

What is Job Coaching?: A Toolkit to Support Access to Employment

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There are many pathways to working, including employment, volunteering and business development. We view Job Coaching as identifying, celebrating and building upon strengths and vocation-related interests of individuals with autism and/or intellectual disability in terms of employment. Job coaching involves integrating specific employment supports/strategies that are attuned to the individual with autism and/or intellectual disability in addition to other life skills, social communication, fine motor and/or sensory supports, and strategies that will ultimately enhance the work environment for the individual with autism and/or intellectual disability.

The aim of this Toolkit is to offer skills and ideas for Job Coach development, based on multiple sources. Examples of resources that have been drawn on and may be helpful are included in Appendix A. This Toolkit is for:

- Those considering a Job Coach to provide support
- Those who are, or want to become, a Job Coach, and
- Those who just want to better understand the potential role and benefits of a Job Coach.

The Toolkit emphasizes the importance of adult-based learning and person-centeredness. It is organized by the following sections:

Section 1: What is a Job Coach?

Section 2: Roles of a Job Coach

Part A: Establishing a Relationship with the Job Seeker or the Employee

- Preferences and Strengths
- Internal and External Influences
- Goal Setting and Self-Determination

Part B: Preparatory Work with the Job Seeker

Part C: On-site Supports with the Employee and the Employer

- Employee Supports
- Employer Supports

Section 3: Steps for Moving Forward

There is also a separate link that describes employment support programs in Canada that already exist.

Meet Derek...

Derek was recently hired as a Job Coach to work one-on-one with two different individuals: Janine and Miguel. Janine is a highly-verbal 20-year-old autistic woman who has struggled with maintaining employment in the past. Miguel is a minimally-verbal 17-year-old with intellectual disability who is trying to enter the workforce for the first time. Derek is nervous about his new role as he does not have much experience.

Section 1: What is a Job Coach?

A Job Coach implements strategies and techniques to help a person with a disability, subsequently referred to as a Job Seeker or Employee, find and retain employment. The Job Coach can help with identifying strengths and grappling with challenges related to employment. The Job Coach can provide both preparatory and on-site training to the Job Seeker/Employee, with the aim of meaningful employment and career development. We recognize that there are diverse forms and functions of Job Coaching or employment support. However, this role inherently needs to be supportive of the Job Seeker/Employee in their quest for meaningful employment. The Job Coach sees the goal of employment as attainable and seeks a positive experience for the Job Seeker/Employee in addition to the Employer and Co-workers.

Important qualities of a Job Coach include being respectful, empathetic, caring, attentive, trustworthy, sincere, and adaptive. They listen and adapt to what the Job Seeker needs in the context of their life and quest for employment. Persistence, creativity, and optimism are valuable Job Coach qualities that will facilitate the Job Seeker's quest for employment. Equally important attributes are professionalism, a team orientation and being network-savvy (Tilson & Simonsen, 2013; Whitley et al., 2010). A Job Coach must earn the trust of those with whom they work, respecting others' perspectives whilst being a champion for community and cultural diversity and engagement.

Section 2: Roles of a Job Coach

The role of the Job Coach will vary based on where the individual is on their employment journey. However, the roles of the Job Coach include: (1) *preparatory work* with the Job Seeker and potential Employers, and (2) *on-site support* with the now Employee and Employer. But importantly, the first task of the Job Coach is to establish a relationship with the individual.

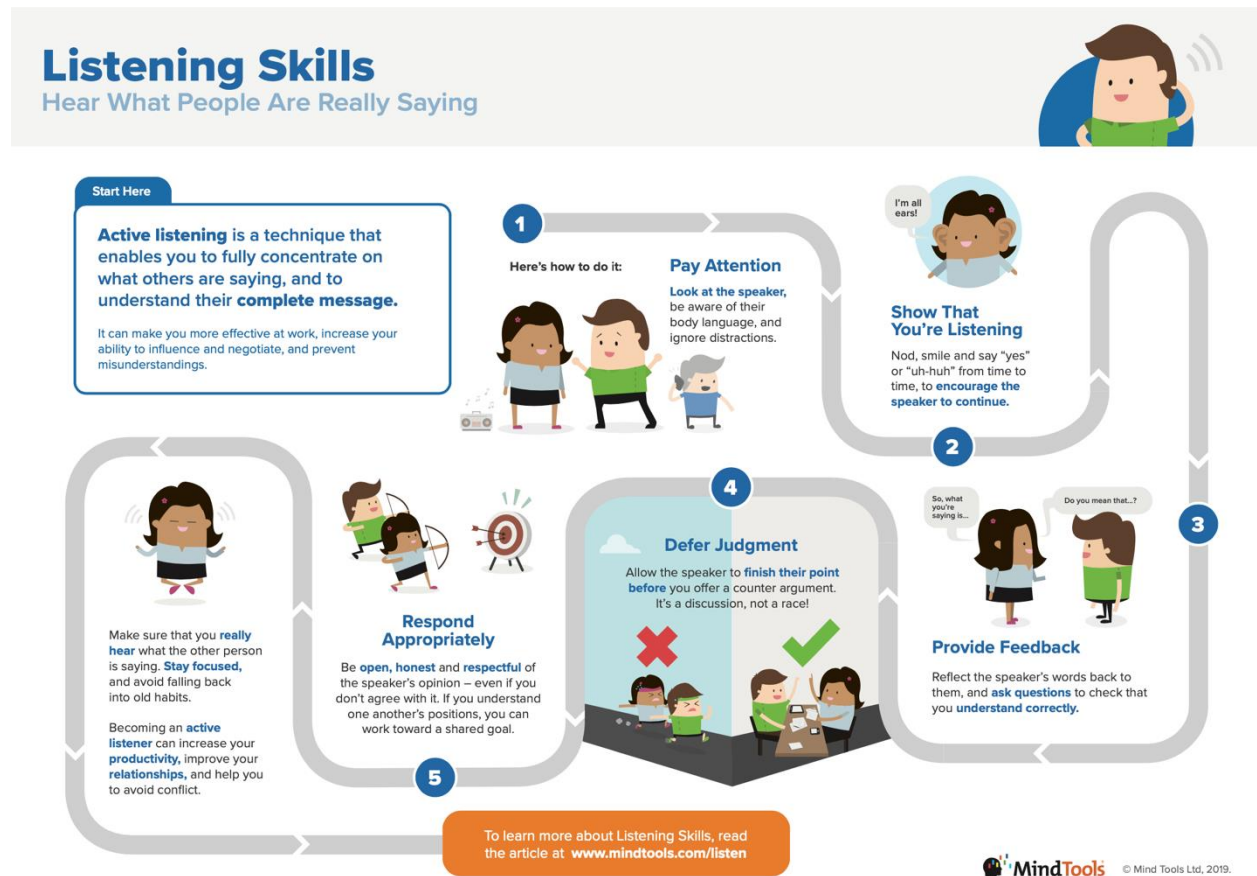
Section 2: Part A: Establishing a Relationship

Derek started the process of Job Coaching by spending time and getting to know Janine and Miguel to find out about their interests. Janine was very comfortable talking about how she

likes to spend her time and describing her preferences for employment. She enjoys working on computers in a quiet office setting. Derek noted Janine’s preference for spaces that were clutter-free and that during their interactions she would disengage if he talked for lengthy periods. Miguel tends to respond “yes” to most questions or just repeats the last option given when asked to make a choice (e.g. echolalia). Derek asks Miguel’s family to describe what he chooses to do in his free time and how he communicates his preferences. He also asks for suggestions for ways to effectively connect with Miguel and build rapport. Miguel’s parents indicate that he learns best when someone shows him what to do and when he has the opportunity to manipulate things with his hands.

The Job Coach begins to establish a relationship and learn about the Job Seeker’s or Employee’s preferences and strengths by actively listening (Figure 1) and observing.

Figure 1: Mind Tools Active Listening (Mind Tools, 2019)



The Job Coach’s regard for what’s important, enjoyable and motivating to the individual, and a focus on the individual’s strengths, convey a genuine interest in the person. This information is not only valuable when exploring employment interests and opportunities. It can also help to increase the individual’s **confidence**.

Confidence: A Job Coach understands that many individuals with autism and/or intellectual disability don't feel confident about employment. The work environment or certain situations like the lunch room may generate angst as these are unfamiliar environments or situations. Perfectionistic qualities and the fear of making a mistake or previous experiences being bullied may also negatively influence a person's confidence about obtaining and sustaining employment.

The Job Coach builds confidence in the Job Seeker or Employee by:

- focusing on the individual's strengths and abilities,
- providing positive feedback about the individual's efforts and abilities,
- sharing personal experiences (e.g., learning from mistakes, feeling anxious in new or unfamiliar situations),
- preparing the individual for success by providing opportunities to prepare and practice, and
- encouraging the individual to reflect on their experiences. Reflection helps the individual gain insights into their thoughts and feelings, and provides opportunities for the Job Coach and individual to align observations with self-reflection.

The Job Coach also needs an in-depth understanding of internal and external influences on the Job Seeker or Employee.

1. How is the Job Seeker/Employee influenced by every day sensory experiences such as sound, temperature, space, visual stimuli, smells, movement needs, and need for space?
2. What is the individual's communication style? Are they talkative or do they use very few words? Do they understand verbal directions, body language and intonation? Do they ask for help if they require assistance? Respectful communication that creates constructive conversational opportunities establishes a connection between the Job Seeker/Employee and the Job Coach. Adjustments in the Job Coach's communicative style are dependent on the individual's communicative abilities. For instance, a Job Coach may use closed-ended questions (e.g., questions that invite a response of "Yes" or "No") if the Job Seeker/Employee has challenges with abstract communication. However, if the Job Seeker/Employee is able to explore more abstract ideas, the Job Coach will use more open-ended questions.
3. How well does the individual comprehend the information being conveyed? The ability to understand is important to an individual's verbal output. Yet, verbal output does not necessarily equate to comprehension. Some Job Seekers/Employees may struggle with the rapid comprehension required for spoken communication. The fleeting nature of verbal language once spoken words disappear, can be especially problematic when the information is complex or lengthy. To support understanding, a Job Coach should keep

language simple and concrete, provide written instructions or visuals whenever possible, allow participants time to process, always provide a model or an example, and confirm that individuals have understood by having them reiterate the message.

4. What is the Job Seeker/Employee's learning and work style? Some may benefit from reading, listening, engaging and/or watching examples (e.g., film/video). Others may prefer talking and discussion, while still others benefit from seeing demonstrable examples and/or "doing". Learning styles beyond visual, auditory and physical / kinaesthetic (Figure 2) may also better describe the learning style of the individual. The Job Coach can inquire about the times that the Job Seeking/Employee effectively acquired new skills, and determine which of the following learning styles resulted in that success.

Figure 2: Learning Styles



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5. Does the Job Seeking/Employee thrive when activities are predictable and routine or is the individual more engaged when there is variety and change? Equally important is the need to understand current routines, the significance of these routines, and what happens when these routines are disrupted.

6. How does the Job Seeker/Employee engage with others socially? Do they seek out social activity or tend to avoid social situations? How do interactions differ among those who are familiar compared to those who are unfamiliar? The *do2learn* website has a free Social Skills Assessment (Figure 3) that can be used to help determine the individual's social engagement preferences. See <https://do2learn.com/JobTIPS/DeterminingInterests/WhatsYourScene/Overview.html>.

Figure 3: do2learn Social Skills Assessment (do2learn, n.d.)



Part I - Self Assessment
(page 2)

	Questions:	Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1.	When someone asks me a question, I answer them.	A	B	C
2.	I can start a new conversation with someone (i.e. "Hey, did you see that lightning storm last night?").	A	B	C
3.	I join in on conversations with other people.	A	B	C
4.	I change conversation topics appropriately (i.e. "Speaking of Atlanta, did you hear that U2 is performing there in June?").	A	B	C
5.	I speak clearly so others can understand what I am saying.	A	B	C
6.	When I am talking to someone, I use appropriate body language (i.e. turn body in their direction, look at them, smile, etc...).	A	B	C
7.	I am able to stay out of other people's personal space (i.e. keep an arm's length distance).	A	B	C
8.	When someone is talking to me, I show them that I am listening by looking towards them and nodding my head.	A	B	C
9.	I use greetings ("Hi, how are you?").	A	B	C

We suggest exploring with the individual and those who know the individual well how the environment influences the individual and how the person best learns, communicates, and engages with others. The Job Coach considers all of these factors in relation to employment fit and success for the Job Seeker/Employee.

Derek learned more about both Janine and Miguel over several weeks. Janine had some experience with computer programming and had previously worked as an administrative assistant. She said that she enjoyed working indoors and away from loud noises, but felt overwhelmed in her administrative duties because there were too many requests coming from different people at once. Miguel started feeling more comfortable around Derek and he noticed that Miguel would communicate his happiness by jumping up and down. He also

found that Miguel would walk away if he wasn't interested in doing something. It was further noted that Miguel was particularly engaged with soap and bubbles as a focus of interest, and he would enthusiastically reach for and enjoy them when given the option.

Knowing a Job Seeker/Employee's aims and learning needs fosters the relationship with that youth or adult. The Job Coach can explore goals and aspirations in relation to employment with the Job Seeker/Employee. In doing this, the Job Coach reinforces the individual's **self-determination** by considering and supporting what the individual wants to learn and how they best learn.

Self-determination: The Job Coach supports the individual as they evaluate options, makes a choice, and takes responsibility for that choice.

Depending on where the Job Seeker/Employee is on their employment journey, goals may focus on activities related to preparing for work (e.g., conducting a job search, completing job applications, or preparing responses to interview questions). They may be related to employment (e.g., driving or taking public transportation to work or establishing a morning routine to arrive at work prepared and on time), or perhaps may be directly focused on tasks in the workplace (e.g., completing work requirements, implementing strategies in the lunch room, remaining calm when engaging with a customer). The Job Coach works with the Job Seeker/Employee by integrating what the individual wants to learn into goals that are *SMART* (Figure 4).

Figure 4: SMART Components



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Documenting the goals and reflecting on the progress towards achieving these goals provide tangible evidence for the Job Seeker/Employee. Generally, we are all encouraged by progress

and it motivates further steps forward. Table 1 provides a sample of a Goal Reflection form and a template is available in Appendix B.

Table 1: Sample Goal Reflection Accomplishment Form

Date:	Feb 4, 2021	What is my goal?:	To identify my strengths and find three job postings that would be a good fit.
I hope to accomplish this goal by:	Steps that help me achieve my goal:	My attitude, computer skills, but I don't have a degree. I may need to get training or experience.	
Feb 10, 2021	Strategies to help me achieve my goal:	Talk with others and use resources to help me identify my strengths and ways to get a job. Visit a work support site with a friend or parent to assist me in looking for jobs that match my interests.	
Monitoring Progress:			
Date:	Actions or steps I am taking to achieve my goal:		
Feb 5, 2021	I went to https://do2learn.com/ and talked through the questions with my mom and dad to help me identify my interests and strengths. I discovered that I have a few other things that I am good at besides the computer. I really like motors – taking things apart and putting them together.		
Feb 7, 2021	Explored character strengths – I spent some time on the ALIS website (https://alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite/) with my Job Coach identifying what I am good at. I did the Skills Sampler checklist.		
Feb 10, 2021	Still working with my Job Coach going through the booklet. I think it's a good idea to try and contact small appliance repair businesses. My uncle is really good at fixing stuff. I am going to talk to him.		
Date Goal Achieved:	What was achieved? How does it feel (what is my emotional response) in having achieved this goal?:		

Section 2: Part B: Preparation

Derek and Janine looked at job postings for entry-level programmers. Derek used this opportunity to learn more about the times that Janine felt satisfied versus overwhelmed at work. Janine shared that her hardest times at work usually came towards the end of the day when she was tired and usually had a headache from the florescent lights.

Miguel had never been employed before, but Derek wanted to see if he would enjoy doing useful activities that involve bubbles and soap, like washing dishes in a sink. Miguel knew how to load a dishwasher, but he had not hand-washed dishes before. While Miguel did enjoy the activity, he got so excited that he jumped and dropped the dishes a few times.

During this phase the Job Coach emphasizes the Job Seeker/Employee’s strengths and fosters the development of skills related to employment access and engagement. Tasks and activities that may be completed with the Job Seeker during this phase include:

- Identifying activities that the Job Seeker/Employee is good at and what they prefer
- Job characteristics and activities that are appealing and not appealing
- Researching potential employers
- Completing job application forms
- Developing a resume / portfolio
- Preparing for a job interview
- Guidance in relation to disclosure of autism or intellectual disability
- Employment preparation (public transportation or pursuing a driver’s license, personal/work schedule development, self-care routine)

The Job Coach is committed to supporting the Job Seeker as the individual ultimately determines job fit, exerting choice over pursuing or declining a specific job or service. Table 2 illustrates how an individual’s preferences and preferred activities align with employment sites.

Table 2: Preferences, Preferred Activities and Employment (adapted from Virginia Department of Education, 2010).

Preference	Preferred Activities	Employment Fit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being outdoors ○ Moving heavy things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gardening ○ Lifting weights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Garden Centre ○ Landscape company
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Water ○ Smells 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Swimming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pool ○ Outdoor Park or Nature Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Factual information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Museums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Museum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizing things ○ Pushing things ○ People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Library

During this phase, the Job Coach's knowledge about the Job Seeker's community is of paramount importance. The Job Coach should be developing or have community linkages and collaborative relationships with support organizations and businesses. The Job Coach should explore employment options and opportunities with relevant networks, in the aim of marketing the Job Seeker's skills and abilities. The Job Coach nurtures the relationship with a potential employer by explaining the benefits and opportunities of hiring a person with a disability (refer to Appendix C: *Ready, Willing and Able: Inclusive Hiring Works*), and assesses the employer's openness to hiring or job creation opportunities. The Job Coach can engage in dialogue with the employer about the workplace strengths and areas for potential development.

Section 3: Part C: On-Site Supports

After working together on how to best prepare for interviews, Janine is hired by a computer software company. She enjoys the work, but is still struggling with the florescent lights and feels overwhelmed when people drop by her office to make requests. Derek helps Janine practice asking for accommodations such as changing the lighting in her office, or requesting that inquiries be emailed instead of being made in person.

Miguel was able to find a job washing cars. Derek was able to help Miguel practice job tasks/steps, using the same sponges and towels utilized at the Car Wash. Derek also talked with Miguel's employer on how to best give him directions and to recognize that Miguel jumping up and down is a sign that he is happy. Once they had settled into their new jobs, Derek found that he was able to reduce the amount of time he spent directly supporting Janine and Miguel in their continued employment.

In the work environment, the Job Coach will support both the Employee and the Employer.

Employee Supports

It is important that Job Coaching is a positive experience for the Job Seeker/Employee. This means working on areas for optimal workplace engagement and doing so in positive ways that reinforce strengths and support the abilities of the individual. Positive communication that accentuates strengths and is engaging can be enormously important. Yet so too is identifying areas for development and potential shifts for better employment outcomes. But in this aim of being clear in communication, being kind and other-oriented is integral to effective Job Coaching.

Some learners may need the Job Coach to “concretize” areas of work tasks. That means breaking complex ideas or abstract notions into more concrete or easily understood ideas. For many, retaining and generalizing areas of skill development may require informal discussion as well as formal learning strategies such as documenting/writing which could take the form of a written list, video and/or visual images. This could be adapted for use on an electronic platform such as an app on one’s phone. For instance, an employee could be reminded on an app of a checklist of what is needed before leaving for work (e.g., hygiene, work clothes, transit schedules, work tasks, taking breaks, etc.). Both formal information and informal supports may be helpful, as needed, in ensuring that the individual has what they need to ensure their success on the job.

Employee supports may include encouraging the employee to recognize when they need to use self-monitoring strategies, apps or other technology (e.g., cell phones, tablets,) to support self-regulation or independence. Written materials (e.g., mini white board instructions, ‘to do’ lists, scripts or ‘power cards’) can also be used to encourage an individual to monitor their work and/or conduct in the workplace.

In the moment ‘prompts’ are an effective strategy that can be used to support the Job Seeker/Employee as they facilitate learning or initiate the use of a specific skill. A Job Coach will need to consider the task or activity to determine the type of prompt to use and also how to fade the use of the prompt.

Employer Supports

The goal of the Job Coach is to facilitate employment success for the Job Seeker/Employee, and seek wider inclusion in the workforce for people of all abilities and diversities. This requires the Job Coach to engage with the Employer and understand the work environment, having a clear understanding of the Employer’s expectations and needs. The Job Coach identifies and fosters **natural supports** to support the new Employee in the work environment. **Adaptations and accommodations** or a **customized job** may be required to facilitate the Employee’s success. The Job Coach works with the Employer to create a “win-win” for the Employer and the Employee.

Natural Supports: Connecting with coworkers or supervisors to assist the employee in learning about the work culture and work environment. For example, when are coffee breaks, what is the lunch room etiquette, what happens at the end of the shift?

Adaptations and Accommodations: Changes made to a job or the work environment that make the job easier for the employee. These are often no or low-cost solutions such as, de-

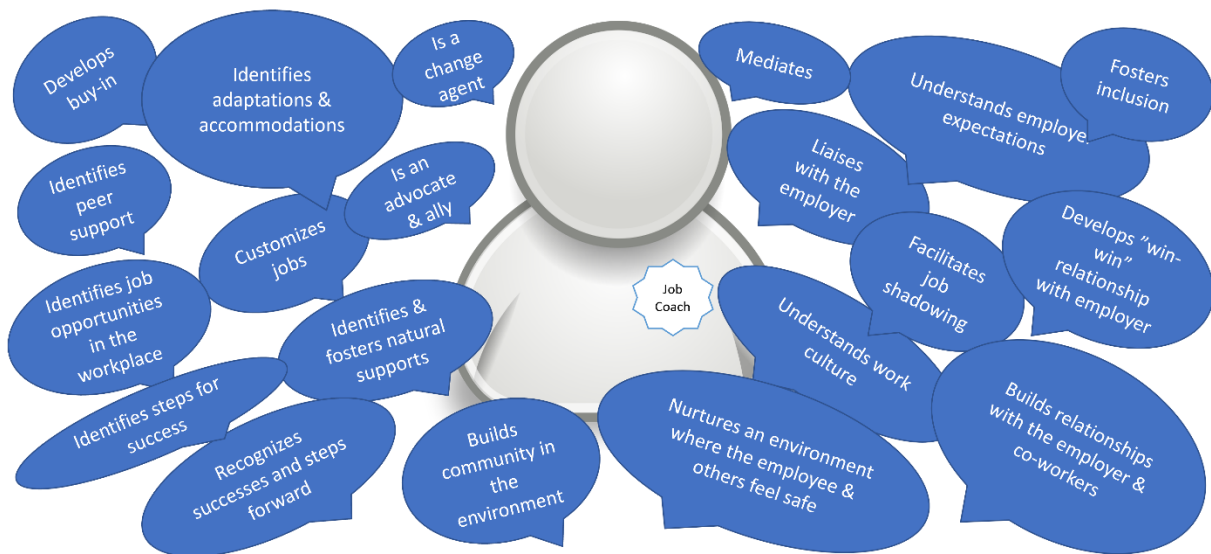
cluttering work environments, replacing fluorescent lights, using specialized software, utilizing visual scripts/schedules, modifying the work schedule, and providing the employee with brief breaks when their anxiety levels increase.

Customized Job: The creation of a new job that meets the needs of the employer and capitalizes on the strengths and abilities of the Job Seeker.

Figure 5 depicts Job Coaching roles (Nicholas, 2016) of supporting the Employee to become independent of the Job Coach's support. Although the Job Coach fades their engagement with the Employee and the Employer whenever possible, a commitment to providing ongoing support is encouraged. This can nurture extended workforce engagement and success.

Figure 5: The Job Coach and the Employer (Nicholas, 2016)

In the Work Environment The Job Coach:



Section 3: Steps for Moving Forward

The Job Coach has a diverse range of roles and has numerous skills to effectively support an individual and build workplace capacity. Some tips are offered by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (2017):

- Offer clearly stated goals
- Be specific in the messages you convey
- Focus on the concrete task in developing skills/actions

- Be sure to recognize good work and strengths
- Clarify if there is ambiguity or uncertainty.

Beyond support to the Job Seeker/Employee and the Employer, the Job Coach potentially engages with family members and others in the workplace, as appropriate. When working with these various stakeholders in the employment environment, the role can seem overwhelming. To manage the work, it seems important that the Job Coach breaks down priorities. As an example, incremental priorities could be:

1. Identifying who are the key people to support
2. Determining the strengths and needs of each individual
3. Identifying opportunities in this situation, including optimal jobs, natural supports, resources, contextual considerations, etc.
4. Identifying barriers to achieving workplace goals
5. Determining plans for mitigating barriers
6. Remaining positive and flexible
7. Integrating the plan, including training and capacity building
8. Recognizing that the more capacity that is integrated in the workplace system, the better
9. Appreciating the commitment and effort of those involved, as well as gains achieved.

Summary and Key Points

- Job Coaches offer a multi-faceted resource.
- Listening and assessing need are important.
- Deep respect for others must underpin this work.
- Job Coaching is much more than supporting individual skill building with the Job Seeker/Employee. It also entails advancing inclusive employment settings and communities.
- Targeting change efforts to an individual's need is important.
- Relationship-building skills are integral to the Job Coach.
- Evaluation is a means to continual service improvement.

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-010-0297-9>

Appendix A: Helpful Job Coaching Resources

- *A Guide for New Job Seekers for Youth and Newcomers to the Workplace* (Government of Alberta, 2007),
- *Employability Skills Toolkit for Employability Success* (The Conference Board of Canada, 2000),
- *Getting There: A Curriculum for People Moving into Employment* (Colette, Woliver, Bingham, & Merrifield, 1996),
- *Job Smart* (Government of Alberta Human Services, 2003),
- *Learn the Steps, Get Employed* (Uptimize & the Autistic Global Initiative),
- *Let's Talk* (Government of Alberta, 2007),
- *Life Skills Activities for Secondary Students with Special Needs* (Mannix, 2009),
- *Positive Works II* (Government of Alberta, 2004),
- *Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success* (United States Department of Labor, n.d.),
- *The Soft Skills Solutions Series of Booklets* (Cross & Lanaghan, 2015),
- *The Interview Skills Curriculum* (Morgan, Leatzow, Clark, & Stiller, 2014),
- *Workability* (Government of Alberta, 2007).

Appendix B: Goal Reflection Form

Date:		Goal:	
I hope to accomplish this goal by:		Making progress may be influenced by these challenges or barriers:	
		Strategies to use to help me achieve my goal:	
Monitoring My Progress:			
Date:	Actions or steps I am taking to achieve my goal:		
Date Goal Achieved:	How I feel having achieved my goal:		

READY **PRÊTS**
WILLING **DISPONIBLES**
& ABLE **& CAPABLES**

INCLUSIVE HIRING WORKS

THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF HIRING PEOPLE WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY OR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



Building an Inclusive Labour Force

The difference between success and failure lies in the talent and diverse skill set of your workforce. Across Canada, there are close to 500,000 working-aged adults with an intellectual disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This untapped workforce can help address current labour shortages while making your business stronger, more diverse and more productive.

Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) is a national initiative of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA) and their member organizations. Funded by the Government of Canada and active in each province and territory across the country, RWA supports Canadian businesses to build an inclusive workplace that capitalizes on the skills and qualifications of people with an intellectual disability or ASD.

There is rapidly increasing pressure on businesses both large and small to be on the cutting edge of innovative practices, processes, and products. A business that can build and retain a diverse team where employees are engaged and invested, and where their skills and interests align with their roles, is much more likely to be successful.

As a national strategy to create inclusive and effective labour markets, RWA provides:

- Insights on the business benefits of inclusive hiring and the return on investment experienced by Canadian businesses who hire people with an intellectual disability or ASD
- Access to research and best practices for leveraging the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce
- Disability awareness training
- An individualized approach to developing and implementing inclusive recruitment and selection strategies
- Coordinated access to a broad talent pool of persons with an intellectual disability or ASD
- Direct connections to local employment agencies who provide on-the-job supports and accommodations to candidates and new employees with an intellectual disability or ASD