

Chapter Five

An Employment Tool

For learners who may have a learning disability

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“Learning disabilities do not preclude individuals from becoming successful, from being leaders in their organizations or, even better, in their fields. There are countless examples of adults with LD across the country who have made it in professions, in business and industry, in politics and the arts, and some who have become well-known entrepreneurs” (Gerber, et al., 1992; Reiff, et al., 1997).¹

¹ Retrieved from: http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/adult/characteristics.html Gerber, P. “Characteristics of Adults with LD”

As literacy practitioners, we are aware of the many lifelong obstacles that trouble individuals with learning disabilities. Although some people think that learning disabilities only affect individuals in an educational construct, we know how much it can impact work, friendship, learning, self-esteem and daily life. Employment problems can cause considerable stress for adults with learning disabilities. Some learners often reveal gruelling stories of chronic unemployment and especially underemployment. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of information available in order to help these learners because the problems these individuals have with employment are not widely publicized.

The following is a summary of research studies that have been administered with high school and college students with LD. They show the following:

- Many lacked clear understanding of their disability and its impact on career choices and ability to perform a job (Hitchings and Retish 2000).
- Restricted early opportunities, dependence on family, and experiences of academic failure may lead to low self-esteem and limited self-knowledge (Michaels 1997).
- Type and severity of disability, amount of time spent on remediation, parental overprotectiveness, and low expectations may limit opportunities for career exploration (Hitchings and Retish 2000).
- Adolescents with LD were more likely to limit their educational and occupational aspirations; aspirations for postsecondary education "did not necessarily translate into comparable occupational aspirations" (Rojewski 1996, p. 474).
- Many youth with LD had unrealistic career ambitions or no ambitions. Those with realistic ambitions seldom acquired the education or training that would prepare them for those jobs (Kortering and Braziel 2000).
- Not all who were eligible were involved in comprehensive transition planning in high school, sometimes because of the timing of onset or identification of their disability (Hitchings and Retish 2000).
- About one in three dropped out of high school, but those who took occupationally oriented courses were significantly less likely to drop out (Blackorby and Wagner 1997).
- A large number were not actively engaged in career development and believed they had little control over career decision making (ibid.)²

² Kerka, S. Learning Disabilities and Career Development. 2003.

So, you can see that individuals with learning disabilities are impacted greatly in their career aspirations before they even leave high school. This brings us to discuss the general barriers that individuals with learning disabilities face with employment.

Employment Barriers for Adults with Learning Disabilities

”The key to success is hard work. Tenacity is more valuable than knowledge and skills. The difference between success and failure is that when you fall down a million times you fail, and when you get up a million and one times, you succeed. All you need is one. (as cited in Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1994 p. 33)”³

There are several barriers that adults with learning disabilities face surrounding employment issues. First and foremost is the fact that there is a definite lack of awareness by employers when it comes to learning disabilities. Many employers don’t even realize that learning disabilities impact a person beyond cognitive factors. Also, employees may display as being lazy, disorganized or incompetent to their employers. Often individuals with learning disabilities are not even aware of how their learning disability impacts them in the workplace and therefore are not able to explain their learning disability to employers.

One of the most prevalent barriers to employment for adults with learning disabilities are social skill deficits. In fact, some studies have shown that up to 70% of individuals with learning disabilities are at risk for exhibiting problems with social skills. Although, difficulty socializing and forming relationships, and depression are associated with those who have learning disabilities, these problems do not necessarily **always** coexist.

Some of the social skill deficits that affect adults with learning disabilities include; lack of judgment, deficient perception regarding the feelings of others, difficulty in making and keeping friends, difficulty with socializing and interpreting social cues, non-assertiveness, problematic family relationships and poor self concept. These social skill deficits may manifest in individuals in many different ways, however, the impact they

³ Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1994 p. 33

have on employment is always significant. For instance, some individuals might have difficulty picking up the phone to inquire about a job, some may present themselves awkwardly in an interview and others may simply have difficulty getting along with co-workers on the job.

Among reasons for job termination, social skills problems rank second only to incompetence (White, 1992). Adults who struggle with social skills often have difficulty reading the nonverbal signals of others and adjusting their own body language. Nancie describes her difficulties with controlling her own voice tone:

“I don’t hear the tone of voice. I don’t hear it when it comes out - people have to tell me. I can recognize it in other people, but I can’t recognize it in my own tone of voice. Sometimes I think I’ve been screaming. I’ll say to somebody, “Was I kind of loud in that last section?” because I was really animated or something. I’ll make some kind of excuse and people will say, “No, I don’t think so at all,” but at that point it sounds like screaming in my head.”⁴

Regardless of how the social skill problems present themselves, they can have a significant impact on an individual’s career path.

Previous negative school experiences are another issue that can have an impact on a learners’ vocational career. Some individuals do not even consider certain career paths because of their negative school experiences. Just because an individual does not perform well in learning situations does not always determine their potential to have a successful career. While some individuals only focus on their academic problems, others do what they can to make it through high school and follow some sort of passion that leads them to a successful career. Individuals who focus on their academic problems may have limited career goals because they might not be able to recognize their strengths or be able to market their abilities.

Untapped potential can be another reason why individuals with learning disabilities struggle with employment issues. Many individuals with learning disabilities feel frustrated in jobs where they are underemployed and are not utilizing their potential. They are all too aware of the opportunities that are out there to become trained and skilled in various designations. However, because they don’t always perform well in

⁴ Roffman, Arlyn J. Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. 2000.

learning situations their potential often remains unrecognized and untapped. Many adults with LD feel misunderstood and unappreciated in the workplace.

Emotional overlay is something that many individuals with learning disabilities are plagued with throughout their lives. This is a result of years of frustration, chronic stress, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, anger and isolation. Many individuals struggle to cope with these emotional problems and they find it difficult to focus on anything else.

Finally, discrimination is by far the most difficult of all the barriers that individuals with learning disabilities face when it comes to employment. The fallout of discrimination includes individuals being fired because of things that are a result of their learning disability eg. social skill deficits, consistent lateness or failure to follow instructions. Although the employer is not aware of it because they do not know about the person's learning disability, they are committing an act of discrimination by letting the person go. This is why learning disability awareness is so important for employers.

Summary

Individuals with learning disabilities are impacted in the workplace by many barriers. These barriers include lack of awareness by employers, social skill deficits, negative school experiences, untapped potential, emotional overlay and discrimination. Social skill deficits may include lack of judgement, deficient perception of other's feelings, difficulty maintaining friendships and challenges associated with socializing and interpreting social cues. Such deficits rank second only to incompetence among reasons for job termination. Although, lack of social skills can be a huge barrier for individuals with learning disabilities, discrimination is by far the most difficult barrier to overcome.

Specific Challenges Associated with Learning Disabilities in the Workplace

There are very specific challenges adults with learning disabilities face when it comes to employment. For instance, individuals who have auditory processing deficits find that the ability to remember more than one step of complex instructions is extremely difficult for them. Unfortunately, the subsequent lack of follow-through is often misinterpreted as

disinterest or laziness. According to Hoffman et al. 1987 “ ‘problems following directions’ is the number one problem identified by employers in getting and keeping a job.”⁵

Workers with auditory processing problems also have difficulty functioning in open, cubicle-like surroundings where noise is able to filter in from many directions. This can also happen in factories where loud machinery and conversations compete. These scenarios make it particularly challenging for individuals to focus and filter out background noises. During meetings, some adults find it difficult to focus on one key speaker, especially if other attendees are having side conversations, circulating or getting up to get coffee.

Individuals with visual processing deficits struggle in the workplace with specific challenges as well. For example, individuals with visual memory problems tend to forget where they have filed important memos and may not remember the face of a new customer they have recently met. Individuals with visual processing deficits often have difficulty with written language. This can impact them greatly in an employment setting because of the amount of text that they are often required to work with.

Individuals who have organizational processing deficits may have trouble prioritizing their work responsibilities. The job interview itself can be troublesome as they may be late, inappropriately dressed or unprepared. Organizational problems may manifest as inefficiency because the employee may have a disorganized or chaotic workspace. This type of disorganization can cause employees to misplace important documents, miss appointments or deadlines, and mismanage their time; co-workers or clientele may question their credibility. “Disorganization is linked to inaccuracy and inefficiency, causing workers to require longer periods of time to complete assigned tasks.”⁶

The most common of challenges that impact individuals in the workplace involve skill deficits in reading, writing and math. Reading impacts so many aspects of work. There are memos, notices, e-mails and many other ways that individuals with reading deficits are bombarded by print.

Writing is another skill that troubles individuals with skill deficits. In some cases, individuals are tested for certain skills during the application process. Writing deficits may severely limit an individual’s potential for job advancement.

⁵ Roffman, Arlyn J. Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. 2000.

⁶ Roffman, Arlyn J. Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. 2000.

Individuals who struggle with math and numbers may find jobs very difficult if they are required to handle cash or balance finances. Some individuals may transpose phone numbers, addresses or account numbers. Since math and numbers are a part of so many jobs from retail to truck driving, this type of processing disability can be particularly challenging for those in the workforce.

Individuals with learning disabilities can sometimes be easily distracted when completing various tasks. This can be very detrimental in the workplace because employment is usually “results driven”; an individual who is easily distracted by background noises, another task or room lighting may be seen as inefficient.

When adults with learning disabilities have a pattern of non-assertive behaviour, it may hinder success in the workplace at many points of getting and keeping a job. It may be difficult for them to articulate their strengths and “sell” their skills and abilities during a job interview. On the job, they may not come across as a team player because they are afraid to ask co-workers for help when they need it. They may also agree to do too many tasks within a certain timeframe.

The hallmark of learning disabilities is difficulty with processing information. Unfortunately, success in the workplace is often directly tied to the ability to take in all types of information and respond appropriately. According to researchers, employers cite “problems following directions” as the number one reason why they discharge an employee.

Summary

For an individual with visual, auditory or organizational processing deficits, there may be specific issues like the inability to filter out background noises or general issues like non-assertiveness. In the workplace, employers may misinterpret the individual’s actions and make assumptions about them as an employee; this could lead to the loss of employment.

Keys to Success

"Dyslexics are overrepresented in the top ranks of people who are unusually insightful, who bring a new perspective, who think out of the box,"

- Sally Shaywitz, author of *Overcoming Dyslexia*

There have been several research studies looking at keys to successful employment for individuals with learning disabilities. Many studies focused on individuals with learning disabilities who have had notable career success; the studies sought to identify the common factors that may have led to their success. Ginsberg, Gerber and Reiff in 1998 compared highly successful and moderately successful adults with LD with respect to income level, job classification, educational level, prominence in the field and job satisfaction. From this study, they developed a model for career success of individuals with disabilities. The main component of the model is the degree to which the individual is able to take control of their life.

"Taking control" has particular import for people with LD. First, the experience of growing up with LD often leads to a loss of control ...The autonomy of people with LD is undermined, especially as they find they have great difficulty with tasks that others take in stride...In the worst instances, people with LD may learn to be helpless. They feel that they do not control their own destinies; rather they are simply adrift." (Reiff 1998, p. 320)⁷

Retrieved from: <http://www.calpro-online.org/ERIC/docgen.asp?tbl=pab&ID=110>

The following is from the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Take note of the questionnaire that would be really effective to use with learners who are having difficulty identifying and understanding their strengths. The section following also helps learners determine their marketable skills.

Understanding Your Strengths

"I urge kids and young adults who have LD or AD/HD to view their struggles as an opportunity to learn about themselves. When being tested and

⁷ Kerka, Sandra. Learning Disabilities and Career Development. 2002.
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evaluated for learning problems, it helps to view the process as a chance to learn about one's strengths and weaknesses."

Jonathan Mooney, Co-Author of "Learning Outside the Lines"

To succeed in the workplace in spite of having LD, it's important that you work at a job that is a good fit for you. You can determine if a job is a good fit by looking at the responsibilities of the job and making sure they match your strengths. For example, if you are good at working with people but not good at writing reports, you may enjoy being a tour guide, a physical therapist, or a receptionist. If you have artistic talents but have trouble counting money and making change, you might consider a career in graphic arts.

Over time, successful adults made three internal decisions that helped them take control, and they transformed these decisions into four behaviours or external manifestations. These seven factors comprise the model:

Internal Decisions

1. A powerful desire to succeed
2. A clear sense of goal orientation
3. Reframing of the LD experience: accepting the disability, understanding their strengths/weaknesses, and taking action toward goals

External Manifestations

1. Persistence
2. Goodness of fit—finding work that maximizes their strengths and minimizes weaknesses
3. Learned creativity—unique individual ways to accomplish tasks and compensatory strategies for weaknesses
4. A social network that provides support rather than encouraging dependence

Other essential factors include positive self-esteem, emotional intelligence, knowledge of one's civil rights regarding disability, awareness of accommodations, and skills for self-advocacy and disclosure. Several of these factors build upon the experience of disability and reinforce each other. For example, effective self-advocacy requires positive self-esteem. "Simply enduring in the face of the many obstacles that learning disabilities present may be a building block of emotional intelligence" (Reiff 1998, p. 323). ⁸These success factors and the career-related research cited in the previous section suggest practices that should be the focus of career development for persons with LD. Retrieved from: <http://www.calpro-online.org/ERIC/docgen.asp?tbl=pab&ID=110>

Strengths are based upon interests. Individuals will spend more time doing things that interest them, and, as a result will strengthen their skills in those areas. To gain a better understanding of strengths, one can think about things they enjoy doing. To help learners with learning disabilities get a better picture of their interests, practitioners can use the following questionnaire.

Interests & Strengths Questionnaire

My Interests & Strengths:

1. What did you do when you were young that was fun?
2. What do you do now that's fun for you?
3. What did you do when you were young that you were proud of?
4. What do you do now that you are proud of?
5. What did your parents and teachers always praise you for?
6. What do you do now that makes your family members and friends proud of you?
7. What are you good at now?
8. What have you achieved?

⁸ Reiff 1998, p. 323

9. What kinds of jobs have you had so far that you have enjoyed?
10. What volunteer work did you do that was successful?
11. What skills are you currently trying to develop?

After a learner has completed the questionnaire, they may want to show it to family members or friends who may be able to point out additional skills that the learner didn't include.

The following will help individuals determine their marketable skills. Similar to the interests and strengths questionnaire, this chart can be used with learners to help them better understand themselves and their strengths.

Determining Your Marketable Skills

Many of your strengths and abilities are "marketable." This means that they are of value to employers. Your marketable skills can be translated to specific jobs. Employers will want you to have both job-specific skills and general employability skills. Job-specific skills depend on the job. For example, carpentry, sewing, electrical wiring and bookkeeping are all job-specific skills. General skills include the ability to get along with others, be a team player, manage time, respect diversity, organize work and solve problems. The following is a sample of the marketable skills you may have to offer:

Marketable Skills Chart

When you do the following:	You build marketable skills in:
Participate in sports, clubs and other group activities	Leadership and team work
Participate in group presentations in class or at club or community meetings	Listening, organization, public speaking and processing information
Attend class, club, or community meetings on assignment; meet deadlines for turning in work	Time management, organization, follow-through, dependability and responsibility
Cooperate with others on team efforts and respect the different cultures and opinions of those with whom you work	Adaptability, flexibility, and teamwork
Write letters and reports; solve everyday problems at home, in school or at work	Critical thinking, writing and problem solving.

All of the above skills are valuable to employers, but these represent only a sample. There are many other marketable skills that learners may possess. They can complete the following chart to get a picture of the skills they have and would like to improve.

My Skills

1. Writing

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

2. Public speaking

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

3. Planning

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

4. Computer skills

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

5. Budgeting

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

6. Managing people

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

7. Organizing projects

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

8. Researching

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

9. Training others

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

10. Decision-making

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

11. Negotiating

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

12. Problem-solving

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

13. Leading

☐ Do well ☐ Don't have ☐ Need to improve

Predictors of Success

The following information comes from a longitudinal study that Dr. Marshall Raskind of the Frostig Center called, "Patterns of Change and Predictors of Success in Individuals with LD." According to this study individuals with learning disabilities who found success possessed the following attributes:

- 1) Self-Awareness
- 2) Proactivity
- 3) Perseverance
- 4) Goal-setting
- 5) Presence and use of effective support systems
- 6) Emotional stability

1) Self awareness

The successful individuals often referred to themselves as "learning disabled." They were very open about their difficulties and described life events in terms of their LD. At the same time however, they were not overly defined by their difficulties. These individuals were able to "compartmentalize" their disability- seeing their difficulties as only one aspect of themselves. They also accepted their LD and utilized appropriate services to overcome difficulties whenever possible. Many of the "successfulls" also had a clear picture of their individual strengths and weaknesses, recognizing and accepting their talents along with their limitations.

2) Proactivity

Successful individuals with LD were actively engaged in the world around them. They tended to socialize, participate in community activities, and take an active role in their families, neighborhoods, and friendship groups. They believed they had the power to control their own destiny and affect the outcome of their lives. The ability to make decisions and act upon those decisions to control their lives was also evident. Furthermore, these individuals displayed an internal locus of control. After making decisions and acting upon them, they faced the consequences- taking responsibility for both positive and negative outcomes.

3) Perseverance

Successful individuals kept pursuing their goals despite adversity. They maintained the attitude that difficult situations were necessary learning experiences and that in the end, their struggles would help them improve their character, and ultimately, reach their goals. Many described themselves in perseverant terms such as "I am not a quitter," and "I never give up."

4) Goal setting

Adults in the successful group made reference to past and current goals in their lives. Many individuals indicated that goals had been identified early on, and that they had provided direction and meaning to their lives. They also showed evidence and awareness of the step-by-step process to reach their goals. Additionally, goals set by these individuals appeared realistic and attainable.

5) Presence and use of effective support systems

Persons in the successful group frequently spoke about the support, guidance, and encouragement they received from "significant others." These "others" included friends, mentors, teachers, therapists, co-workers, or family members. Individuals in this group actively sought support and were able to attract or draw support to them. Furthermore, they were willing to accept support when offered. In many instances, these individuals actively maintained contact with "significant others" over the course of their lives. Also of note is the finding that these "significant others" appeared to hold clear and realistic expectations for the individual.

6) Emotional stability

Successful participants did not often report being diagnosed with identifiable psychological difficulties. This is not to suggest that they had not been diagnosed, nor never experienced psychological distress, but rather that they appeared to have developed effective means of coping with stress, frustration, and ambiguity. Additionally,

individuals in this group were able to maintain a positive, optimistic, and hopeful outlook in the face of difficulties. They were also able to maintain positive peer relationships and draw upon social support systems in times of need.⁹

Summary

Many research studies have looked at the keys to successful employment for individuals with learning disabilities. According to the studies, factors that contribute to notable career success include persistence, goodness of fit, learned creativity and a strong social network. It's important for individuals with learning disabilities to understand that their strengths will most likely be based on their interests. Determining strengths will help them with career choices and can also help them identify marketable skills.

Good Employment “Fit” or “Match”

We may often we meet learners who come into our programs with very unrealistic goals, particularly around employment. They may seem adrift, moving from job to job and feeling reduced self-worth from losing multiple jobs or from not being hired for the job they want. For some learners there may be complex reasons for this pattern, but other learners may simply not realize their strengths or weaknesses. Some individuals find jobs but never seem to be happy in them. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, one can determine whether a job is a good fit by looking at the responsibilities of the job and ensuring that they match his or her strengths.

Dr. Paul Gerber is a specialist in the field of learning disabilities and has authored many books including *Learning Disabilities and Employment* and *Exceeding Expectations of Highly Successful Adults with Learning Disabilities*. One study analyzed the degree of vocational success in individuals with learning disabilities; they included income level, job classification, educational level, prominence in one's field, and job satisfaction.

From this study the following characteristics were considered precursors to success:

1) Desire

One of the requisite characteristics for success is desire. The reasons that the adults in the study had acquired such high levels of desire are varied. Many were plainly angry, often

⁹ Retrieved from: <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=742> Raskind, M. “Specific Success Attributes Among Individuals with Learning Disabilities” 2002.

at the school system, and set out to prove that they were capable people. Others, however, developed their desire from more positive experiences such as encountering success in a particular endeavor, receiving strong support from family or significant others, or realizing that basic academic survival simply requires more determination for a person with learning disabilities.

2) Goal Orientation

The successful adults in the study were extremely goal oriented and viewed having a focus or direction as crucial to their success. However, goals cannot be frivolous or fanciful; realistic aspirations must guide the decision-making. As with desire, goals become more apparent and attainable through experiences of success. When one achieves at a particular endeavor, one often begins to consider pursuing it. For persons with learning disabilities, that focus may also derive from a realization that many aspirations are not realistically attainable. Some adults even saw learning disabilities as playing a proactive role in the goal setting process. They didn't waste time aimlessly exploring a multitude of possibilities but concentrated on areas in which they were more likely to be successful.

Goal-oriented people must be willing to take risks. Achieving most goals usually requires venturing into uncharted territory, and sometimes new directions and strategies become necessary. Willingness to change and grow must accompany the decision to pursue a goal. Additionally, few people achieve their intentions without enduring setbacks along the way. Part of risk-taking involves coping with temporary failure and not losing sight of the goal.

3) Reframing

Perhaps the key component and certainly the most complex of the internal decision making lies in the process of reframing. In order to cope successfully with the demands of the adult world, all the subjects, to some degree, had reframed or reinterpreted the learning disabilities experience. In this process, they transitioned from focusing on disability to an emphasis on their abilities to confront and overcome challenges imposed by their learning styles. They moved from reacting to learning disabilities to a proactive stance where learning disabilities became merely one piece of the total picture of the self.

Four stages characterize the reframing process: recognition, acceptance, understanding, and formulating a plan of action. The first stage of dealing effectively with learning disabilities is to recognize that it exists. Recognition does not automatically lead to acceptance, but recognizing that one is different is a prerequisite for accepting that

condition. Once the individual accepts the fact of having a learning disability, an understanding of how to work with it can develop. This understanding encompasses realization that one has strengths as well as weaknesses, and that within this combination lies a uniqueness or a special gift. From this level of understanding emerge the special coping skills and strategies that individuals with learning disabilities find necessary to succeed. The last stage of reframing involves applying these decisions and knowledge to chart a course of action for coping with demands proactively. In reaching this point, the individual achieves a totality that supercedes the specific condition of having learning disabilities. The individual does not deny or run away from the learning disabilities but rather learns to take the disabilities into account without losing sight of a larger identity.

4) External manifestations

Decisions are essential for finding the path to success but are relatively meaningless unless complemented by action. The internal decisions made by successful adults with learning disabilities lay a foundation for adaptive behavior. These adults found ways to choose the best work environment by adapting themselves to the demands of the environment and adapting the environment to meet their own needs. Four specific behaviors underpin this adaptation.

5) Persistence

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the successful adults with learning disabilities was an unusually high level of persistence. The individuals in the study discovered that they would have to work longer and harder than others simply to keep pace. The unanticipated benefits came as they realized that the ability to work hard is not necessarily developed by most people. The idea of working hard and long was not something to be applied occasionally but was simply a way of life. Additionally, persistence was emblematic of a powerful resiliency, the ability to deal with failure by not giving up and trying again. One subject offered a theory of why persistence leads to success: "I want to work hard because most people in the world do not want to work at all."

6) Goodness of Fit

In order to be successful, the subjects chose work environments that allowed them to maximize their strengths and to compensate for their weaknesses. This match, or goodness of fit, between individual characteristics and job demands plays a significant role for any individual; it is absolutely essential for a person who deals with learning

problems that have the potential to undermine routine activities. People with learning disabilities need a highly developed sense of adaptability--their own and that of the workplace--in order to determine a true goodness of fit. In addition, goodness of fit relies on a subjective yet crucial quality, the enjoyment or enthusiasm found in the particular job or endeavor. For many subjects, strengths that became useful in particular endeavors had been previously labelled as weaknesses. The transformation occurred because of careful and fortuitous planning and decision-making. Without such forethought, disaster could have struck. In other interviews (Gerber & Reiff, 1991), adults who had experienced little vocational success demonstrated less concern with goodness of fit.

7) Learned Creativity

Successful adults with learning disabilities have learned and devised various strategies, techniques, and compensatory methods to enhance their ability to perform well. Learned creativity involves divergent approaches to problem solving. Because many individuals with learning disabilities have great difficulty meeting demands through "normal" methods, they invent new approaches that capitalize on their strengths and are not jeopardized by their weaknesses. Learned creativity takes on numerous manifestations. Some adults learned to manipulate events in order not to expose learning difficulties; others were forthright about having learning disabilities and learned to utilize devices and technological adaptations that allowed them to meet task demands. Many subjects found unique ways to study and prepare for demands at school. If the person was a poor reader, learned creativity did not negate the reading difficulty, but it did offer a way for the person to accomplish the same task as an able reader (e.g., taking courses with less reading demands; using books on tape; devising personalized "SQ3R" approaches; forming discussion groups with more able readers). Variations of learned creativity are boundless. The unifying concept of learned creativity assumes that persons with learning disabilities can learn specialized and individual methods for coping and succeeding with the very circumstances previously deemed overtaxing.

8) Social Ecologies

The final behavioural component of the success process highlights the tendency for successful adults with learning disabilities to seek and utilize assistance through supportive and helpful people. This network of support, or positive social ecologies,

comes in many forms encompassing parents, siblings, spouses, friends, mentors, colleagues, staff, and so on. Almost all the subjects cited the importance of having moral and psychological support in childhood. In adulthood, they sought help and guidance for specific situations, yet they resisted becoming overly dependent on their support systems. They knew what they could do and when not to call on help. They often developed interdependent relationships where they returned support by offering their own unique talents. They learned to accept help when it was necessary with the realization that a degree of dependency was essential to achieving maximum control and autonomy.

Self-designing apprenticeship types of programs, modeling careers on those of mentors, and consciously seeking others who could provide specific services to fill in the gaps created by learning disabilities represent diverse ways that subjects developed favourable social ecologies. In some cases, subjects had to negotiate for specific accommodations; in this instance, they exerted control over their psychosocial environment to enhance their adaptability. In other cases, they combined a measure of learned creativity to establish innovative types of support systems.¹

¹⁰ Retrieved from: <http://www.ahead.org/publications/JPED/jped10-1-b.html> Gerber, P., Ginsberg, R., Reiff, H. Learning to Achieve: Suggestions from Adults with Learning Disabilities

Examples of Goodness of Fit

Type of Learning Disability	Poor Fit	Good Fit
<i>Auditory Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty processing information taken in through the ears • Understanding oral instructions • Differentiating similar sounds • Hearing one sound over a background noise 	<i>Auditory Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything where verbal information is relied upon • Job examples that might be a poor fit: call centre operator, telephone operator, dispatcher 	<i>Auditory Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs where strengths can be utilized eg. visual ability • Job examples that might be a good fit: graphic artist, welder, tool & die maker, accounting clerk
<i>Visual Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty receiving or processing accurate information from their sense of sight • Have difficulty picking out an object from a background of other objects • Problems seeing things in correct order 	<i>Visual Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything where lots of attention to visual information has to take place. eg. administrative assistant, shipper/receiver, technical writer 	<i>Visual Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs where oral memory or verbal abilities might be strengths eg. public relations, child care worker, cook or chef, auto repair, welder, front desk clerk, recreational director, roofer, flight attendant, tour guide or personal support worker
<i>Organizational Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty with time management • Problems with focussing (easily distracted) • Difficulty organizing tasks and activities or physical items eg. desk, space 	<i>Organizational Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs that require a lot of organization and attention to detail eg. accounting clerk, dispatcher or teaching 	<i>Organizational Processing Deficit</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs where risk taking or employment that require creativity eg. sales, marketing or an artist

The following chart produced by the New York State Education Department gives some excellent strategies that can help individuals with learning disabilities achieve a good employment fit.

Good Employment Fit Chart

LD & Employment		
LD Behaviour	Vocational Impact	Compensations/ accommodations/ modifications/ strategies
Difficulty following through on instructions from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty completing job applications • Miss job promotions • Loss of job • Low self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify learning/working styles • Provide instructions in preferred learning style mode (auditory/visual/tactile) • Provide feedback/supervision • Provide special assistive aids, accommodations, etc. prescribed to meet individualized needs
Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty following multi-step instructions • Increased risk for accidents for certain jobs • Increased risk for mistakes on-the-job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break tasks into short segments • Gradually extend activities into longer units • Schedule breaks between tasks • Arrange environment to block visual/auditory distractions • Use earphones to block sound
Difficulty working independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems in jobs where you need to be a self-starter (e.g., sales) • Problems in “helping” professions • Problems in jobs requiring travel from supervised work setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a structured and clearly defined task • Work close to peer or supervisor • Identify and practice preferred learning/work style

Takes longer to do job than others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules out production jobs • Rules out assembly jobs • Irritates other co-workers who work faster • Problems with jobs having deadlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow extra lead time • Gradually decrease practice time while maintaining or increasing job demands • Use a timer to set pace and cue consumers
Has difficulty following oral instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to complete work assignments • Problems with attendance/punctuality • Aggravates supervisor • Safety may be a factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of written instructions • Provide diagrammatic instructions • Provide hands on task demonstrations

Cognitive Challenge	Possible Intervention
Orientation	Keep a calendar for appointments, to-do lists, checklist, phone numbers, etc.
Attention/Concentration	Ask for clarification and step-by-step instructions when necessary. Present new information slowly.
Visual/Perceptual Process	Provide orientation to written documents or screens/fields on a computer screen.
Organization	Follow an established, set process, organized checklist or schedule for completing certain tasks. Do one thing at a time.
Memory	Use a tape recorder to remember information provided in presentations or meetings. Take notes. Summarize information. Organize notes.
Problem-Solving	Depending on the task, use a decision table or chart to solve recurring problems.
Self-Monitoring	Keep a schedule or checklist of work tasks necessary to complete. Check-off completed items.

The following are tips taken from interviews with hundreds of persons with learning disabilities who have been successful with employment.

Understand Your Learning Disability:

- know how to describe your LDs to teachers and to employers without relying on professional jargon
- determine how and when you learn most effectively
- identify accommodations that help you operate more efficiently at school and on the job
- learn about when, where, and how to seek appropriate support
- think about the strengths and assets you may have developed because of your LDs (perseverance, creative problem solving, determination)

Develop Helpful Life Skills:

- practise creative and assertive ways to advocate for yourself
- learn how to use computers and other helpful technological assists
- write down specific goals to help keep you on track
- develop the best time and stress management systems
- learn to accept constructive criticism and don't permit negative feedback to deter you
- remain flexible in exploring alternative learning strategies
- nurture relationships with friends, family, or professionals to exchange support, encouragement, and important feedback

Plan Your Career:

- don't let other people put a ceiling on your career goals
- learn about how your skills, interests, and personality relate to career options
- seek out opportunities for work shadowing, cooperative work terms, and volunteer experiences

¹¹ Retrieved from: Learning disabilities and vocational rehabilitation implications
<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/publications/briefs/ld/home.html#Significance%20of%20Disability>
An Employment Tool

- participate in extracurricular activities and summer jobs that foster skills, confidence, career knowledge, and important contacts
- research appropriate career information to make informed and timely choices
- develop creative and effective job search skills
- be informed about employment equity and human rights legislation
- contact employment equity officers to discuss equity goals, policies, and procedures of specific companies

Remember:

- maintain optimism and hope
- work hard to achieve goals and persevere over obstacles
- don't be deterred if it takes longer to reach objectives
- many people don't understand learning differences and jump to the wrong conclusions
- people with LDs are entitled to educational and job equity¹²

Summary

Some individuals with learning disabilities can have very unrealistic goals about employment. This can impact a learner's self worth because it could cause them to go from one job to another without having much success. Goodness of fit is an extremely important part of the puzzle. It represents work environments that allow individuals with learning disabilities to maximize their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. For example, an individual with an auditory processing deficit who has difficulty hearing distinctive sounds over background noises may be frustrated in a job that where verbal information is relied upon eg. a telephone operator, dispatcher. A better fit may be where the individual can rely on other strengths such as visual abilities eg. graphic artist, accountant.

¹² Retrieved from: http://www.ldao.on.ca/about_ld/adults/adtips.html

Advocacy

Barriers to Self-advocacy

Adults with learning disabilities may not self-advocate effectively for many reasons, including the following:

- They may lack knowledge of themselves as learners, and be unable to clearly describe their abilities, needs and the conditions that best promote their learning.
- They may not know who to contact to obtain the necessary assistance or accommodations, what to ask for or how to best utilize supports.
- They may lack the ability to articulate personal strengths and needs clearly and appropriately. This may be a result of expressive language difficulties, weak social skills or lack of practice in describing their needs.
- They may not have been directly taught appropriate self-advocacy skills and/or do not have someone to coach them through situations where they might need to self-advocate.
- They may have limited confidence in their abilities and low self-esteem. As a result, they may be reluctant to ask questions in class or request extra assistance.
- They are often passive in their approach to their education, feeling that their educational future is beyond their control. This includes relying on their parents and teachers to advocate for them.
- They often encounter people who do not understand learning disabilities and why accommodations or assistance may be appropriate.¹³

¹³ http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/unlocking/unlock_8.pdf

The following information is from the Aldercentre in Toronto and provides excellent ways that adults with learning disabilities can self advocate.

How to Effectively Self-Advocate

Adults with learning disabilities can learn how to self-advocate when curriculum shows how to: (a) make informed decisions; (b) set goals; (c) communicate interests, needs, and rights to achieve goals; (d) take responsibility for decisions and advocacy; (e) apply self advocacy information, skills, and strategies across a variety of situations; and (f) link with support resources or agencies in the community that will provide the adult with opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills over time.

To many people, literacy is more than being able to read. Being literate means being able to perform a variety of functions independently and to fully participate in and enjoy life. Teaching an adult to be a self-advocate involves a combination of strategies, social skills, and knowledge. Self-advocacy curricula should include the following characteristics.

Understanding of the Individual's Learning Disability

Adults need to know the characteristics of their learning disability and how these characteristics affect their learning. They should learn how to detect situations in which their learning disabilities may cause a learning or performance problem.

Learner's Legal Rights and Responsibilities

Adults should be fully informed of their rights under the law, the responsibilities of employers and agencies related to providing equal access to services for adults with learning disabilities, and the mechanisms that are in place to obtain these rights. Advocating for these rights should include instruction in self-understanding and self-assertion.

Social Skills for Seeking Help and Cooperation

Adults should be taught social skills for situations such as requesting the information they need about testing or other situations in which they may need accommodations. They also need to be taught the appropriate ways to share specific and relevant information with professionals and employers.

Ways to Request Accommodations

Learning about accommodations puts emphasis on discovering useful ways of coping with and getting around the functional limitations of an individual's learning skills.

Adults need to know:

- The types of accommodations that are appropriate for their specific disabilities
- How accommodations should be provided
- The conditions under which accommodations should be used and will be helpful
- How to request accommodations
- How to seek and use accommodations independently.

The challenge of requesting accommodations also may require instruction in specific social skills.

Emphasis on Meeting Individual Responsibilities

Self-advocacy involves accepting the responsibility for one's own success. Adults need to learn the actions necessary in specific situations to function independently and responsibly.

Appropriate Use of Self-Advocacy Curricula

Adults with learning disabilities often face situations or conditions in their lives that they feel helpless to improve. For example, they may not have been given equal access to a desired employment opportunity because reasonable accommodations were not provided. When conditions in an adult's life demand change, a self-advocacy curriculum should be considered. In most instances, this approach simply enhances other options selected.¹⁴

The following is a questionnaire that could be used with learners in order to determine if they have adequate self-advocacy skills.

¹⁴ Retrieved from: http://ldlink.coe.utk.edu/cur_self.html , National Institute for Literacy special collection Southern Lincs

Self-advocacy Questionnaire

Can you answer these questions?

- 1) What exactly is your LD?
- 2) What does LD mean?
- 3) Isn't LD the same as intellectual disability?
- 4) What kinds of modifications do you need in the workplace?
- 5) How can you be effective and efficient in the workplace?
- 6) Will your LD interfere with productivity?
- 7) When we train you, can you tell the trainers how you learn best?
- 8) Can you work well with people? Can you work in a team?
- 9) Can you be given the lead role in a work group?
- 10) Are you an organized person?
- 11) Can you do your work as well as a person who is non-disabled?¹⁵

¹⁵ Gerber, P. Network to Learning Conference (London, ON.) 2003.

Disclosure

Disclosure in the workplace is a very sensitive subject because many individuals who have learning disabilities are afraid to admit it to others because they are afraid of being stigmatized.

How to Disclose

If you decide to disclose your learning disability, be prepared to discuss the following:

- Your specific learning disability
- How your LD affects your performance
- The accommodations or modifications you need to be successful on the job
- Examples of successes you have had in the past when you have used these accommodations.

Be straightforward in your statements. Discuss your disability briefly and positively. A sample statement might be the following: "I have a learning disability that affects my ability to understand multi-step instructions that are given verbally. That means that I need your support, as my supervisor, to help me be a high-performance employee for (name of) Company. When you have instructions for me that involve several steps, please either write the instructions down, or permit me to either write them down or tape record them. In my last job, my supervisor always sent me email messages with her instructions, and it worked out fine. In fact, I received an outstanding evaluation in my last performance review."

At this point, you should be prepared to answer questions about learning disabilities. There is a common misunderstanding that learning disabilities are somehow related to intellectual disability (some may even still refer to it as "mental retardation"). Your responses about learning disabilities can help dispel that myth. You may wish to give the employer a simple fact sheet on learning disabilities.

After you have come to an agreement with your employer on your specific job accommodations, ask your employer to give you a memo or letter stating the specific accommodations that you are permitted to use. This is for your protection, should you ever need documentation that you requested and were granted permission to use specific

accommodations.

A word of caution: never use your learning disability as an excuse for failure in a job.

Individuals with learning disabilities should consider the advantages and disadvantages to disclosing their disability and when the right time to do it if they decide to go ahead with disclosure.

When to disclose?

Disclosure on a job application

Advantages: Peace of mind; allows the employer decide if the disability is an issue; easy to do

Disadvantages: You may be disqualified with no opportunity to present yourself or your qualifications; you will never know if screening took you out of the competition

Disclosure during an interview

Advantages: Peace of mind; can speak for yourself about your specific disability issues; discrimination is less likely to happen in a face-to-face situation

Disadvantages: Have to handle disability issues right up front; if there is too much emphasis on disability issue, it could indicate a possible problem; you may not be evaluated on abilities

Disclosure after the interview (when the job is offered and before you begin work)

Advantages: Peace of mind; if the disclosure information changes the hiring decision and you are sure that your disability will not interfere with your ability to perform the job, the Human Rights Code will apply

After you start work

Advantages: Opportunity to prove oneself on the job before the disclosure; allow you to respond to disability questions with peers at work; if disclosure affects employment status and the condition doesn't affect ability to perform job or job safety, you may be protected by law

Disadvantages: Nervousness on the job; employer may accuse you of falsifying your application; problems on the job may begin; could change interaction with other employees

After a problem on the job

Advantages: Opportunity to prove oneself on job before disclosure

Disadvantages: Employer may accuse you of falsifying your application; Can perpetuate disability myths and misunderstandings

Never

Advantages: Employer and coworkers will not automatically assume that any work performance issues are disability related; you will not be asked to explain your disability.

Disadvantages: If disability is discovered, you run the risk of being fired.

Summary

Self-advocacy is vitally important for individuals with learning disabilities. There are many barriers that could prevent effective self-advocating: poor self-awareness as a learner; not knowing who to contact to obtain necessary job accommodations; not being able to articulate personal strengths and needs.

We can teach self-advocacy by encouraging the learner to:

- Understand his/her specific learning disability
- Know their legal rights and responsibilities
- Use specific social skills
- Know a few ways to request accommodations
- Be clear about their individual responsibilities

Disclosure is also an important issue that impacts employment for individuals with learning disabilities. Learners can be taught how to disclose and the pros and cons of when to disclose.

Accommodations

Accommodations can be described in many ways. Some would say that accommodations give individuals with learning disabilities the opportunity to compete on a more level playing field with their non-disabled peers. According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada:

- An accommodation is a different way to do a task. It uses a learners' strengths to work around the learner's areas of need
- Accommodations allow a person to work better and more efficiently
- An accommodation can be as simple as using your fingers in math or, with the help of assistive technology, as complex as working a voice-activated computer that types what you say

In order to assist people with learning disabilities to reach their potential, there are two key requirements. These are:

1. **Help the learner acquire coping skills**

The learner must be aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses, individual learning style and level of ability in the best conditions.

2. **Determine the appropriate accommodations**

The best accommodations are those that are available, and those that match the learner's coping skills.

The issue of accommodation usually arises in two specific areas: educational settings and the workplace.

It is usually not too difficult to deal with the issue of accommodation if the concerns of the employer or educational institutions are identified. These concerns tend to focus in the following areas:

- Safety
- Cost
- Effects on co-workers or fellow students
- Industrial relations or union implications
- Impact upon the integrity of the institution

For example, in an educational setting, lowering the pass mark for a course by 10% clearly interferes with the integrity of the course. On the other hand, allowing the student

to tape lectures is a minor modification that is unlikely to be considered "unfair" by others.

It is often very helpful if the individual with a learning disability is able to identify the required accommodation and put it forward before any problems arise.

Factors to consider when requesting job accommodations:

- What are your job duties?
- Analyze the aspect of your disability that is causing the difficulty.
- What job tasks are difficult for you to perform?
- What is the layout of your workplace?
- Are there visual or auditory distractions that may affect your performance?
- What assistive devices could you use which would help you perform your job tasks?¹⁶

These accommodations could be used in an employment setting based on the particular deficits of some individuals with learning disabilities:

Deficits in Reading

- Recording for the Blind-books on tape (Persons with LD qualify for this service)
- Tape-recorded directives, messages, materials
Reading machines
- Screen reading software for computer use
- Colored transparencies or mylar sheets for reading and scanning
- Color-coded manuals, outlines, maps
- Scanners that allow the user to enter hard copies into the computer system

¹⁶ Retrieved from: Retrieved from: The Job Accommodation Network
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/LD.html>

Deficits in Writing

- Personal computers/laptop computers
- Voice output software that highlights and reads (via a speech synthesizer) what has been keyed into the computer
- Voice input software that recognizes the user's voice and changes it to text on the computer screen.
- Locator dots for identification of letters/numbers on the keyboard
- Word processing software
- Spell checking software/electronic spell checkers
- Software with highlighting capabilities
- Grammar checking software
- Word prediction software
- Form producing software that computerizes order forms, claim forms, applications, credit histories, equation and formula fields.
- Carbonless note-taking systems

Deficits in Mathematics

- Fractional, decimal, statistical, scientific calculators
- Talking calculators
- Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) software for arithmetic/ mathematics
- Computer Assisted Design (CAD) software for architecture/engineering
- Large display screens for calculators, adding machines
- Colored transparencies or mylar sheets
- Color-coding for maintaining ledger columns

Deficits in Organizational Skills, Memory, and Time Management

- Day Planners
- Electronic organizers/schedulers
- Software organizers with/without highlighting capabilities
- LCD Watches, data bank watches, timers, counters, alarms
- Personal Information Managers (P.I.M.S.) (e.g. “palm pilot”)
- Electronic mail (E-mail) for memory deficits

Managing the Physical Environment

- Room enclosures/cubicles to reduce auditory and visual distractions
- Private office space
- Use of "white noise" by using a sound soother/environmental sound machine
- Use of colored files, folders
- Mapping the workspace/office

Accommodation Examples For Learning Disabilities

A **custodian** was assigned several duties and had trouble remembering. As an accommodation, she was assigned only one task at a time. She also had difficulty reading the job postings. As an accommodation, when a position was open, it was brought to her attention rather than relying on her to read the written job postings. These accommodations were no cost to the employer.

A **police officer** had a learning disability and was diagnosed with an expressive writing disorder. As an accommodation, the police officer was allowed extra time to take examinations. He was also provided with a dictionary to use while taking the examination. These accommodations were at no cost to the employer.

A **college student** with dyslexia, dyscalcula, and memory loss had difficulty reading textbooks and completing assignments. To accommodate him, a loaned computer with Arkenstone Reading software was provided to the student. This computer had voice output and scanned printed materials. The computer, software programs, and printer are available to use until the student completes schooling, then it must be returned. The cost of the accommodations was \$6,245.

A **saw operator** with a learning disability had difficulty measuring to the fraction of an inch. A small card that could fit into a wallet was developed with the fractions listed on an enlarged picture of an inch. The employee could then compare the fraction listed on the reference card with the location on the ruler to identify the correct fraction. The cost for this accommodation was \$5.

A **computer programmer** had a learning disability and deficiencies in reading, mathematics, and spelling. A schematic chart summarizing procedures was provided to assist the programmer with tasks. Also provided were tutorial readers and "talking back" tapes because the programmer was an "auditory learner" and had difficulty with visual discrimination. The cost of the accommodations was \$30.

A **clerk** with a learning disability maintained files and had difficulty categorizing and sorting paperwork. The office was rearranged to eliminate visual distractions. Task sequencing was used in the office. Also provided were reading templates, colored marker tabs, and incandescent lighting. Total cost for these accommodations was \$20 for the reading templates.

A **student** with a learning disability had difficulty taking notes. A tape recorder was provided during lectures, with the tape transcribed at home at the student's own pace. The cost of the accommodation was \$60 for the tape recorder.

A **clerk/receptionist** with a learning disability had difficulty typing from the printed original. To avoid skipping lines, an automatic "line guide" was provided. Total cost of the accommodation was \$256 for the copyholder/line guide, and also for a lamp and magnified cursor.

An **electronics repair student** with a learning disability had difficulty reading. A tape recorder was provided to the student for lectures. Books on tape were provided to the student, as was access/enrollment to a "survival reading skills" class offered at a local school. Total cost of the accommodations was \$127 for a hand-held cassette recorder.

A **typist** with dyslexia was transposing telephone numbers. The accommodation included verbal verification of the phone numbers and extra time to proofread letters. The accommodations were at minimal cost to the employer (staff time).

A **juvenile officer** with dyslexia had difficulty with follow-up casework. The employee was provided with a dictation machine, weekly meetings with supervisors, and casework forms. Total cost of the accommodations was \$200 for a dictation machine.

A **child-care assistant** with a learning disability had low reading skills. A video was provided to the employee to teach a children's story and the hand motions that accompanied the story. The employee viewed the video to prepare for lessons. Total cost of the accommodation was \$50 for the videotape.

A **clerk** needed extra reinforcement when answering the phone, distributing pamphlets, entering "leads" into the computer, and answering questions. A job coach was assigned for two weeks and was then utilized as needed for reinforcement. This accommodation was at no cost to the employer.

A **dishwasher** with a learning disability had many tasks to complete. Using a list of job duties, especially at closing time, with words and/or pictures, helped the person stay on task. The list also helped with organization and efficiency. There was no cost for this accommodation.

A **cutter** with a learning disability with a deficiency in mathematics and difficulties with sequencing was responsible for cutting parts from foam sheets. A pocket-sized card with mathematical calibrations was provided to the employee to help him cut the foam sheets. Total cost of the accommodation was \$25 for the pocket cards.

A **record maintenance clerk** with a learning disability and epilepsy was responsible for filing claims, searching for materials, and classifying material. The employee was provided a job trainer, and was re-trained on many aspects of the job. There was no cost to the employer for this accommodation.

Sample Accommodation Examples For Attention Deficit Disorder

A **journalist** with Attention Deficit Disorder was hyperactive and very sensitive to visual and/or auditory distractions. The employee was provided a cubicle to eliminate distractions. Flextime was also provided, as was additional time to prepare questions in advance. Ear plugs and the use of a tape recorder were also provided. There was no cost for these accommodations.

An **employee** with Attention Deficit Disorder and learning disabilities was provided with a personal computer, a personal information manager (P.I.M.), and an environmental sound machine with headphones. In addition, the employee used colored markers and orange sticky dots for color coding along with yellow mylar sheets for reading and scanning purposes. Cost for these accommodations was \$2,350.

An **attorney** with Attention Deficit Disorder provided himself with the following accommodations: exercising on a regular basis to alleviate some of his restless energy, using a software organizer and P.I.M., using colored folders and color-coding. In addition, he listened to music when agitated. He purchased a color monitor for his computer and chose a color palette on the screen that is personally effective. He used a word processing program that allowed him to work on more than one task at a time on his screen. Cost for the color monitor and software organizers was \$490.

A **school teacher** with Attention Deficit Disorder has accommodated himself by purchasing a computer for classroom use. He used a software scheduler/planner with a timer. He has made the software timer quite large on the screen and makes it flash. This alerts him to time changes during the class period. Finally, he used a large file box with colored file folders with written lists of things to do inside of each folder. He purchased a color monitor and used blues and greens on the monitor, which is effective for him. Total cost for these accommodations was \$2500.

A **manager** with Attention Deficit Disorder used a software scheduler/organizer and a dictation machine for letter writing. Total cost for these accommodations was \$230.

A **worker** with Attention Deficit Disorder who worked shift work received a modified work schedule and is now working day shifts with two days off in a row. This accommodation was at no cost to the employer.

A **landscaper** with ADD was having difficulty remembering the route, and the various obligations along it. He now uses a daily organizer with great success. This accommodation costs \$10 per year.

A **guidance counselor** in a high school with ADD was having difficulty concentrating due to the school noise. His school provided him with a phone light, sound proofing, and a floor fan for white noise. The accommodations were very successful and cost was under \$600.

A **technical analyst** with ADD was having difficulty keeping track of his various responsibilities. He started using a paper daily organizer. Total cost was under \$10.

A worker in **retail sales** with ADD was increasingly frustrated by day-to-day responsibilities on the floor. She broke her day into highly structured chunks. The cost was nothing.

An **account clerk** with ADD working at a bank was having difficulty concentrating on her work. Her office was soundproofed and she self-implemented an accommodation of a personal stereo with nature sounds as white noise. Accommodation cost was under \$1000.

A **marketing consultant** with ADD was having difficulty keeping track of all of her accounts. As an accommodation she self-implemented a variety of daily planners, including one in her date book, another on a digital watch and a third on her computer. She considered the accommodations very successful with a cost of under \$200.

Questions To Consider When Determining Accommodation Solutions**Issues Related to the Individual**

1. What are the individual's job duties?
2. What job duties are problematic?
3. Exactly what does the person have trouble doing within the problematic area? (One must be very specific here.)
4. Examples of pinpointing:
 - spelling problems?--(this may be an indicator of LD) is it due to reversals?
 - visual or auditory deficits?
 - reading problems?--is it due to a visual or auditory discrimination difficulty?
 - memory deficits?--is this due to lack of attention, the inability to focus, or the inability to screen out extraneous stimuli, or short-term/long-term memory deficits?
5. What are the neurological deficits? (One may have to do some educated guessing here.)
6. How can the deficit be compensated? (This is where an accommodation(s) will be considered.)

Issues Related to the Workplace

1. What is the physical layout of the workplace?
2. What specific equipment is utilized in the work setting?
3. What kind of lighting is used and what is the noise level in the workplace?
4. Is the workplace visually distracting, auditorially distracting?

5. How can the physical environment of the workplace be changed so that the worker will be able to perform his/her job duties?
6. Can the job duties be restructured so that the worker can perform the duties that are easier for them?
7. What assistive devices could be used that will help the individual perform his/her job duties?¹⁷

Summary

Accommodations are important because they can give individuals with learning disabilities the opportunity to compete on a more level playing field with their non-disabled peers. However, when requesting job accommodations, there are certain factors that need to be considered including:

- specific job duties
- specific disability and area of difficulty
- specific tasks that are difficult to perform
- the layout of the workplace -- visual or auditory distractions

Resources for Practitioners

AlderCentre

The ALDERCentre is located in Toronto and offers assertiveness training through self-advocacy. Counsellors work with clients to develop competency statements that focus on individual strengths and weaknesses. Clients' understanding of how their learning disabilities affect them in the workplace and what tools are needed to assist them could lead to greater success in the mainstream workplace. If needed, a job coach can be arranged to act as a liaison between the client and the employer to arrange accommodations ranging from simple modifications (e.g., seating within the workplace, instruction on tape, typed assignments and time allocation to complete tasks) to more complex modifications such as adaptive devices like Dragon, WIN and Kurzweil.

¹⁷ Retrieved from: <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/LD.html> Job Accommodation Network
An Employment Tool

Destination Employment

This is a pre-employment program for learning disabled adults, initiated by our national office in Ottawa - the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada - and funded through the national component of the Opportunities Fund (OF), Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

This program is for: unemployed adults who are 18 or over who know or suspect they have a learning disability. The program includes a pre-assessment screening, followed by a complete formal assessment to determine strengths and weaknesses, individual and group work on communication, goal setting, learning preferences, problem areas, rewriting resumes, defining the type of work and environment most suitable to the individual's strengths and weaknesses, pursuing counselling, medication or medication changes, receiving and giving support, and self advocacy.

To find out about this program in your area please contact the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (<http://www.ldac-taac.ca/>)

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (National Office)

323 Chapel St.

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2

Telephone:(613) 238-5721

Fax: (613) 235-5391

Email: information@ldac-taac.ca

Workink

<http://on.workink.com/default.asp>

Job Accommodation Service

<http://www.ccrw.org/en/mission.htm>

JAS can be used by anyone who wants general job accommodation advice, including:

- Employers
- People with disabilities
- Rehabilitation professionals
- Union representatives

- Educators
- Placement Specialists

Individuals can use their services when:

- An employee becomes disabled, or when someone with a disability is applying for a job.
- An employee encounters unforeseen difficulties on the job.
- An employee's work site changes.
- An employee is asked to take on new responsibilities or is promoted to a new job.
- You want to know that you are using the most current and effective job accommodation strategies.

Toll Free: 1-800-664-0925 ext. 224

Telephone: (416) 260-3060 ext. 224

Email: nfarah@ccrw.org

Great websites for Practitioners!

Georgian College – Getting & Keeping a Job

Check out this website which outlines some excellent employment strategies for adults with disabilities for getting and keeping employment. This presentation was facilitated by Stan Ryba and Jim Bryson of Georgian College's Centre for Access and Disability Services.

http://www.georcoll.on.ca/c4a/natcon_notes.htm

Profiles of Success

This website features profiles of adults with learning disabilities who are successful university graduates with learning disabilities (LDs) who were told that they didn't have the academic or career potential to obtain a technical, professional, or managerial career. Yet, all were able to overcome negative predictions to achieve academic and career success.

<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/ldp/success/index.htm>

Interviews with adults who have learning disabilities about employment

The following website features interviews where individuals reveal their experiences in life and on the job, the decisions they made and why they made them.

<http://ld.org/newsltr/1002newsltr/1002real.cfm>

Mentor Program through York University

This website features a mentor program offered by the Learning Disabilities Program at York University. This program gives students and employers an opportunity to work together to develop the career goals of university students with learning disabilities.

<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/ldp/careers/mentoring.htm>

Preparing adults with learning disabilities for post-secondary education

This website provides some great information about summer transition programs that are available to individuals with learning disabilities who would like to enter post-secondary programs. These programs are offered in the summer and help prepare incoming students with training in self-advocacy, adaptive technology, learning strategies and other important information that will help them transition into their program.

<http://www.ldrc.ca/projects/projects.php?id=51&>