IMPLEMENTING
PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING

Voices of Experience

EDITED BY

JOHN O'BRIEN & CONNIE LYLE O'BRIEN

Implementing Person-Centered Planning
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John O'Brien & Connie Lyle O'Brien

Editors

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A Simple Half-Hitch

Debra McLean

> *It's naught but knots that tie me up,*
> *But for knots, naught binds me.*
> *The very same rope that gives me hope*
> *Could be the rope that winds me*
> *Belaying out, belies within,*
> *Be lies where truth be laying.*
> *The very words that seem so clear,*
> *Are knot, the words I'm saying.*

How work is so often the large knot that ties us to the community

I have always been inspired by the magic of seeing people not just bloom but burst into capability in the process of working. In my own patchwork history as a job developer and trainer, I have to say that the facilitative art of person centered planning has been as useful a skill as driving a car or reading. As a tool in figuring out job development and support strategies, it has rarely failed to show me what jobs might fit or how to proceed.

When people have had a very limited exposure to the diverse ways their fellow citizens earn money, it's hard for them to decide whether they want to go to work. But work is such an integral part of who we are and what we do that we can't give up on making good jobs a reality for people with developmental disabilities.

The benefits are obvious. I watch people, many of whom have never worked, go to work and see how soon they realize what being connected to a real job means. Their systemic exclusion from the world of work has affected and pained them, sometimes to the degree that they have ceased to ask for work, not because they didn't believe in or understand it, but because they felt it was a place they would never truly be allowed to be.

Most people with developmental disabilities have never worked or have held dismal underpaid jobs. They have lost hope in earning a living and so have the people around them, even those who knew

them best and admired them. Their lack of work opportunity some-how got explained by their disability labels rather than the paucity of choices offered them.

Again and again, I have been struck by the secret of competence kept in the family. The secret is that the person is a learner, can do things, has interests, ideas, and methods of organizing their world –in spite of labels. Again and again, I have been moved by the way people's faces lit up as they told stories of competence:

> *He built a clubhouse with his brother in the yard.*

> *She sorts all the cans by weight, even though she can't see the labels, when I bring the groceries home. One time she got mad at me and removed all the labels and wouldn't tell me which was which.*

> *She puts all her clothes in the closet color by color.*

The composite picture that families, friends, neighbors and sib-lings draw for me in the stories they tell gives form to the person's capability as a worker and shows very clear ways to pursue occupa-tions that fit them.

How work is that last stubborn knot to untie

People have sat through so many meetings, gatherings and encoun-ters, from the time they were very small and heard those dooming, damning words move from prophecy to painful reality…

> *will never work*
> *low productivity*
> *can't work*
> *not interested in work*
> *won't stay on task*

In my experience, unwillingness to even approach the endeavor of developing a good job explains most unemployment among people with developmental disabilities. Just refusing to make a creative try explains more than those greater myths that people with disabilities can't or won't or shouldn't or don't want to work or that employers don't want them.

So many people have been excluded from the work force due to inaction justified by labels or perceived notions of incompetence that the possibilities for creating good jobs are wonderful. I believe all the people I work with are capable, and competent. I trust that

their person-centered plan will identify both the right kind of job and the best strategies of support. Amazingly, each time it does.

Of course it's the people you know

There are many ways to get jobs. One is through the people we know. One person tells another person that a certain business is hiring, and to talk to a third person in a specific department. Friends or colleagues refer friends and colleagues to certain employers or call on their behalf.

Once people participating in a person-centered employment planning meeting identify definite skills or interests that can be tied to specific occupations, I ask people to name actual people they may know in that type of work. I have found that I, a stranger, in a particular town, could move swiftly through local social networks by following the names given to me at the meeting.

"I'm here because Mary Smith, told me to see you. Your name came up because her son, Eric, is looking for a job. He's very enthusiastic about Xerox® machines." Even if that business hasn't got an opening, I can continue on a personal intertwined trail by making my last question, "Who else should I talk to?" That way I always have a personal connection with the person in the next business.

Sometimes the connection is as immediate or quick as the family's pastor saying at the planning meeting that he never realized Joe's interest in construction and he would talk to the builders in his congregation on Sunday.

Sometimes it was a matter of following connections through the social networks of the town. A person tells me to talk to the next person in a similar business who refers me to the next and so on.

It's *also* who you don't know

Employers often hire people they don't know, based on common interests and skills. Employers hire people who are enthusiastic about their particular type of work.

> A woman who loved to arrange her vast collection of purses at home was pleased to be hired to arrange purses in a local store.

> An employer hired a woman to run a large noisy machine. She was someone who didn't talk but spent a great deal of her time yelling and pounding on tables. When a switch was placed on the table, near where

she sat in her wheelchair, she could run an automatically fed paper-shredding machine. She did this in a large print shop that had many noisy machines, yelling happily all the while. The employer commented, "You know, when she is in a good mood she's a great worker, when she's in a bad mood she's a really great worker".

A person's productivity is always a matter of job match plus the support and structure that ensure success. The job must have elements of tasks that the person enjoys doing and can do independently or be re-structured so that the person can do independently. In addition to kinds of occupations that might fit the person, I collect clues for how to teach and structure the job through the person-centered planning process.

Process

Assembling a group of people who know and like the person, I use a variation of personal futures planning to get an accurate, quick sketch of a person so that we can start job development immediately after a short hour and a half of planning. I listen to the stories people share and record them. I am not a passive listener: I ask specific questions regarding the person's habits, places, interests, and loves.

I use five basic maps to collect the wisdom of the whole group and come up with five ways to begin work.

- Gifts, Strengths, Capacities ➔ Rough Resume.
- Works/ Doesn't work for the person ➔ Strategy for support, non-negotiables in the workplace and in the way the job is developed.
- Possible dream jobs, tasks ➔ as many different categories of work environments the group can think of based on the first two maps.
- Personal Connections ➔ as many actual local businesses and people connected to them as the group can think of.
- Resources ➔ as many agencies, entities and people as the group can think of who might be interested in partnering to realize the plan.

I consider all stories about a person from the point of view of good work for the person.

A woman who loves to meticulously paint her fingernails a different color daily, exhibits her accurate eye, steady hands, patience and careful dexterity She was also the only one in the house who could find the

polish bottles amid the familial clutter. She became a
valued worker in the accessories section of a department
store, organizing and putting away stock. She can al-
ways tell customers and co-workers where everything is.

Perceived barriers to employment provide further information for
implementing a successful plan. If a person "can't be left alone at
all", I want to know how far away a person can be before it's too far:
next chair? next room? The activities people pursue on their own are
clues to occupational preferences and interests even when they are
the reason for others saying that a person needs constant supervi-
sion. A man I met "could not be left alone" because he persisted in
removing the light switch covers and molding from the walls, truly
a problem for his family, but a gift to the remodeling company who
eventually hired him.

Look beyond attributes: It's neither positive nor negative

It's not enough to describe a person as "kind" or "friendly" in
looking at attributes that will make a difference at work. Collect
specifics.

Tell me about "friendly".

She loves to stand at the church door and greet people.
She smiles at everyone and shakes their hands.

versus

He never forgets a person's name or face, he will be sure
to say hello and greet them personally"

or

She has a great memory for birthdays and special events
and loves to buy and mail cards for them.

All these different attributes and skills fall under the heading of
"friendly", but make a difference to what jobs might best suit a
person.

Inherent in all the stories concerned people tell are clues to genu-
ine occupations. If a genuine occupation exists, then we can locate
the employers and share the good news. Clarity about a person's
interests makes it unthinkable to appeal to an employer on the basis
of charity or disability –as in "I'm representing an agency that has a
person in it with a bunch of labels, who has never worked in his life,
doesn't talk and would somehow be a worker in the most entry level
position you have because…" Clarity about a job that will really

suit a person writes a script about strengths, common interests, and community connections. "I'm representing a person who is very enthused and quick at molding removal. I'm wondering if we could talk. Mary Jones gave me your name."

Regarding dreams

I look closely at dreams and feel it is important to ask not only "What is your dream job?" but also "If this was your dream job, what would you be doing?" Inherent in people's descriptions of their dreams are the essential elements of jobs that might fit them. The details of these dreams are particularly useful in sketching out a direction of possible occupational categories to locate.

When Dan, a man with autism and blindness spoke about his dream job, he said he wanted to be a dentist. There was silence. Such a dream seemed impossible. In answer to the second question –"What would you be doing if you were a dentist?"– Dan described his vision, "I would feel and pull your face, and then I would go away and play the piano for you, then come back and fool around with your face some more". Dan was talking about dentistry and was also talking about music. From a job development standpoint, he was reminding us of his manual dexterity and skill at playing the piano. Matching fingers to specific keys and auditory acuity were prominent features of the stories his family told about him. Building from this realization, Dan ended up taking computer key boarding at a community college and became a transcriptionist. He loves the sound adaptation on his computer that says the letter of each key as he presses it. He was motivated and interested in acquiring this new skill, and he uses it as a way to earn a living.

Another person, Jeff, spoke eloquently about his love for elevators. Impressed by his passion, I neglected to ask him the second question, "If you were working with elevators what would you be doing?" He was hired by the state of Oregon to operate an antique elevator at the State Capitol building . He charmed the interview committee with his knowledge about the history and mechanics of elevators. For the first two weeks all was well. Then reports of wild and irresponsible elevator driving came back from Jeff's employers. Jeff was running the elevator too fast and sometimes without lights. He began to also leave the elevator unattended in order to explore the rest of the building. After discussion, observation and training, we all decided that this was not Jeff's dream job. Elevator operation

is more about sitting calmly in a small confined space with occasional machine operation than it is about pursuing an interest in elevator lore. Jeff left the job and another person who was interested in needlepoint and word-find puzzles took the elevator job and proved highly successful in it. It was an important lesson to me to carefully consider the essential elements of the person's dream when considering job matches.

Both the person and the group of people concerned with the person have crucial information about job interests and conditions of job success. It is important to consider all the nonverbal information given by people regarding interests and preferences, as well as the stories told by people who know and care about them. Job tasks and routines are a collaborative effort among the person, the employer and the employment specialist. This collaboration is rooted in the person-centered plan.

Regarding resources

It is most effective to strategize from person to the resource rather than from the resource to the person.
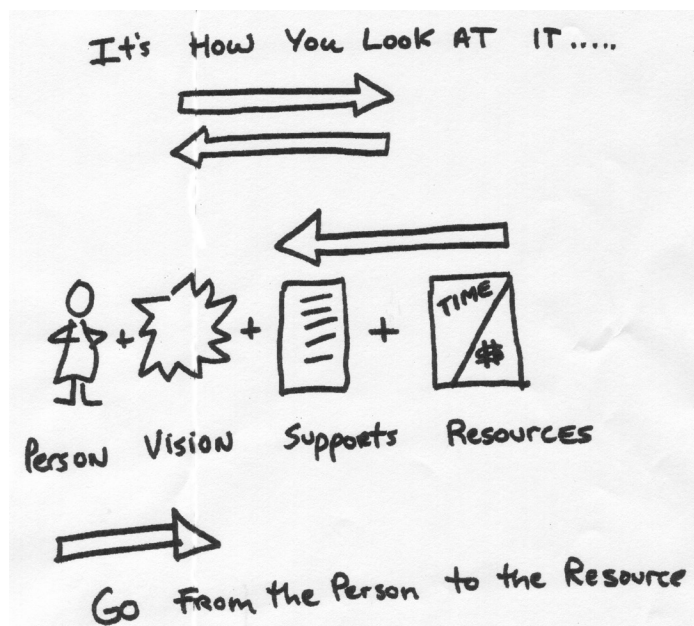
Too often planners begin with the resources available from a single source. The adequacy of this amount becomes the focus of discussion and often turns into a barrier to even commencing a search for the right job. Social service workers might begin a planning meeting with a conclusion, "We know Bob might like a job but there is not enough money available to support him."

This blocks the process and ignores the fact that the support, time and resources available depend on the vision and person, the type of job located, and the strategies devised for support. Resource development is most effective in partnerships, and resources can come from a multitude of sources, much the way college students utilize a range of funding to pay for their education.

Supports

I don't define support by units of human supervision. I let the person and the job define the support strategies needed and refine them accordingly. When I think about supports and strategize their implementation, I collect the information from people who know and like the person. What family, friends and neighbors have figured out about how to live with, teach, support, and communicate with the person provides keys to success in the workplace from non-negotiable requirements to subtle nuances.

> *I have to take my medication every morning.*
> *He sharply hits his own chin when he's not happy*
> *Raised eyebrows mean "I need a break"*
> *He's memorized every Golden Oldie since 1967*
> *If you sing it, he'll learn it.*
> *When she cooks, we put ingredients in small bowls, set up*
> *left to right and she just moves down the counter*

This information tells me how to structure and arrange supports so the job makes sense to the person, can be quickly learned and does not depend on simply having a job coach present. The role of the coach or employment consultant is to set up successful strategies in the work place and to communicate their use and importance to the employer.

Follow up and perseverance

Follow-up and follow-through are critical to success. After the plan is outlined at the meeting, it becomes a blueprint for job development and job design. A plan unrealized is often a plan unattempted.

The most common failure I encounter is beautifully crafted plans that never led to action.

Some basic math

$$\text{Person } (3e+3c/3p)B^2 = \text{Success}$$

Look at the person first: Consider who they are, what they do, where they live, what's important to them, what strategies and supports will succeed.

Multiply that by 3E: Empowerment, Encouragement, Employment. Consider: People need information and the encouragement, education and empowerment to act on it. Plus 3C Community, Communication, Collaboration

Divide by 3P: Persistence, Patience, Perseverance. The process of locating jobs takes continual process, work, and investment over time.

Multiply the whole thing by B^2 : Belief. Believe that the right job for the person exists somewhere in their community and, once it's located, the person will be able to do it.

SOME BASIC MATH

$$\left(\frac{3E+3C}{3P}\right)^{B^2} = \text{Success}$$

3E Empowerment
   Encouragement
   Employment

3C Community
   Communication
   Collaboration

3P Persistent
   Patience
   Perseverence

Belief