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# Thought Sauce!

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## *Hot Ideas for Cool Employment*

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Foundational Readings in Customized Employment  
from Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC & The Center for Social Capital, Inc.



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**Discovering Personal Genius**

**Resource Ownership**

**The Vocational Themes**

**Lists of Twenty**

**Going Where the Career Makes Sense/GWTCMS**

**Going Where the Theme Makes Sense/GWTTMS**

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THE COMPETITIVE/CUSTOMIZED DICHOTOMY

Assessment	Discovering Personal Genius™
Train & Place	Place & Train
Chasing Smoke Stacks	Economic Development
Qualified Applicant	Quality Applicant
Labor Market	Job Creation
Help Wanted	Hiring 24/7
Career/Job Trends	GWTCMS/GWTTMSTM *
“Networking”	Leveraging Social & Economic Capital
Win/Lose –Positional	Win/Win – Interest-Based
Fitting In	Conditions of Employment – Ecological Validity
Scarcity	Unlimited Ways to Make a Living
Gratitude	Mutuality
Market Segments	Community
Entry-Level	Resource Ownership™
Comparative	Individualized
Job Descriptions	Vocational Themes™
Human Resources	Shared Interests
Job Search	Lists of Twenty™
Resume	Portfolio of Skills & Tasks
Smooth Talking	Smooth Listening™
Dependence	Adventure
Rules for Hiring	Improvisation
Big Business	Small Business
Retail	Artisanal
Supervision/Management	Mentoring
Online Applications	Informational Interviews
Business Degree	Business Ideas
Entrepreneurship	Self-Employment

\* Going where the Career Makes Sense/Going where the Theme Makes Sense

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## Customized Employment Plan Design Guide

Griffin-Hammis Associates

The information included here is based on our Customized Employment implementation model. CE is defined by the U.S. Dept. of Labor as: *a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both.* It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, skills, contributions, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development—one person at a time and one employer at a time. Self-Employment, job creation, and job carving are all facets of employment approaches used in CE.

Inherent to any sustainable support approach is proper employment match, meaning that assessment must anticipate proper ecological fitment. In other words, designing employment in terms of the “ideal conditions of employment” reduces the need to create, purchase, or significantly redesign work-related supports repeatedly. The process of Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) which GHA developed for individuals with significant disabilities is efficacious in design, enlists existing supports and supporters, leverages increased social capital, reduces spending on predictive and norm-referenced testing that has proven unreliable regarding employment for such individuals, and offers up numerous employment options, including business ownership, as meaningful self-determined means of going to work. DPG involves observation and exploration through active participation in various community, home, and work settings that match the individual’s career interests, support needs, family resources, and skills. Unlike traditional vocational assessments, no testing is used, although review of neurological evaluations and psychological factors are sometimes referenced to frame support strategies and to determine the best ecological work match.

The Stages of DPG include:

1. Home & Neighborhood Observation
2. Interviewing Others
3. Skills & Ecological Fit
4. Review

5. Vocational Themes
6. Descriptive Narrative
7. Career Development

These Stages rely on the following content steps:

1. **Gathering a team** of people. This includes the person assigned to do job development, and additional people who can help with the process. Some team members may only be involved in one or two steps. One person should act as team leader, ensuring that the process is thorough and well documented.
2. **Explain** customized employment, the DPG process, and the vocational profile (e.g. the Discovery Staging Record) to the individual, family and other significant support people. Be clear about what you will be doing and what is expected of them. Make certain the information you have about the employment seeker is current and complete.
3. **Schedule your first meeting** with the individual and family, if available and desired by the individual, at the person's home. If meeting at home is not an option or the employment seeker does not wish to meet there, find an alternative location.
4. **Tour the neighborhood** around the person's home observing surroundings, safety concerns, businesses, culture, transportation and services near the person's home. This step may be completed after step 5
5. **Meet with the individual** and family for 1 to 2 hours in their home. (Practice Smooth Listening!) Discuss:
  - a. Daily routines
  - b. Chores and other household responsibilities
  - c. Activities the individual enjoys and engages in
  - d. History of the family/individual, especially as it relates to employment

If the person is willing, have him/her show you his bedroom. Look at how it is organized, what's in it, and what it says about the person. Have him/her demonstrate how he performs chores, engages in activities etc.

Throughout the visit observe interactions, living context, interests and skills.  
*Ask yourself if any themes are beginning to suggest themselves and make note of them.*

Ask for names and contact information of people who know the person well.  
Ask permission to interview those individuals.

6. **Interview other people** who know the employment seeker well. This may include parents, siblings, teachers (if a student or recent student), neighbors, support providers. Ask especially about the individual's interests, support needs, successful support and instructional strategies, skills and performance in various activities. *Look again for themes in the person's life.*
7. From information gathered so far, **identify several activities** the employment seeker participates in successfully. Do those activities with the person and observe interest, performance, demonstrated skills, connections, etc.
8. **Identify activities outside the home** that are familiar to the person. Accompany the person to these places and activities and observe skills, relationships, supports etc.
9. Based on the individual's interests and the themes you have identified so far, **identify a couple unfamiliar places and activities** that may be in line with his interests. Go with him to these places and activities. Observe to gain additional information about support needs, reactions, attention to natural cues, interest etc. *Continue to identify specific skills and refine the themes.*
10. **Go to some places of employment** with the person related to the identified themes. Make an appointment with a manager and conduct an **informational interview**. In addition to conducting the interview, ask for a tour and observe the kinds of jobs people do at the business. Look for the jobs that are out of view and/or are unexpected. Look for clues about the culture of the work place and whether this person might fit. Do several of these interviews. *(Note that when using Info Interviews during DPG, it is made clear to the employer that no job is being sought, simply career planning information. During job development the focus of the interviews does change to acquiring employment).*
11. **Return to the individual's home** if needed, to collect any additional information needed, have informal conversation and make more observations.
12. **Review** files, memorabilia and records of past and current activities and services.
13. **Develop a list of places**, specifically 20 places of business where people do jobs related to each of the three themes identified for a total of 60.
14. **Review the notes** taken throughout DPG and add to them as needed to ensure they are thorough and descriptive.
15. **Complete the draft vocational profile** using the information gathered during DPG. Identify the person's ideal conditions for employment including skills, interests, culture, environmental considerations, preferred or required days and hours for work, supports needed, equipment or adaptations that may be needed and any other important considerations. Reference the three themes and the list of 60 jobs where interests, tasks, contributions, skills, and overall conditions match.
16. **Review** the draft vocational profile to the employment seeker, family, and others involved on the DPG team.
17. **Meet with the individual** and/or family and others as needed to discuss the profile, for comments and for approval. Develop a customized employment plan to be used for job development.
18. **Distribute final copies** of the DPG Staging Record, vocational profile, or other form of customized employment plan to everyone involved in the job development process.
19. **If needed, develop a representational portfolio** for the employment seeker using visual and narrative information developed during DPG. This may be a photo album with captions, PowerPoint, narrative description or

other medium that can be easily utilized by the individual to demonstrate his skills and interests to prospective employers.

20. Following the vocational profile/CE plan, **begin job development.**

Briefly, critical steps to Discovering Personal Genius:

Discovery stages the job development efforts to follow by answering some basic questions about the job seeker. The process typically begins where the individual lives, with listening sessions with friends and family where professionals should maintain silence except when prompting conversation. We recommend a simple: “tell me about your brother,” when doing the initial home-visit with a family, for instance. This discussion is not an interview or interrogation; there’s no checklist or script. The conversation goes where it needs to go and is not interrupted until all that needs to be said has been spoken. Generally there is time for follow up and clarification. Some rules for conducting Discovery include:

1. **Start with the person’s home and those he or she is closest to.**  
Explore the rooms of the home for clues about interests, skills and tasks performed. Explore past work interests and competency levels as well as the surrounding neighborhood for employment or work-experience opportunities, transportation resources, long-term supports, and places to learn new skills.
2. **Don’t simply go to places of interest; participate.** In other words, plan activities that demonstrate the skills and tasks the individual can perform, wants to learn, and has an interest in learning.
3. **Seek to establish at least three over-arching vocational themes in the individual’s life.** These are not job descriptions, such as “wants to refuel airplanes.” Instead, think more broadly; in this case think aviation. This leads to a richer series of activities in relevant environments. Someone interested in refueling airplanes may simply be grasping at the one job they’ve seen or that someone has told them they might be able to do. By exploring the broader field of aviation, using both Informational Interviews and short work-experiences, a world of possible tasks and environments is opened.
4. **Develop a solid profile statement capturing the essence of the person,** their predominant skills, and the three areas of vocational relevance.
5. **Make Discovery a project.** That is, manage it with a start and finish date. Customized Employment is not about getting a dream job. CE sees a job as the beginning of the rehabilitation process, not the end. Therefore, starting with a job that matches existing or quickly learned skills, in an environment that matches the individual’s profile is the target for now. We are finding that precise focus on an individual by a team should result in adequate Discovery that takes 20 to 60 hours over a 6-week period.



## Job Development

Searching for work begins as Discovery ends. Some rules for this economy that utilize the CE approach include:

1. **CE relies on negotiated job tasks that mutually benefit the employee and the employer.** By approaching specific employers who have task needs matching the job seeker's talents, a match is more easily determined.
2. **Understand that employers are always hiring.** They are hiring people who fit their company and who can generate their paychecks through profits.
3. **If filling out applications and going through interviews is anything more than a formality to make Human Resources happy, then it's not customized.** CE circumvents these traditional comparative processes that screen people with disabilities out. There is nothing inherently bad about these processes for people who can survive them; but many people with disabilities are immediately screened out. Again, CE is based on negotiation, not the traditional employment process.
4. **For each of the three vocational themes, construct a non-duplicative list of Twenty Places *where the career makes sense*.** In other words, list 20 specific, non-duplicative places of employment in the community, accessible to the person, where people with similar skills and interests work. There is nothing magical about the number 20, but 5 or 10 is just too easy, and creativity in employment, along with complexity, comes after the obvious employers are listed.
5. **Use Informational Interviews to gather advice for the individual's career plan.** By asking for advice, and a tour of the company, the tasks are revealed and if a match seems possible, job development can be introduced (otherwise, job development doesn't start until after Discovery is complete). Informational interviews should not be used as a bait and switch technique, but they often reveal needs employers have as well as opportunities for a business-within-a-business. Also, Resource Ownership possibilities can be determined through the informational interviewing process, wherein the individual brings specific tools or technology with them that make them more employable, in the same way a college grad brings their diploma or a mechanic brings their tools to a job.
6. **Stay away from retail.** In this economy, retail is tough. And, regardless, retail has been stripped of much of its complexity. Complexity in work tasks often means more stable work, an abundance of natural supports via co-workers and equipment or technology, and higher earnings potential.
7. **Seek out small businesses.** There are only 17,000 businesses in the United States with more than 500 employees. There are over 28 million small businesses, with an average of fewer than 4 employees, the majority of which have no Human Resources Department or even job descriptions. Fewer barriers to employment mean easier negotiations.

8. **People come together over shared interests.** Therefore, having an opportunity to meet with a small business manager or owner who shares the interests of the job seeker makes the negotiation easier. As noted of course, interests are not enough, there must also be the potential for learning the requisite skills of the job, but the presence of shared interests is the foundation of all human relationships.
  
9. **There are unlimited ways to make a living in the world;** therefore, thinking in terms of job descriptions and job openings is pointless. Most of us only knew the 5 or 6 job descriptions promoted by our Guidance Counselor: teacher, nurse, firefighter, police officer, and lawyer. For people with disabilities that list became: janitor, dishwasher, paper shredder, grocery bagger, and recycler. CE represents an unrestrained economic development approach to infinite job creation, restructuring, and small business ownership. Negotiate with employers while highlighting skills that match their customers' needs instead of looking for stereotypical openings.

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**THE THREE VOCATIONAL THEMES:  
*EXPLORING WHERE THE CAREER MAKES SENSE***

By Cary Griffin and Dave Hammis

**Introduction**

Customized Employment (CE) is a process that builds upon the foundation of Supported Employment. CE involves a functional, real-time assessment of an individual's skills and talents, based on the assumption that everyone is "work ready"; the development of best-match scenarios between work environment, supports, their interests, and work tasks; and, in the case of wage employment, a negotiation between the potential employee (and often a representative) and the employer. CE is a non-comparative approach to employment; therefore in most cases typical application and interview processes are afterthoughts, indulged only to meet any existing hiring protocols. Crucial to the CE process are vocational team members that understand the proper steps of Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) (assessment), interest-based negotiation, job analysis, systematic instruction, job carving, and job creation. CE represents an economic development approach to employment that eschews the vestiges of historic charity models (e.g. "Hire the Handicapped"), and labor market studies, while recognizing that wages are the residue of profits created through an individual's contribution to a company.

**Time, Money, Ideas**

Among the biggest barriers to good employment development is the paucity of information and ideas about what work actually occurs in a given community. The lack of connectedness disability agencies have to their towns or neighborhoods complicates this problem. Many other factors contribute to this distance and lack of knowledge. Foremost is the idea that time and money are in short supply. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Many people with significant disabilities spend 20 to 30 years in day programs waiting to "be ready" for employment that never comes. We need to be cognizant of just whose time we are considering. Furthermore, during that long tenure, Medicaid day-funding expenditures alone average somewhere between \$240,000 and \$360,000. This very conservative number doesn't include medical care (Medicare and Medicaid), case management, transportation, Social Security payments, the cost to families, or the impact that living in relative isolation and poverty has on people. Compared to employment development costs ranging between \$5000 and \$10,000 for typical community employment, neither time nor money seems to be the substantive issue.

**The Abundance of Small Business**

Another major issue is our understanding of community and business. Much of the employment data, practices, and policies surrounding disability systems are faulty; they are based on a big-business view of the world that does not exist. No one is suggesting that IBM, GM, GE, and other Fortune 1000 companies do not have a major impact on our

economy, but at the local, functional level, CE is best implemented in the ubiquitous small companies that populate the countryside and contribute over 85% of all new jobs. In fact, according to the Kaufman Foundation for Entrepreneurial Leadership, big business generated no new net jobs in the past 4 years. With over 20 million single owner-operator firms out of a total 37 million businesses in the United States, and only 17,000 of these businesses having more than 500 employees, small business is the place for job development. But why?

1. Because most small business is under-capitalized, which means they could use talent that helps them generate more revenue. Using a Resource Ownership (Griffin, Hammis, Geary, 2007) strategy that provides tools, skills, and technology that make an individual more productive, is easily funded through SSA Work Incentives or Vocational Rehabilitation for instance;
2. Because most small businesses do not have Human Resource managers or written job descriptions that have to be changed or circumvented as in larger companies;
3. Because in smaller companies it's much easier to reach the decision maker;
4. Because small business owners and managers gravitate towards job seekers with similar interests, whereas in bigger companies the HR manager, who likely does not have a shared interest with the job seeker, often stands between making this connection to the production floor. Hiring is personal in a small company. And, people with similar interests are more likely to mentor and coach one another. Artisans, after all, run most small companies, not MBAs. Artisans have and share skills that help employees grow competent, leading to better jobs in the future.

### **Vocational Themes**

The development of Vocational Themes evolved over the past decade of implementing Customized Employment in numerous sites across the U.S. and Canada (Griffin & Keeton, 2010). The process of identifying themes is a natural outcome of the Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) strategy. Too often in the past, job development hinged on rapid-fire discernment of an individual's interests, and then divining a few job ideas. Most of us only know of a few jobs, and we tend to think in job descriptions, instead of discerning the tasks and skills a person has or is likely to learn through structured teaching using systematic instruction. Because so few employment staff know how to teach complex tasks effectively, and how to engage the natural worksite trainer in the process, we job develop only to our own competence level and experience. This is why we have stereotypical jobs as the rule: grocery bagging, rolling silverware, janitorial; and microenterprises of equal blandness including the production of greeting cards and paper shredding. Now, there is nothing wrong with any of these employment options.

The critical question to ask is: Do these jobs lead to a better job through the development of skills and talents? Unfortunately, they often do not.

Because so many folks with serious disabilities only get one or two chances at community employment, the process we use to identify potential jobs must be rigorous. Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) is designed to generate no fewer than 3 overarching vocational themes. The themes are not job descriptions. They are large umbrella topics that represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills/task sets, and interests. Too often someone may have an interest in say flowers. The stereotypical job suggestion is likely to be: Work in a greenhouse or assisting at a florist shop. This is very limiting

for both the individual and the person charged with assisting in the career search.

By thinking through the theme a bit, supported by DPG evidence of current skills, tasks that can potentially be taught/learned, and interests, as well as work environments that make sense, a broader and richer palette of opportunity emerges. By slowing down the process just a bit; engaging a team for ideas; and exploring the community using informational interviews and work try-outs (Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007), creative options emerge.

So, someone who helps their parents grow flowers in the family garden demonstrates that they know how to water the flowers, how to prune back dead leaves, and how to hoe weeds. This might mean, although additional Discovery is warranted, that there is an Agricultural Theme. This is not a flower or a plant theme; that would be far too narrow. The same skills used in flower gardening are used across many types of agriculture (and within other themes too). The flower garden, after all, is likely the only place the opportunity to learn and perform these tasks has occurred. In fact, DPG challenges us consider that this might not be an interest of the person at all. Perhaps this is just one of the only activities accessible to the individual. Still, the skills they have (watering, weeding, trimming) are relevant in many work environments and should not be dismissed. The DPG process helps determine where both interests and skills lie. And often employment is secured during Discovery when the themes are just emerging. Just be aware that accepting any job that's offered or appears a match too early in the process can jeopardize lasting success.

If Agriculture is indeed determined to be a theme through various DPG activities (e.g. a positive work try-out on a weeding team at the Botanical Gardens; a brief experience trimming trees with the local Parks Dept.), then a List of Twenty is developed. These lists compile places "where the career makes sense;" local companies where people who also have agriculture-related skills and interests work. This provides a multitude of options for job development, or the creation of internships and apprenticeships. Developing the List of Twenty is difficult, especially in smaller towns. This difficulty mandates creativity and exploration of one's community, especially since the work options must be accessible to the individual and be non-redundant in nature. A general rule is no more than 2 similar businesses on a List of Twenty.

Certainly no one will come close to visiting all 60 businesses, either. Generally it's recommended to formally visit a couple from each List using informational interviews, or get insights into a few via connections to folks who work in these companies, or through leveraging the social and economic capital of an agency's staff, Board, or supply chain. If employment is not secured, certainly a deeper knowledge of which theme is strongest generally occurs and further focuses the job development effort. Typically, the Lists of Twenty grow through just a little exploration. Business owners refer job developers and employment seekers to others in their networks as well. The point is that the abundance of options yields more creative job development, when tied to advanced job creation and coaching skills.

A List of Twenty for the Agriculture Theme might include: the local feed mill or grain elevator, a ranch or dairy farm, the local Bureau of Land Management Soil Testing Laboratory, a neighborhood grocery store, an office-plant maintenance company, the airport where crop dusters operate, a natural vitamin supplement processor, etc. We will

need to know about the individual's environmental fit, their skills, and their interests to make the best match, but the Theme opens up the potential for a match beyond simply guessing at job descriptions. A quick study of Agriculture reveals links to possible exploration of careers relating to: animals, cooking and food production, decorating and design, et al. Since the best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas, developing the themes is a keystone task.

Because all people have complex lives and are adaptable to varied situations, it is recommended that at least 3 Vocational Themes be identified before moving into job development (or small business creation). Why three? First, because one theme is never enough to anchor job develop efforts and often represents the most obvious of ideas. Two themes still means there's only one hardy theme. Three seems to work well, and gives vocational teams the diversity and depth of thought to move beyond stereotypical employment.

Three themes also allows for mixing and matching. So, taking the agricultural theme and combining it with a mathematical theme replete with such skills as: being able to calculate a ball player's batting average; being able to add numbers on a desk calculator; being able to read digital and analog scales may yield some interesting businesses to explore. Any business engaged in agriculture deals with mathematics on some level. They are buying and selling, they are weighing, they are bagging, they are projecting, they are taking measured samples, they are selling by the dozen, the gross or the hundredweight, etc. The point is that until these companies are explored the actual existing or potentially created jobs are unknown. Perhaps there are opportunities at the local ketchup factory where trucks roll across the scales full, then empty to determine the value of the tomatoes they brought in; perhaps bagging and weighing seeds at the local plant nursery; measuring out how much fertilizer is mixed with water in a 500 gallon tank.

## **Conclusion**

There is far more commerce in even the tiniest of towns than any one person can know. By using the Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) approach, individual profiles that guide career design are articulated. The development of the Three Vocational Themes helps signal the culmination of the assessment milestone and the natural commencement of work development. The themes work to satisfy funders looking for solid measures of activity, and the Lists of Twenty provide a more robust and measureable job development plan than is typical. The process informs staff of the breadth of business activity in a community, and builds their data repository so essential to serving future employment seekers who need adventurous and engaging jobs as much as anyone.

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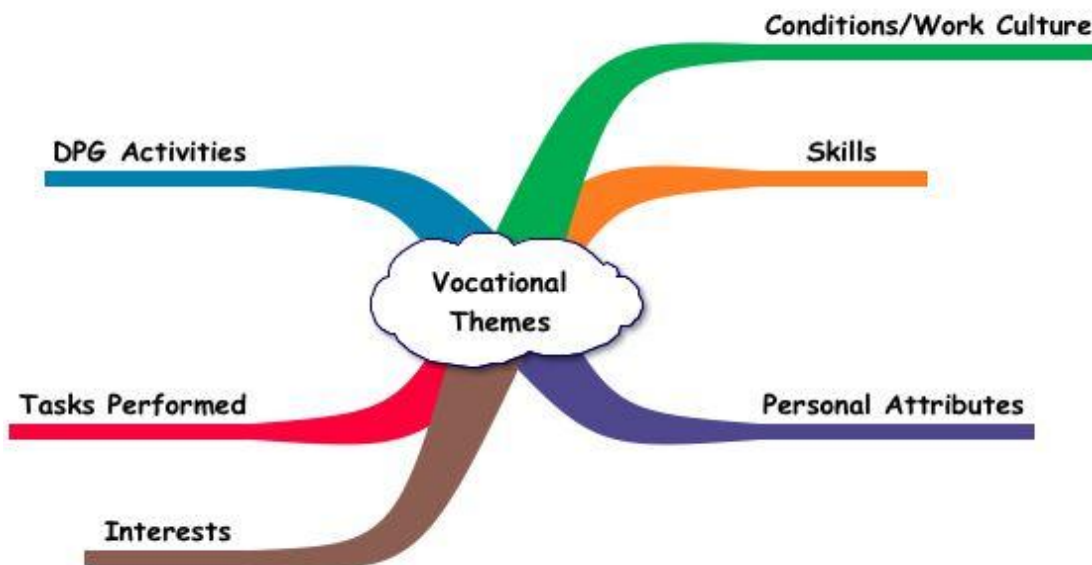
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# Developing Vocational Themes: Workbook

Cary Griffin & Dave Hammis

Griffin-Hammis Associates & The Center for Social Capital

Griffin-Hammis Associates:  
Elemental Flow Chart for Developing Vocational Themes



This workbook is a **discussion guide** for those designing and overseeing **Discovering Personal Genius (DPG)** activities in order to capture critical elements for review by the "Discovery Team," "Community Action Team," the individual themselves, or any and all folks involved in establishing the vocational plan. *Training in DPG is highly recommended before using this tool.* This workbook supplements the **Discovery Staging Record (DSR)** and is meant to foster team conversation through the gathering of non-speculative observational data during DPG activities. Discussing the basic elements here, including the individual DPG **Activities**, the **Tasks** the individual performs, their **Interests**, the **Skills** they exhibit and those that can be built upon, their personal **Attributes** and **Characteristics**, and the **Conditions** of employment and the **Work Cultures** providing the best, most natural fit, helps discern the overarching **Vocational Themes**. These themes lead us to developing the **Lists of Twenty** places in our community "where the theme and career make sense."

*This workbook is designed for taking notes before and during DPG team meetings; the workbook is not meant to be another report...use it to inform your conversation and actions.*

**To briefly Recap:** Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) is designed to generate no fewer than 3 overarching Vocational Themes. The themes are not job descriptions. They are large umbrella topics that represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills/task sets, and interests. Too often someone may have an interest in say, flowers. The stereotypical job suggestion is likely to be: Work in a greenhouse or assist at a florist shop. This is very limiting for both the individual and the person charged with managing the career search. By thinking through the theme a bit, supported by DPG evidence of current skills, tasks that can potentially be taught/learned, and interests, as well as work environments & cultures that make sense, a broader, richer palette of opportunity emerges. By slowing down the process just a bit; engaging a team for ideas; and exploring the community using informational interviews and work try-outs, creative options emerge. And while none of us will ever be well versed in the intricacies of even a miniscule number of companies in our communities, the good news is that skills and tasks often transcend industry sectors. Someone who can wash a dish can also wash a car part in a solvent tank. DPG gets us to look in myriad places where similar skills and ecological fitment are found.

So, someone who helps their parents grow flowers in the family garden demonstrates that they know how to water the flowers, how to prune back dead leaves, and how to hoe weeds. This might mean, although additional Discovery is warranted, that there is an Agricultural Theme. This is not a flower or a plant theme; that would be too narrow. The same skills used in flower gardening are used across many types of agriculture (and within other themes too). The flower garden, after all, is likely the only place the opportunity to learn and perform these tasks has occurred. In fact, DPG challenges us to consider that this might not be an interest of the person at all. Perhaps this is just one of the only activities accessible to the individual. Still, the skills they have (watering, weeding, trimming) are relevant in many work environments and should not be dismissed. The DPG process helps determine where both interests and skills lie.



If Agriculture is indeed determined to be a theme through various DPG activities (e.g. a positive work try-out on a weeding team at the Botanical Gardens; trimming trees with in the backyard), then a List of Twenty is developed for that one theme....

**Activities:** Briefly detail the DPG Activities observed to date. Discuss why they were chosen and what they revealed. What additional Activities are planned; What additional activities seem warranted?

Activity 1.

Activity 2.

Activity 3.

Activity 4.

Activity 5.

Add additional pages for more Activities...

**Tasks:** In each of the Activities listed above, please describe the Tasks the individual performed during each (Note that a Task is generally a series of actions that complete a process: Changing the spark plug in a lawn mower is a task). Discuss the quality of the work performed; teaching & support strategies; where (and *where else*) these tasks are likely to be valued; new tasks that might be useful to introduce/teach...

Task 1.

Task 2.

Task 3.

Task 4.

Task 5.

Add additional pages for more Tasks...

**Skills:** For the Tasks listed above, describe the discrete Skills exhibited during each (Note that a Skill is a learned/practiced action that contributes to the performance of a Task: Selecting the correct wrench; setting the gap of the spark plug are both discrete skills used when tuning up the lawn mower). Discuss the level of skill demonstrated; teaching & support strategies; where (and *where else*) these skills may be valued; new skills that might be useful to introduce/teach; and other skills the person has that are obvious or assumed even if not observed...

Skill 1.

Skill 2.

Skill 3.

Skill 4.

Skill 5.

Skill 6.

Skill 7.

Skill 8.

Skill 9.

Add additional pages for more Skills...

**Interests:** The dictionary defines an interest as *an activity that diverts or amuses or stimulates*. The steps of DPG are designed to illuminate interests and the resident skills and tasks involved. Interests are important because being engaged augments skill development, but interests alone are not enough to build a job on; skills, even emerging ones, should also be in evidence. One discovers their interests through repeated exposure with family, friends, educational opportunities, and through personal exploration. Often, for individuals with significant disabilities, choices are limited and what appear as interests are actually the choices of others. List the Interests revealed through DPG observations & conversations. When discussing, match Interests with skills and tasks to help clarify *where the career makes sense*. Note that Interests often tend to be more like job descriptions than overarching themes. For instance, an Interest in Flyfishing may lead to the theme of Water, or Nature, or Animals, or perhaps Problem-Solving....

Interest 1.

Evidence of Interest:

Interest 2.

Evidence of Interest:

Interest 3.

Evidence of Interest:

Interest 4.

Evidence of Interest:

Add additional pages for more Interests...

**Personal Attributes:** Describe the person in terms of personality or behavioral qualities they demonstrate. Be especially careful not to speculate; just report on what's been observed. Use these attributes as a guide to the type of environment most suitable/preferable for employment, and to determine what works and what doesn't work for the individual. Punctuality, style of dress, and sense of humor are common attributes. Note that attributes often inform the Conditions of Employment....

Attribute 1.

Attribute 2.

Attribute 3.

Attribute 4.

Attribute 5.

Attribute 6.

Attribute 7.

Attribute 8.

Attribute 9.



Add additional pages for more Attributes...

**Conditions of Employment/Work Cultures:** These are the considerations for good worksite fitment and include such elements as preferred work hours, performance of specific tasks and the use of particular skills, regularity and intensity of supervision, etc. In almost any workplace, substantial deviation from the cultural norm of expected traits and performance may inhibit acceptance and inclusion, so knowing the Conditions and Cultural preferences of the individual minimizes bad job match. Note that the discussion again returns to asking: *where might folks with similar conditions work; where might such conditions be negotiated; where might this work culture exist in our community?*

Condition 1.

Condition 2.

Condition 3.

Condition 4.

Work Culture Element 1.

Work Culture Element 2.

Work Culture Element 3.

Work Culture Element 4.

Add additional pages for more Conditions/Cultural Elements...

**Vocational Themes:** Based on the evidence collected and discussed so far, what are the solid themes; what are the emerging themes; what information do you need to solidify the list of Three Vocational Themes?

Solid Vocational Themes:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Emerging Vocational Themes:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What information and activities are needed to settle on the final list of Vocational Themes?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



### **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

Informational interviewing is a great way to develop work experience settings, build a job placement network, to discover new kinds of jobs, to introduce yourself and your services to employers, and to build the mental database that all of us rely on for employment ideas when beginning a job search with someone. Getting an appointment for an informational interview is usually much easier than setting up a job development meeting. A casual conversation with a prospective employer at the monthly Chamber of Commerce “Business After Hours” social or at a service club meeting (e.g. Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, et al.) can lead to a probe such as, “I’ve never seen your operation before, would you mind if I called you to set up a time for a tour and a bit of a chat?” Most folks love to talk about their business and since you are not pressing them, setting up a phone call is considered low-risk. Make sure to follow-up soon, before the conversation is forgotten, and to illustrate commitment.

Generally a request for fifteen to thirty minutes works well because it signals respect for the person’s time, and it indicates that you are busy as well. In our experience, fifteen minutes always becomes thirty to sixty minutes once the discussion and tour begins.

On-site, the job developer or employment specialist is seeking information about the company, its hiring practices, what opportunities exist to create or carve jobs, and getting insights into the company culture. The general format of an informational interview is:

1. Brief Discussion prompted by the employment specialist asking something to effect of: “Before we tour, can you tell me a bit about the history of the business, the products and services, and how the business is evolving?” And, “Tell me how you got into this line of work.” People want to know that you care, so give them a chance to talk about themselves.
2. Tour, with questions asked at appropriate times and of various people performing the many tasks along the way.
3. Wrap-up by thanking the person for their time, indicating that you may have someone interested in this field as a career or even possibly working there now or later. Make your exit and promise to stay in touch.

Throughout the process, opportunities to ask questions conversationally exist. Since this is not a job development visit, do not press someone for a job. That comes later in the relationship. For now, the tour is answering questions about the varying tasks and duties people perform, the values and culture of the company, and needs the business has that your organization or workers can address.

The tour provides an opportunity to witness, for instance, the level of natural support that may be available to someone with a disability. Keen observation reveals whether co-workers and supervisors help each other out during a typical day; it reveals who does the training and how an employment specialist might structure the initiation period so that the employer takes significant responsibility for supervision and training right from the start; it reveals what is valued on the

worksite, such as muscle, brains, humor, attendance, speed, quality or other worker traits. These are important considerations, of course, when designing a job match that minimizes on-site training and consultation.

The interviewing process, as well, reveals opportunities or red flags if the place of employment does not provide a good working environment. Some standard questions for an informational interview, again, asked in a conversational and not an interrogative tone, include:

1. Where do you find or recruit employees? (This is asked in case you now need to refer to Job Service if they do all the hiring searches for this particular employer; to identify your competition; and to create an opportunity to discuss the service you provide).
2. How are people trained in their jobs? (This gives information about natural training means and methods that can be sculpted into a job match and training plan, especially one that recognizes that in most cases business already trains its employees and that the support you offer is customizing their training, not replacing it).
3. What are the prerequisites for working here? (This points out the various qualifications, certifications, etc., that might be needed).
4. How or where do your employees gain the experience required to work here? (Another question that gets at qualifications and that seeks the advice of the “expert.” This also gives the job developer a list of other similar companies).
5. What personal characteristics do you look for in employees? (This gives insight into the kind of candidate the employer seeks; provides information on what to highlight in a resume or interview; and gives a glimpse inside the culture of the company regarding the most valued skills and attributes).
6. When employees leave, what other industries or businesses do they go to? (This starts getting at issues of staff turnover, which might be an indicator of a great place to work in the case where no one leaves, to an indication of poor management in the case where there is high turnover. It also provides the job developer with information on related industries and possible opportunities for someone interested in similar work).
7. What are the pay and benefit rates?
8. What are the work hours? Is there shift work? Does the company allow for flextime or other job accommodations? (This gives the employment specialist insight into the flexibility of management and the company’s policies on work hours and expected work effort).
9. What impact is technology having on the industry? (This is a common concern for most businesses today and provides an opportunity for the job developer using Resource Ownership strategies to propose a job for someone who can use or bring with them a piece of essential technology that can be purchased through a Social Security PASS Plan or through Vocational Rehabilitation).
10. What are the current forces for change in this industry? (This question often leads to a lively discussion of how the market is changing, how personnel preparation and training is evolving, and how the competitive market is adapting).

All these questions and their answers breed add-on questions and discussion points that provide opportunities to solve labor problems or to innovate in the face of emerging trends in hiring. Informational interviews are a low-tech, high-touch option that provides insight into the inner workings of business. Knowing what goes on in a given company gives the employment specialist or job developer an added advantage when creating employment or responding to an employer need.



**Plans for Achieving Self-Support:  
*There's No Greater Burden Than Potential***

By Dave Hammis, Cary Griffin, Roger Shelley, Russell Sickles,  
Corey Smith, Janet Steveley & Molly Sullivan

Less than one half of one percent of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries return to work and leave the public benefit rolls. Everywhere, rehabilitation and special education budgets are being pared. Families are stretched financially. But, there exists a powerful Social Security Administration (SSA) Work Incentive that provides cash relatively quickly to employment seekers (and *potentially* to those providing services) that sees very little use. The Plan for Achieving Self Support or PASS, is more vital and necessary than ever; it is promoted through training and websites (see: <http://www.vcu-ntc.org/> and <http://mntat.org/passplanswebcast/index.htm>); SSA has a team of nationally distributed PASS Specialists (see: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/passcadre.htm>); and there are local experts as well (see: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>). Yet today, fewer than one percent of those eligible for a PASS have one.

This is rather remarkable when PASS represents a huge untapped resource that puts money directly in the hands of people who need resources to find and keep employment through earned wages or business ownership. And, few rehabilitation agencies take advantage of assisting folks with their PASSes, with which employment seekers, in turn, could purchase services. Statistically, about 30% of people served in community rehabilitation programs have what are known as “perfect PASS” scenarios. That is, PASS *potential* that takes little massaging to get approved; just a solid career goal and a budget. The perfect PASSes occur when an individual receives both Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and SSDI.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) reported in 2010 that there were 2,697,963 Americans receiving both SSDI and SSI. The *potential* amount for PASSes represented is in the neighborhood of \$37,771,482,000. Let's just call it \$38 billion. Billion, with a B. All of it consumer-controlled money to go get a job, earn a college degree to enhance employability, to acquire specialized skills, to buy job development and coaching services, to cover transit costs, etc. \$38 billion. This is based on our current experience that the average PASS we develop is for 24 months at \$7,000 per year.

(Just an aside: there are roughly 5,000 community rehabilitation programs across the United States. On average, a CRP serves 100 individuals, 30 of whom are concurrent recipients and, *potentially* - there's that word again - this means \$2.1 billion - \$2,100,000,000 - in additional income from selling employment services to consumers nationally using PASS. Or, to bring it down to the local level, 30% of the average 100 people attending a CRP will be concurrent recipients. So, for each CRP, that's an additional \$420,000 available for employment)!

PASS is not something most people with significant disabilities ever hear about. Families certainly are not made aware. Most front-line employment staff in community rehabilitation programs have only a cursory understanding of PASS *potential*. And the \$38 billion is only counting concurrent recipients. People receiving just SSDI or just SSI can also qualify for PASSes with just a bit more effort.

A substantial myth also surrounds the complexity of developing and overseeing a PASS, when in fact, PASS plans are easy to comprehend and manage. The general lifespan stages of a PASS include:

Stage 1: Conceiving of a PASS	Risk: Very Low
Stage 2: Running the preliminary numbers	Risk: Very Low
Stage 3: Drafting the PASS on the SSA form, including the Career Goal, the budget and timeline of events, factoring in services to be purchased, etc.	Risk: Low (Investing some writing time)
Stage 4: Sending the PASS application to SSA	Risk: None.
Stage 5: SSA calls to review the PASS/Offer Edits	Risk: Very Low (Small time investment)
Stage 6. SSA approves the PASS	Risk: Very Low
Stage 7: SSA starts sending Employment Seeker a new SSI check or more SSI due to the PASS	Risk: Very Low
Stage 8: The PASS funds are spent & accounted for	Risk: Low (Assuming Plan is followed)

PASS is easily modified with SSA approval, and when mistakes are made, SSA has always been quite forgiving.

Here are just a few examples of recent PASSes we've assisted folks with.

**1. Steven**, a young man on the autism spectrum transitioning from high school, was on a track for referral to a local day activity center. In the last year of high school his family became aware of Customized Employment (CE) options and reached out for assistance for community employment. In partnership with state Vocational Rehabilitation, Steven's local high school, local adult service agency, family, friends, and family business and social relationships (local church, local business owners the family knew) we began working with Steven. Over a period of about 6 months Steven's family, and all involved and invited community members, supported the school transition staff, and also a local customized employment provider to engage in a variety of Discovery activities, home visits, and local informational interviews (For more information please visit: <http://mntat.org/informationalinterviewawebcast/index.htm>). Eventually the Discovery process revealed three vocational themes of construction/building, transportation, and agriculture. (For more information please visit:



[http://griffinhammis.typepad.com/florida\\_rural\\_routes\\_to\\_e/2011/08/discovering-personal-genius-vocational-themes.html](http://griffinhammis.typepad.com/florida_rural_routes_to_e/2011/08/discovering-personal-genius-vocational-themes.html))

From there a home-based business developed, and within six months moved into a local cabinet shop, as a business-within-a-business, where Steven builds and sells wishing wells (Construction/Building theme) for \$500 each, Bat Houses (Agriculture theme) for \$40 each, and karate boards/bricks packages (Construction theme) for \$30 each. His business started at home and then through the Lists of 20 (a component of the Griffin-Hammis job development strategy), he developed the business relationship with the local cabinet design and fabrication company, which had quite a bit of extra space.

Steven's CE provider also negotiated a wage job at a local large equipment rental company, where he uses a high-pressure washer to clean large construction equipment (Construction and Transportation themes). His co-workers are also teaching him the basics of backhoe operation, Stephen's core motivation!

The local Small Business Development Center assisted when the business idea was initially proposed and continues to provide technical assistance. Funding was amalgamated from multiple sources, including 6 months of final transition School Staff funding, Medicaid waiver self-directed community day services funding, State Vocational Rehabilitation CE services and business equipment funding, a local small community business development grant, plus a \$9,000 PASS was developed and approved for supporting business operating expenses, materials, supplies, web site development and ongoing internet access fees. PASS, by default, is mainly building operating capital in the business each month, and by the end of 18 months will have provided \$9,000 in operating capital, while simultaneously paying for business operating expenses.

**2. Antonio** worked for almost 20 years in a sheltered workshop. After leaving the workshop, his parents and sister connected with a local Customized Employment provider, asking "Can Antonio work?"

Antonio and his employment staff, using Discovery, spent time learning about Antonio's interests, abilities, tasks he performed, and needs by exploring his preferences and relationships in the local community. Among other insights a strong Organization theme was discovered: Antonio folded, put away, and hung his clothes—and also reorganized his room—twice nightly. Antonio's team eventually returned to the first location visited, a family entertainment business, using a family connection as an introduction.

Antonio and his staff observed and analyzed the work that occurred there, looking for duties and tasks that interested and "fit" him. Negotiations ensued with the business owner, focusing on ways that Antonio and the business could meet each other's needs. During these negotiations, the business owner shared his need for a ticket-counter machine that would save the business money. Ultimately, a job was created by reassigning duties that fit (token removal from arcade games, counting and organizing tokens to be sold to customers, set up for dinner buffets, removing tickets from a ticket-counter machine, light cleaning tasks, and other duties) and also utilizing Resource Ownership techniques (For more information please see:

<http://mntat.org/resourceownershipwebcast/index.html> and see: [The Job Developer's Handbook](#)) using a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS). The 2-year PASS purchased the ticket-counter

machine (\$14,000), paid for initial work support and training (\$4,000), and also paid for transportation to and from work (\$1,000).

Antonio has been working in his first competitive, community-based job since October 2008.

**3. Bill** was served by a local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office in a very economically depressed region of the state. Bill faced significant barriers to employment, due to autism and an intellectual disability. A year and a half earlier, he had been closed by the local vocational rehabilitation office as “unemployable.”

His new VR counselor took the lead in developing a customized employment team. Bill’s team identified a few overarching employment themes including the strongest ones: manufacturing and furniture. They began a series of informational interviews in related trades, including talking to a local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) counselor. Bill and the VR counselor returned to the SBDC counselor to continue exploring self-employment.

Bill and his team developed an employment goal: self-employment providing local furniture manufacturing facilities with production floor maintenance, mainly the abatement of sawdust. This service allows the companies to maintain a more productive and much safer workplace.

At the request of Bill and the VR counselor, a business/financial plan was outlined and written with the SBDC counselor, including funding through both VR and a PASS. An economic development program was approached during this process and additional funding was secured. The bottom line contributions to his company:

Economic Development Project: \$20,000 for mechanized floor cleaning machine

State Vocational Rehabilitation: \$2,500 for work clothes, safety equipment, shop vacuum, and job coaching

Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS): \$2,928 over 12 months for: insurance, cell phone, transportation, saw and tools, safety equipment.

Bill is operating his company, netting \$9.50 an hour and looking for more customers.

**4. Adam** showed strong interest and skills in working with plants (an Agricultural theme). But through informational interviews in several companies the team found that much of the watering and other tasks done at larger nurseries generally happen early in the morning. Due to the medication that Adam takes to control seizures, getting up early was difficult. This got the team thinking about self-employment as a possibility for Adam to reach his vocational goal without the rigid schedule required in many wage employment positions.

A PASS was written to help Adam start his own business, which focuses on growing and selling plants (various ground cover varieties) to local retail stores that sell plants. The PASS provided funds to purchase business consulting and accounting services, a green house, van modifications to accommodate his wheelchair, a business license, and marketing materials.

**5. Deborah’s** employment desires suggested a job that involved organizing (Organization theme), preferably in an office environment. In the process of job search, the Employment Specialist working with Deborah met with a local company that sold cell phone contracts, inquiring about the

work that was done there. The supervisor for the Customer Service Department explained the role of Customer Service representatives primarily involved selling cell phone packages over the telephone.

When asked what task didn't get done, or didn't get done to the supervisor's satisfaction, the supervisor immediately responded "filing"! She said that "filing" was a bad word in the customer service department and that employees sometimes paid their own children to do it. The employment specialist later learned that customer service representatives get paid commissions based on sales, and that sales don't occur when employees are filing.

An employment proposal was presented to the company outlining the benefits of hiring Deborah to organize their paperwork. The proposal outlined key benefits as improving efficiency, saving money, and improving morale among the customer service representatives. Deborah was hired for 20 hours a week, to begin, to organize and file the paperwork and used a PASS to cover many of the supports that made her job successful, including employment consultation, some modified office equipment, and on-going support provided by a co-worker to help her transition between tasks throughout the work day.

**6. Lucien** is a young man who recently graduated from high school and lives in a very rural county where wage jobs are hard to come by. He has an intellectual disability and also uses a wheel chair. He owns a support dog and requires some personal supports. When we began the Discovery process it became clear this job seeker had a lot of social capital. Over 300 people attended his graduation party and he is known throughout the town. His Ideal Conditions of Employment indicated that a home-based business might be a means of accommodating some of his personal needs, reduce his reliance on meager local transportation options, and provide economic opportunity in keeping with his skills and interests.

His team discovered that Lucien had real "people" skills, and sales experience from auctioning videos on Ebay. With some additional training Lucien gained additional computer skills. After doing some market research he gravitated towards becoming a Notary Public.

Lucien and his family drew on many of the 300 people attending his high school graduation party, seeking out potential customers for his new company. With the support of DD Council project grant funding a business plan was developed, along with a PASS. Vocational Rehabilitation and the community rehabilitation program are contributing business and job coaching. The PASS is covering a number of start up costs including licensing, marketing, signage, website development and office supplies.

**7. Charise**, a woman with a brain injury living in the Midwest, had spent several years at home. She had a strong desire to work, but she wasn't sure what she could do. She received a flyer in the mail about a self-employment workshop and decided to give it a try. At the workshop she got hooked up with a local employment provider who offered to help her do some Discovery and determine if wage or self-employment made more sense.

Over a period of about 3 months the employment provider engaged in a variety of Discovery activities with her, her family, and her friends including home visits and informational interviews with several local business owners. While several ideas were generated, there was one idea that

seemed to suit her best. The idea came from her friend who worked for the local police department. He had shared that he saw a need for a mobile key making business. After reviewing all the Discovery information, it became clear that the idea suited Charise's preferred working conditions.

Over the next 6 months, Charise and the employment provider conducted a feasibility study to determine if the business idea was viable, and to assure it would truly fit her needs. During that time Charise also applied with the state Vocational Rehabilitation agency. The feasibility study revealed there was indeed a need for a mobile locksmith business in the area and also confirmed the business idea was a good fit for Charise.

Charise worked with her employment provider and vocational rehabilitation counselor to create a business plan. She received \$10,000 from vocational rehabilitation and was approved for approximately \$18,000 in PASS funds to cover the cost of a truck, equipment, tools, inventory, training, and professional organization membership. Since her state's vocational rehabilitation agency requires a consumer match, the PASS was critical for her in meeting that requirement. Additionally, she continued to receive customized employment services from her employment provider, which were funded through the state Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG). Not long after her business started she secured an \$80,000/year contract with an apartment management company to provide key making services for all their residences. Her business is going strong, and the PASS played a critical role in making the venture a success.

We hope these examples get your creative juices flowing and encourage you to go help someone access a better life. And, now that you know about PASS and the billions available to help people get out of poverty, to help that student transitioning from special education to skip day-program segregation, and instead go directly into a job, to help someone start their own company, and yes to purchase services from a community agency, what are you going to do? Now that you know about PASS, ethically you are bound to tell folks you serve that you know the path to a better life. Yes, it involves some math and dealing with a towering bureaucracy. Still, the *potential* PASS holds for helping people succeed is enormous. *There's no greater burden than potential.*

For additional information you may wish to visit these sites:

<http://griffinhammis.com/>

<http://www.griffinhammis.com/cbtac/index.html>

<http://jobsquadinc.blogspot.com/>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG6uru\\_QwiU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG6uru_QwiU)

<http://www.employmentreformresources.com/>

[http://griffinhammis.typepad.com/the\\_ohio\\_microenterprise/](http://griffinhammis.typepad.com/the_ohio_microenterprise/)

<http://www.start-up-usa.biz/>

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/>

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/redbook/>

<http://passplan.org/>

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/pass/>

<http://db101.org/>

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## GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES, LLC

### Self-Employment Assessment: Discovering Personal Genius

By Cary Griffin, Dave Hammis & Beth Keeton

#### Introduction

For the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), deciding to support someone wanting to start his or her own business can be a challenging undertaking. Determining if the business idea is solid, making sure the business design represents a good match with the person's skills and support needs, predicting the business's fidelity to state closure criteria, all the while crafting an Individual Plan for Employment (IPA) that meets policy guidelines can test anyone's stamina and capacity for critical thinking.

The business development literature contains countless references to appropriate personality types, entrepreneurial assessments, and various screenings for determining a person's ability to be self employed (Griffin & Hammis, 2003; Straughn & Chickadel, 1994; Sumner, 1999; Fried & Hansson, 2010). A little internet research reveals an abundance of tools for assessing business readiness. Although there may be something akin to an entrepreneurial personality, owning a small business does not require testing to assess one's potential business character. Most people who own businesses are after all, artisans: people who know how to deliver a service or produce a product. They are not, as the entrepreneurial myth holds, graduates of business school hoping to take over the planet. In fact, most of the people who own the estimated 20.4 million single-owner/operator companies in the United States learned business processes such as

bookkeeping, sales, and inventory control by doing them, or they rely on purchased services for tasks that are too complex for them to master or too unprofitable for them to undertake (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005; SBDCnet.org; Phillips & Rasberry, 2003).

The recommended approach, person-centered business planning, recognizes the need for business and individualized supports. Person-centered business planning, or Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) in this case, is an inclusive process that details a fit between a person's skills as an artisan, their various talents and preferences, and a viable business idea. Business ideas emanate from the individual's experiences and skills and are matched with a market that needs the product or service. This approach focuses on supports and not on remediating deficits. Unlike traditional economic development approaches, this process starts with an individual's vocational profile (i.e. skills & interests) and a complimentary business idea, and finds a market rather than first finding a market and then forcing people to produce a product or service that they may not be committed to or excited about.

Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) is used to find a match between someone's vocational themes and a viable business model. The process typically costs about as much as standard vocational testing, including psychometrics or situational assessments, but yields information critical to developing a plan for employment and for designing supports necessary for successful closure. DPG can be covered by general case service Title I dollars, or with Supported Employment funds.

Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) does not start with the idea that owning a business is the best path for a particular person. DPG is about refining options, because there are unlimited ways to make a living in this world. DPG is about determining the essential elements of work and supports that support the individual's success; regardless of whether the final solution is self-employment or a wage job.

DPG can be used with less intensity for customers with more abundant work histories and skill sets than for those with little or no work history, or who have very complex disabilities. For instance, someone who presents with a lower back injury after working as a carpenter for 10 years and needs substantial job accommodations to return to work may need assistance through DPG to craft the ideal work conditions and begin the business design, whereas someone who has only rolled silverware at Appleby's in a high school transition program and has a label of autism will likely need the full three vocational themes developed, along with a profile outlining their best ecological fit for employment success.

Finally, as part of the person-centered business planning process, visit workplaces "where the career makes sense": businesses owned or operated by people who have similar vocational themes and interests, and can offer advice, suggestions, and encouragement (Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007; Griffin & Keeton, 2009). In other words, if the profile reveals that the person has a transportation vocational theme, then meet some mechanics, truck drivers, train engineers, and others involved in those industries to get a feel for tasks and skills required, and to begin narrowing the vocational theme. Discuss how to

get started in a related career, emerging business trends and innovations, and means for determining a transportation firm's feasibility. People often support others who share their interests; they also know the business and can serve as mentors. Most people enjoy talking about their life's work, and giving advice, so engage them in conversation.

### **Primary Steps in Person-Centered Business Planning**

Person-centered business planning is a flexible, thoughtful, and action-oriented process that leads to the determination of three over-arching vocational themes and a related career plan for an individual with significant disabilities. A person's disability is largely unimportant because it is the series of vocational ideas, contacts, supports, and actions taken that ultimately determines the individual's business design and success. Many people believe that they are better off working for themselves or that they cannot easily enter the traditional labor market. For these individuals, self-employment makes sense as an accommodation.

Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) is one of several emerging iterations of a process more broadly known as Discovery. DPG is not used specifically to design a business or to acquire a dream job or the career of a lifetime. Rather DPG is used to focus on getting individuals into the work arena, be that wage or self-employment, as quickly as possible where they can begin the more long-term tasks of sculpting a career. Therefore, DPG is a time-limited, rapid, outcome-oriented process resulting in work opportunities that fit the individual and provide for personal and professional growth. Employment derived from DPG is ecologically relevant, beneficial to both employee and employer, or business



owner and customer, and is generally developed without regard for the “labor market” or traditional comparative methods of employment that often favor those applicants without disabilities. DPG produces a real-time vocational profile that guides the IPE and work development by unveiling or creating career opportunities.

The DPG process is focused on skills and interests the individual possesses, and which can be built upon. Interests however, are not enough. Many of us have interests but lack skills. Many people would love to be a rich Hollywood movie star, but few of us actually have the theatrical skills and talents to become one. Matching the preferred work to existing and teachable skills is crucial. DPG activities may be identified through recognized interests, but the DPG activities themselves are used to identify existing skills, or those which can be improved through systematic training, workplace or business supports, and technology.

### **Stages of Discovering Personal Genius**

The “Discovering Personal Genius Staging Record” outlines DPG in seven basic stages, and within each tier exists an array of tasks and observations that the individual’s planning team takes into consideration. Current (2004-2010) anecdotal information from numerous project sites across the United States indicates that DPG can be accomplished in 20 to 60 hours, over a period of approximately 6 to 8 weeks, sometimes less, and occasionally more, as when interruptions such as illness complicate or compromise the process. DPG is typically performed by a VR vendor or partner organization (e.g. Community Rehabilitation Program; school Transition Program) and managed as a time-

sensitive team-based effort with the goal of formulating a descriptive profile capturing whom the person is at the present time and answering the basic question “Who is this individual?” Without a time limit, DPG can go on forever, because people are constantly learning and evolving, therefore, milestones or benchmarks are established by the state or the VRC and the customer for the team to follow.

The steps of DPG lead to a vocational profile, captured throughout the Staging Record, illuminating at least three (3) solid but broad vocational themes and enough knowledge of the individual to guide the successful development of employment, including small business ownership as a viable option.

The Stages of DPG include:

1. Home & Neighborhood Observation
2. Interviewing Others
3. Skills & Ecological Fit
4. Review
5. Vocational Themes
6. Descriptive Narrative
7. Career Development Plan

The sample DPG Staging Record form located at the end of this section illustrates the collection methods and types of information sought. However, prior to starting, there are some elements of DPG that require refinement.

## **Data Collection & Counseling Technique: Smooth Listening**

In traditional home visits or individualized meetings, the individual and any family involved are often interviewed and questioned about the individual's likes and dislikes, behavioral issues, program funding, future plans, medical, and safety issues. DPG is a conversation, not a traditional meeting. Service Coordinators (e.g. Case Managers) and others who often lead the planning process are part of an engaged team including the individual and family, if available and desired by the individual, with a common goal: get employment that matches the individual's vocational themes. The teams assign tasks that compliment each member's skills and interests, and spread the work across the 3 to 7 member group, who are responsible to the individual and the other team members. Due to caseloads, the VRC may or may not play an active team role.

The initial home visit is essential to setting the stage for the conversation, and the critical skill for the professionals involved is to gently probe and listen. In essence, the focus moves from the smooth talker to the smooth listener, because the relative silence of those listening elicits more information from the talkers. Here, the talkers are supposed to be the individual and those who know him/her best.

One of the best conversation starters is simply: "Tell me about yourself" or "tell me about your daughter." What we learn is that people start these conversations where they believe the important information lies. Sit and listen, perhaps take some notes. Do not interrupt the flow until the talker is completely finished. When the listener hears something that is relevant, just jot it down inconspicuously and come back to it once the talker is

completely finished. No news from the listener is good news and silence prompts the talker to keep talking.

If the conversation slows or meanders, consider such prompts as:

Tell me a bit about chores and tasks done around the house;

Tell me about typical and special family activities or traditions;

Tell me about family vacations or holiday celebrations;

Tell me about major life events that have influenced your son/daughter;

Tell me about events or activities your son/daughter really looks forward to;

Tell me about techniques you've found helpful when teaching your son/daughter something new;

Tell me about your son/daughter's favorite people, such as teachers, clergy, relatives, or neighbors;

Tell me about what you and your other children or close relatives do for a living.

There are several areas of inquiry that do frame the pursuit of knowledge during DPG stages. We are most interested in finding out who this person is, therefore the following should be elicited through both discussion and the observation of activities that demonstrate or reveal the answers:

Where this person is most at ease and most productive;

When the individual is most engaged and by what people or activities;

What supports are needed most in particular situations and how they are best delivered;

Situations and environments to be avoided;

Personal skills, talents, and interests.

### **DPG Stages: Methods and Tasks**

The outcome of DPG is a vocational profile, captured in the DPG Staging Record that reveals the Ideal Conditions of Employment for the individual. The basic process involves these components.

- interview family/friends
- observe home, skills, tasks, neighborhood
- interview employers with similar interests
- conduct community activities & modest work trials that display skills & tasks
- take pictures when it makes sense

The team compiles notes being thorough and descriptive about what was done and what was discovered. The team identifies overarching vocational themes in the person's life and determines at least three of them by the end of DPG. Themes are not job descriptions or generic interests that almost everyone has (e.g. eating ice cream, drinking coffee, playing with kittens). Themes include more general topics: "sports," "aviation," "organization/fastidiousness," "agriculture," "transportation." The themes must be further supported by the individual's existing skills, or proof from DPG activities that these skills can be learned by the individual or accomplished through the use of technology, tools, or other supports.

### **The Components of DPG include:**

1. **Gathering a team** of people. This includes the person assigned to do work development, and others who will help with the process. Some team members may only be involved in one or two steps. One person should be team leader, ensuring that the process is timely, thorough, and well documented.
2. **Explain** customized employment, the DPG process, and the vocational profile to the individual, family and other significant support people. Delineate what the team is doing and what is expected of them. Make certain the information you have about the employment seeker is current and complete.
3. **Schedule the first meeting** with the individual and family at the person's home. If meeting at home is not an option or the employment seeker does not wish to meet there, find an alternative location.
4. **Tour the neighborhood** around the person's home observing surroundings, safety concerns, businesses, culture, transportation and services near the person's home. This step may be completed after step 5.
5. **Meet with the individual** and family for 1 to 2 hours in their home. Investigate:
  - a. Daily routines; Chores and other household responsibilities
  - b. Activities the individual enjoys and skills they use when so engaged
  - c. History of the family/individual, especially related to employment

If the person is willing, have him/her show you their bedroom. Observe how it is organized, prized possessions, and what it says about the person. Have him/her demonstrate how he performs chores, engages in activities etc.

Throughout the visit observe interactions, living context, interests and skills. *Note if any themes are beginning to suggest themselves.*

Ask for names and contact information of people who know the individual well and ask permission to interview these individuals.

6. **Interview other people** who know the individual well. This may include parents, siblings, teachers (if a student or recent student), neighbors, friends, former employers, and support providers. Ask about the individual's interests, support needs, successful instructional strategies, skills and performance in various activities. *Look again for themes in the person's life.*
7. From information gathered so far, **identify several activities** the employment seeker participates in successfully. Do those activities with the person and observe interest, performance, demonstrated skills, connections, support needs, adaptations, etc.
8. **Identify activities outside the home** that are familiar to the person. Accompany the person to these places and activities and observe skills, relationships, supports etc. **Make sure these are truly activities; in other words, be able to measure and observe the skills involved.** Visiting the mall, for instance, is not a skill. Weeding a garden is a skill, as are its component parts: identifying the weeds, locating the hoe, removing the weeds, etc.
9. Based on the individual's interests and the themes identified so far, **identify unfamiliar places and activities** that may be in line with his interests. Go with her to these places and engage in activities. Observe to gain additional

information about support needs, reactions, attention to natural cues, interest etc.

*Continue to identify specific skills and refine the themes.*

10. **Go to some places of employment** with the person related to the identified themes. Make an appointment with a manager and conduct an **informational interview**. In addition to conducting the interview, ask for a tour and observe the kinds of jobs people do at the business. Look for the jobs that are out of view and/or are unexpected. Gather clues about the culture of the work place and whether this person might fit here. Perform several of these interviews to refine and test themes.
11. **Return to the individual's home** if needed, to collect any additional information needed, have informal conversation and make more observations of tasks.
12. **Review** files and records of past and current activities and services.
13. **Develop a list of places**, specifically 20 places of business where people do jobs related to each of the three themes identified for a total of 60.
14. **Write the draft vocational profile** using the information gathered during DPG. Identify the person's ideal conditions for employment including skills, interests, culture, environmental considerations, preferred or required days and hours for work, supports needed, equipment or adaptations that may be needed and any other important considerations. Reference the three themes and the list of 60 places where people with similar interests work.
15. **Meet with the individual** and/or family and others as needed to discuss the profile, for comments and for approval. Refine the employment plan to be used for job or business development.

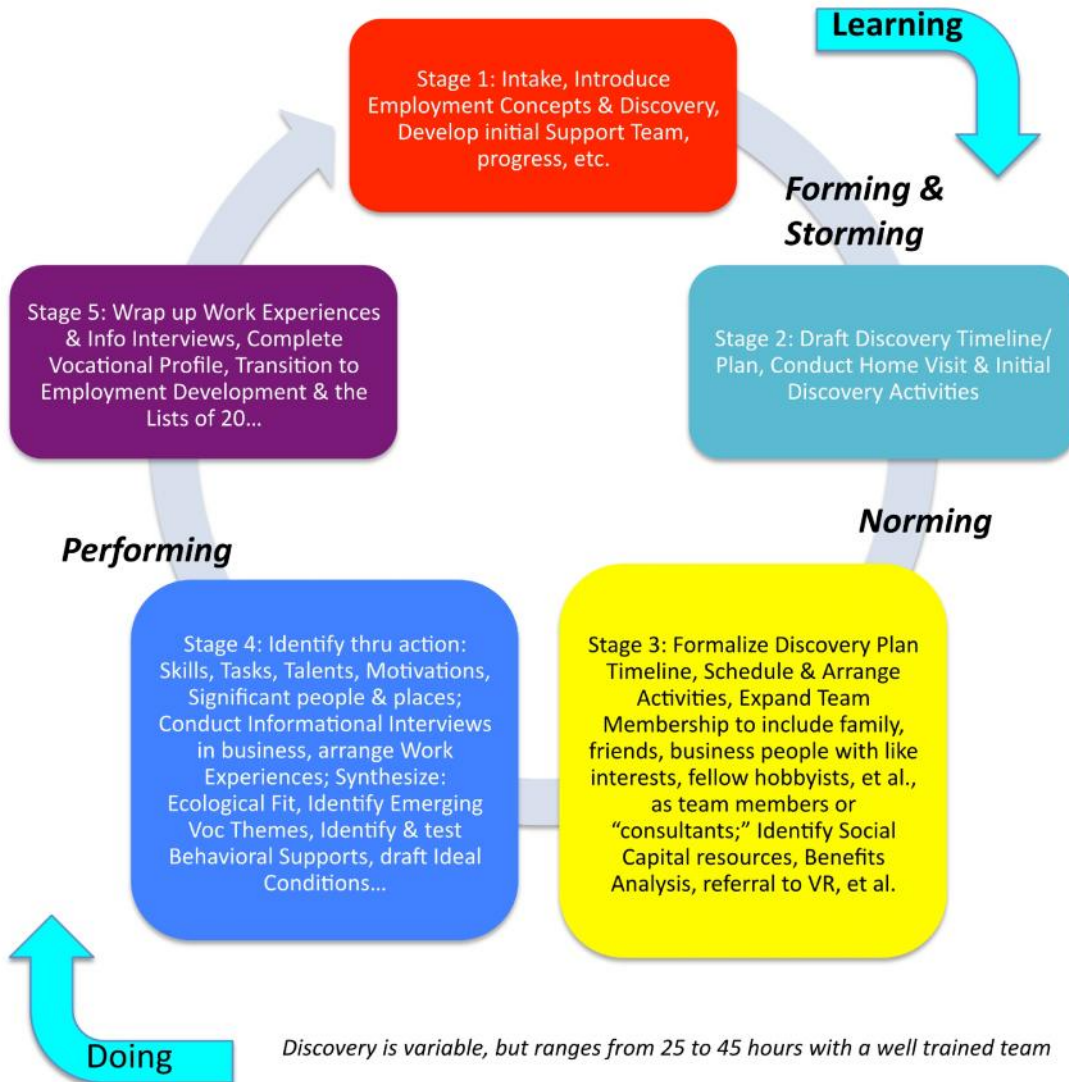


16. **If needed, develop a representational portfolio** for the employment seeker using visual and narrative information developed during DPG. This may be a photo album with captions, PowerPoint, narrative description or other medium that can be easily utilized by the individual to demonstrate his skills and interests to prospective employers.

17. Following the vocational profile/CE plan, **begin job or business development.**

*This graphic of the DPG process represents a typical team's work:*

## Discovering Personal Genius™: Team Process Chart



Griffin-Hammis Associates

Note: Discovering Personal Genius is a Trademark of GHA/CSC

## **DPG Activities**

Throughout DPG, the team engages in activities that tests information from the interviews. These active observational situations are used to develop ideas, test themes and interests, and to witness existing and emerging skills.

If the emerging interests of an individual in DPG are horses, airplanes, and tattoos, the larger emerging themes may be: Horses = Animals; Airplanes = Transportation; Tattoos = Alternative lifestyles and Art.

People engaged in the pursuit of these interests in the community might be found as follows: Animals: petting zoo, veterinarians, University biology lab, environmental organization, dog park, farm, horse stable, aquarium, pet store etc.

Transportation: airport, antique car club, filling station, body shop, delivery company, train depot, parts store, etc.

Art: tattoo parlor, artist's studio, print shop, graphic design company, architecture firm, sign company, art supply store, glass blowing company, photography studio, etc.

Useful activities to observe the individual performing through a short try-out or a time-limited work experience might include: Animals: grooming horses; washing dogs; organizing veterinarian records; prepping a surgical room; feeding fish; exercising pet store animals, etc.;

Transportation: driving a fork lift; gassing up a car; changing oil on an airplane; washing a vehicle; entering part numbers into inventory into a computer, etc.;

Art: tracing a tattoo; painting; framing a picture/cutting a mat; blowing glass; using CAD software; making a clay pot, etc.

Combining these employment themes/skills/locations/businesses result in more complex and creative ideas for job or business development:

Art and Transportation: Skywriting services; Car Pinstriping shop; Car audio design/installation; Travel photography, etc.

Animals & Art: Wildlife photography; Children's mural design/painting service; Stuffed animal manufacture/sales; wildlife art, etc.

Animals & Transportation: Dude Ranch; Service Animal training; Ranching; Animal Control, etc.

The more places of employment explored through the informational interviewing process and through DPG activities, the richer the activities lists become for future DPG sessions.

### **The DPG Staging Record**

Throughout DPG, use the Staging Record, or some other form of vocational profile, to collect the information as it is gathered. DPG is not concerned with speculation about an individual's motivations or interests or behaviors. Record exactly what was observed and discussed without interpretation. The sample included here provides an example of a typical DPG process.

## Sample DPG Staging Record

### DISCOVERING PERSONAL GENIUS STAGING RECORD

Instructions: This form is used to stage, structure, capture and record the major events of DPG. The recorder(s) should pay particular attention to how the tasks are typically performed, any accommodations, technology, supports, or specialized training strategies that should be employed.

Name: Luis Hernandez	Date initiated/Date Completed: 2/09/10 - 3/18/10
Family Contacts: Father: Juan Hernandez, Sr.; Mother: Yolanda; Brother: Francisco; Sister: Estrella	
Phone/E-mail: 555-6654	Person(s) completing DPG Record: Tracy Smithers (teacher)
Additional Contact Information: Sister lives in another state (Oklahoma)	
Team Members: Luis, Jeff Haney (Classroom aide), Juan Hernandez, Terri Samuelson (SBDC), Yolanda Hernandez	
Consultants/Experts to Contact: Ramon Velasquez, Capitol Motors; Troy Jenkins, VR self employment specialist	
Comments/Considerations: Would like to start working or start a business before the school year ends so there's a smooth transition	

#### Stage One: Home & Neighborhood Observation

(Preliminary step: review records, files, assessments to establish current issues, cautions, training, etc., that may be of relevance). Luis has had several work try-outs in town, but only earned money mowing the family lawn. He desperately wants to go to work; mom and dad present a strong support team and promise to work with Luis to support his post-school career. Brother is also nearby to help out. Voc Rehab has indicated they will open his case for supported employment funding, which includes Customized Self-Employment.

Initial Interviews: Begin with the individual's home and/or family home (if residing there). Luis is about to leave High School with a Certificate of Attendance. A family home visit has been scheduled for 2/9 by Tracy & Jeff.

Date: 2/9/10

People interviewed & relationship to Individual: Father, Mother, Brother. Dad is a sales

rep for an auto parts retailer. Mom manages a day care center located within a local hospital. Brother is a lab chemist for the state agriculture department. All family members live and work locally, except for his sister who lives in Tulsa. Dad mentioned that he informally details cars on weekends to pick up extra money and that he is thinking of making this a retirement business in a few years. He has signed up for classes at the local Small Business Development Center. He is also thinking Luis might benefit from the classes, advancing his academic skills and making connections, so they are going together one night a week from 5 til 7 pm.

Recap of Information (attach field notes, pictures): Luis wants to go to work; family is really supportive; Luis wants to move out on his own; Parents are supportive but a little cautious. Luis says he'd like to work at MacDonal'd's; he had a work trial there last year and got paid \$20. The family thinks this would be a good place for Luis to work but haven't got other ideas. They do report he helps dad detail cars occasionally and talks a lot about learning to drive, which they are discouraging for safety reasons.

Observations of home, bedroom, property, belongings that seem relevant: Average home in nice neighborhood; no local public transit other than the Senior Bus and a Dial-a-Ride service; evidence of parental hobbies: Mom: playing Bridge; Dad: working on cars, plays the guitar. Luis' room has a TV, is neatly organized by him, some music CDs, a small Karaoke machine.

Chores & tasks performed at home: Luis has set chores including: clearing the table after dinner; accompanies mom or dad grocery shopping; washes car (sides) with dad on the weekends. Washes his own clothes using the washer/dryer. Some of the task/skills we observed included all of the above, plus copying music CDs using a windows-based computer; dusting shelves and replacing books at the public library (organizational & reading skills). Still much more exploration needed.

Hobbies, Sports, Collections, Interests noticed during home visit: Listens to music. Sings using the Karaoke machine. Has been making BBQ sauce and learning to cook on the grill. Brother notes that Luis wants to learn to drive. Likes attending the Catholic church on Sundays; stacks church bulletins on his lap and wheels up and down the sanctuary in his wheelchair passing them out before the sermon begins.

Family/friend/community activities individual engages in and regularity: Attends church Sunday morning with parents.

Neighborhood Mapping (resources, employers, transportation options, neighbors of interest, activities, civic engagement): Lives in a residential neighborhood. We walked around the block with Luis; he knows a few neighbors and we stopped and talked with a couple of them asking about any Homebased businesses they might know of nearby; Parents know quite a few folks since they have lived here for over 20 years. The small downtown commercial district is about 5 blocks away; Their church is about 2 miles South. Grocery store is within a few blocks as well. Most people drive from the

neighborhood to other community activities.

Talents, interests and skills observable/revealed: Luis' interests include music (listening, and singing in English and Spanish), cars & driving, helping others (passing out hymnals and church bulletins). Skills we saw or heard about included:

Washing & Drying clothes, Clearing the table; running the dishwasher; selecting specific items from the shelves when grocery shopping; washing the sides of the family car; re-shelving books, alphabetizing. Activities, situations, & locations that need to be avoided: Does not like direct sunlight for extended periods; does not like to be left alone for extended periods.

Stage Two: Others to be interviewed (person/relationship/role):

1. Neighbor who sells used CDs, video games, small collectibles on Ebay
2. Sister
3. Priest/Parishioners
4. Sunday School teacher
- 5.
- 6.

What was learned from each:

1. Neighbor: 2/16/10: reported that CDs on Ebay are losing money; knows someone who has a wholesale CD music and movie warehouse that might be hiring (Call Randy Quintana 555-9898). Update 2/18/10: Randy is not hiring but agreed to an informational interview and tour so Luis can polish his portfolio a bit (with critique from Randy) and to see what skills they use at the wholesale CD company.
2. Sister: phone interview on 2/16/10 says she remembers Luis being very interested in cars and food. They see each other only once every couple years.
3. Priest: 2/16/10 said Luis was a great help; said he would be happy to help Luis find employment if needed. Wondered if the Bank the church uses could use someone and will check into it, since the Bank VP is a parishioner. Follow-up in 5 days.
4. Sunday School Teacher: 2/16/10 mentioned that Luis was good with the kids, and helped the teach do "sing-alongs" in Sunday school occasionally.

5.

6.

Patterns Emerging: (Interests, Talents & Skills): Interests include helping others or maybe church/religion? Cars or driving; BBQ and serving food. Organizing materials/items. Music.

Skills as listed above, plus according to school aide and those interviewed he gets quite focused when working and tends not to take a break until the assigned task is finished.

Luis has various cooking and kitchen skills that may need more exploration; perhaps scheduling a cook-out. His mother mentioned that Luis is “quite helpful.” Dad mentioned he really enjoys helping others and Luis says he most wants to work helping other people with disabilities. (Note: this is a very common theme because it is the one job people with disabilities see daily; instead, think of this tendency for helping as perhaps the broader theme of “advocacy”). Observation reveals that Luis is quite fastidious: he has a place for everything; he has skills to polish, clean, organize (from cars to dishes, to items such as books); he follows a BBQ sauce recipe exactly and does not deviate from it).

### Stage 3: Skills & Ecological Fit

Five places where this individual can be observed in activities that give context to their Interests, Talents & Skills:

1. Cooking BBQ at home

2. Observe working with kids at Sunday School

3. Take a cooking seminar at the Valley Food Cooperative

4. Reshelving books at the Library

5. Doing inventory or parts stocking at a car dealer or NAPA auto parts



Observations for each location and the specific activities observed:

1. 2/20/10: Observed Luis making fajitas on the grill at home (shot video for the team). He and Dad discussed the menu. Dad helped get things from the refrigerator, but Luis did all the prep and cooking at a small table he uses that accommodates his wheelchair...he lit the grill by turning on the gas burner and pushing the igniter. He made a marinade for the meat; cut the peppers, onions, and zucchini. He wrapped the tortillas in a damp cloth and put them in the oven to warm at 200 degrees. He sliced avocados and also made a salsa with tomatoes, cilantro and onions; he squeezed a lime into it and told us that this kept everything "fresh." After we ate he loaded the dishwasher.

2. 2/21/10: Attended church with Luis. He asked us to leave the house early so he could get the church bulletins ready to pass out; he greeted folks as he wheeled by the ends of the pews and asked people to pass the bulletins down each row. Then he left the sanctuary and went to the children's area where the teacher asked Luis to load the CD player with a cd and find the selection titled "De Colores." Luis then told the children what the words to the song were in Spanish. Then they all sang along when he started the CD player. After the singing Luis helped pass out biblical coloring books and crayons; he collected and stored all the supplies after class.

3. 2/24/10. Luis and Jeff, his aide, attended a one-night cooking class at Williams-Sonoma at the Mall, titled: BBQ and You. This night's recipe called for making a spicy bbq sauce and grilling chicken. Luis and Jeff worked together and Jeff noted Luis' skills for measuring, mixing by hand. Luis knew to turn down the heat and cover the pot so the sauce wouldn't burn or boil; he was deliberate and safe with the knife. Luis talked with the others in the class and seemed to enjoy the evening. He volunteered to help clean up after class, and this was used to do an impromptu interview with the chef, who owns a local catering service. He agreed to have Luis come to his home kitchen to see his business and maybe to help prepare an order or two. Jeff will follow-up.

4. 2/25/10. Jeff and Luis arranged an informational interview at the CD wholesaler. The owner Jorge noted that "we're not hiring." Currently has 6 employees plus himself. They are a distributor to local retail stores mostly. They process orders for these small to medium sized companies (small record stores; some mom and pop video rentals); they handle a broad range of instructional videos (e.g. Learn to Play the Guitar; Car repair manuals on disc). When asked about issues with the business the owner noted that they buy up unsold stock and sell on Ebay but that the market is bad; also noted that they buy up trade in movies and music CDs also for sale on Ebay, but that many of them have scratches on them and they can't be resold. Also noted during the tour that no one takes time to adequately catalog and shelve the CDs in their proper places; this is costing the company money due to search times for items in the wrong places and not on the inventory database. Jeff will investigate a CD polisher as a resource Luis could own; will also develop a case for hiring Luis to organize the CDs/DVDs and enter inventory on the database.

5. 3/1/10. Jeff and Luis spent an hour with Sharron Phelps of Car Quest Auto Parts. Ms.

Phelps is the storeowner and described their inventory procedures. She thought it would be difficult for Luis to reach most of the shelves, but agreed to a short work trial in the near future. Luis told Jeff he wanted to work on cars, *not* be “around car parts.”

Emerging themes: Organizing; Helpfulness/Helping Others/Advocacy; Children; Transportation; Cooking/Food.

Supports needed during these activities (be specific): Initial training needs to be paced and precise; (Luis seems to know when to ask for help); accessibility is an issue.

What environments & activities need to be avoided and why? Direct Sun; Places where he'd be working all by himself.

What places, skills and activities need more exploration? Luis is really into BBQ and he says he sees feeding people the same as “helping people.” He really enjoyed the library and suggested himself that he could practice his reading and someday “read to children.” He really liked the boss at the CD warehouse and thought that “helping out” would be a “good job.”

Team will meet 3/4/10 to consolidate observations; next steps; and will brainstorm combining the themes into unique ideas (cooking and transportation; transportation and advocacy; organizing and music; cooking and advocacy)

Follow-Up Notes: 3/5/10: Ideas for informational interviews include: Meals on Wheels; Owning or working for a Roach Coach or Caterer; Working for the School Bus service as a bus aide; Cooking for the School Cafeteria; assisting with office work at the local Bank, etc. All these ideas will be considered.

Stage Four: Review

Former school/rehab staff to be interviewed: None

Other family members and friends who may reveal insights: Sister was consulted

Read files, assessments, medical/medication, behavioral and other records that may still be of relevance: developmental disability & physical impairment predominates

Impact of this information on individual's emerging profile: Instructional and support strategies need to be clear and intense at first; rapid skills acquisition appears typical if matches to proper amount of information given.

Stage Five: Vocational Themes (not job descriptions or business ideas)

Emerging themes that meld Interests, Talents, and Skills:

1. Organizing

2. Advocacy/Helping others

3. Cooking or Food Industry

Identify 3 places for each theme where people with similar themes work:

Theme 1: Organizing	Theme 2: Advocacy	Theme 3: Food/Cooking
1. CD Warehouse	1.State Highway Dept.	1. Big Mountain Catering
2. 1 <sup>st</sup> National Bank	2. Valley City Police Dept.	2. Roberta’s Bakery/Deli
3. Valley Auto Pick & Save (junk yard)	3. San Jose Pre-School	3. Honeybee Aviaries

Select 2 places and arrange informational interviews.

CD Warehouse (return for 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview/short work tryout)

Big Mountain Catering

Notes from interview:

1. 3/7/10 Met with Jorge who owns the CD warehouse. Jeff noted Luis’ organizing skills and demonstrated his ability to alphabetize, wipe the CD cases clean, and arrange them neatly on the shelves. They also looked over the database and Luis slowly entered the DVD titles Jorge handed him. With practice it was obvious he could do this task. Still Jorge said he could not hire anyone at the current time. Jeff and Luis mentioned they had been investigating a CD polisher that restores even heavily scratched CDs and DVDs. Jorge mentioned that he did not at this time have such a machine, anyone to run it, or the cash to buy it. Jeff said he and Luis investigated the Azuradisc Advantage CD/DVD Disc Polisher and were quoted a price of \$4,250. Such a machine could easily pay for itself in less than a year. Jorge said he did not want to hire anyone else, but Luis suggested that he set up as his own business inside the warehouse and offer his services to other people (like his neighbor) with scratched CDs and DVDs. Jeff noted that such a “business within a business” could pay rent and help Jorge earn better profits. Jorge liked the idea and admitted to having room for the business. Details such as insurance, % of sales/rent; other on-site work (e.g. data entry; organizing) need to be worked out if the team and VRC agree to pursue this idea.

2. 3/8/10 Met with the chef at Big Mountain catering. He noted that Luis’ skills need to grow, but that a Saturday job while he’s finishing up school is a possibility and if he advances, he could add hours after graduation. Tasks that need doing on a daily basis include shopping, clean-up; chopping; making rice; baking rolls; salad prep., etc.

Which themes seem strongest? The organizing themes are very strong, and cooking with a strong emphasis on learning new skills really matches Luis.

New interests/talents revealed? Max is becoming more vocal about jobs he doesn't want to do. He doesn't want to be rushed. He really wants to learn more about computers.

Arrange further informational interviews and/or short (up to ½ a day) work experiences at the following places:

1. Roberta's Bakery/Deli (prepping salads, making sandwiches; organizing work stations)
2. Valley Auto Pick & Save (pulling high turnover parts such as alternators off newly wrecked vehicles; entering inventory data; locating parts in the bins)

What was observed:

On hold until after meeting with Team, VRC and Jorge about the CD polisher

1. These will be scheduled as part of job development if needed.

- 2.

#### Stage Six: Descriptive Narrative

Consider the following in the description:

1. Interests, Talents, Skills as observed; best ecological fit; best learning mode/methodology; places/situations to avoid; personal resources (benefits, family support, savings, transportation); most endearing/engaging qualities; exploitable skills; 3 strongest vocational themes:

Luis is a young man about to leave special education; he had strong family ties in this community and has interests in music, children, transportation, advocacy/helping others,

and cooking/food. He is skilled in the kitchen and in assisting others (children especially) in daily living skills, and singing in both English and Spanish, etc., is a fast learner who pays strict attention to his instructor/supervisor, and knows how to operate kitchen and household equipment. Luis enjoys assisting others in doing their jobs.

2. Ideal Conditions of Employment: Working indoors where Luis can pursue his interests while working in partnership with his co-workers or customers. Luis learns best when shown a task and is allowed to perform it at his speed; his speed rapidly increases with repetition. Work hours need to be from early morning and can go until later afternoon. He needs access for his wheelchair and does best when he can freely interact with others. Luis states often that he “likes to see what he has done” when working on a task; likes the kitchen drawers and cabinets to be organized and clean; likes to hear the children at Sunday school sing a song he taught them; likes to see the car he helps his dad wash shining.

Stage Seven: Job/Business Development Plan

List of Twenty Places where people with similar Vocational Themes Work:

Theme 1: Organizing (both physical items & basic data on computer)	Theme 2: Advocacy/Helpfulness/Customer Service	Theme 3: Food/Cooking
1. Jorge’s CD Warehouse	1. Catholic Church	1. Big Mountain Catering
2. Valley Pick & Save Auto Parts	2. South Texas Physical Therapy Services	2. Roberta’s Bakery/Deli
3. 1 <sup>st</sup> national Bank	3. Dixie Small Animal Hospital	3. Honeybee Aviaries
4. Hi-Valley Clerical Services	4. Senior Center	4. Cowboy Jerky Company
5. Car Quest	5. Dog Whisperer Training Service	5. Food Co-op
6. Surgical Supply Inc.	6. Meals on Wheels	6. South Street Kitchen Supply
7. Drake’s Feed & Farm	7. Riverside Manor (Assisted Living)	7. River Bend Feed & Grain Supply
8. Golden Grain Rancher’s Cooperative	8. Lazy Q Riding Stables	8. The Flying Burrito Brother’s Taco Wagon
9. Blue Lake Bike & Boat	9. Busy Hands Daycare	9. All-Organic Horse Treats

10. Sam's Autobody	10. Public Pool	10. Jennifer's Greenhouse
11. Eclectic Music	11. County Petting Zoo	11. Community Garden
12. John Deere Tractors	12. Southwestern Homeless Services	12. The Brown Egg Company
13. Banyon Equipment Rental	13. The Nature Preserve	13. Texas BBQ Sauces
14. Jake's Office Products	14. Raptor Education Center	14. Ruiz Chili and Spices
15. City Library	15. The Food Bank	15. School Cafeteria
16. County Social Services	16. The Police Station	16. Smiley Catfish Farm
17. Ace Hardware	17. Catastrophy Clean-Up Service	17. Hot Licks Smokehouse
18. County Historical Museum	18. City Library	18. Mustang Market
19. Frederick's Accounting, CPA	19. Big Bend Search & Rescue	19. Big Bagel Company
20. Rio Grande Mini-Storage	20. Rio Grande Independent Living Center	20. Jawbone Confectioners

Create representational portfolios, picture books, resumes, and other tools for Job Development as needed;

Select 3 or 4 places and arrange Informational Interviews for moving into job development stage.

**Will occur after Team Meeting 3/18/10 to compare notes and begin Job Development**

1. Developing Business Plan for CD/DVD polishing service/business within a business (3/19/10)

2.

**GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES**  
**DISCOVERY STAGING RECORD**

Instructions: This form is used to stage, structure, capture and record the major events of Discovery. The recorder(s) should pay particular attention to how the tasks are typically performed, any accommodations, technology, supports, or specialized training strategies that should be employed. Handwritten Discovery notes should be used in the field during the discovery activity with information summarized here.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Dates started/completed:</b>
<b>Family Contacts:</b>	
<b>Phone/E-mail:</b>	<b>Person(s) completing Discovery Record:</b>
<b>Additional Contact Information:</b>	
<b>Team Members:</b>	
<b>What are the responsibilities of each team member?</b>	
<b>Consultants/Experts to Contact:</b>	
<b>Comments/Considerations:</b>	

<p><b>Stage One: Home &amp; Neighborhood Observation</b>  <i>Who will ensure this stage is completed?      By what date?</i></p> <p><u>Preliminary step:</u> review records, files, assessments to establish current issues, cautions, training, etc., that may be of relevance:</p> <p><u>Initial Interviews:</u> Begin with the individual's home and/or family home (if residing there).  Date:  People interviewed &amp; relationship to Individual:</p> <p>Recap of Information (attach field notes, pictures):</p> <p><u>Observations of home, bedroom, property, belongings that seem relevant:</u></p> <p>Specific chores &amp; tasks performed at home:</p> <p><u>Hobbies, Sports, Collections, Interests noticed during home visit:</u></p> <p><u>Family/friend/community activities individual engages in and regularity:</u></p> <p><u>Neighborhood Mapping</u> (resources, employers, transportation options, neighbors of interest, activities, civic engagement):</p>
--



Talents, interests, skills, and tasks observable/revealed:

Activities, situations, & locations that need to be avoided:

**Stage Two: Others to be interviewed**

Name/relationship/role

1.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*
2.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*
3.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*
4.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*
5.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*
6.  
*Person responsible:            by this date:*

Former school/rehab staff to be interviewed:

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

Other family members and friends to be interviewed:

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

What was learned from each:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Former school/rehab staff – information learned:

Other family members and friends – information learned:

**Patterns Emerging:** (Tasks,

Interests, Talents & Skills):

**Request Benefits Planning Query (BPQY) from SSA:**

Date Requested:

Information Learned:

PASS Potential (or other Work Incentives to investigate):

**Stage Two: Discovery Visits**

Identify five places where this individual can be observed in activities that give context to their Interests, Talents & Skills – TAKE PHOTOS:

1.  
*Person responsible:                      by this date:*
2.  
*Person responsible:                      by this date:*
3.  
*Person responsible:                      by this date:*
4.  
*Person responsible:                      by this date:*
5.  
*Person responsible:                      by this date:*

Note your observations for each location, date, the specific tasks engaged in, and specific supports needed:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Summary of supports needed during these activities (be specific):

What environments & activities need to be avoided and why?

What places, skills and activities need more exploration?

Where/when will this exploration occur?

Follow up needed including who is responsible and dates to be completed:

**Stage Three: Vocational Themes** (not job descriptions or business ideas)

Emerging themes that meld Tasks, Interests, Talents, and Skills:

1.

2.

3.

Identify 3 places for each theme where people with similar themes work:

Theme 1:

1.

2.

3.

Theme 2:

1.

2.

3.

Theme 3:

1.

2.

3.

Select 2 places and arrange informational interviews.

1.

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

2.

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

Interview dates and notes:

1.

2.

**Which themes seem strongest?**

New interests/talents revealed?

Arrange further informational interviews and/or short (up to 1/2 a day) work experiences at the following places:

1.

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

2.

*Person responsible:            by this date:*

What was observed:

1.

2.

### **Stage Three: Vocational Profile**

Summarize findings from Discovery and include the following in your description:

1. Interests, Talents, Skills, Tasks as observed; best ecological fit; best learning mode/methodology; places/situations to avoid; personal resources (benefits, family support, savings, transportation); most endearing/engaging qualities; exploitable skills:

2. Ideal Conditions of Employment:

3. What “off the job” support will be needed and who will provide?

4. How will this person stay in contact with their friends, and who will ensure this?

5. How will this person get to and from work?

6. What is this person's ideal work schedule (days and hours) and why?

**Stage Four: Job/Business Development Plan**

List of Twenty Places where people with similar Vocational Themes Work:

Theme 1:	Theme 2:	Theme 3:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.
11.	11.	11.
12.	12.	12.
13.	13.	13.
14.	14.	14.
15.	15.	15.
16.	16.	16.
17.	17.	17.
18.	18.	18.
19.	19.	19.
20.	20.	20.

Create representational portfolios, picture books, resumes, and other tools for Job Development as needed:

*Person responsible:*            *by this date:*

<b>Stage Four: Informational Interview</b>		
Utilizing information gained during Discovery and summarized in this DSR, select 3 or 4 businesses from the list above and arrange Informational Interviews for job development		
<i>Information learned:</i>	<i>Person responsible:</i>	<i>Date completed:</i>
<b>Person responsible: by this date:</b>		
Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<b>Days:</b>	<b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>	<b>Start date:</b>	
<b>Person responsible: by this date:</b>		
Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Days:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>	<b>Start date:</b>	
<b>Person responsible: by this date:</b>		
Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Days:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>	<b>Start date:</b>	
<b>Person responsible: by this date:</b>		

Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<b>Days:</b>	<b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>		<b>Start date:</b>
<b>Person responsible:            by this date:</b>		
Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<b>Days:</b>	<b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>		<b>Start date:</b>
<b>Person responsible:            by this date:</b>		
Business Name:		
Contact person and title:		
Phone:	e-mail:	
Notes:		
Follow up (what, who and by when):		
<b>JOB OFFER</b>		
<b>Description of job:</b>		
<b>Salary:</b>	<b>Days:</b>	<b>Hours:</b>
<b>Date offered:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Accepted</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Declined Date:</b>
<b>Date of job/task analysis:</b>		<b>Start date:</b>

## DSR Final Approvals

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Conservator/Care Provider Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Vocational Specialist Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Voc Manager Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Special thanks to Easter Seals Southern California/Work First for Field Testing





# GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES, LLC

## DISCOVERING PERSONAL GENIUS DEBRIEFING GUIDE

### *GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES, LLC*

Instructions: This note-taking guide is for use at team meetings to review Discovery activities.

Individual: \_\_\_\_\_ Team Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SKILLS		
Observed	Surmised	Documentation/Comments
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
Issues/Next Steps:		

INTERESTS		
Observed	Surmised	Documentation/Comments
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

9.		
10.		
Issues/Next Steps:		

<b>PREFERENCES/ENVIRONMENT</b>		
What Works	What Doesn't	Negotiables/Environmental Mediators
1.	1.	
2.	2.	
3.	3.	
4.	4.	
5.	5.	
6.	6.	
Issues/Next Steps:		

<b>CONTRIBUTIONS</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Support, environmental & Instructional Issues:

<b>INTERVIEWS: DISCUSS FINDINGS</b>		
Completed	In-Process/Pending	Needed
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.
Issues/Next Steps:		

<b>EMERGING VOCATIONAL THEMES &amp; PATTERNS</b>	
Themes	Related/Relevant Patterns
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

<b>NEXT STEPS</b>		
Places to Go	Action/Activities	Team Members
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.

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## GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES, LLC

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### **JOB DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY:**

#### ***YOUR FIRST JOBS***

Instructions: Many of us had first jobs that on the surface seem to just be about making some money and gaining some experience. However, closer examination often yields information about why or how this job matched “who we were” at the time; the importance of our co-workers/friends; and our interests in specific aspects of the work including potential skills acquisition & career potential, operations, or equipment we found intriguing, etc. List your jobs and their attributes.

<b>Job</b>	<b>Interests/Connection</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Friends/Co-Workers</b>	<b>How you got the job</b>	<b>Why you left</b>

Considerations for Discussion: Did a family member or friend help you get one of the jobs? Did you care for all assigned tasks or for one aspect in particular (e.g. got to drive a tractor; got to work alongside my best friend)? Was this actually your business (e.g. babysitting)? Did you use the skills learned at one job to move to a better job? Were you totally qualified when you started or did you have to learn new skills? Who trained you at your job?



SOCIAL/ECONOMIC CAPITAL INVENTORY

Instructions: To develop call-lists for Discovering Personal Genius activities, informational interviews, and job development, list the businesses and organizations you and your immediate family patronize, along with the average amount spent or frequency of transactions. Do the same for your organization. Consider having all agency staff submit their personal supply chain information, and have your Board of Directors submit their personal and organizational supply chain contacts as well, in order to leverage their social/economic capital. Get permission from your boss prior to conducting this inventory or making contacts within these supply chains.

Table with two sections: PERSONAL SUPPLY CHAIN and ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN. Each section has columns for Business Name, Frequency &/or amount of patronage, Contact Info, and Comments/Considerations. The Personal Supply Chain section has 12 rows, and the Organizational Supply Chain section has 14 rows.





**BIG SIGN SYNDROME:  
*THE JOB DEVELOPER'S SMALL BUSINESS ADVANTAGE***

**BY CARY GRIFFIN AND DAVE HAMMIS  
GRIFFIN-HAMMIS ASSOCIATES**

**INTRODUCTION**

Consider Klements Lane in Florence, Montana, where Cary lives. Florence has about 1,000 residents and we live outside the town center on a two mile long road with 24 mailboxes. On this road are at least 11 families supported by their small businesses. None of these enterprises is identified by a sign. Now, this circumstance is certainly a ringing endorsement for the power of business enterprise in rural areas, but more than that, it should be a source of wonder and optimism for Employment Specialists and Job Developers everywhere. Small business in the U.S. creates more jobs than big industry, and of the estimated 26 million businesses in this country, only 17,000 have more than 500 employees. So, where are the jobs? Evidently, they are in these companies scattered throughout the urban, suburban, and rural communities of America.

**THE BIG BANG**

As job developers, we always reveled in the accomplishment of finding jobs in large corporations. Both of us have worked with the huge companies that mean multiple placements once an "in" is nurtured with the Vice President for Human Resources. It is true that these companies, including Wal-Mart, McDonalds, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Citicorp, Home Depot, and others mean good jobs for people. It also means significant time and effort cracking the hiring code, it often means facing 200 applicants for each job, and it also means that changes in shift managers or department heads, something all too common in big business, can signal a change in corporate culture on the local store or factory level that leads to folks with significant disabilities losing their jobs or suffering reduced hours and opportunities. Still, the seductiveness of landing a dozen jobs scattered throughout a company with just one good shot, the Big Bang, is too hard for most of us to resist. And who doesn't want a few Fortune 500 companies on their resume?

Experience teaches us that working with big companies can yield significant payoffs for people with disabilities. In the early 1990s in Colorado, Dave and our team at the Center for Technical Assistance and Training (CTAT), along with the state VR agency, and the late Rick Douglas from the U.S. Department of Labor, established the prototype for what would become the Business Leadership Network (BLN). This group of employers was less an educational group than the BLNs of today. Instead, they were actively involved in meeting job seekers, using their personal and professional networks, and creating employment up and down their supplier and customer chains. With Dave taking the lead, these members of the BLN, many from very large corporations, helped find work for about 50 people with significant disabilities in one year. Interestingly, the small business

members were just as active as the others, but the complications in creating employment were significantly reduced. Sometimes in seeking the Big Bang of a corporate account, job developers may be creating more work than necessary.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Looking for jobs in big companies makes sense. Cultivating relationships with HR people is one important aspect of identifying opportunities for employment that often result in fringe benefits and long term employment tenure. But, it is just one part of the equation.

Driving down “the strip” in any community reveals all the same box stores. The home improvement company, the department store, the discount store, the fast food giants. And while these employers are happy to employ people with disabilities, they can also be the toughest to break into. Big companies have standardized approaches; their job descriptions are developed far away at corporate headquarters by HR people and labor attorneys; and when they advertise positions available, 200 applicants show up for the same job opening. The competitiveness of this job market, the sluggishness of the corporate office to approve a local job carve, and the dead-end nature of ubiquitous part-time positions must be a consideration for job seekers and developers alike.

In a recent job development seminar, Cary was reminded by over 40 Employment Specialists working in a community of 6 million people, that HR staff complain regularly that someone from a human services agency is always knocking on their door. These developers suffer from Big Sign Syndrome. That is, they are the ones driving the town’s commercial strip, pulling into the lot of every corporate chain store, and seeking ready-made jobs. Over the course of a year, every agency visits every store. Of course, the small businesses, many hidden from view and requiring a networking effort to crack open, remain beyond the view of these “job cruisers,” they often have no set application method, they hire based on word-of-mouth, and a written job description can be a rarity.

## **THE SMALL BUSINESS FIX**

Getting off Main Street may be the most obvious fix for Big Sign Syndrome. But, getting onto Elm Street sometimes requires a network. Those are easy enough to develop of course, and involve at least a few of these items:

1. Using a Board of Directors member to get a lunch or an informational interview with small business owners they know who might have employment opportunities related to the interests of a job seeker;
2. Joining a Service Club (the Lions, Rotary, the Chamber) and getting to know the diversity of business and industry in the local community;
3. Completing a relationship map with others in the agency to identify staff family and friends who own or work for local businesses;
4. Completing a relationship map with families and consumers to identify in which local companies they spend their money for goods and services, and what family



- members either own businesses themselves or can serve as the entrée into businesses they frequent or work for;
5. Identifying the suppliers of the many goods and services the rehabilitation agency buys and enlisting them as employers or as connectors to other potential employers in their networks.

Having identified smaller employers who may fit the employment needs of specific consumers is just one step in curing Big Sign Syndrome though. Because many small businesses are under-capitalized and surviving on limited profit margins, a job creation approach is often required to create jobs or intrigue employers. In fact, breaking the cycle of entry level employment for people with disabilities generally mandates a creative re-thinking of positions and opportunities. The typical scenario for people with significant disabilities is part-time, minimum wage jobs for a lifetime. One successful approach we've used for years now is Resource Ownership. This approach recognizes that small business could sell more goods, better satisfy customers, or increase market share by adding a person with particular talents or technology. For instance, a baker we worked with recently heard customers complaining that they could not buy an espresso to go with their fresh Danish. The baker simply couldn't afford a \$4000 espresso-maker. But, a young lady itching to go to work in a coffee shop, through a Customized Employment project in Georgia and some Vocational Rehabilitation dollars, was able to purchase the machine and create a new position within the company. This mutually beneficial approach helped a struggling entrepreneur and created a career track based on an individual's work preferences. And, happy customers mean more business, which means higher wages all around.

In this case, the espresso machine is the same lever that a college degree or a welding certificate represents for other job seekers. Having exploitable resources, whether it be brain-power or a color Xerox machine that boosts customer satisfaction at the local copy shop, is critical to creating jobs a few rungs up the career ladder from entry-level. Resource Ownership is simply the concept of acquiring materials, equipment, or skills that an employer uses to make a profit. For instance, many people spend \$50,000 or more on a college degree, and that degree is a symbol of exploitable resources. Employers reason that they can profit from a graduate's intellect so people with degrees get hired. In essence, the graduate gives the employer that degree in trade for wages. The same occurs when a truck driver who owns a tractor-trailer applies for a hauling job. Without the trucking equipment, the trucker is possibly forced to face unemployment, or a less satisfactory, lower paying trucking job in which the employer has to buy the equipment. The point is that people have to have exploitable resources to get a good job, and by putting the means of production in the hands of people with disabilities, it makes them more employable.

IBM and Boeing can afford their own equipment, and negotiating these job creations in companies of this size will likely end in a bureaucratic tangle of policy and regulation. Small business is the perfect place for job creation strategies such as this, however, because the job developer and job seeker are likely dealing with the owner or manager, there are few, if any, layers of approval to be navigated, and management is less likely to

change and reverse previous hiring decisions. A small business owner can also see immediate results in the bottom-line by adding valuable products or services, and employers still tell us that they enjoy creating jobs for people. Giving back to the community by employing one's neighbors is one of the joys of owning a business.

## Conclusion

This article is limited in scope, but does point out that with literally millions of small businesses across the country, no job developer should ever run out of employer prospects for any sort of job seeker's dreams. Driving down Klements Lane, no outsider would ever guess that so many opportunities for job creation exist. There are thousands of miles of country roads, inner-city avenues, and suburban cul-de-sacs that hold a potential job match . Get off the strip and start looking for the small-sign/no-sign shops that fuel this American economy.

Cary and Dave are the authors of the book [Making Self Employment Work for People with Disabilities](#) (2003). For more information or to arrange training contact Cary at [cgriffin@griffinhammis.com](mailto:cgriffin@griffinhammis.com) or Dave at [dhammis@griffinhammis.com](mailto:dhammis@griffinhammis.com). More information can be found at [www.griffinhammis.com](http://www.griffinhammis.com)



### CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT PERSONAL SALES SKILLS

Excerpted from: **Cary Griffin, Dave Hammis, and Tammara Geary (2007). The Job Developer's Handbook: Practical Tactics for Customized Employment. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.**

Every employer, job seeker, and circumstance is unique; therefore job development approaches must be customized to compliment the facilitation of the employer/employee relationship. Customized employment is focused on creating relationships, and some general guidelines for sales conduct are important.

1. Preparation is crucial. Anyone developing jobs must know the job seeker's personal characteristics and be able to synchronize these with the employment marketplace.
2. Selling is personal. Customers want to know you care. This is not about intimacy, but rather about listening before helping the customer solve a problem.
3. Listening is more important than talking. Unless the employment specialist is hearing what the customers need, the wrong placement scenario is liable to be offered, thereby injuring the opportunity for lasting relationship.
4. Prospecting is an on-going process. Building a network of friends, suppliers, and business associates is crucial to finding new employers.
5. Initial contacts can make or break a customer relationship. Job developers should be aware of interfering. "Cold calls" or job development calls made without prior contact are seldom appreciated. Instead a "warm call" approach is generally greeted more favorably. A call is warmed up by sending out a letter of introduction; meeting a prospect at a professional or social gathering, and following up with a phone call later.
6. Use Leave Behinds. Each individual served should have representative materials such as portfolios or resumes, and each job developer should use business cards or other items that illustrate credibility.
7. Be prepared to handle objections. Employers new to hiring people with disabilities may doubt the viability of such an effort. Listen respectfully, but anticipate concerns and respond professionally.
8. Allow the employer to say no. Sometimes a business just does not need or want a new employee. Be respectful and polite. By walking away promising to be in touch later, the customer is relieved from making a decision they wish to avoid, and they may remember the job developer's graciousness later.
9. Stay in touch. Job development and even hiring is never final. Show customers, employers, and job seekers alike, their satisfaction is important.

10. Follow up. If an employer or job seeker asks questions the job developer does not know the answers to, make certain to find out and get back in touch with that customer. Maintain the relationship.

11. Be a Gracious Guest. Job development calls are typically on someone else's turf. Act like a good guest. Arrive promptly, be sociable but businesslike.

12. Be concise. Friendly talk is important to loosen up the situation. Comment on a picture in the office or ask about the employer's family, but keep it short and sweet. People are busy, and employment specialists should respect that.

13. Personal Behavior. Employment specialists dress respectfully and appropriately. When developing a job at a bank; dress as the bankers; when developing employment in the auto parts trade, dress like those behind the counter at NAPA or a little better, but certainly not in a 3 piece suit. Be neat and clean; do not smoke, drink alcohol, or tell dirty jokes; do not overstay the set meeting time unless the employer makes it clear they want to hear more; do not talk politics or religion.

14. Ask for a referral. Whether an employment situation is secured or not, ask the employer for the name of someone else in a similar business or someone they believe might be interested in knowing about the individual job seeker.

15. Be kind. Do not attempt to develop employment by complaining about, slandering, or attacking another competing service agency or employer. Resorting to attacks in an effort to secure a particular employer offends and frightens. Focus on the qualities of the individual seeking employment and the match to this specific business.

16. Personal Management. Keep appointments; write up job analyses immediately; manage time, and do not miss deadlines.

17. Customer service. Make certain promises are kept; appointments are honored; training occurs as negotiated; and support is conveniently accessed by employer and job seeker alike. Make certain people answering the phones at agency headquarters are informed and courteous; make certain promises are honored with a minimum of customer frustration. Do not promise what the agency cannot deliver.

18. Get busy. Job prospecting is hard and demanding work. Design an individualized job development plan with each consumer, outline the employers to be contacted, target broadening personal networks to expand employment possibilities, document the efforts, and work with a team to provide support and advice.



**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:**

**GUIDE FOR TRAINING ACTIVITY**

Informational interviewing is a great way to develop work experience settings, build a job placement network, to discover new kinds of jobs, to introduce yourself and your services to employers, and to build the mental database that all of us rely on for employment ideas when beginning a job search with someone.

Getting an appointment for an informational interview is usually much easier than setting up a job development meeting. A casual conversation with a prospective employer at the monthly Chamber of Commerce “Business After Hours” social or at a service club meeting (e.g. Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, et al.) can lead to a probe such as, “I’ve never seen your operation before, would you mind if I called you to set up a time for a tour and a bit of a chat?” Most folks love to talk about their business and since you are not pressing them, setting up a phone call is considered low-risk. Make sure to follow-up soon, before the conversation is forgotten, and to illustrate commitment.

Generally a request for fifteen to thirty minutes works well because it signals respect for the person’s time, and it indicates that you are busy as well. In our experience, fifteen minutes always becomes thirty to sixty minutes once the discussion and tour begins.

On-site, the job developer or employment specialist is seeking information about the company, its hiring practices, what opportunities exist to create or carve jobs, and getting insights into the company culture. The general format of an informational interview is:

1. Brief Discussion prompted by the employment specialist asking something to effect of: “Before we tour, can you tell me a bit about the history of the business, the products and services, and how the business is evolving?” And, “Tell me how you got into this line of work.” People want to know that you care, so give them a chance to talk about themselves.
2. Tour, with questions asked at appropriate times and of various people performing the many tasks along the way.
3. Wrap-up by thanking the person for their time, indicating that you may have someone interested in this field as a career or even possibly working there now or later. Make your exit and promise to stay in touch.

Throughout the process, opportunities to ask questions conversationally exist. Since this is not a job development visit, do not press someone for a job. That comes later in the relationship. For now, the tour is answering questions about the varying tasks and duties people perform, the values and culture of the company, and needs the business has that your organization or workers can address.

The tour provides an opportunity to witness, for instance, the level of natural support that may be available to someone with a disability. Keen observation reveals whether co-workers and supervisors help each other out during a typical day; it reveals who does the training and how an employment specialist might structure the initiation period so that the employer takes significant responsibility for supervision and training right from the start; it reveals what is valued on the worksite, such as muscle, brains, humor, attendance, speed, quality or other worker traits. These are important considerations, of course, when designing a job match that minimizes on-site training and consultation.

The interviewing process, as well, reveals opportunities or red flags if the place of employment does not provide a good working environment. Some standard questions for an informational interview, again, asked in a conversational and not an interrogative tone, include:

1. Where do you find or recruit employees? (This is asked in case you now need to refer to Job Service if they do all the hiring searches for this particular employer; to identify your competition; and to create an opportunity to discuss the service you provide).
2. How are people trained in their jobs? (This gives information about natural training means and methods that can be sculpted into a job match and training plan, especially one that recognizes that in most cases business already trains its employees and that the support you offer is customizing their training, not replacing it).
3. What are the prerequisites for working here? (This points out the various qualifications, certifications, etc., that might be needed).
4. How or where do your employees gain the experience required to work here? (Another question that gets at qualifications and that seeks the advice of the “expert.” This also gives the job developer a list of other similar companies).
5. What personal characteristics do you look for in employees? (This gives insight into the kind of candidate the employer seeks; provides information on what to highlight in a resume or interview; and gives a glimpse inside the culture of the company regarding the most valued skills and attributes).

6. When employees leave, what other industries or businesses do they go to? (This starts getting at issues of staff turnover, which might be an indicator of a great place to work in the case where no one leaves, to an indication of poor management in the case where there is high turnover. It also provides the job developer with information on related industries and possible opportunities for someone interested in similar work).

7. What are the pay and benefit rates?

8. What are the work hours? Is there shift work? Does the company allow for flex time or other job accommodations? (This gives the employment specialist insight into the flexibility of management and the company's policies on work hours and expected work effort).

9. What impact is technology having on the industry? (This is a common concern for most businesses today and provides an opportunity for the job developer using Resource Ownership strategies to propose a job for someone who can use or bring with them a piece of essential technology that can be purchased through a Social Security PASS Plan or through Vocational Rehabilitation).

10. What are the current forces for change in this industry? (This question often leads to a lively discussion of how the market is changing, how personnel preparation and training is evolving, and how the competitive market is adapting).

All these questions and their answers breed add-on questions and discussion points that provide opportunities to solve labor problems or to innovate in the face of emerging trends in hiring. Informational interviews are a low-tech, high-touch option that provides insight into the inner workings of business. Knowing what goes on in a given company gives the employment specialist or job developer an added advantage when creating employment or responding to an employer need.



**CUSTOMIZED JOB DEVELOPMENT: TACTICS FOR TOUGH TIMES**

**BY CARY GRIFFIN AND BETH KEETON  
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**Introduction**

In his latest book, Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell determines that successful careers depend on two fundamental elements:

1. Starting out in a supportive environment, and
2. Acquiring skills through repeated application and refinement

Gladwell notes that Microsoft CEO Bill Gates grew up in a family that supported continuous learning, and he had easy access to some of the first computers in the country where he could practice and learn. The Beatles landed their first real work in the strip clubs of Berlin where they had to perform grueling 8-hour shifts. Playing ceaselessly for years made them incredibly good musicians. For our purposes, the lesson here is that interests are important, but that skills mastery determines an individual's degree of success.

Recent employment practices, based in person-centered planning, have not proven overly successful. The focus of many person-centered approaches is the listing and cultivation of interests. However, interests devoid of related skills makes meaningful and lasting employment a tough goal to achieve.

It is true that strong interests motivate learning, but past assessment approaches reveal serious weaknesses in eliciting unique personal desires. Typical among the interests listed for people are: animals, coffee drinking, music, movies, etc. These are bland at best, and certainly universal likes among human beings. The Discovery process, however, illuminates interests, accompanying tasks, and skills that have specific application in businesses.

While several groups have proprietary Discovery processes (e.g. Griffin-Hammis Associates, Marc Gold Associates, The Rural Institute, et al.) all share the premise that employment derives from the creation of profit, and profit is generated by producing goods or services of value to customers, and production requires the performance of skills-based tasks. Again, while interests may help us find a career direction, instruction, application of skills, and mastery play an often-overlooked role in securing solid employment.

**Steps to Discovering Personal Genius**

Discovery stages the job development efforts to follow by answering some basic questions about the job seeker. The process typically begins where the individual lives, with listening sessions with friends and family where professionals should maintain silence except when prompting conversation. We recommend a simple: "tell me about your son," when doing the initial home visit with a family. This discussion is not an



interview or interrogation; there's no checklist or script. The conversation goes where it needs to go and is not interrupted until all that needs to be said has been spoken. Generally there is time for follow up and clarification. Some rules for conducting Discovery include:

1. **Start with the person's home and those he or she is closest to.** Explore the rooms of the home for clues about interests, skills and tasks performed. Explore competency levels as well as the surrounding neighborhood for employment or work-experience opportunities, transportation resources, and places to learn new skills.
2. **Don't simply go to places of interest; participate.** In other words, plan activities that demonstrate the skills and tasks the individual can perform, wants to learn, and has an interest in learning.
3. **Seek to establish at least three over-riding vocational themes in the individual's life.** These are not job descriptions, such as "wants to refuel airplanes." Instead, think more broadly; in this case think aviation. This leads to a richer series of activities in relevant environments. Someone interested in refueling airplanes may simply be grasping at the one job they've seen or that someone has told them they might be able to do. By exploring the broader field of aviation, using both Informational Interviews and short work-experiences, a world of possible tasks and environments is opened.
4. **Develop a solid profile statement capturing the essence of the person,** their predominant skills, and the three areas of vocational relevance.
5. **Make Discovery a project.** That is, manage it with a start and finish date. Customized Employment is not about getting a dream job. CE sees a job as the beginning of the rehabilitation process, not the end. Therefore, starting with a job that matches existing or quickly learned skills, in an environment that matches the individual's profile is the target for now. We are finding that precise focus on an individual by a team should result in adequate Discovery that takes 20 to 60 hours over an 8-week period.

### **Job Development**

Searching for work begins as Discovery ends. Some rules for this economy that utilize the CE approach include:

1. **CE relies on negotiated job tasks that mutually benefit the employee and the employer.** By approaching specific employers who have task needs matching the job seeker's talents, a match is more easily determined.
2. **Understand that employers are always hiring!** They are hiring people who fit their company and who can generate their paychecks through profits.
3. **If filling out applications and going through interviews is anything more than a formality to make Human Resources happy, then it's not customized.** CE circumvents these traditional comparative processes that screen people with disabilities out. There is nothing inherently bad about these processes for people who can survive them; but many people with disabilities are immediately screened out. Again, CE is based on negotiation, not the traditional employment process.
4. **For each of the three vocational themes, construct a non-duplicative list of Twenty Places where the career makes sense.** In other words, list 20 specific places of employment in the community, accessible to the person, where people

- with similar skills and interests work. There is nothing magical about the number 20, but 5 or 10 is just too easy, and creativity in employment, along with complexity, comes after the obvious employers are listed.
5. **Use Informational Interviews to gather advice for the individual's career plan.** By asking for advice, and a tour of the company, the tasks are revealed and if a match seems possible, job development can be introduced. Informational interviews should not be used as a bait and switch technique, but they often reveal needs employers have as well as opportunities for a business-within-a-business. Also, Resource Ownership possibilities can be determined through the informational interviewing process, wherein the individual brings specific tools or technology with them that make them more employable, in the same way a college grad brings their diploma or a mechanic brings their tools to a job.
  6. **Stay away from retail.** In this economy, retail is tough. And, regardless, retail has been stripped of much of its complexity. Complexity in work tasks often means more stable work, an abundance of natural supports via co-workers and equipment or technology, and higher earnings potential. Of course, it also means more rigorous use of systematic instruction by Employment Specialists.
  7. **Seek out small businesses.** There are only 17,000 businesses in the United States with more than 500 employees. There are approximately 26 million small businesses, with an average of fewer than 4 employees, the majority of which have no Human Resources Department or even job descriptions. Fewer barriers to employment mean easier negotiations.
  8. **People come together over shared interests.** Therefore, having an opportunity to meet with a small business manager or owner who shares the interests of the job seeker make the negotiation easier. As noted of course, interests are not enough, there must also be the potential for learning the requisite skills of the job, but the presence of shared interests is the foundation of all human relationships. And, employment is as much a personal relationship as marriage.
  9. **There are unlimited ways to make a living in the world;** therefore, thinking in terms of job descriptions and job openings is pointless. Most of us only knew the 5 or 6 job descriptions promoted by our Guidance Counselor: teacher, nurse, firefighter, police officer, and lawyer. For people with disabilities that list became: janitor, dishwasher, paper shredder, grocery bagger, and recycler. CE represents an unrestrained economic development approach to infinite job creation and restructuring. Negotiate with employers while highlighting skills that match their customers' needs instead of looking for stereotypical openings.

## Conclusion

It's a tough employment market out there right now. But then, it's always been tough for people with disabilities. Go where the career makes sense, emphasize tasks and skills, and negotiate for mutual benefit.

Note: This article draws upon content from a new CE curriculum for the Province of British Columbia being prepared by GHA in partnership with the Langley Association for Community Living. For more information, please see [www.griffinhammis.com](http://www.griffinhammis.com)



**THE DREAM JOB  
TRAP**

**CARY GRIFFIN & DAVE HAMMIS** Revised 2012

Person-Centered job development strategy adopts an abundance-adventure model philosophy. In other words, the job market is forever expanding through the creation of products and services that meet evolving needs or solve emerging problems. Just as entrepreneurs create business, job developers can create jobs.

Beginning, always, with the job seeker's profile, developed from Discovery, the best possible conditions of employment are sought. Matching the potential contributions of the job seeker with an employment situation, without regard to existing job descriptions is, again, the key feature. The savvy employment specialist, or self-directed job seeker, is out to create employment, not react to what is available as revealed through want-ads or employment postings at the local Workforce Center.

Reacting to the paucity of employment options offered by the job market resulted in a profusion of entry-level, stereotypical, and high turnover low-paying jobs for people with the most significant disabilities. Correcting this situation by matching people's individual talents and aspirations to adaptive work situations is the employment specialist's cause. This effort requires ingenuity and imagination; a re-thinking of how the job development process should work.

Person-Centered Planning approaches emphasized the accumulation of the "dreams" of people with disabilities (Griffin & Hammis, 1993; Mount, 1987). An unintended consequence of this vital planning method was the development of the "dream job." Chasing after a dream job is a noble gesture, but in the long run this pursuit too often ends in failure. The authors certainly bear responsibility for their role in promoting this approach, but suggest that dream jobs are problematic for a number of reasons.

1. Dream jobs are often one-of-a-kind. For example, a young man decides he wants to be the manager of the Philadelphia Phillies. There is no reason to think he cannot do this, however, only one such position exists and without experience in the Major Leagues it is highly doubtful that even exhaustive efforts will result in the dream's attainment. Chances are the Manager's position was perhaps the most visible and desirable job to the individual. However, by exploring this interest in baseball, many tasks reveal themselves which may present an opportunity to create employment related to baseball precisely, or in the sports field generally. Perhaps also, by exploring what a baseball manager does, the elements of being in charge may be revealed as the motivating factor for the job seeker, thereby opening up opportunities in supervisory positions in a number of fields. Or, perhaps management positions offer a symbolic respite from a life of clienthood where control is vested not in the individual but rather in programs and professionals. The baseball theme deserves exploration, and with an open mind and some imagination a wondrous number of possibilities may arise.
2. Dream jobs assume only one vocational interest. Many people with significant disabilities

have little life experience. Discovery, coupled of course with various work experiences in school and perhaps as an adult, expands interests and choice making. Too often, staff close to the individual, and with the best of intentions, suggest jobs based on their limited knowledge of the person. Because some people with significant disabilities acquiesce to those in charge, or perhaps because the individual is highly prone to suggestion, the dream job identified is not a choice, but rather represents a decision to work or not to work.

3. Dream jobs suggest a one-time career placement, instead of the growth and change expected from typical workers, who, in the United States, change jobs and careers multiple times (Hoff, et al, 2000).
4. Dream jobs are often governed by the experience and talents of the professionals. Stereotypical jobs for people with significant disabilities exist because the rehabilitation field has limited skills in teaching complex job tasks, and because our social and professional networks are typically limited to others in this or similar fields, and new ideas do not arise unless new people with unique experiences are engaged in the process.
5. Dream jobs suggest that people with significant disabilities are one-dimensional. Job developers should adopt a philosophy that recognizes the complexity and potential of all human beings. Through significant experience all people learn, adapt, and grow new interests. Looking only at one exhibited preference fails to acknowledge the appreciation of multiple, and perhaps unlimited interests.

The Customized Employment (CE) process suggests that Discovery and work experience present an array of employment opportunities awaiting exploitation. The job developer armed with all this evaluative information can locate or create money-making opportunities using inventive and imaginative strategies. Instead of making sales calls to likely business prospects, the employment specialist should seek to capture the essence of a workplace by touring, arranging for paid work experiences, and getting past the ubiquitous entry-level positions to find the career opportunities often hidden from the view of the general public; the jobs behind the jobs.

Entry-level jobs certainly are typical and serve a number of important functions in the life's work of any person. We learn critical work and social skills, we learn how to manage our money between paychecks, we discover growth opportunities through exposure to other operations within a company, and we also hone our talents and recognize our employment-culture preferences. Closer scrutiny of entry-level job histories, however, often reveals personal preferences and themes, and not simply the acceptance of jobs solely because they existed. Anecdotal research by the authors, in discussion with a small sampling of about 130 adults in several states, reveals that the majority of jobs they held as teens, their first jobs, were indeed related to personal interests and/or allowed them to be close to friends. Those entry-level jobs also represented a mere starting point in their careers and were meant to be short-term, serving as stepping stones to better jobs, higher earnings, and increased professional satisfaction. Jobs for people with disabilities often represent limited growth potential, and attempts by the worker to move on to better jobs is often greeted as a sign of non-compliance or failure (Griffin & Sweeney, 1994; Noble, et al., 1997; Griffin & Hammis, 2001). There are over 20 million businesses in the United States; opportunities for upward and lateral movement in career exploration abound, and growth should to be encouraged and expected.

This article is excerpted in part from the authors' book:

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



## DISCOVERING PERSONAL GENIUS:

### *SELF-EMPLOYMENT FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH*

By Cary Griffin & Dave Hammis

Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC

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#### **The Challenge**

In the United States there is significant evidence that class-distinction predetermines occupation. For instance, boys from poor families grow up to work in blue-collar low-wage jobs; girls from middle-class families attend college and take professional positions; children of the “country club set” choose career-paths that maintain this status. While there are many exceptions, a very strong trend-line for this phenomenon exists (Wharton, 2001).

Anecdotal evidence also exists to suggest that class distinction guides the career futures of children served through special education programs. This bigotry of low expectations is evidenced nationally by out-dated and contraindicated methods of vocational preparedness and job development. This may be the reason why so few transition-age youth graduate from special education with paid jobs; why the jobs they do enter remain part-time, low-wage, and very low status; and why the predominant careers involve fast-food, entry-level retail, cleaning, and other dead-end service occupations (Wehman & Kregel, 1998; Griffin, Hammis, Geary, 2007). It’s time to re-think work.

The predominant approach to employment for students with disabilities stands on several false assumptions.

False Assumption #1: People with significant disabilities are not welcome in the workplace.

False Assumption #2: People with disabilities can choose from a very limited pallet of jobs (e.g. food service, janitorial, repetitive non-complex tasks such as those found in many sheltered workshops).

False Assumption #3: The economy cannot support great jobs for everyone, so people with significant disabilities must take what is available.

Debunking the first myth is easy. Take, for example, the Muscular Dystrophy Telethon, numerous Autism fundraising events, and the ubiquitous local charitable appeals. These events raise millions of dollars annually. The bulk of this money comes from businesses, or personally from the 5 out of 6 of your neighbors who work in for-profit companies. Employers think so highly of people with disabilities they give cash donations, and they also volunteer in great numbers to help with these fundraisers. We know the business community wants to help; we simply need to change the message from one of pity to one of economic equality.

Debunking the second assumption is simply a matter of reviewing the data to see the reality of choice limitations. There are actually unlimited occupational choices. By invoking the principle of Partial Participation, emphasizing each individual's competence, portions of jobs, select business activities, and newly created work tasks can be developed. A new concentration on job carving, job creation, and on small business development opens the world to a renewed vision of work. There is certainly more than enough work to get done. As a rancher recently commented on the evening news when asked if the work he does is difficult, he declared, "it's not that the work is hard, it's that there's so darn much of it." If we are clever, we can figure out how to make doing some of this work profitable to the employer, thus creating an employment opportunity. Focusing on the job/person match is essential and largely commonsense. Transition, plain and simply should not be approached as a *Process*. Rather, Transition should be considered in terms of *Outcomes*.

Finally, considering Assumption #3, we must remember that economies grow and shrink without appreciable effect on the employment rate of people with disabilities. Jobs should be created through a negotiated process using pro-active methods. Waiting for the want-ads to appear, listing just the right job is hopeless. Self-employment, a major Customized Employment option, is one way of creating employment where none seems to exist previously.

Consider Melody, for example. Several years ago she received her Certificate of Attendance from a high school in a very wealthy city district. Her passion is art, especially painting still-life and landscape themes. In school, she took art classes, but her unpaid and paid job experiences all involved entry-level food service positions. Why? Because the assumption existed that art-related businesses have few positions for painters, largely because there were never ads for artists in the classifieds; because it was assumed she needed to learn good work habits (i.e. timeliness, attendance); and because the school did not have time for individualized career exploration. Melody's behavior was also a consideration. She was known for being "non-compliant," for showing little enthusiasm in her work experience settings, and for "talking back" when asked to perform menial tasks. By forcing Melody into situations she regarded as boring and undesirable, her behavior reinforced the assumptions her teachers had of non-compliance.

Of course she was also rated as a "below average" performer on assigned tasks, taking into account her speed as the determining factor. Timing someone, while also giving little in the way of precise instruction on tasks of little relevance is traditional in special education, and wrong. The CEO of a large organization recently confessed that the only real measurable part of his job is typing, something that if assessed would drop his pay below that of most entry-level workers. Using productivity as a measure of employment potential is a throwback to 19<sup>th</sup> century factories. The individual's contribution, which may indeed be partially based on speed, and ecological fit within a company are more reasonable measures (Griffin, Hammis, & Geary, 2007).

Upon graduation, Melody was referred to an adult services agency and vocational rehabilitation. Based on her school records, a plan was developed for her to take a job rolling silverware at a local restaurant. After almost a year of resisting this ill-conceived placement, Melody and her advocates were able to convince the state that she indeed could work part-time painting pottery in a shop, volunteer and show her work at the local artist's cooperative, and develop a line of paintings and products in her own art business. Without advocacy, Melody would likely have been labeled as behaviorally unfit for employment and would be sitting at home. Instead, her talent was recognized by a local artist and was hired, even though he had no positions

open at the time. And, her small business income continues to grow as she sells paintings. Melody's tenacious self-determination and human desire for self-sufficiency helped establish her as an artist.

## **The Process**

Small business ownership is the fastest growing employment option in the United States today (Schramm, 2010; Brodsky, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; Access to Credit, 1998; Freidman, 1996; Sirolli, 1999). Self-employment is also a rehabilitative option under the Rehabilitation and the Workforce Investment Acts (WIA). Both systems can help a person with a disability purchase business equipment and/or assistive technology, training, and the supports necessary to run their business (e.g., legal, marketing, accounting). The Social Security Administration (SSA) is also actively promoting the use of business ownership to stimulate employment of individuals with disabilities, through the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS). A PASS is one of the few financial options providing actual operating cash to businesses, and is a critical compliment to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and/or WIA resources (Griffin & Hammis, 2003). Schools are not restricted from exploring small business ownership, and indeed can blend funding with the systems above to create a smooth transition from school to entrepreneurship.

## **Discovering Personal Genius & The Vocational Themes**

Customized Employment (CE) is a non-comparative vocational process that builds upon the foundation of Supported Employment, but that also recognizes self-employment as satisfying an individual's ideal conditions of employment. In other words, the individual is not compared to others; there are no norm-referenced test scores to determine employment suitability. CE involves a functional, real-time assessment of an individual's skills and talents, based on the assumption that everyone is "work ready"; the development of best-match scenarios between work environment, supports, their interests, and work tasks; and, in the case of self-employment, matching skills, interests and customers in the marketplace. Crucial to the CE process are vocational team members that understand the proper steps of Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) (assessment), interest-based negotiation, job analysis, systematic instruction, job carving, and job creation. CE represents an economic development approach to employment that eschews the vestiges of historic charity models (e.g. "Hire the Handicapped"), and labor market studies, while recognizing that wages are the residue of profits created through an individual's contribution to a company, whether that company is owned by they themselves or by someone else.

Discovering Personal Genius, or simply Discovery, is a process that is generally conducted in the home, community, and school, and records information about the person, their family and friends, social connections, the skills they have and the tasks they do, best support strategies, interests, concerns, and experiences. Usually a simple but diverse series of community and school activities are engaged in and documented to highlight the individual's potential contributions, large and small. From the profile that emerges, a career plan, sometimes including self-employment, is discerned.

The development of Vocational Themes evolved over the past decade of implementing Customized Employment in numerous sites across the U.S. and Canada (Griffin & Keeton, 2010). The process of identifying themes is a natural outcome of the Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) strategy. Too often in the past, employment development hinged on rapid-fire discernment of an individual's interests, and then divining a few job ideas. Most of us only know of a few jobs, and we tend to think in job descriptions,

instead of discerning the tasks and skills a person has or is likely to learn through structured teaching using systematic instruction. Because so few employment staff know how to teach complex tasks effectively, and how to engage the natural worksite trainer in the process, we job develop only to our own competence level and experience. This is why we have stereotypical jobs as the rule: grocery bagging, rolling silverware, janitorial; and microenterprises of equal blandness including the production of greeting cards and paper shredding. Now, there is nothing wrong with any of these employment options. The critical question to ask is: Do these jobs lead to a better job through the development of skills and talents? Unfortunately, they often do not.

Because so many folks with serious disabilities only get one or two chances at community employment, the process used to identify potential employment must be rigorous. Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) is designed to generate no fewer than 3 overarching vocational themes. The themes are not job descriptions. They are large umbrella topics that represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills/task sets, and interests. Too often someone may have an interest in say flowers. The stereotypical job suggestion is likely to be: Work in a greenhouse or assisting at a florist shop. This is very limiting for both the individual and the person charged with assisting in the career search. Sometimes the other extreme is broached, suggesting that the person open their own florist shop, even though retail is not the theme and might well detract from the true theme and the person's interest in plants.

By thinking through the theme a bit, supported by DPG evidence of current skills, tasks that can potentially be taught/learned, and interests, as well as work environments that make sense, a broader and richer palette of opportunity emerges. By slowing down the process just a bit; engaging a team for ideas; and exploring the community using informational interviews and work try-outs (Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007), creative options, including business ownership, emerge.

So, someone who helps their parents grow flowers in the family garden demonstrates that they know how to water the flowers, how to prune back dead leaves, and how to hoe weeds. This might mean, although additional Discovery is warranted, that there is an Agricultural Theme. This is not a flower or a plant theme; that would be far too narrow. The same skills used in flower gardening are used across many types of agriculture (and within other themes too). The flower garden, after all, is likely the only place the opportunity to learn and perform these tasks has occurred. In fact, DPG challenges us consider that this might not be an interest of the person at all. Perhaps this is just one of the only activities accessible to the individual. Still, the skills they have (watering, weeding, trimming) are relevant in many work environments and should not be dismissed. The DPG process helps determine where both interests and skills lie.

If Agriculture is indeed determined to be a theme through various DPG activities (e.g. a positive work try-out on a weeding team at the Botanical Gardens; a brief experience trimming trees with the local Parks Dept.), then a List of Twenty is developed. These lists compile places "where the career makes sense;" local companies where people who also have agriculture-related skills and interests work. This provides a multitude of options for job development, or the creation of internships and apprenticeships. It also provides a quick scan of the market place and may reveal a market opening ready for exploitation through an individual's own business. Developing the List of Twenty is difficult, especially in smaller towns. This difficulty mandates creativity and exploration of one's community, especially since the work options must be accessible to the individual and be non-redundant in nature. A general rule is no more than 2 similar businesses on a List of Twenty.



Certainly no one will come close to visiting all 60 businesses, either. Generally it's recommended to formally visit a couple from each List using informational interviews, or get insights into a few via connections to folks who work in these companies, or through leveraging the social and economic capital of schools staff, Board of Education, student's family, or the school supply chain.

A List of Twenty for the Agriculture Theme might include: the local feed mill or grain elevator, a ranch or dairy farm, the local Bureau of Land Management Soil Testing Laboratory, a neighborhood grocery store, a local ice cream company, an office-plant maintenance company, the airport where crop dusters operate, a natural vitamin supplement processor, etc. Consideration of the individual's environmental fit, their skills and interests are still needed, but the Theme opens up the potential for a match beyond simply guessing at job descriptions. A quick study of Agriculture reveals links to possible exploration of careers relating to: animals, cooking and food production, decorating and design, et al. Since the best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas, developing the themes is a keystone task.

Because all people have complex lives and are adaptable to varied situations, it is recommended that at least 3 Vocational Themes be identified before moving into job development or small business creation. Why three? First, because one theme is never enough to anchor employment development efforts and often represents the most obvious of ideas. Two themes still means there's only one hardy theme. Three seems to work well, and gives vocational teams the diversity and depth of thought to move beyond stereotypical employment.

Three themes also allows for mixing and matching. So, taking the agricultural theme and combining it with a mathematical theme replete with such skills as: being able to calculate a ball player's batting average; being able to add numbers on a desk calculator; being able to read digital and analog scales may yield some interesting businesses to explore. Any business engaged in agriculture deals with mathematics on some level. They are buying and selling, they are weighing, they are bagging, they are projecting, they are taking measured samples, they are selling by the dozen, the gross or the hundredweight, etc. The point is that until these companies are explored the actual existing or potentially created jobs or complimentary businesses are unknown. Perhaps there are opportunities at the local ketchup factory where trucks roll across the scales full, then empty to determine the value of the tomatoes they brought in; perhaps bagging and weighing seeds at the local plant nursery; measuring out how much fertilizer is mixed with water in a 500 gallon tank.

**Referral to VR and WIA** is one of the steps along the way, and can happen at the beginning of the career exploration process, or later as development occurs. It is recommended that both VR Counselors and Workforce Center staff have a meaningful role in the development and generation of business ideas because they are experts in understanding the local market and the support strategies people often need. Do not use these systems solely as funding sources or an opportunity to benefit from years of experience and a breadth of support is lost.

Vocational Rehabilitation policies on self employment vary from state to state, but the Rehabilitation Act does indeed consider business ownership a reasonable outcome of services. Counselors can use their general case services funding for self employment and they can use their supported employment allocations, as well. VR can pay for such things as business classes, business plan development, marketing services, business/job coaching, work experience, vehicle repairs, capital equipment, tools, and other necessities of a small business. Workforce Investment programs, such as One-Stop Centers, have less experience with both

disability and self employment, but the U.S. Department of Labor, their funder and administrative unit in the government, is clear that business ownership is a reasonable outcome of services (Callahan, 2003; Griffin & Hammis, 2004).

**Skill building and business training** is also available through the VR and the WIA systems, as well as through many Small Business Administration (SBA) programs. The list is long, but the SBA funds, or supports in-part, such programs as the Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), Women's Entrepreneurship programs, the Tribal Business Information Centers (TBIC), the Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), community kitchens where space to produce food products is available at low cost, business incubators that provide mentoring, production space, and office equipment to start-up enterprises at low cost, and numerous special projects (Griffin-Hammis, 2003; SBA, 2004).

Business training often involves a multi-week commitment, attending a series of classes once or twice a week. Those attending are interested in starting an enterprise or expanding an existing one. This setting, a good inclusive setting for many people, can lead to profitable business relationships. Sometimes, however, it appears that these classes are used to screen people out if they cannot grasp the academics involved. The issue in self-employment is support, so if someone cannot read or write and produce a business plan, if they have someone else working with them who can perform these tasks, then funding should continue based on the business idea, not on the person's perceived limitations. Small business ownership for individuals with significant disabilities is based on the principle of partial participation (Brown, et al., 1987). Simply stated, a person who performs part of a task still has value and can contribute in a work setting. This concept is the foundation of outsourcing in business, where tasks are carved out for other sub-contractors to perform, and of the rehabilitation concept of Job Carving where emphasis is focused on the contribution of the individual in a worksite and not upon the tasks they cannot perform or do not enjoy (Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007; Griffin & Targett, 2000).

**Financial and Benefits analysis** is another key aspect in any vocational planning. During Discovery it is critical to add a financial analysis to the process. When developing a business or working with an ongoing small business, there are a series of critical factors that need to be accounted for by small business owners with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. SSI and SSDI have different policies and laws regarding self-employment than are used for wage employment. In some cases, significant monetary gains occur as a result of small business earnings and resource exclusions. In other cases, substantial losses occur if not planned for. Preparing a small business benefits analysis is a very important initial step. (More information and on-line classes can be found at [www.griffinhammis.com](http://www.griffinhammis.com) and [www.cbtac.org](http://www.cbtac.org)).

Further, both Medicare and Medicaid present opportunities for small business owners in health care coverage and long-term living supports, or can have critical impacts if SSI and/or SSDI are lost due to poor benefits planning. Self-employment allows for wealth accumulation in the SSI and Medicaid systems through a work incentive called Property Essential to Self Support (PESS). This policy allows a small business owner with SSI and/or Medicaid to have unlimited cash funds in a business account and unlimited business resources and property. Such opportunities do not exist in regular wage employment. A single person receiving SSI is required to have less than \$2,000 in cash resources if employed in a wage job. PESS neutralizes that resource limit and allows the individual to accumulate wealth in the business account that can be harvested later for personal and business purchases.

**Testing feasibility and refinement of the business idea** is often confusing. One of the simplest methods of testing ideas is to draw up a brief survey and ask people at the local mall, on the street, or via telephone a few short questions about the idea. James, for instance, established a retail urban-wear clothing shop. To test his business idea, he surveyed shoppers asking them:

1. Are you interested in purchasing the latest in urban wear?
2. Would you shop here for those items if such a store existed?
3. What items would you be most interested in?

Another option for testing the idea is to do a competitive analysis. That is, survey the community or, do an internet search for similar businesses, to identify other possible competitors, visit some of them, and discern their unique market niche. Planning a similar business then involves differentiating the enterprise from the others. For instance, there are thousands of jewelry makers. Their designs differ though and appeal to various customers. Some sell high cost items; others sell lower cost goods for the budget conscious. Still others use precious stones whereas another jeweler employs precious metals. Some rely on classic styles while others produce modern designs. The role of testing is to meld the owner's interests with those of the marketplace to find a match. Then, marketing and sales approaches are refined to attract customers and motivate them to buy.

Perhaps the most efficient and functional method of testing business ideas is to simply sell a few. Wash cars for a few weekends; sell your jams and jellies at a couple county fairs. If customers seem pleased, perhaps a business is born.

## **The Business Plan**

**Writing the business plan** derives from all the steps above and puts the information in a logical sequence. The plan is essential in acquiring funding through most systems, and banks or loan funds will certainly require a comprehensive plan as well. Business plan templates are available from numerous sources including your local VR office, [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov), and the local SBDC. Before writing the plan, check with the funder to ask which format they prefer or require. Briefly, most plans will ask the prospective owner to elaborate on the following:

**Product/Service.** A precise statement describing the Product or Service is written, followed by an examination of the Market Environment and Location. This statement includes information regarding the market and reasons why the business will succeed. This section also includes a short assessment of the person's situation and support strategies, their talents, the availability of SSA Work Incentives, and their love for making the product or delivering their service, and a discussion of why this business makes sense for them.

### **The 3 Cs.**

First the business' potential **customers** are examined:

Who are they?

Where do they live?

Why would they buy this product/service?

Are they one-time buyers or will they want/need more?

Is price a consideration for them?

What quality of product/service do they expect?

What level of customer service will they require?

The **Competition** evaluation is similar:

Who is the competition?

Will it be easy for another competitor to enter the market with a similar idea?

Will the business compete on price, quality, or both?

Is there a plan to turn competitors into partners or suppliers of needed parts/services?

What makes this business's product/service better or different than the competition's?

The **Capabilities** of the business are summed up by posing a series of questions emanating from the Customer/Competitor analysis:

1. How many customers can we potentially reach?
2. How many repeat customers will we have?
3. Will our competitors supply us with raw materials or component parts? Can we supply them with finished items or sub-assembly work?
4. How will we grow into other markets such as opening other retail outlets, securing contracts from wholesale buyers, creating an internet presence?

**Marketing Mix.** This portion of the plan expands on the information collected about customers, competitors, and capabilities. Based on this information, the target market is clarified.

**Pricing** is determined not simply by the labor and materials used in producing the product. The price also includes burden costs such as salary and benefits, rent, legal fees, business licensing, insurance, shipping and handling, tooling and equipment, communications, advertising, depreciation, and other fixed and variable costs. There is also a psychological aspect to pricing. Some customers seek bargains, and at other times they insist on high priced name brands. Knowing the market helps determine the price.

**Distribution and promotion** refers to where and how customers get the product, and the methods used to attract customers (i.e. networking, advertising, sales, marketing). Distribution planning includes determining the boundaries of the sales territory; reserving shelf space; form of delivery; and the planned approach for reaching the customer. Promotion refers to the method used to advertise and market the business and its goods or services.

**Operations** concerns production of the product or service, and using appropriate processes and support strategies. Listing the tools and equipment necessary for production is an essential component here.

**Contingency plans** are also necessary in the Operations section. If a supplier is unable to deliver, alternative suppliers should be known. And if the business is seasonal, perhaps a tourist related service, a plan for bad weather should be outlined so that the business does not falter.

**The Financial Plan** is perhaps the most critically developed and managed portion of the plan. Here the Benefits Analysis is merged with available funding, and the long term (2 to 5 years generally) estimation of income and expenses. Typically the business develops an operating budget, a cash flow projection, a break-even analysis that illustrates when sales income exceeds expenses, and a PASS if applicable.

## **Conclusion**

This brief article is meant to offer small business ownership as another option for Transition-age youth. Waiting until graduation to start a small enterprise is neither necessary nor advised. Many adolescents babysit, wash cars, or have interests that can translate into good after-school, weekend, and summer businesses. Waiting until graduation to plan a career results in poverty and isolation for many graduates. With a little planning, family support, and school/community resources, small business creates opportunity when none may have appeared obvious.

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**THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LEADERSHIP:**

**TEN CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS**

**BY CARY GRIFFIN**

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The traditional study of management and leadership leads one to believe that the role of top administrators is to set a course and stick to it. The image of a ship's captain as leader is archetypal: the haggard admiral standing on deck, wheel in one hand, sextant in the other, guiding the ship tirelessly through the storm. Using time-honored, and often very effective, techniques including strategic planning, performance evaluations, formal (written) inter-departmental communiqués, policies and procedures that anticipate every possible corruption of the mission, and internal quality measures (rehabilitation managers know this as "accreditation"), leaders attempt to keep the organization stable, predictable, and on course.

Of course, off course is where the fun begins! And this very issue strikes panic into the hearts of most of us charged with assuring the sustainability of our organizations. The challenge for leaders is contradictory: manage for stability while simultaneously creating new opportunities and innovations. This mutually exclusive goal itself is at the heart of the best organizations; ones that invent new products and services, create multi-layered networks, and that cast off the ballast of past management practices while carefully retaining the best attributes. And, of course, since this is a largely non-linear undertaking, there can be no cookbook; no one right way; no formula for success. Instead, great leaders envision the future and adapt along the path.

The following Ten Contradictions are offered only as a starting point in re-thinking our role as leaders; leaders at all levels of an organization, and in various circumstances including: at work, in our families, in our communities, and in the world at large.

**1. GREAT LEADERS KNOW THE DESTINATION BUT LOOSE THE MAP.** In other words, leaders are responsible for gathering broad-based support for the strategic vision, but must jettison linear work models that mandate straight-line production. Innovation is generated and nurtured through experimentation that is sometimes wasteful and unfruitful on the surface, but that generates new experiences leading to problem solving in new ways. An organization that planfully and playfully embraces new circumstances (and a new circumstance occurs whenever a customer asks for something new; or when we ask a customer if they would prefer something new), is regularly confronted with side excursions that may lead to new knowledge and opportunities, but can also lead to loss, political confrontation, and trouble. Good leaders are prepared for either, and take smart risks.

**2. DON'T MAKE MISTAKES; LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS.** Contrary to the popular cliché, there are indeed stupid ideas, lots of them in fact. Countless consultants and business books suggest making fast-failures while encouraging us to learn from our mistakes. This seems irresponsible and unwise. One of many great reasons to read books is that they recount and often dissect historical mistakes made by industry and humankind. Learning from *others'* mistakes in order to minimize new ones is a much better approach.

Responsible leaders, and their colleagues, use their intuition and experience to discourage bad ideas, but support marginal ones that just might have a chance at succeeding. A leader who allows for, and budgets for, experimentation sends a clear signal that personnel are encouraged to find better methods and products. In the long run, profits come to those who innovate, not to those who stay the course. Various “skunk works” inside innovating corporations such as Canon, Xerox, and 3M proved remarkably profitable following short-term expenditures to generate and test new ideas.

**3. THE CUSTOMER COMES SECOND.** Customer service starts internally. Appreciated and intellectually challenged staff perform better, stay longer, and earn organizations better reputations by treating their work mates better. Satisfied personnel treat external customers better, and happy customers tell their friends. Therefore, staff satisfaction should be among the first concern of leaders. Job satisfaction comes from reasonable pay of course, but more so from challenging work, being provided the tools and core competencies to do the work, and from the visible respect of leadership. A 360 degree relationship develops over time where appreciation generates high performance, which generates satisfied customers, which generates profits, which generates better pay and new tools for innovation, which generates appreciation and so on. Investment strategies in long-term personnel recruitment and development are a key action step in satisfying customers.

**4. USE AD HOC JOB DESCRIPTIONS.** While we all want to know where our responsibilities begin and end, it is almost impossible to predict what every employee should be doing for every customer, in every circumstance these days, especially in a person-centered service environment. Certainly, guidelines spelling out broad categories of work duties, core tasks and competencies, and responsibilities are critical, but discretionary effort makes or breaks good companies. Rigid job descriptions are based in logic and analysis, which are good tools for managers. But, adaptive organizations need personnel who also rely on intuition, experimentation, analogy, and the ability to cope with ambiguity. Consider the airline customer with a cancelled flight that cannot get re-booked on another airline because the gate agent repeats, “I am not authorized to help you.” The situation is so much more pleasant (and eventually profitable) if gate agents have the power to fix customer problems at the point of face-to-face contact. Repeat business from paying customers is critical to even non-profit success.

**5. PAMPER THE CORE 20 PERCENT OF YOUR CUSTOMERS.** While it is true that all customers are critical and important, and want to feel that way, in most circumstances Pareto's 80/20 Principle holds true. Roughly eighty percent of an organization's business (profit) is generated from twenty percent of its customers. Paying attention to those critical customers keeps the organization focused



on critical innovations, problem-solving, and opportunities to nurture these select few assuring a solid future. Of course, innovation happens on the fringes, so the other customers are important too, and may very well lead the organization into new service territory. Contradiction at its best!

**6. CHALLENGE THE CORPORATE CULTURE.** Corporate culture is made up of all the unwritten and written rules of behavior in an organization. There is comfort and stability in learning, knowing, and practicing the rites and rituals of the enterprise. And as humans, and good managers, we seek consistency and predictability because it allows us to move forward without distraction. However, a stable corporate culture also breeds complacency and discourages invention. Bending company procedures, not abolishing them, especially by leaders, begins the process of blurring the lines of conformity and fosters experimentation by example. Creating new ideas and concepts necessitates that teams of people create a culture of questioning and positive conflict. From the edges of discord and anxiety comes innovation. Furthermore, making changes or subtly standing in contradiction to the culture makes the past visible and reveals the fears and traditions that stifle creativity. As someone once said, “if you want to understand the corporate culture, make a change.” Understanding is the first step in making and managing change.

**7. PLAY POLITICS.** Politics is almost always cast in a negative light. Political relationships bring up images of corruption, favoritism, deal making, and dishonesty. By definition, politics is the interaction of any two human beings. Being politically savvy means thinking about the future and how each action may cause a reaction. Playing politics means managers are considering the impact of their actions on others; that they are using insider information to position the company into a stronger market position; that they are creating alliances and partnerships that offer protection to their organization and enhanced service and value to their customers. Politics keep organizations alive.

**8. IT’S BUSINESS; IT’S PERSONAL.** In western society, people are identified in the community by what they do for a living. Thinking that professional and community/family lives are separate is a strange business school notion. Imagine if the director of an environmental group, say Green Peace, did not recycle at home. Is that person not guilty, at the very least, of hypocrisy? Leaders are leaders twenty-four hours a day, and business relationships are simply human relationships with a profit motive (or perhaps a non-profit motive). As leaders at all levels, especially in the rehabilitation field, we need to make our passions for economic justice visible and credible by voting for supportive candidates, by shopping in stores that hire people with disabilities, by keeping our money in accessible banks, and by making certain our friends, our Boards of Directors, and our neighborhoods are representative of the people we claim to be at work. One can only be as good a leader as they are a person.

**9. BOTH/AND, NOT EITHER/OR.** Our society is built on the notion of one God, one President, one Director, etc. So, sometimes it is difficult for us to imagine more than one route to a solution, or more than one solution to a problem, or even that no solution is possible and that we are faced with managing ambiguity for long stretches. In most American schools the biggest person standing at the front of the class has all the answers and he or she disapproves of anything but the one right

answer. As students we are also expected to keep quiet, focus our eyes on our own work, and keep our desks in a straight line. The real world is not a linear, controllable environment, so managers are constantly challenged by complex circumstances that do not lend themselves well to the educational rules students are taught that inhibit teamwork and experimentation. There is unlimited wealth, knowledge, answers, approaches, and options in the world. Great leaders see this circumstance as invigorating and liberating, while more linear thinkers see these options as terrifying and uncontrollable.

**10. MOVE TOWARDS YOUR ANXIETY.** Most of us attempt to ignore conflict or discomforting situations hoping they whither away or find quiet resolution. Of course, conflict rarely evaporates. Conflict does, however, fester, manifest itself in other behavioral or organizational aberrations, and eventually grows into a big pile of time and resource wasting goo. True, not every conflict or hiccup in the organization is worthy of attention, but too often gossip, high degrees of expressed emotion, staff turnover, and over-emphasis on internal processes result from values, mission, communication, and goal disconnections. Leaders, again at all levels, have to tune in to these disruptions, address their causes, seek solutions, and build consensus on new ways of working and thinking, all the while running the risk of making the trivial seem important.

Managing and leading is hard work, which is probably why so many of us turn to the latest best-seller for ready answers. The truth is that hard work demands approaches that allow each action to solve multiple problems. This is accomplished through networks of allies and capable employees, using some of the tried and true tools of management. Much of the time our actions are contradictory, which is the way it should be in a complex, evolving world.

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