

ENHANCING NATURAL SUPPORTS THROUGH JOB CARVING

By Cary Griffin, Dave Hammis & Tammara Geary

Excerpted from: Griffin, C.C., Hammis, D. & Geary, T. (2007). The Job Developer's Handbook: Practical Tactics for Customized Employment. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

Job carving is a natural component of Customized Employment (CE) because it provides a clear path to accommodating an individual's ideal conditions of employment. One design consideration in carving is the identification and facilitation of natural supports, to speed the safe emancipation of the consumer to the workforce, augment workplace relationships, and to ultimately cut rehabilitative costs. Key to creating opportunities rich in natural support is identifying intersecting work tasks during the job analysis and initial training phase of placement.

Intersecting Work Tasks

Many years of observing worksites reveals that the closer in proximity people work, generally, the more they come to know and understand each other. Fostering co-worker inter-relation is especially critical for individuals with high support needs. Having friendships or respected roles at work helps increase job retention and improves acceptance (Nisbet & Hagner, 1990; Griffin & Sherron, 2006). Sociological studies of integration and neighborhood belonging illustrate that sharing physical space, over time, is one of the strongest predictors of social integration, therefore it follows that proximity at work is also an important consideration in job carving (Oldenburg, 1989).

When completing a job analysis, such as the Job Analysis Record (attached), noting intersecting opportunities is critical. The following example, modified here for confidentiality reasons, but true to the actual job design, illustrates what Patricia Rogan at Indiana University noted as early as 1990, as the crucial role of shared, or intersecting, tasks in lessening the impact and stigma of job coaching by relying instead on natural workplace assistance in performing routine operations (Rogan, 1990).

“David” was a young man with a label of Down syndrome. He was intent on becoming a welder, but even with instruction this vocation seemed out of reach in his rural surroundings. Complicating matters was the fact that the disability program serving David was over 70 miles away and could not afford to provide lengthy job coaching in the very small town where he lived with his mother. After some investigation, David agreed that just working in a welding shop would meet his career goals. An appointment at the local welding shop was secured and his employment specialist, Lisa, proceeded with a job analysis. She spent a total of 7 hours over 2 days listing the major duties of the 3 welders at the shop, and made lists of tasks she thought the welders could relinquish to David, while improving their own performance. Lisa was careful not to give David the less desirable work, but instead analyzed the tasks and pulled duties into a new job description that involved joint or intersecting tasks with the welders. David might be cleaning a work area for a welder, but he was there during regular work hours, doing work important to the business, alongside his co-workers.

As Lisa observed, she noted that the welders often stopped their projects and cleaned their surrounding area. This was because the waste they created was heavy and cumbersome steel that, if left unattended, was bothersome, impeded their work, and created a tripping hazard. She also

noted that the big recycling cans were carried out back to the dumpster on a regular basis by two welders. She also noted that supply deliveries, changing acetylene tanks, project set-ups and tear-downs, et al., often required two people working together, largely because most items in a welding shop are heavy.

Obviously, well-paid welders doing lifting and cleaning tasks is a wasteful practice. By “carving in” David’s talents and creating a Welder Assistant position, the welders could maintain attention on their projects, and David would become a vital member of the team, assisting with joint tasks throughout the day. The job was developed to solve the production problems at the shop, create a job that David enjoyed, and eliminate the need for job coaching since co-worker support was already the norm throughout the day (Griffin & Sherron, 2006).

Ideal Conditions of Employment

“Jennifer’s” job carve presents another set of considerations. Jennifer’s vocational profile, following Discovery, revealed that she:

Is of Transition Age

Is Friendly

Has a Strong Work Ethic

Resists Supervision Vigorously

Orients well and rides the city bus independently after initial training & experience

Uses some sign language and minimal verbal language

Reads and writes a little

And is very “street” smart

Her ideal conditions of employment:

Work Alone

Work With Others

Pink Collar and/or Blue Collar Tasks

Inside Work

Outside Work

Where she works should have a Bowling Team

Wealthy People should be in the area

Jennifer presents a contradictory picture, at least had traditional testing and evaluation been used. The power of Discovery is again illustrated by accepting what the process reveals. In this case, Jennifer is as inconsistent as most people; she enjoys variety, likes being in control, and has a complex personality. As noted, she preferred working outside and inside; working alone and with others. Most of us do too, but traditional approaches to assessment seem to hold these truths as mutually exclusive. Proper job development demands respect for the complexity of lives.

Jennifer’s past was critical to further job development. As a special education student, she had several paid and non-paid work experiences and part-time jobs. She showed an interest in wealth and accepted a job doing clerical tasks, along with some light janitorial work, at a local branch

bank. Jennifer's resistance to supervision turned out to be more an issue of predictability and personal autonomy. As long as she knew her work schedule and no one singled her out to perform a last minute task, everything was fine. At the bank, an officer gave her a previously unassigned duty, and Jennifer refused, costing her that job.

At an insurance agency, she was doing well with filing and copying a few hours a day, but lost her job when she loudly protested being asked to make a pot of coffee.

Her ideal conditions of employment slowly became apparent. Jennifer relished working, but not taking orders she felt singled her out. Perhaps working in a team where everyone did the same jobs or in a setting where work orders were universally used might cushion her behavior. Working in a team-based setting also increases the interesting tasks, thereby lessening the role of a job coach, who again could be considered just another boss giving orders and prompting behavioral issues. It is important to note that people with disabilities are often labeled as being frustrated by change. First, that is a very human trait, and second, Jennifer did not mind change, she resisted change that seemed to, in her mind anyway, single her out and disrespect her previously assigned duties. Jennifer actually enjoyed, as do most people, a variety of work tasks and challenges.

Six months of prospecting finally lead to the development of a carved position at a city botanical park. Working with a program director there, a job was developed that involved Jennifer occasionally working in the main office assisting with bulk mailing of educational and theatrical events hosted at the gardens; becoming a member of the weeding teams that worked both inside

the greenhouses and outside in the gardens; helping in a team to set-up and break-down conference rooms where classes and special events regularly occurred; delivering mail, by herself, across the campus thus utilizing her great sense of direction and autonomy; and working in the gift shop, alongside the wealthy patron volunteers who supported the gardens financially, gave lectures about rare plants and their eco-tour adventures, and who took great civic pride in this establishment. Over time we learned that Jennifer's interest in wealthy people had an interesting logic about it. She reasoned, silently for a long time, that wealthy people travel, and if she had wealthy friends, perhaps they would invite her along sometime. Again, the power of Discovery is in accepting the information and not speculating about motivations; if the information is important, it will be revealed. Further, although the gardens did not have a bowling team, the money she earned allowed Jennifer the opportunity to bowl on a regular basis.

Corporate Culture

Any job analysis must consider the impacts of corporate culture on acceptance and accommodation of a new worker. In the rush to succeed at job carving, sometimes culture is not analyzed nearly enough. As a preventative illustration, Jack's story is presented here. Again, all these examples are disguised and modified to protect confidentiality.

Jack's vocational profile reveals a young man in his mid-thirties who experiences schizophrenia. He attends regular counseling and takes psychotropic medications that control many of his symptoms. He does, sometimes, still have auditory hallucinations and as a personal management strategy tends to seek solitude rather than display these occasional conversations. Coupled with

his seeming shyness, Jack can sometimes seem anti-social or aloof according to his support staff. Regardless, Jack loves to drive (often a solitary task), he is not mechanically inclined though he likes cars and would like to perhaps detail or wash them, he also has computer skills.

Jack has had several custodial jobs, but he does not enjoy that type of work. He is personally fastidious and does not like being dirty. Jack also has some background in computer use and enjoys surfing the internet and writing e-mail. Jack and his employment specialist are exploring the possibility of his working at a local car dealership, since it is near his home and offers several jobs that might be to his liking.

The employment specialist visits the dealership and discovers they have a “lot-boy” position open. Jack, however, is not interested in washing cars outside all day, though it is a solitary task; Jack insists this is too much like janitorial work. He re-emphasizes that he wants to drive or learn higher level skills.

The employment specialist returns and observes the dealership for several hours over a week’s time. He discovers through watching and asking the service manager, mechanics, and parts department manager that:

1. The specialized shop tools owned by the dealership are in disarray and not inventoried. He believes Jack could set up an efficient tool check-in system on the computer.
2. The parts manager is often assisting others when the mechanics need a tune-up or routine part. Rather than having the mechanics wait at the parts counter, shop policy allows them

to pull the part and enter the part number on the computerized work order. Unfortunately, the mechanics regularly forget to enter these data. When the bill is settled, the part number is assigned a price, but without the part number, the customer is not charged. The parts manager makes a point that he needs help to stop this loss of revenue and the irritation he feels at the forgetful mechanics.

3. Throughout the week, the service manager pulls mechanics off the line to run errands to a parts warehouse, to the local paint company to pick up autobody supplies, etc. While the mechanics see this as a reward, the employment specialist believes that well paid mechanics are performing a job that costs the dealership money in downtime and delays impacting customer satisfaction.

After discussing his observations with Jack, the employment specialist proposes a job carve to the dealership manager. The carved tasks include:

Detailing cars;

Managing the tool inventory;

Assisting the parts manager with entering part numbers on the computer;

Working in the body shop assisting with bodywork (learning a trade);

And taking over all the driving to retrieve parts, etc.

The pressure on the employment specialist to close Jack's case contributed to the job's ultimate failure. First, Jack is fastidious and working in the bodyshop does not suit him particularly well, although it would teach him a valuable trade; his hallucinations and shyness make him seem

aloof to the mechanics who he now seems to be “managing” by requesting they see him for parts and the specialty tools; and finally, by taking over the driving duties, Jack in essence has stripped the mechanics of their unofficial “break-time,” an informal reward doled out by the boss that relieves each of them from leaning over hot engines at least once or twice weekly. All these factors added up to Jack not being accepted in the culture and his quick departure from feeling that he was unwelcomed. A little more rigorous analysis and job matching could have saved Jack this embarrassment and failure. The culture of a workplace should be studied and honored; too much disruption to a work culture can have devastating impacts on job seekers (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Conclusion

Job carving is a tried and true approach to individualizing jobs. Critical throughout the process is a written analysis of the worksite and tasks; a thorough understanding of the individual’s skills, talents, abilities, and desires; and an engaging negotiation style that reveals common ground between the job seeker and the employer. Combining these elements fosters creative employment options.

Deal, T.E. & Kennedy, A.A. (1982). *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Griffin, C.C. & Sherron, P. (2006). Job carving and Customized Employment. In Paul Wehman (Ed.) Life Beyond the Classroom. 4th Edition. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

Nisbet, J. & Hagner, D. (1988). Natural supports in the workplace: A reexamination of supported employment. Journal of the Association for persons with severe handicaps, 13, 260–267.

Oldenburg, R. (1989). The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Hair Salons,

Bars, and other neighborhood hangouts at the heart of a community. NY: Marlowe & Company.

Rogan, P. (1990). Strategies for Facilitating Natural Supports in the Work Place. Presentation: Virginia Commonwealth University, National Symposium on Supported Employment.

**GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES
JOB ANALYSIS RECORD**

Instructions: This form is used to capture the major task steps of each job or project. The recorder should pay particular attention to how the tasks are typically performed, any accommodations, technology or specialized training strategies that should be employed with the new employee. The tasks sets are to be recorded as “projects” so that a discrete training format can be established for each.

Name of Worker:	Date initiated/Date Completed: / /
Company:	Contact Person/Supervisor:
Phone/E-mail:	Person complete JAR:
Proposed Job Title:	
Major Tasks or Projects:	
Proposed Work Hours/Days per Week:	
Anticipated Pay Rate/Benefits:	
Comments/Considerations:	

Culture of the Company
Record observations regarding the rites and rituals of the company: e.g. dress code, commonly used language and slang that may be helpful to understand, work hours, break times & lunch behavior, initiation rituals for new hires, social interactions, car pooling, et al.

Project One Description:
Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

Project Two Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

Project Three Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

Project Four Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

Notes and Recommendations for on-site trainer, resource ownership, universal/assistive technology, further job modification, etc.: