

The Vocational Profile and the Profile Meeting: A Process Not a Form

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In 1987 Jan Nisbet and Michael Callahan experienced that the more significant a person's disability, the greater the need for an individualized approach to employment (Nisbet and Callahan, 1987). They also found that traditional assessments only indicated what a person was not able to do. Ecological strategies were not focused enough to result in employment outcomes for people with the most severe disabilities. In implementing the Vocational Profile and the Profile Meeting, Nisbet and Callahan took the ecological inventory process one step further. These two very critical strategies linked information about an individual with information about potential jobs for the individual.

United Cerebral Palsy Associations used the Vocational Profile and Profile Meeting approach extensively in a federally funded demonstration project from 1987-1990. The project demonstrated that people with severe physical disabilities could successfully be employed. One hundred and fifteen (115) people with severe disabilities were assisted in finding employment which demonstrated that people with severe disabilities can be successfully employed (Callahan, 1991).

And yet, years later, people with the most severe disabilities are not the people who are getting jobs through supported employment. Why? Because agencies were utilizing the Vocational Profile as a form and not a process as it was intended and as it has been proven effective.

The Vocational Profile is an information gathering process...a guide that suggests questions to ask in order to discover information about an applicant. In addition, the time spent with the applicant and the relationship that is formed provides a facilitator the knowledge and insight into the life experiences and contributions of the applicant. These life experiences and contributions provide direction for employment. The Profile provides a complete picture of an applicant, rather than looking at one or two skill areas. A specific job can then be identified consistent with the person's entire life, not merely from an instance of performance.

There is a direct correlation between knowledge of the individual applicant and a good job match. This means that the most appropriate person to assist in finding employment is the person who knows the applicant best. Conversely, the person developing the job, must be the person gathering the Vocational Profile information.

Profile: A process not a form

The Profile Meeting brings together the applicant, the facilitator (job developer) and others significant to the applicant in order to link the information from the Profile to job tasks and employment situations that match the needs of the applicant. During the meeting, the applicant, with the assistance of the other people at the meeting, is asked to define an ideal employment situation based on his or her contributions, preferences, and conditions. Using the definition as a framework, job tasks and specific employers are identified that encompass aspects of the definition. People at the meeting are asked for assistance in using their knowledge of the applicant and their knowledge of the community. This results in a list of specific employers whose job tasks match the interests and abilities of the applicant. A job developer will leave the meeting with a plan and specific contacts.

Vocational Profile Activity

The Vocational Profile form is to be used as a guide in getting to know an applicant in order to assist in identifying his or her interests and job preferences.

- I. Meet with the applicant at his/her home to begin gathering personal/family information. It is very important to be able to spend some time with the applicant in his/her most comfortable environment. Look around; see what is on the walls and in the rooms. Observe the applicant doing routine activities. Discuss these routines and begin to identify favorite activities. Observe and/or discuss basic functional abilities such as personal care, dressing, eating, telling time, and accessing transportation. Learn what an entire day is like from waking up to going to bed.
- II. After the meeting identify supports/businesses that are in the area. One might be an ideal match. Neighbors and local business owners might be good friends of the applicant. Also make a list of the available transportation routes.
- III. Ask the applicant to identify friends, parents, and supporters who can provide information. Many times friends are able to identify interests and abilities that might not even occur to the applicant. Arrange to speak with these people, and ask them to talk about the applicant's interests and goals. Ask about potential employers within the family or among friends. Connections are important.
- IV. Accompany the applicant on an outing (go to a movie, a restaurant, a sports event or just walk around the neighborhood). Observe mobility, interactions with other people and situations, transportation abilities, money handling, reading directions, and other skills necessary to move about comfortably in the community.
- V. Identify and discuss interests and dreams, including the type of job tasks the applicant would like to do and the tasks the parent feels is appropriate. Identify what social situations are preferred, the typical environment, the people who make up the social circle, and other preferred activities.

Profile: A process not a form

- VI. Observe activities at school and on any job or work experience. Identify any accommodations, assistance, and/or personal care that might be needed at the work site. If necessary, read information provided from existing files. Keep this information in perspective with what you have experienced with the applicant. If you feel that this information is not necessary to complete the picture of the applicant, don't use it.

The Profile Meeting

The Profile Meeting is the culmination of the entire Vocational Profile process and is the tool that will lead to a job match. The sole purpose for this meeting is to identify employment possibilities and employment sites. This process results in a clear list of prospects for the job developer to use in beginning the job development phase, prospects that are specific to the applicant.

- I. Discuss the Profile Meeting with the applicant and set a date and time. Identify, with the applicant's assistance, who is to be invited to attend the Profile Meeting. Consider all of the people involved with the applicant. The majority of the people attending should favor family, friends, and other non-paid people, rather than staff who are paid to interact with the applicant. Ask the applicant to send a letter inviting the people to the meeting, state the purpose of the meeting and provide each invited person with a completed Profile to read before the meeting. Provide whatever assistance the applicant might need to contact these people. Hold the meeting in a room of the applicant's choice and large enough for everyone to be comfortable.
- II. The person who has completed the Profile process and will be doing the job development best facilitates the meeting. The applicant should provide direction and guidance. This allows the facilitator to keep the meeting focused on the task. Introduce everyone and review the goals and guidelines for the meeting. Employment is the goal. The focus will be on employment possibilities. Other issues will be discussed at another time.
- III. Ask the applicant to describe his/her ideal job. Write on the flip chart, the key information that is given. Define the ideal job in terms of the applicant's preferences, contributions, and conditions. Open this discussion to others in the room, realizing that the definitions by the applicant are the guidelines for the job and discussion should expand or enhance those criteria. Remove this page from the flip chart and hang it in a place where it is easily visible. Refer to it often.

- IV. Once the job characteristics are identified and defined, begin to identify the types of employment situations (tasks) in the area that meet those criteria. List these on the flip chart. Begin with just three or four tasks and job types. Make sure that everyone is participating.
- V. When the job tasks and types have been identified, specifically identify employers in the area who utilize those types of jobs. Be specific, naming businesses in the area. Be sure all of these businesses meet the key information identified in the applicant's ideal job description. Give the applicant a chance to eliminate any of the listings he or she doesn't want to pursue. Expand the categories.
- VI. The next critical step is for the applicant to identify which places are preferences, which ones should be contacted first, second, and last. Ask if anyone in the room has contact in that place. The more specific information that is available, the easier it is to make a good contact. Write down on the flip chart the name of the person who will make the contact and when they agreed to make the contact.
- VII. Record the information from the meeting on the Profile Meeting form. When the meeting is over, type up all of the information and mail it out to the meeting participants. Begin to contact employers from the list. Talk to the applicant as you call employers, keeping the applicant a vital part of the process.