e., Vocational Profile) and ends with successful employment. The Portfolio is just one event in this sequence. The success of developing and utilizing an employment Portfolio is dependent upon completing ALL of the steps involved in the process. It was never intended to be used in isolation as the only component in the job development process.

PROCESS	TOOL
Discovery	The Vocational Profile
Developing a plan and identifying employers	The Profile Meeting Form
Development of an individualized employment Portfolio	Template of the Portfolio
Approaching employers	Steps for successful employer calls
Negotiating jobs and job tasks	Job Carving
Support and follow-up	Job Analysis

The Prototype Presentation Portfolio

The Portfolio information is in a binder that is hinged to fold back and form a tabletop easel. The top flap fits into the notch on the back cover. There is a space for your own business card.

The prototype of the Presentation Portfolio is in two parts: 1) general information and photographs; and 2) specific information and photographs of a person looking for a job. The general information begins with the page *"We match individual employee skills with specific employer needs"*. A photograph that represents the narrative follows this page. The remainder of these pages follows this flow- all of the photographs represent the narrative of the preceding page. The photos depict people with different disabilities, varying complexities of disability, in very different employment situations. They represent people in negotiated jobs, in carved jobs, and in created jobs. All of the photographs represent real people who are successful in their jobs.

The next section is of a particular individual, the focus person for your development. Pictures of the individual should showcase them in many of the activities they currently enjoy. Show them with different people and in different settings. The narrative that is included speaks to the individual's preferences and contributions. This section flows like the preceding section - a photograph represents narrative.

Text and Photo Information

Both the text and the photos were carefully chosen based on selections of our advisory committee and on the feedback from the focus groups. The text supports the idea that as job developers and employment consultants we begin the process by doing things the "natural" way. This means that we work with an individual employer to hire and train an applicant with a disability in the same manner they

would use for an applicant without a disability. We do not want you to read the text to the employers. We want you to highlight key points. In the same manner, it is not necessary to tell the entire story of the individual that is pictured. Some job developers have found it useful to leave the Portfolio with the employer following the initial meeting to enable the employer to review it further or share it with coworkers. Additionally it gives the job developer an opportunity for another contact or meeting with the employer to pick up the portfolio and answer any additional questions the employer may have.

Supported Employment: The Basics

Traditional vocational services for people with severe disabilities were based upon a continuum model. This model relied upon the belief that people with disabilities must be ready to work before moving to community employment and the best way to get people with disabilities ready is to train them in segregated sheltered workshop settings. This view has turned out to be flawed. The continuum model did not result in community employment for people with disabilities, but most often resulted in alternatives to work at sub-minimum wage, such as piecework in sheltered workshops.

Supported employment was initiated in the early eighties when people began to realize that traditional services were not resulting in community employment for people with disabilities. The fundamentals of supported employment are based upon a set of beliefs much different from previous vocational models. Supported employment embraces the following beliefs and values:

People with disabilities are employable.

People with disabilities who want to work have the same right to work and earn a living wage as non-disabled people.

Facilitating community employment allows people (who have traditionally been excluded from community life) the fullest community participation.

Successful employment is based upon support and assistance, not skill and readiness.

People learn a job best *on the job*, not in simulated segregated environments.

Employment options are based upon preferences, skills and needs of the applicant.

Jobs may be carved or created to fulfill the specific needs of an employer and the specific skills of the employee.

Employer/employee consultation and support is provided after a job has been found for as long as the employer and employee feel it is necessary.

**Developing Individualized Employment Portfolios for Job
Development Representation by People with Severe Disabilities**

Final Report

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Summary

This report describes the development and field-testing of a presentation portfolio, a job development tool for individuals with disabilities, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), U.S. Department of Education. The portfolio was developed with significant input from the vocational rehabilitation field and employers. Findings indicate that the portfolio could be an effective tool for job development.

Background

It is widely recognized that individuals with disabilities represent the largest unemployed minority in the nation. Only 3 in 10 working age (18-64) people with disabilities are employed full or part-time compared with eight in 10 working age people without disabilities. Over the past 15 years, the disability population has become more severely disabled, and in turn, those who say they are unable to work due to their disability have grown from 29% to 43%. And yet overwhelmingly, these individuals say they want to work. (Harris Poll, NOD, 2000).

Supported employment and self-determination initiatives have clearly assisted people with disabilities to access employment. By developing innovative approaches to individualized planning, job development, job analysis/technology, and employer-directed job site supports, professionals in the field are putting together the tools needed to assist people with disabilities to reach their employment goals.

However, there remain those waiting for the opportunity to be included in work. One of the most compelling reasons for the lack of inclusion in the employment community lies with job development (Callahan & Garner, 1997, Sowers & Powers, 1994). A significant issue for people with severe disabilities seeking employment and for professionals assisting them continues to be how to approach employers and how to effectively represent the strengths and potential contributions of an applicant. (Sowers & Powers, 1995). This is further complicated when the person is unable to effectively and clearly represent themselves during an interview (Callahan & Garner, 1997). Because of the complexity of disability barriers, especially communication barriers, these individuals often have difficulty representing themselves to employers in interview situations. Interviews are a critical (and often the deciding) factor in hiring. Unfortunately, individual job applicants and job developers are often unsure how to approach an employer if the applicant isn't able to effectively communicate (and thus effectively compete) during an interview situation.

Job development appears as the "bottleneck" in the effort to assist people with disabilities into work. The lack of tools that focus on representing strengths and potential contributions of an applicant through job negotiation, carving, and/or creating, and the lack of other forms of technical assistance in this area creates the "bottleneck" that prevents people from achieving employment. Some generic labor-market-focused job development materials are available, however these general methods do not solve the puzzle. Most focus on identifying and interviewing for existing and available job slots. Recent materials emphasize ways to structure an employment program to resemble an employment agency by focusing on job openings and matching an applicant to an existing job description, rather than putting the applicant first and attempting to find an individualized

position that matches their unique contributions and preferences. In this day of hi-tech, on-line job searching, job developers can be seduced into connecting themselves and individuals with disabilities to the internet, thinking this will solve the problem of job development. However, these hi-tech approaches rarely meet the needs of people with disabilities. They lack the individual approach that focuses on an applicant's contributions and an employer's needs. Past experience has shown that the magic of the face-to-face meeting between the individual or his/her representative and the employer is what creates job opportunities for people with disabilities

The need remains for products and effective representation techniques to use with potential employers in ways that emphasize the applicant's strengths and their potential contribution to a work environment. Available products and other materials often address the issue of preparing the applicant for the interview, but do not address strategies for significant representation on behalf of an applicant (Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke & Barcus, 1990; Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, Wehman, 1997; Callahan & Garner, 1997). Compounding the issues is the confusion and disagreement within the field as to how to balance the pure sales/marketing aspect of job development with the human/individualized perspective of representation (Hagner & DiLeo, 1993). The need exists for techniques and strategies that can bridge the gap between high cost, emotionally charged sales techniques and the employment needs of persons with disabilities.

Callahan and Garner in *Keys to the Workplace*, talk about the need for presentation materials that have the effectiveness of a slide presentation. Photographs are able to communicate a message in ways that words never will. In looking to other professions for effective presentation strategies, the use of

portfolios by sales representatives and others who use this presentation technique in order to get their message across has proven very successful. The question was asked. "Why not use this same approach in job development and representation of people with disabilities?"

A literature search found little evidence that presentation portfolios were being used outside of school transition programs. In some special education districts, part of an individual's transition plan includes the development of a portfolio that has certificates, resumes, letters of reference, and in a few cases, photos. But the literature search found no evidence that portfolios were being used for people beyond school. There were a few job developers who were using portfolios to represent individuals when other approaches weren't working. This usually occurred when the individuals being represented were persons with significant and multiple disabilities. Employers reacted very positively and in one case, a job was secured after the first meeting.

What Is a Presentation Portfolio?

A presentation portfolio is a "sales approach", a marketing tool that is value-supported and individually customized for each applicant. It provides a flow or outline for a presentation by a job developer. An effective portfolio is based on a perspective that is centered on individualization, discovery, and representation. It presents a positive visual description of people with disabilities at work.

The portfolio should incorporate language that describes the role of an agency in securing employment for a specific individual based on the natural way an employer does things. Text pages describing the phases and steps used in

supported employment are followed by photographs of people at work that illustrate the text message. Photographs can depict people being supported by job coaches, co-workers, and supervisors. They represent people in negotiated jobs, in carved jobs, and in created jobs, providing examples of successful job placements. The pictures give an employer a visual description of people in several jobs, assisting them in being able to picture a person in their own work place.

A portfolio can have two very distinct sections, a generic section that illustrates many different people with disabilities in many different jobs and most importantly, and a section on the individual to be represented during job development. Using two different sections allows an employer to see people with disabilities in jobs in other workplaces in the community, some that he/she might know and then provides the story and information about the specific individual being represented. Pictures and text of the potential applicant represent a visual resume that communicates the best of the individual in ways that words cannot do. Pictures should communicate the individual's preferences and choices as well as describe the way the individual goes about accomplishing tasks, interacting with others, and "having a life". This provides the employer with a comprehensive and positive picture of the potential employee and allows them to see just how that individual will contribute to their worksite.

Creating Portfolios

Portfolios are easily compiled. Using an easel-type binder, photos are assembled and arranged with text pages to communicate the message and story. Both photos and text pages can be generated on a computer and printed with an inkjet printer. Photos can be scanned or can be processed onto a disc, then printed

into an 8x10 inch format. This creates an inexpensive but professional looking tool.

Creating a generic set of photos that depict an array of individuals with disabilities in different jobs allows for employers to see the possibilities of people. It creates a visual endorsement from existing local employers to use when approaching new employers. This generic set of photos and accompanying text can be used over and over again.

Customizing the portfolio for representation on behalf of a specific applicant is just as easily accomplished. Photographs can be taken of the individual that communicate what they want, what they are good at, what they are already doing, and the way they do it. By using 5 or 6 strategic photos, an applicant and his/her abilities and contribution can be effectively represented to an employer. Letters of reference, certificates or other materials can also be added for support.

The UCPA Portfolio Presentation Project

In 1997, the United Cerebral Palsy Associations entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to develop and field-test a presentation portfolio for use by supported employment programs. The remainder of this paper will describe the steps undertaken to validate the portfolio developed under this agreement.

Extra section:

The way the portfolio fits into job development

This Job Development approach utilizes a presentation portfolio as a tool for job developers to use to introduce both the general idea of students with significant disabilities making contributions to employers and as a personalized, visual resume that represents the best features of the student with a disability. It is based on the concept used traditionally in sales called a "pitch book" and therefore has generic validity from the perspective of employers who are often the subject of sales presentations. The use of the portfolio is based on the assumption that the manner in which people are represented to employers frequently makes the difference in whether a person gets a job or not (Mast, Sweeney & West, 2000).

The framework of the portfolio that we are proposing to use as the exemplar has two distinct sections - a *general* section that introduces the concept of customized employment for students with significant disabilities and a specific section that introduces the particular student being represented. The general component of the portfolio (see Appendix for a sample) incorporates language that describes the role of schools in securing employment for students. It describes the phases and steps used in supported employment and includes photographs and descriptive narrative of people at work that illustrate these steps. The photographs depict people being supported by job coaches, co-workers, and supervisors. They represent people in negotiated jobs, in carved jobs, and in created jobs, providing examples of successful job placements. The pictures give an employer a visual description of people in several jobs, assisting them in being able to picture a person in their own work place.

The *specific* section is designed to convey to employers the unique potential contributions of the specific student who is being represented. It includes both pictures and narrative that are designed to represent the best features of the student. This information is identified and compiled during the discovery phase of the

portfolio process by the teacher in partnership with the student and family members, friends and others. This sections (see Appendix for sample) contains: a) narrative pages that describe the student, b) photographs of the student performing competently in work settings, the community and at school, c) a resume suitable for leaving with an employer, d) letters of recommendation, as available, from other employers concerning the student, and e) a customized task list of potential contributions that is used as the basis for negotiating a customized job description.