

Working with Disabilities Part II

Bret: Hello this Bret Anderson and Jan Trunce and we are continuing our conversation in working with individuals with disabilities. So Jan when we left off we wanted to talk about alternative work strategies. so what are some of the ways that we can get these individuals back into the workforce?

Jan: Well, First Bret I don't want to generalize for everyone with disabilities, because as you know, they could run the gambit from very simple to very complex and further there are some things that we can do to help people who have some difficulty in the work place that maybe we haven't tried before, so lets talk about what they are. These usually will come into play when we are talking about people with mental health, or with say, for example, traumatic brain injury. So we know that if someone is having difficulty with memory and concentration, that we talked about a bit last time that an accommodation in the work place is very likely. So the first thing to look at is what are the possible accommodations, what is out there that people can perform a job the same as they have in the past and what accommodations could you use. The second is there is a possibility that you could use something like Supported Employment. This has been around for a long time and I don't think it is used too often anymore and I think it is something we really need to re-examine. So supported employment would really be sending a job coach, for example, to the work place to be able to learn the job and they would then teach the individual how to do the job. What this does is it takes the pressure off the company that their line supervisors wouldn't need to take, say, extra time in writing down hints or writing out instructions for someone who is doing a job that they haven't done before. People with traumatic brain injury often this is very helpful for them, so they can maybe take a little longer to learn a particular task and the way someone is paid is often negotiated throughout that period, but a job coach could work side by side with someone for a week and then slowly pull away from that situation. The important thing there is to make sure that they hand off easily and they are comfortable with that the person knows the job well when they finish it. Does that make sense?

Bret: Yes, that makes clear sense. So how do I know where to get a job coach?

Jan: Well, recently I've heard some interesting perspectives on that. One is that maybe go to a universities or colleges and ask them if they have graduate students who would like to do this type of a project as part of their graduate program. A lot of times, we see employers who are being asked to do some very special things to help people be able work in a good work setting as for as writing things out and getting them hint cards and getting them electronic reminders. A lot of employers are not going to be willing to do that they are not going to be willing to bend over backwards. A Job Coach can do that, in fact that would be a great part of a graduate program and counseling, for example, or in Vocational Rehabilitation. That people could get some hands on experience working with some of these returning soldiers and veterans that we have who are looking for work.

Bret: So, the Job Coach seems like it's a really good alternative for someone who has got memory loss or someone that is related to TBI. One of the other complications that you mentioned a lot that comes with TBI is also Post Dramatic Stress. How do you deal with the two of them together?

Jan: Either one on their own is difficult to put together. I think what you really have to do is to make sure that you follow up with this person very closely. The placement, the relationship with the employer, is very important. If you use someone who is a Job Coach, you might want to think about having a mentor as well, someone who is inside the company who is willing to kind of be the go to person for them, who could give them ideas or when something changes they could spend a few extra minutes helping them know what that change means or making sure they are taking their medication, making sure they are getting to their counselor on a regular basis; those kinds of things are really helpful for people to have. And it is difficult for a Job Coach to be there on an ongoing basis but frequent follow up with the employer and the direct supervisor and the mentor, if there is one, is really a critical thing at least through the first, I think 2 months, 3 months that a person is on the job.

Bret: Sounds like a reasonable time frame. So now I know that PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Syndrome is really difficult for any individual to experience and go through, but we also have a video in the course that talks about how it manifests, it could come back in twenty years, ten years, it doesn't always have to come up right away. How do you convince a person who is young and seemingly able to get along well with others and not have as much trouble? How do you convince them or get them to become aware that this might happen to them or how it might affect them later on in life?

Jan: Good point. I think we all learned from the Vietnam War that this disability is something that can stay, I wouldn't say late but can be there, but can be masked for many many years and the longer it's masked the more the individual has to go through difficult periods in their life. So recognizing it early it's definitely treatable, it's definitely something that people can get counseling for and, if needed, take medication for, but it doesn't have to wait thirty years as it did in the past and I think that in order for people to accept this is going on that you need to just help them lay out what is happening to them. Similar to the people with traumatic brain injury these individuals definitely loose jobs, they have flash backs, they have certain incidents that can bring things up for them. We are seeing a large surge of individuals claiming PTSD right now from the Vietnam War and it is brought on by the triggers of the war that is happening now. So if young people, the sooner they get there the more they are helped. It's hard because a lot of them have a stigma attached, or they feel employers, the public, everyone has a stigma attached to mental health issues. A lot of that is just ignorance on the part of the public, but as somebody working in the field to get them to accept this and get them to understand they need to talk to stop the cycle they are in. Because, as you know and I know, self medication through alcohol and drugs is a big issue. We don't want to see that happen again.

Bret: Correct. You know I know that in the video we also talked a lot about family members. Do we encourage family members to come and talk to us?

Jan: Absolutely! If they will, if they're willing, and if the relationship is there, often times family members can observe and see things that an individual can't see themselves or that you as a DVOP or LVER can't see in an hour conversation. A lot of people can make themselves sound and look and be great in an hour. They may be holding down responsible jobs, but they may be holding down a lot of different responsible jobs, as they go from one to another.

Bret: Correct. I know that the manifestations of undiagnosed mental health issues relate similar to be PTSD that they can cause an individual to do a lot of things to self medicate and to cope with it. So is it our job to then to just identify or in the referral process do we bring up many of the other things that we suspect as Placement Specialists?

Jan: I think you have to be careful that you don't diagnose someone. In this short podcast we can, by no means, educate you on all of the details or the issues to look for. But, I think you can always talk to somebody and they feel and you feel that something is not right. So you need to have a good referral basis to send people to for mental health help. The Beth Center is great if you live in an area that has a Poly Trauma Center and you suspect that somebody may have TBI. And what they do say is about 80 % of the people who have TBI, also have Post Traumatic Stress, which makes sense because if you've been in explosion or have been in some type of a situation where you've injured your body or your head or your mind, you are definitely going to remember that as pretty traumatic event. PTSD happens to all kinds of people not just in wars but in other situation, like in auto accidents and assaults. But we tend to see a high number happening in this particular war. People are going for deployment, their going for longer, they don't have long to rest when they come back, they are not getting great sleep because they don't get to often be in a place to get that sleep, so all those things really wear down a person's physical being and mental health as well.

Bret: That would certainly cause them to have trouble at work. So are there any other alternative work strategies? You mentioned Job Coaching; are there any others you want to talk about?

Jan: Well, one is a little bit more difficult and that is doing your job proposal. And the job proposal has been labeled many things, but what this is is creating a job for someone is being able to look at situations where you feel the employer could use some help. You have to be kind of vigilante and have the individual as well be vigilante. What you think you can do? And so that is what that is all about, is really looking at what they can do and not what they can't do. Putting that out into a proposal to employers and maybe proposing for a job they never thought about. Let me give you an example. If you are at a restaurant, and you see that the waitresses are just incredibly busy running crazy and they are busing their own tables, they are having to move furniture around to reset tables. They have bus boys, but maybe they could use someone who could move furniture and move tables or could set things up for

them. That is a very simple example, but would the employer be willing to listen to that? If you could show them there was a profit in there that what they would have to pay the person and how that would increase their volume of customers for example. Having someone to be a security guard in a parking lot in a major city where the crime rate is really cut down on their customers. Would you have someone who maybe could do that, so you present this as a proposal to an employer and say, "I know this person here is what they can do, here is your profit this is how it would help your business," and you have to be able to present that. That means you as a job developer need to be extremely aware of the employers in your community the needs they have, asking them what was their biggest issues as far as what problems they were having and then knowing the clientele you are working with and being able to match them all.

Bret: Well, it sounds like a restaurant that you and I went to last week, so I can imagine that they could do some easy work with that. It really sounds like they need to be aware their environment and being able to see if there is a job opportunity for a person. Alright, well I think this wraps up part two and I want to thank you for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add or didn't maybe get to?

Jan: Well, Bret I think we have covered the many of the main points. I think it is important for everyone to just remember that we are dealing with individuals here and you can't give any blanket prescriptions that is going to solve anyone problems. Asking a person, what would work for them, being aware of what their concerns are, making sure they get the help they need and staying on top of what happens when you do put them a job to make sure you can give them whatever they need to keep the job, which we know is real critical.

Bret: Very critical. And I know that from experience that I have had teaching this course and also being in the course that these individuals that get experience in the class benefit from the information that we've gone over here, plus the experience of talking to other individuals about what they are going through. If anything at all, we've at least brought the topic back to the surface and said, "it's okay for them to talk about it, because we're going to see a lot more numbers and see a lot of numbers of this coming back and it's important that we are aware of this as Placement Specialists." Alright, as you know the job proposal sounds very interesting and exciting. In fact I know for our listeners we want to make sure that they get an opportunity to go to the web site and download the link as an example of a job proposal. We talked about one other alternative work strategy and that was the Direct Placement. Give some information about it.

Jan: Right Bret, you know there is the Veterans Recruitment Act which really applies to Federal jobs and that says that anyone who is rated at 30% or greater could go to a hiring authority and they can give them a job that was noncompetitive. So in other words they don't have to go through the typical laborious kinds of testing and background that the normal application would go through. They would be able to get the job directly by them in the interview with a direct hire. This is a great way for people to get into jobs with the federal government and right now we know that the federal government is trying to raise the number of disabled

people working for them from below 1% to 2% by the year 2010. So that gives them incentive to want to do more to get more disabled people on board. This is a great thing that DVOP's and LVER's can do if they can get to those direct hires. That is really important.

Bret: So what are those numbers? You talked about percentages, what does that look like in terms of raw numbers. Can you give us a broad estimate?

Jan: Very broad. But about 1% of the employees for the Federal government. We are talking thousands of people.

Bret: Wow! So that sounds like a great opportunity.

Jan: Definitely.

Bret: Alright thanks. And that concludes part two of Working with Disabilities. We've added supporting links and information, just be sure to click on the podcast link. Also, keep in mind that there are going to be several podcasts coming in the next month, so be sure to check the web sites for any updates. Also, look out for any class e-mail we send out regarding our podcast through NVTI. Thank you for your time and thanks for listening.

