Research Study #2

Fact Sheet

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The Role of an Employment Specialist: The Benefits of Individuals with Disabilities and Community Businesses

What is an Employment Specialist

An Employment Specialist (ES) might also be known as a job coach, job developer, or skills trainer. Regardless of how this professional is referred to, their role is to support individuals with disabilities to find, maintain, and eventually advance in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). Once employment is secured, the ES also plays an essential role in supporting the business. It is important to note that while the overarching goal of an ES' work is to secure and support CIE, they are also a key liaison between other individuals and organizations that support employment such as:

- Families and caregivers
- Vocational Rehabilitation agencies
- Community Service Boards or other Developmental Disability and Health and Human Service Organizations

How Does an Employment Specialist Support Employment?

There are several pathways or models that an ES might use to obtain employment. The most common methods are Supported Employment, Customized Employment, or Self-Employment (see https://vcurrtc.org). Regardless of the method used there are a few key activities that the ES will engage in across a series of phases. It is helpful to have an awareness of these activities across models so that everyone is aware of what quality employment services look like.

Key Activities Across Employment Service Model Phases

Regardless of the type of employment service that an individual is receiving an ES will take the time to:

Phase	Goal	ES Role
Information Gathering	Build a relationship with job seeker and identify strengths, interests, preferences, and support needs for employment.	Engage in activities to gather this information, develop a plan for finding employment.
Job Development	Search for and secure employment based on the information gathered.	Develop resume, contact employers, support job seeker in application and interview process.

Phase	Goal	ES Role
On the Job Training	Support the employee with a disability to integrate into business, learn job tasks and social communication skills. Support the employer to integrate and build a relationship with the employee.	Provide systematic instruction, develop and teach use of supports/ tools to help the employee become independent. Provide training to employer as needed.
Long-Term Supports	Provide continued check-ins with employee and employer to monitor success and identify needs after employee is considered stable in employment.	Identify funding pathways for this service. If a change in provider occurs ensure a smooth transition for employee and employer.

Benefits of an Employment Specialist?

The information provided above is not an exhaustive list of services that an ES will provide during quality employment services, it provides a basic overview. Working with a skilled ES is more likely to lead to initial and long-term employment success for an individual with a disability. It is becoming increasingly evident that the ES is integral in not only helping the employee learn the essential job tasks they were hired for but also in supporting their social integration into the workplace and providing support to employers who may be brand new to working with individuals with disabilities and service providers. This is particularly true for individuals with significant disabilities who would not otherwise be able to access and maintain CIE.

****Please visit our website or review the Quality Supported Employment Services Handbook for additional information on the importance of the ES and the services they provide.**

References

McDonough, J., Wehman, P., Brooke, A., Ham, W., & Hence, C. (Eds.). (2026). Quality Supported Employment Services: A Handbook for Employment Support Professionals. (2nd.ed.). Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center.

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