

Work and Disability: Issues and Strategies in Career Development and Job Placement

E. M. Szymanski & R. M. Parker (Eds.) (1996)
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This is an exceedingly comprehensive text on a wide variety of subjects related to employment preparation, job development, career and workplace issues for persons with disabilities, and the professionals who assist them in these areas. It is laid out as a 12-chapter edited volume with contributions made by 29 individuals with a variety of expertise, who also offer diversity in terms of geographic location and type of employment setting, including research centers, educational institutions, and private consulting operations. The topics highlighted in the chapters include such areas as psychosocial and economic aspects of work; selected legislation that relates to career counseling and job placement for persons with disabilities; career development theories, constructs, and research; issues in vocational assessment and disability; accommodation in the workplace; occupational and labor market information and analysis; career development interventions; a business perspective on job development; job-search and employer-negotiation strategies; supported employment; career counseling; and job-placement theory and practice. Each of the chapters, in most cases written by multiple authors, provides an extensive review of the literature on a particular area of focus, an excellent synthesis of theory, and an effort at practical application of the theory to career counseling, job development, and job placement for persons with disabilities. An author index and a subject index are included.

An example of an interesting contribution from a broad perspective of the workplace is a discussion in one of the chapters on issues relating to work stress and their implications for professionals working with persons with disabilities in supported employment. The authors discuss the importance of looking at psychosocial factors in the work environment that research has shown contribute significantly to a worker's experience of stress. Some of the factors presented are (a) the amount of control over one's work (e.g., schedule, pace, use of skills); (b) the nature of job demands (e.g., monotony versus variety, high versus low level), especially as these dimensions interact with the level of control; (c) social

support, both inside and outside the workplace, which acts as a mediator of stress; (d) conflicts between task demands, between work roles (e.g., serving client needs versus employer interests), and between work and family responsibilities; and (e) degree of uncertainty in the job. The authors recommend that rehabilitation professionals look at these factors before, as well as during, job placement. And if, as a result of this analysis, stress is an issue for a particular individual, they suggest modification of the work environment to minimize the negative impact of such stress.

Several other chapters bring together useful information about the changing future workplace. The authors point to the fact that workers increasingly must expect that they will be changing jobs frequently in the future and, therefore, need to learn to compete for available jobs. They underscore the importance of job-seeking skills as a necessary survival tool for all workers, because people who are unemployed must be able to identify and access alternative employment options efficiently and quickly. Given current trends in downsizing and outsourcing by employers, having such skills becomes even more imperative for persons with disabilities. Authors of another chapter point to the double discrimination which can occur if a person with a disability belongs to a minority group, and has experienced poverty and barriers to social and economic resources. These authors emphasize that rehabilitation practitioners must deal with the person with a disability in the job placement process in the context of interpersonal relationships in the society at large, examining how this might impact interactions in the work environment.

Discussion is also provided about the differences between public and private sector rehabilitation services. It is indicated that there are currently more than 10,000 rehabilitation practitioners employed in the private sector, such as service providers in worker compensation structures. These organizations are known for stressing the goal of finding an expeditious way to return the employee with a disability to gainful employment.

Among rehabilitation-related publications, this book is rather unique in emphasizing the importance of rehabilitation professionals' being knowledgeable of the power dynamics of the workplace and the prestige implications of specific career choices, and being able to discuss these factors with persons whom they are serving. In addition, the authors articulate the importance of employer issues and supervisor concerns, and identify the skills needed to deal with them as part of the job placement process for persons with severe disabilities.

This publication has significant utility for rehabilitation counselor educators looking for a comprehensive text for job placement and job development courses in a graduate degree program. It provides a thorough review of the literature in each of the areas covered by the respective chapters. In addition, there are substantive issues presented in each chapter that lend themselves to in-depth discussion in seminar classes.