

by Allen Anderson

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## Is There a Job for Me?

The challenge of how to find jobs for people with skills limitations has been troubling the job development profession forever. When I started in 1980 as a job developer for people with intellectual disabilities, it was our great dilemma. Now, 25 years later and after thousands of people with intellectual disabilities are in jobs, the issue still seems as pressing as ever.

Even with our successes, our collective wisdom does not seem to have coalesced and revealed how this is done. Some in our profession have figured things out -to them a tip of the hat. For the rest of us, I would like to outline a more systematic approach to what works and what does not and to dispel misconceptions about realities we face.

Let's start with a confounding dilemma for working with people with intellectual disabilities or any kind of skills limitation—where have all the simple jobs gone? The simple jobs were those routine and structured manufacturing jobs that suited so well the training given to people with intellectual disabilities. News reports and dinner conversations suggest that most of these jobs have vanished overseas or with the use of technology. This sense of job losses suggests there are a lot fewer jobs that people with straightforward skills can do. Where will these people find work?

How we view the job market and get a feel for its volatility/vibrancy is key to any level of success in job development. Narrowing our perspective to those jobs that we think fit our target group's

capabilities/desires robs us of the richness, which the total job market offers. People with intellectual disabilities do not fit into a defined place in the labor market. They define their places by what we believe are jobs they will fit and training we can give. This narrow job market lens makes the professionals feel excluded when the labor market we know and understand diminishes. Let's try a different point of view.

If we looked for opportunities where our candidate's skills (reliability and dependability) would be an asset and not just job requirement matching, we would quickly see jobs we would not have thought of.

This broader approach would also give us a better sense of the actual job market. If we ask employers if they have tasks that are handled best by reliable people who can stay focused on straightforward tasks, we would find opportunities not considered from other perspectives. We self limit the labor market by looking for jobs that are pre-ordained by the skills we train in or our perception of the jobs that best fit our candidates. Our real job as job developers is to search (be the detective), not only just to match.

What does this mean? The job market is the job market and there are always straightforward jobs in it no matter what we think. They may not be the ones we know from our past experiences, but if we cannot find jobs for our candidates, it does not speak to labor market demise but rather to our ability to understand the market and/or respond to it.



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As the job market becomes unfamiliar to us, it means we must change, not lament. We need to change what we are building and selling and to whom we sell it. Organizations often try to get certain jobs for people because those are the jobs the candidates were trained in or we committed to them. The market place governs jobs available, not the training given to the candidates. It would be wiser for people with skill limitations to learn widely applicable skills as opposed to more narrow selections. Work in the areas of the soft skills (staying on task, accepting supervision, working in teams, contributing, participating), good work habits and any level of problem solving will open up the job market much more than specific task skills.

A basic rule of thumb is if the job marketplace is resisting or not accepting, it does not mean there is something wrong with the marketplace. A

resisting market place means there is something wrong with your interaction with the marketplace: wrong presentation/communication, wrong candidate skills, wrong support etc. The issue lies with us, not the market. You gain control by recognizing it is always us that needs to change, not the job market. We need to learn the skills to recognize and execute the moments for us to change.

Our next episodes will focus on further dilemmas in job development. Why does job developing for candidates in an organization's pre-selected order lead to a lot of failures? What skills/tips help employers see people with intellectual disabilities in a new, positive light? What simple things can job developers do to better position their candidates with skills limitations? Keep reading for more tried and true answers forth coming.

