



**BRAIN INJURY  
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No Brain Injury is  
Too Mild to Ignore,  
or Too Severe to  
Lose Hope

## **The Job Search Process for Individuals with Brain Injury**

*By Judi Weinberger*

### **Committing to the Job Goal**

Agreeing upon a specific job goal may be a challenge when working with an individual with a brain injury. Deficits will vary from person to person, based on the type and location(s) of the brain injury. Intact skills and abilities also vary, and will be influenced by age, education, and prior work experience. Many individuals with a brain injury may not appear to have a disability. Conversely, some individuals with physical impairments may be able to function at a higher level than they appear. For these reasons, the job coach must remember that people with brain injury may be able to work in all types of jobs, from unskilled work to professional-level occupations. The job coach should be open to helping individuals pursue jobs that are commensurate with their strengths and abilities, keeping in mind their areas of weakness.

### **Here are some steps to follow to ensure the best job fit:**

- Make sure that you receive comprehensive information from the DVRS counselor about the client's current abilities and weaknesses. This information can be obtained from a recent neuropsychological evaluation, vocational evaluation or in the recommendations provided following cognitive rehabilitation.
  - Explore the client's knowledge, awareness, understanding, and acceptance of his work capabilities and weaknesses, and of his injury in general.
  - Compare this to the provided information. This is an important step, as individuals with brain injury may lack insight into their current strengths and limitations. They remember their functional level prior to injury and may have difficulty coming to terms with their new limitations. Individuals may also be unaware of changes in their behavior and emotions.
  - Review the job goal developed by the DVRS counselor and discuss this with the client.
  - Write everything down for your client in a memory log during the job search process. Include the specific types of jobs and job settings that are best suited to the individual. Ask the client to refer to the memory log on a regular basis during the job search.
  - If an individual makes a poor job selection, provide constructive feedback to remind him of the types of jobs best suited for her current abilities and weaknesses. "Yesterday we discussed that XYZ Company does not provide individual work stations, and distractions from such a



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busy work site may negatively affect your performance. Let's look for a quieter work site.”

- If the client insists on pursuing a job that appears to be unrealistic (or not recommended by the DVRS counselor), discuss and explore the possibility of a job trial or mock job experience to see if the client is truly able to perform this job. During the work trial, provide immediate feedback about the client's performance. Encourage the person to evaluate or rate her own performance. Discuss any discrepancies.

If the job appears appropriate, contact the DVRS counselor to discuss modifying the job goal.

- If the client is not willing to pursue a job goal identified by DVRS, notify the DVRS counselor as additional counseling may be indicated.

- Watch for signs of depression, anxiety or anger and notify the DVRS counselor if these issues are interfering with the job search process as additional supports may be needed.

### **The Job Search**

Begin job exploration by determining how much assistance the individual needs to find appropriate job leads.

- Establish with the client a method in which the client identifies the jobs he will pursue.
  - Demonstrate how to perform a job search (want ads, online job search engines, personal contacts, etc.).
  - Discuss and/or list the pros and cons of each job choice.
  - Frequently assess if the client is able to identify and select appropriate job openings.
  - Determine whether the client can complete the process independently. If problems with organization or initiation are identified, provide more structure and supervision.
  - Evaluate whether the person is capable of calling to enquire about job openings, schedule interviews, complete an application, and/or develop a resume and cover letter. Provide assistance whenever it is needed while ensuring that the client is doing as much as possible on his own.
  - Provide instruction through demonstration and supervision.

### **Once an individual is capable of finding job openings:**

- Assist in setting up a schedule and process for the job search.
- Use a daily planner to write down all assignments and activities. Teach the client how to use the daily planner and assess that it is being used regularly and appropriately.
- Assign a specific time for the client to consistently read the want ads and/or perform online searches. For example, have the client look



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through the want ads every Sunday night and perform online searches on Monday morning.

- Meet with the individual regularly.
- If needed, develop a written contract specifying the methods that you and your client agree to utilize during this process
- Provide an easy-to-follow daily assignment sheet that resembles a work day. For example, a written or printed guide that reads:

**MONDAY SCHEDULE**

1. Wake up at 7 am, shower, and dress.
2. Eat breakfast from 8-8:45 am.
3. Review the want ads and/or online searches from 8:45 – 10:00 am.
4. Respond to the want ads from 10:50-11:50.
5. Eat a nutritious lunch and take a break from 12:00 – 1:30.
6. Review online job possibilities from 1:45-3:00
7. Respond by email or fax to online want ads from 3:00-4:30.

**REMEMBER, THROUGHOUT THE DAY:**

Keep the environment free of distractions.

Take a break and walk or stretch for 10 minutes out of every hour. Only lie down to rest when fatigued.

Do not have a television, MP3 Player, or radio on while pursuing the job search.

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*Judi Weinberger is the Director of Family Support and Vocational Projects at the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey.*