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Tools for Inclusion: Four Strategies to Find a Good Job: Advice from Job Seekers with Disabilities

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Tools for Inclusion

family and consumer series

Four Strategies to Find a Good Job: Advice from Job Seekers with Disabilities

By Jaimie Ciulla Timmons, Doris Hamner, & Jennifer Bose

Introduction

Finding a job is hard work. Even though there are a lot of agencies out there that can provide help, it can still be a difficult process. The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) talked to adults with disabilities who used a state or local agency to find a job. ICI asked these individuals about their experience using an agency. ICI also asked them to explain other things that were helpful while they searched for a job. These nineteen job seekers told ICI that the following strategies helped them to find jobs that they liked.

Four strategies

Strategy #1:

Explore new opportunities

Exploring new opportunities meant being open to new ideas, being flexible in the type of jobs they wanted, and thinking that each new job was an opportunity to learn something new. It also meant being flexible about the way that they looked for jobs.

Strategy #2:

Make sure services meet your needs

The job seekers in our study knew what help they wanted from an agency. This help could be either job listings, or contacts to employers, or some other kind of information. In addition, they made sure that they got that help in a way that was useful to them.

Strategy #3:

Use personal job search strategies

The job seekers in our study searched for jobs either on their own or with the help of their family and friends. They also used more than one agency to meet their job search needs.

Strategy #4:

Take control of your job search

Taking control meant helping themselves, and not only depending on help from agencies. It meant taking matters into their own hands, instead of thinking that someone else knew what kind of job they would like or should have. Taking control of their job search also meant being "the leader" as they searched for jobs.

Using these strategies:

- Helped them when they were frustrated or disappointed during the job search
- Helped them find jobs that they liked
- Added to the help they got from their agency
- Allowed them to focus on their own goals
- Made them feel more in charge

What does this mean for you?

Did you know that even though you may be getting help from an agency to find a job, there are additional things you can do? Just like the people ICI interviewed, you can use these four strategies as you look for your job. Hopefully, these ideas will help you find a job you like, in the same way they helped the people ICI interviewed.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AN "AGENCY"?

There are many different types of agencies that help people with disabilities find jobs. These include both **public** (government) and **private** organizations that provide direct employment support.

There are **public** government agencies specifically for people with disabilities. These include Departments of Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD), Mental Health (MH), or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Agencies or Commissions for the Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI). Other agencies provide employment-related services to a variety of people, including people with disabilities but also other individuals as well. An example is each state's TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) agency.

Private agencies are also called community rehabilitation providers, supported employment agencies, and private providers. Sometimes private agencies get funds to help people find jobs.

In addition, there are **One-Stop Career Centers** that are not actually agencies but instead consist of a variety of agencies and programs delivering services at one location. One-Stops have basic services that are available to anyone, and other services you may be eligible for as well. One-Stops are operated by both government and private agencies.



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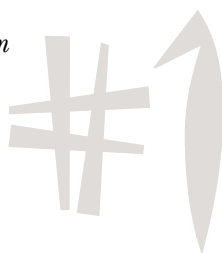
Strategy #1: Explore New Opportunities

There are many ways to explore new ideas as you look for a job. You may need to be a little creative and think about things in a different way to get the job you want. Here is what we mean:

- ❶ **Try different job search strategies** and don't wait for a job to come to you. For example, you can:
 - Explore temporary work. Find a temporary agency that can help match you with the employers whose jobs you might like to explore. Fill out applications at these agencies and talk to their staff about what you are looking for. This work can also let you explore a job by working at it for a short time. If you take on temporary assignment, you can get a taste of what it is like to do a particular kind of work and use a particular skill.
- ❷ **Read the books** *What Color is Your Parachute* by Richard Nelson Bolles or the *Job Search Handbook for People with Disabilities* by Daniel Ryan. The first is a very practical manual for people who are job hunting or thinking about changing their careers. It offers very good strategies, techniques, and useful exercises. The second is specifically for people with disabilities.
- ❸ **Try volunteering.** If you are volunteering, you are working without pay to help an organization. Look for volunteer opportunities that have to do with your skills and interests. Spend time as a volunteer to see whether you are interested enough to find paid work doing something similar.
- ❹ **Learn about yourself.** Think about your interests and the things you do well (your skills). This way you can be as clear as possible about the job you want. Ask yourself:
 - What things do I know how to do?
 - What things do I like to do?
 - Where would I like to work?

You can also fill out a prepared self-assessment exercise in a book or on the Web. These assessments are lists of statements or questions that will uncover your skills and interests. Some websites to explore are:

- www.discoveryourpersonality.com
- www.self-directed-search.com
- www.review.com/career
- <http://online.onetcenter.org/>



- ❺ **Learn new skills.** Sometimes there are specific areas you might realize you need more skills in. You could:
 - Take an adult education class—in computers, business, or writing, for example
 - Enroll at your community college
 - Take a vocational/technical course
 - Set up an internship
- ❻ **Experiment with job shadowing.** Job shadowing means watching someone at work to see if you would enjoy doing his or her job. As you observe a person at work, notice whether you think that person's duties and responsibilities fit with the kind of work you would like to do.
- ❼ **Consider all the possibilities.** You may find something you have not done before, but that you may also really enjoy.
- ❽ **Keep actively searching.** Stay alert to types of jobs and places to work that look interesting to you. If you are unsatisfied in your current position, try looking for a job while you are still working.

Keisha's story

Keisha is a young woman with a physical disability who decided to get a new job. She called the Vocational Rehabilitation agency (VR) for help. While looking for a job, she decided it was important to take some computer classes to gain more skills. She discussed this with her counselor who was able to help. Together they found a training program where Keisha could learn computer, filing, and phone answering skills. VR also helped her with applications, reviewed her resume, and arranged for job interviews. In the meantime, while Keisha was receiving help from her agency, she decided to volunteer at places where she thought she might enjoy working. Keisha had several volunteer opportunities but it was the third one that offered great office experience. This volunteer opportunity eventually led to a job.

Keisha **explored new opportunities**. She:

- decided to learn a new skill. She participated in a training program that increased her computer and office skills. This made her ready for a greater variety of office work.
- kept her options open by volunteering. She was willing to try anything. In Keisha's case, this is how she got her permanent job!

Strategy #2: Make Sure Services Meet Your Needs

It is important to think about what you need and what your agency provides! Different agencies have different ways of helping. Some work one-on-one with you until you get a job. At others, you may look for a job more on your own. Either way, you have to make sure your agency is helpful to you.

First, figure out what you need from your agency. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I know what type of job I am looking for?
- Have I searched for a job before?
- Do I know how to search for a job?
- Do I know what kind of help I need in order to get that job?

Second, ask questions. Go to your agency with a list of questions to learn about the type of help the agency provides. For example, ask if they provide:

- Job training (in computers, business, or whatever you specifically need)
- Training about finding a job (for example, this may include training on resume writing, interviewing, or using the Web)
- A list of job openings
- Help defining your career goals
- Help looking for a job
- Support or help at the job once you get it
- Money to help with transportation, child care, or other things you may need in order to work

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

The goal of this type of interview is to learn about a type of job or a certain company, not to get a job. Informational interviews are an excellent way to explore different interests and jobs while making new contacts. They are also easier to arrange because you only want a little time to talk.

Nina's story

Nina, a woman with a psychiatric disability, enjoyed working in the human services field. She was returning to work after a short period of unemployment. Nina went to the One-Stop Career Center because she knew it had computers and fax machines and everything she would need to do a professional job search. Nina knew that any time she wanted to use a computer or send out a resume, she would have access to that at the One-Stop. Nina did not work with the staff that much because she already knew how to search for a job on her own. She didn't really use the agency's career counseling services, because she knew the type of job she wanted. In the end, Nina got a position in the human services field where she is able to directly work with clients.

Nina **made sure services met her needs**. She knew:

- exactly what type of job she wanted and how to search for a job.
- that in order to find her job, she needed access to job listings and the equipment necessary (such as computers and fax machines) to find a job. This is what Nina used the agency for.
- that she did not need help learning how to search for a job or career counseling support, so she did not waste time with those services. She made sure the services met her needs.

HOW TO GO ABOUT DOING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

You only want to do an informational interview with the actual people who are doing the work that interests you. You can start by getting the names of such workers from any personal or professional contacts that you already have. Once you have the names, call them and ask for a chance to talk to them for twenty minutes. You should make a list ahead of time of all the questions you want answers to. Some questions might be:

- How did you get into this line of work?
- How did you get into this particular job?
- What things do you like most about this job?
- What things do you like least about this job?
- Who else, doing this type of work, would you recommend that I talk to?

Strategy #3: Use Personal Job Search Strategies

It is okay to look for a job on your own while you are getting help from an agency. It can keep you busy and help you to find the best job.

For example, you can:

- ➔ **Get help from family members and friends.** Family members and friends are helpful because they know you well. In addition, their job leads create new options for you that you might not hear about from your agency. Getting help from family members or friends can often lead to better jobs for you too!

Tell family members and friends about:

- Your skills and interests
- Jobs you might like to do
- Places you would like to work

Ask family and friends if:

- They have any ideas about what kind of work you would be good at
- They know of places that are hiring
- They can refer you to people or places that could help you in your search
- They can introduce you to anyone who works in the type of jobs you are interested in

- ➔ **Do your own research.** You can always search on your own while you get help from an agency. You can do your own research by:

- Walking around your neighborhood and asking about job information, collecting application forms, asking if anyone is hiring, or writing down information on places that look interesting
- Looking at the "Help Wanted" section of your newspaper
- Putting your resume, if you have one, on such websites as www.monster.com
- Going on informational interviews (*see boxes on page 3 for more on informational interviews*)

- ➔ **Use more than one agency.** Getting help from more than one agency is good because one agency may not have all the services you are looking for. The more you reach out to different agencies, the more help you will have in your job search. Using just one agency might even cause some roadblocks during your job search. For example, one agency:

- Might not have all the resources you need
- Might have a long waiting list for services while another may not

Remember, however, that the more agencies you use, the more confusing it can get. Dealing with numerous counselors and agencies can be overwhelming to some people. It takes responsibility on your part to keep organized. Some people may like this responsibility, and others may not.

Jorge's story

Jorge is a man who came to the U.S. with his wife and children. He has a visual disability, and began working with the state's Commission for the Blind. His counselor at the Commission for the Blind helped Jorge get all the adaptive equipment he needed to find and keep a job. Jorge knew, however, that this counselor, working alone, could not find him a good job as quickly as he needed one. He decided to look for jobs himself and follow any leads from other people he knew. He told all his family members, friends, and professional associates that he was looking for a job. His wife helped him with his job search by following up with job listings in the newspaper and on the Internet. It was his wife who found out about the One-Stop Career Center and told him to use it. When he went to the One-Stop, he discovered that it offered career counseling, workshops, and many different resources to look for jobs. Staff at the One-Stop helped him call companies, answer ads, prepare for interviews, and follow up with jobs. He also found out from his counselor at the Commission for the Blind that the two agencies could work together through a contract. He told each counselor about the steps he was taking to speed up his job search and kept track of the help he was getting from each agency. Jorge found an office job in the field of his choice.

Jorge used three **personal job search strategies**. He:

- did his own research. He searched through newspapers knowing that he could look for a job along with his counselors.
- got help from family and friends. He told all the people that he knew that he was looking for a job, increasing his chances of finding a job quicker.
- used more than one agency to help him find a job. He took advantage of the different resources that each agency had to offer (equipment and training from the Commission for the Blind and applying for jobs more directly through the One-Stop).

Strategy #4: Take Control of Your Job Search

Taking control of the job search means understanding that your success in finding a job is up to you! Avoid sitting back and waiting for someone else to do the work for you! Do your homework and you can find out more about the newest opportunities that are available. Even though other people can help you in reaching your goals, remember that ultimately they are your goals alone!

Here are five steps to take during the job search with an emphasis on making sure the plan is yours.

Step One:

Write a personal vision statement. This will help you determine what type of job you want, your goals, and the steps you need to take to get your dream job.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND WRITE A PERSONAL VISION STATEMENT!

- What are my **interests**?
- What are my **strengths**?
- What **skills** would I like to use at my job?
- **Where** would I like to be working in one year?
- What do I **dream of being** in the future?
- What **type of office** would I like to work in? (e.g., fast/slow paced, large/small)
- What **other things** about a job do I need to make me happy? (e.g., opportunity for advancement, medical benefits, access to public transportation)

Step Two:

Develop a plan for achieving your goals. Make decisions and choices about what you will need to find your job. Ask yourself:

In order to get my next job,

- what areas do I need training in?
- what do I need help with?

Step Three:

Ask for input and support from others. You can get support from people in your life or you can work with a professional such as a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor or a career counselor. Divide out tasks to those who are involved in helping you.

Step Four:

Control and direct the services you receive. You should decide what type of services you need. You should also decide where you want to receive services from. Tell your counselor what is important to you, but listen as the counselor gives you support, advice, or recommendations. Be open to listening to suggestions, but you should also make all choices and decisions.

Step Five:

Learn about job opportunities that are out there.

By using the personal job search strategies we offered earlier, you can learn important information to find the right job. Also, exploring new opportunities will assist you in discovering ideas, types of jobs, and types of strategies you may not have thought about before. All of this contributes to the control you will have over your job search.

If you don't take control of your job search, you run the risk of others making decisions for you. You sell yourself short by not learning the skills you need to find and keep a job. By taking control of your job search, the process becomes **yours**. In addition, it is more likely that the job you get will make you happy in the end!

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR COUNSELOR

Talk to your counselor about your goals and needs. Tell him/her if you need more or less attention. Tell him/her if you need a different type of help completely. Make sure that you are not doing the same work as your counselor. It is important that you and your counselor are communicating and working toward the same goal without doing the same work twice!

#4

WHERE THIS BRIEF CAME FROM

This brief is based on interviews with nineteen adults with disabilities. These people used different state or local agencies to help them find jobs, such as:

- One-Stop Career Centers
- Welfare offices
- Their state's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- Their state's Department of Mental Health (MH)
- Their state's Department of Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD)

The people who participated in this study had varying racial/ethnic backgrounds, ages, and educational backgrounds. They had a wide range of disabilities including physical, cognitive, learning, psychiatric, and sensory impairments. Some of the adults lived in suburban locations while others lived in cities.

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