



8

Innovative Strategies: Successful Transition to Work for People with Disabilities

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People with disabilities face many barriers to achieving competitive employment; these barriers include a lack of work experience, stigma and bias of others, inability to meet educational requirements, absence of employer-provided accommodations, transportation, affordable housing and other impediments (Beatty 2012; Burchardt 2004; Shier et al. 2009; Lindsay et al. 2019). Transition to work can be defined in many forms such as moving from education to post-secondary education, from education to employment, from one career opportunity to another opportunity and sometimes from unemployment due to layoff or personal issue to employment (Pedersen et al. 2012). Innovative strategies for successful transition to work for people with disabilities have one common theme, commitment and participation from the employer community (Kulkarni and Scullion 2015). The results of innovative transition strategies are sometimes impacted by a specific job role, by industry and by type of disability; the more severe the disability is, the more challenging it is for a person with a disability to achieve competitive employment (Schur et al. 2009). As research by the author has highlighted, ‘People with disabilities want Paychecks, not Pity’ (Bender 2016), consequently this chapter will outline key factors to innovative transition strategies and the key factors required for people with disabilities to successfully transition to work. Specifically it will examine stigma and the misguided perception for people

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with disabilities, the key components of transition programs and how employers and academic partners can be engaged effectively.

People with disabilities including high school students and adults face many employment hurdles, including discrimination and, given that we live in a 'civilized society', it is unconscionable that people with disabilities are unemployed at twice the rate of their non-disabled counterparts (Stewart and Schwartz 2018). This war for wages represents the fight people with disabilities have been trying to gain ground with and count positive results in, for decades. Moreover, economies with low unemployment often have high disability rates, what Bratsberg et al. (2010) refer to as 'unemployment in disguise'. The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 (Americans with Disabilities Act 1990); since then, so many barriers have come down (Coelho 2000), such as: people with mobility disabilities using sidewalks and entering buildings and theatres; people with hearing disabilities having access to captioning; people who are blind using JAWs software and other screen readers to consume content on computers, tablets and mobile devices; and in general people with disabilities having the opportunity to buy an accessible home, ride on the bus, and not having to answer the illegal question, such as 'what is your disability?' versus the question, 'when can you start working?', within the context of an interview.

In 1999, the author received the President's Award, at the White House from President Clinton, for her success in finding competitive employment for people with disabilities. However, since then, the employment outlook for people with disabilities has not significantly improved and according to the Office of Disability Employment Policy (2019), part of the US Department of Labor, the labour force participation rate for people with disabilities was reported at 21.5 per cent and for people without disabilities was 68.5 per cent. In addition, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 7.9 per cent and the unemployment rate for people without disabilities was 3.8 per cent. It is clear that thoughtful action is required to reset this inequitable employment situation and the most profound way to increase this abysmal employment rate, for high school students and adults with disabilities, is to invest in and deliver quality transition programs that build self-esteem, and create and confirm work competencies that break down stigma (Quintini and Martin 2014). The most effective transition programs are centred within active employer participation, including corporate America, government agencies and social services employers. To gain employment, students and adults with disabilities must understand the world of work: understand how to dress, understand how to present professionally, and understand what it

takes to be employed, stay employed and advance in a successful career (see, e.g., Viscardi Center Programs 2019). Although there are similarities and differences in transition programs for high school students and adults with disabilities, there are also common barriers such as stigma.

Foundational Issues: Stigma

Stigma means ‘a mark burned into the skin to signify disgrace’ (Scher 2006) and in Haiti, the main religion is Voodoo where many with epilepsy have a mark burned into their forehead. Throughout the world, there is pervasive shame, if a family has a child with a disability and the child may be seen to be demon-possessed, or the child’s disability may be perceived by others to signify the parents are being punished by God (Otieno 2009). The author has travelled throughout the world, from Panama and South Korea to Kazakhstan, and from Japan to Indonesia. She has witnessed first-hand the shame felt by family members, of having a child with a disability. This shame and stigma results in exclusion and discrimination and, in some cases, abuse (Rüsch et al. 2010). This stigma is based in shame and fear (Hinshaw 2007). In these countries people with disabilities, whether a child or an adult, are often viewed as inferior or almost sub-human. This arises from the general view of the Old Testament, which has been interpreted as that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions for sin or as an expression of God’s wrath for people’s disobedience (Otieno 2009). In South Korea, the author was told to not even use the word epilepsy, even though she herself is a person who is living with epilepsy. To many, epilepsy is disgraceful and the stigma results in situations, such as husbands leaving their wives when they learn their wife is living with epilepsy (De Boer et al. 2008). In Asia, stigma is so much worse than it is in the United States, although stigma still does exist in Westernized countries (WHO 2011). Stigma is a major barrier that must be addressed. A recent study by the World Health Organization (2018) listed the major barriers to the employment for people with disabilities and it was not a surprise that one of the barriers listed was an attitudinal barrier—stigma which remains the hallmark reason of why people with disabilities are unemployed (Hinshaw 2007). Although America has made great progress over time, deep-seeded fear and ignorance have maintained the attitudinal barrier of stigma. President Bush, at the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26, 1990, said, ‘Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down’ (Bush 1990). However, while many architectural barriers have come down,

competitive employment remains a challenge due to stigma; this attitudinal barrier must also come down.

Stigma is the evil hound that follows people with disabilities from youth through adulthood and impedes the ability to gain competitive employment; it has existed and has followed people with disabilities throughout the ages (Vornholt et al. 2018). Years ago, the 'freak shows' at fairs and carnivals, showing people with disabilities as 'scary' and 'shocking to see' were made famous by P.T. Barnum's Circus (Smithsonian 2017). People with disabilities, many of whom were 'little people' found the only job they could find working as an object, on stage at a Freak Show. Barnum even had a museum to present 'freakishness' in the form of 'living curiosities'. In 1960, the author went with her family to the Canfield Fair in Ohio. As we walked through the fairground, I heard a person speaking loudly and telling everyone to come over and see the wonders and mysteries and monsters of the world. I was afraid, but I looked. I looked and saw people gasp or laugh at the freaks, who were 'people living with disabilities'. There was a boy born with 'stumps' as arms, who was known as 'Seal Boy'. There was the fat man, the tall man, the Siamese twins and lobster boy, a young man who had two fingers on each hand. Many people with different types of disabilities were exploited and people flocked to see them (Smithsonian 2017). Today, we do not have freak shows, but we still do have ridiculous games, such as 'dwarf tossing'. Dwarf tossing, also called 'midget-tossing', is a pub/bar attraction in which people with dwarfism, wearing special padded clothing or Velcro costumes, are thrown onto mattresses or at Velcro-coated walls (Gruen 2014). The activity of dwarf tossing has not been readily accepted by domestic law in various countries including Ireland, the United States and France. It was outlawed in the state of Florida in 1989 and subsequently there was an attempt to repeal this prohibition which failed (Sommer 2011).

Even more deeply rooted in history are the 'ugly laws'; they were laws in place in America until the 1970s that fined or jailed people with disabilities (Schweik 2009). Under the law, municipalities had beggar ordinances known colloquially as ugly laws. These laws deemed it illegal for 'any person, who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or deformed in any way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, to expose himself to public view' (Sommer 2011). The history of the disability community came from stigma; that stigma exists today in a hidden form, defining the attitudinal barrier to employment of people with disabilities. We can change it and we can be an example for other parts of the world where the freak shows still exist.

Transition Program Key Components

Transition is defined as the process of a period of changing from one state to another and one synonym for Transition is Passage (Pacheco et al. 2018). Passage is a pathway to freedom and people with disabilities want to move from being unable to work at the same level as their non-disabled counterparts, moving to their dream of competitive employment (Taylor 2000). We must construct educational transition programs that help break down barriers and result in employers hiring people with disabilities at the same rate as non-disabled workers. These programs should teach work success competencies through the methods of classroom learning and work-based learning experiences (Kohler and Field 2003). We have come a long way since the days of freak shows and ugly laws, but without employment, we are still only a show—we need to work. Years into the future, people will write about the time when unemployment for people with disabilities was so low; we had to write text books and have national programs and conferences talking about why we should hire people with disabilities.

We know from the high unemployment and low workforce participation rates that stigma and attitudinal barriers exist (Hinshaw 2007), but how can we change them? We need innovative transition programs that are a great offensive plan of preparation and competency-building success and education is the key. We need innovative training for people with disabilities to arm them with what it takes, beyond an academic education, to gain employment (Kohler and Field 2003). We need a transition program based on business models and a no pity culture, with innovative programs that raise the bar for people with disabilities and build self-esteem. Soft skills, known within the workplace as essential career skills, play a significant factor in finding employment (Robles 2012), indeed without good essential career skills a student or adult with a disability will fail in gaining, keeping and advancing in work. When Bender Consulting Services Inc. was founded in 1995, the corporation saw success early in finding competitive employment for adults with disabilities (Bender 2019). The soft-skills training that Bender Consulting Services deliver to people with disabilities prior to starting work has been a critical success factor for its employees with disabilities integrating well, into the workforce (Brubaker 2000). Thus, we need to provide prospective hires with the ability to see what the employers need and want.

Students with disabilities have been historically marginalized in educational settings, and adults with disabilities are oftentimes excluded; pity is the basis for this exclusion (Broderick et al. 2005). If it is decided at an early age

that a student is not capable of a successful career or an adult with a disability is thought of as ‘less than’, they will not succeed at work. Students and adults with disabilities do not want pity; they want equality. One way of achieving this is through self-efficacy, which is defined as an individual’s beliefs regarding their capabilities to produce a level of performance (Bandura 2010). An individual’s self-efficacy beliefs will determine how they think, feel, behave and motivate themselves and a strong sense of self-efficacy can have positive affect on an individual’s level of accomplishment and personal well-being. Individuals who have strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to approach difficult tasks in a positive way and to recover more quickly from set-backs and failures, whereas a lack of self-efficacy can create a belief that one will fail; self-efficacy, therefore, is paramount to a successful transition to work for students and adults (Bandura and Locke 2003).

Competency-Based Approach

A critical success component of securing and succeeding in employment is impacted by several key competencies, including high self-esteem, good communication, social engagement, business acumen and interviewing skills. These competencies, for both adult and student transition programs, provide the foundation for convincing an interviewer about future success, based on past competency growth, and for success in job role, resulting in retention and promotional opportunities. Five of the core competencies will be discussed in turn.

Self-Esteem

Young people with disabilities have experienced the brunt of stigma by classmates, families, and even some educators, which has left a high percentage of students with disabilities with low self-esteem (Kowalski et al. 2016). Many have fallen through the cracks and live in poverty or have moved on to homelessness, crime or addiction and sometimes even death—suicide is not uncommon. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States found that the suicide rate with teens aged 10–17 increased 70 per cent from 2006 to 2016 (CDCP 2018). Many of these students live with mental health issues and/or learning disabilities and high school students living with disabilities also experience a high degree of bullying. In 2012, Disability Scoop

stated that roughly 50 per cent of students with autism, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and speech difficulties were bullied at school (Diament 2012). This all contributes to that population of students who do not graduate, have poor grades or drop out. It contributes to low self-esteem. The bar must be raised, and students must be taught how to deal with, and challenge, negative attitudes and an environment that includes bullying; no matter where those attitudes and negative actions come from, it is now time to teach our students that they can succeed, and they are winners, not losers. Successful transition programs must include a focus on building a positive self-esteem competency.

Communication

To be successful in life and in work, students and adults with disabilities need to develop communication competencies, including verbal and written skills, listening and reading (Embregts et al. 2018). Of course, some individuals with disabilities use alternate methods of communication, as a result of their disability. These skills may be honed through a series of exercises including journaling, practising key conversations with friends and family, and through public speaking. Public speaking includes, preparing content prior to the event, practising to gain confidence and staying within a designated time period. In addition, communicating a message that compels listeners to take action provides the foundation for gaining confidence, employment and credibility.

Social Engagement

High school students and adults with disabilities are often not socialized and have a very limited group of friends (Kavale and Mostert 2004). In, addition, people with disabilities are often not included in sporting or other social events. All of these conditions, in addition to lack of work experience, result in poor social skills, that is low social capital. Sometimes it is necessary to teach students and adults with disabilities very basic social skills, as basic as, why you must be clean, brush your teeth and have other good hygiene habits. They are building blocks of social skills that lead to employment: learning these basics will help with getting a job, keeping a job and building additional friendships, thereby increasing social capital (Stephens et al. 2005).

Business Acumen

Otherwise known as ‘business savvy’ and ‘business sense’, business acumen is keenness and quickness in understanding and dealing with a ‘business situation’ (i.e., risks and opportunities) in a manner that is likely to lead to a good outcome (Garavan et al. 2012). Students and adults with disabilities must be taught to understand the power of every single step as it all relates to success in business. This includes the value of planning, goal setting and evaluating progress towards achieving goals. Using a ‘think like a manager’ exercise teaches the value of perceiving and rewarding a winning attitude and set of actions. ‘Think like a manager’ exercises relate to topic areas such as appearance, social media, interpersonal skills, communications methods and reliability.

Interviewing

Landing a career opportunity and a chance for advancement requires sharing concise content about other work competencies and experience to convince an interviewer to extend an offer of employment (Bobroff and Sax 2010). This key skillset should be taught to apply to multiple interview settings including; in-person, using technology, and facing a panel of interviewers. Key areas of focus include researching the company and job role, dressing for the interview, eliminating the mobile phone distraction, arriving 20 minutes early and other basics, including not chewing gum and thanking the interviewer for their time. Preparation activities for a successful interview are based on an understanding of that industry. For example, if a candidate is interviewing for a position in Silicon Valley at a start-up technology company, wearing a business suit could be viewed negatively; however, if interviewing at a bank, jeans would end the interview. Being prepared for an interview is based on understanding what companies look for and using that knowledge to build questions and architect and practice responses. When you know the company, interviewer or industry, the preparation will win every time. In addition, a relevant professional resume should lead the application process and be available for reference, during the interview. Mock interviews and resume preparation are a must to ensure full preparation for an interview that will lead to the opportunity to work (Alwell and Cobb 2009). Successful interviewing also requires having permission from trusted colleagues to provide a favourable reference when requested. Whether preparing someone for an interview or helping them write a resume, it is critical to understand the corporate world. Once you understand this one fact, outcomes will be more successful.

Youth and Student Specific Transition Considerations

Youth and students with disabilities build competencies to transition successfully in the following stages:

- From school to additional education
- From school to work

Successful transition begins with the right mindset. The bar cannot be lowered by parents, counsellors, teachers or transition coordinators; the bar for students with disabilities must be equal to other students. We have seen great successes for high school students with disabilities making the transition to self-efficacy and employment, if they receive the support from family, educators and the 'system'. Successful student transition programs (i.e., the Bender Leadership Academy Programs) include: goal setting, career readiness training, competency development and work-based learning. These programs also understand that students with disabilities encounter much input that impacts their self-efficacy. Socialization begins at a young age; it drives how we learn values, habits and social skills from family, educators, friends, society, media and more. We know first-hand that with the right training, and work-based learning experiences, students with disabilities can be transitioned to competitive employment.

High School Students with Disabilities and Transition Programs

Compared to non-disabled students, students with disabilities are likely to face higher unemployment or underemployment (Schur et al. 2009). Also, in many cases, it isn't a vocational plan that results in students with disabilities landing a job; it is a chance find, the influence of someone else or sometimes it is simply all that is available at that time. The lack of vocational plans with effective results leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction. The author has met many high school students with disabilities over the past 20 years who were unemployed or underemployed. When the author served on the board of the US President's Committee on People with Disabilities in 1996–2000, under Congressman Tony Coelho, co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it was determined that people with disabilities were unemployed, underemployed or 'employed in the industry'. 'Employed in the industry' means

people with disabilities who are blind working at the School for the Blind, people with disabilities working at an independent living centre or people who are deaf teaching at a school or college for the deaf. Over the years, high school students with disabilities were mainstreamed at schools and began going to colleges and universities, but still faced very high unemployment. Today, things have improved, but the employment landscape for high school students with disabilities still lags the employment landscape for those without disabilities (Bender 2016). High school students with disabilities are some of the best talent in America and many have been damaged by families and/or educational systems—the bar has been lowered. The expectations for employment are not high. It is a major hurdle to graduate.

About 16 percent of 25- to 64-year-olds who had not completed high school had one or more disabilities in 2015, compared to 11 percent of those who had completed high school, 10 percent of those who had completed some college, 8 percent of those who had completed an associate's degree, 4 percent of those who had completed a bachelor's degree, and 3 percent of those who had completed a master's or higher degree. Differences in the employment and not-in-labor-force percentages between persons with and without disabilities were substantial, amounting to about 50 percentage points each. Among those who had obtained higher levels of education, the differences were smaller. (Cameto 2019)

Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act became law in 2014; this federal mandate significantly increases the opportunity for high school students with disabilities to gain employment and incents companies to hire students with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act 1990). This law requires state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to set aside at least 15 per cent of their program funds to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to help high school students with disabilities make the transition to postsecondary education and employment.

Pre-employment Transition Services

The best way to identify pre-employment transition services is by sharing an example. Bender Consulting Services, Inc. is a for-profit company, which provides disability employment expertise in the areas of recruitment, workplace mentoring, strategic planning, training and digital accessibility to drive innovation and realize business value for customers. Since 1999, Bender Leadership Academy, 'The Academy', has become known nationally as a premier

transition to work training program for high school students with disabilities. The program was designed at the request of transition coordinators from several school districts in the Newark, DE area. These interested educators approached DXC Technology (formerly known as CSC and a multi-billion-dollar global technology organization), a customer of Bender Consulting Services, Inc. and DXC asked Bender to partner to deliver this program to high school students with disabilities.

Over that time, the Bender Leadership Academy grew to work with three other school districts in the Pittsburgh, PA area, and has been conducted as a pro bono program prior to incorporating a not-for-profit organization and building a partnership with the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide an important funding stream for the program. Over 1000 high school students with disabilities have graduated from the Academy and many have moved on to successful employment or college—the majority, transition to work. Through those years, the Academy has gained incredible expertise in transition to work and continues to maintain long-term relationships with many of the graduates. This program has many parts in the paradigm of success. It is all about breaking down attitudinal barriers that those students deal with every day and building core work competencies through strong programs, solid partnerships and real work, as the following case study demonstrates.

Case Study: Bender Leadership Academy—Pre-employment Transition Services Best Practice

Each Academy class focuses on developing many work-based competencies. The following are examples of those competencies that provide the foundation for career success.

Self-esteem: The Academy raises the bar and reminds students in every class how awesome they are and how they need to believe that they will find employment. Each student is treated as a young adult; there is no pity in the Academy class.

Communication: Every class, the students are required to share a 2-minute speech in front of the class. The assignment is given in a prior class and is based on a subject they have already been taught, such as initiative, independence, team work, interviewing and other career readiness topics; this experience builds self-esteem and confidence in the participants. Graduates are selected to speak at events in the community and performed better than other business leaders who spoke. The keynote speaker for the Academy's graduation is a student participant who is selected by their classmates. When employers attended and saw these students speak about what they learned in the Business Leadership Academy, they were so impressed.

Social engagement: The Academy curriculum includes students joining a team to work on projects that teach work skills, teamwork and comradery. One school created a Bender Leadership Academy Club that meets weekly to support each other and to prepare for the next class. In the class, there is a mantra shared by one of the founding transition coordinators in Delaware, Joyce Kaufmann, 'Show me your friends and I'll show you your future'. There is an emphasis on teaching the class the importance of choosing the right friends and avoiding the wrong friends. Students are also taught to volunteer for activities to build work competencies.

Business acumen: People are often surprised that in the Academy, the students are taught the Investor's Business Daily, Ten Secrets to Success. The first secret is, 'How you think is everything' the last secret is Integrity or Numbers one through 9 do not matter; when I am asked 'Why?' I say, 'Why not?' In every class, we remind the students how important initiative is in the business world; we distribute \$5.00 gift certificates when a student answers a question first or volunteers to give their speech. The idea is to teach students that when you show initiative at work, you receive a reward: a promotion or increase in salary.

The Academy's partnership success factors follow:

Employer partners: Big business hosts the Academy, provides breakfast and lunch, includes an engaging kick off speaker, and allows students to learn in a work environment.

Academic partners: School system partners understand the demands of the program, select students for the program, set expectations, ensure between sessions assignments are completed, and provide needed feedback for quality program delivery and accountability.

Student example: David, a student participant in the Bender Leadership Academy class, attended his first class; he was not happy and he did not communicate. He questioned comments made by me and was not confident that his employment outcome would be affected by my advice. As the program progressed, he became more confident and more affable. He actually looked forward to coming to class and was an engaged participant and he was excited to invite his father to the graduation ceremony, a mid-day luncheon event that provided the students the opportunity to receive a graduation certificate in front of the class. David's father walked several miles to attend the graduation; he and his son were both so proud. Since then, David got a job after he graduated from high school, was promoted and got married. He told me he learned more in the four classes at the Academy than he did in 4 years in high school. It is all about raising the bar.

Adult Specific Transition Considerations

Adults with disabilities build competencies to transition successfully in the following stages:

- Promotion: transition to more responsibility and opportunity,
- Job disruption: transition from lay off to work,
- Disability: transition from one field to the next.

With adults, while it is sometimes harder to achieve successful transition, due to the years of poor socialization and isolation; it is not impossible to celebrate career success with training and education. So often, people underestimate the power of a good transition program. Many adults with disabilities do not know the basics of interviewing, or have lost hope due to rejections, but, this can be changed. Through building and following a good transition program not everyone realizes a competitive employment result, but many do. Freedom through competitive employment provides the basis for living with dignity. We know, the first question you are asked in any social situation is ‘what is your name?’ and the next is ‘what do you do?’ We all have the right to have a work answer to that question.

Adults Transitioning to Work

With 70 per cent of Americans with disabilities not counted in the workforce and having twice the unemployment rate of those without disabilities, people with disabilities need to learn how to land a competitive job and how to advance their position—how to build a career. Adults with disabilities need the same type of competency-based career readiness training programs and work-based learning, to transition to work and maintain work.

Bender Career Reality Training Program

Bender Consulting Services designed the Bender Career Reality Training Program in 1995, which is taught to this day for all new Bender employees and Bender candidates hired by Bender customers in the private and public sectors. This program has been so successful that it has been requested, by corporate America, to be provided to all employees. Over the years, thousands of articles have been written about transition to work for adults with disabilities. Some articles include very scholarly content and well-researched work and, though the product is comprehensive, it is not business oriented. Jobs and employment opportunities are located at private and public sector employers, not with researchers and successful programs should be based on work and business acumen, not only on theory. As I often say about transition success, ‘Where the rubber meets the road is employment’.

Partnership Imperatives

Partnerships are important for successful transition programs. There are three key partnerships which will be explored in this section: employer partners, business partnerships and academic partnerships.

Employer Partners

Employer partners drive the demand for hiring, the job roles of interest and the curriculum and competencies required for success: as a result, they represent the ‘tip of the spear’ for successful transition. Successful transition programs begin with including and promoting employer participation, gaining employer participation and long-term commitment starting at the top. The higher the business executive connected to the transition program, the more successful the program will be. You need a corporate leader that will provide access to the company leaders, and everything else falls into play. Adults with disabilities successfully gain competitive employment with understanding the needs, culture and expectations of employers who are engaged in your training. In addition, important social and business skills become evident.

An example of a customer we have been successful with is a company that has had a long-standing commitment to student and adult transition programs; they are Highmark, Inc., headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA. In 1995, Bill Lowry the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Highmark (then Blue Cross of Western PA), believed in the author’s vision to build a company focused on advancing the employment of people with disabilities, in professional positions, competitive, integrated employment. Since then, Bender has assisted thousands of students and adults in transitioning to competitive employment across the United States and has influenced disability employment, inclusion and accessibility globally. Highmark has since then continued to provide access to all leaders and continues to stress the importance of the Bender Career Reality Program and the understanding that soft skills and work ethics are keys to career success.

Business Partnership: Curriculum, Retention and Culture

One of the basics of training adults with disabilities for a successful transition to employment is an understanding of the business world. What happens after the job offer? What happens next? This is where training often falls short.

It is imperative, once again to base this training on what the business world wants and the demands in sustaining employment and advancing in a career. The Bender Career Reality Training Program referenced earlier in this chapter is based on steps to ensure success at work. After meeting with corporate leaders, it is a clear conclusion that training attendance is a hallmark of dependability; this is where people with disabilities shine. When you are left out, you value employment. This is not based on the 'Hero' mentality but based on being designated as a member of a marginalized group, who is finally given a chance to work (Castañeda et al. 2019). Many corporate leaders state that just being there is a prominent factor that drives success. We have a mantra in the Bender Career Reality Training Program, 'Be at work early, every day, with a smile on your face'. We know that when you live this mantra, you beat 70 per cent of the non-disabled associates within the workplace. It really is all about being there every day, developing strong work ethics and delivering value with quality (Burke et al. 2013). Work ethics always win.

When training people with disabilities, employer partners share perspective about the keys of social engagement. How do you act in Corporate America? What are the rules of conduct at meetings? What about sexual harassment training? What about privacy issues? What about teamwork? What is an appropriate e-mail? Should I use my mobile device at work? Should I connect with my colleagues on social media? There are so many areas of training that are key to a successful transition. How can you possibly know which are the most pertinent and how to cover them? This is where partnering with the business community is critical. In the partnership plan, trainers need to meet with the business partner and ask them 'What are the most important traits or keys to success in the workplace? What do you look for in a successful candidate? What are the biggest hurdles?'

Business leaders should review and assist in the development of the training program. There is no greater key to success in a transition to work program than having companies involved in the training (Wehman et al. 2008). Invite them to speak at training classes. Their participation will result in an increase in hires and also in success in building an advocate and mentor to support a life-long career. Employers share a key role serving as a mentor and partner companies are also willing to provide employees to mentor an individual, within a training or workforce development program. Their participation ensures immediate support, a quick way to learn about the culture of the company, and the critical success factors driving the careers of high performing associates.

Getting a job is one thing; successful transition certainly includes sustaining work and being promoted in a career area. Too many training programs

do not include a solid partnership with companies, but the success of people with disabilities is about equity and equality; this translates to having an opportunity to celebrate the same life as any other American. The walls of Stigma will never fall until people with disabilities are employed: you cannot change the workforce of America without seeing people with disabilities employed in the workforce. A transition or passage to freedom through competitive employment will only happen if the training includes strong partnerships with the world of business.

Academic Partnerships

Partnering with great transition coordinators and teachers who support the mechanics of the transition programs is critical. Academic partners need to understand the time and effort requirements of career success programs; in addition, these partners need to know the expectations of the program and support the belief in raising the bar for students with disabilities and adopting a no pity perspective. Great academic partners have full authority to support successful transition programs and administer the rules of engagement, including student participation, dress attire and rules of conduct. These programs, when delivered well create a culture where students are viewed and treated as young business professionals.

Great examples of forward-looking and supportive academic partnership leaders include those from the Fox Chapel, Beaver County, Pittsburgh Public Schools and Delaware school systems. These great educators have supported me 100 per cent, as I have delivered successful transition programs for their high school students with disabilities. I could not have done it without them. I am grateful for Dr. Stacie Dojonovic, Dionna Harris, Debbie Scott and Diane DuFour-Gaudio; these amazing educators helped me to help their students build self-esteem, independence, business acumen, presentation skills a solid resume, interviewing skills, career readiness and the ability to communicate well.

Summary and Conclusion

On 19 July 1990, Senator Tom Harkin, a Democrat from Iowa and co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), presented his ADA testimony on the Senate floor in American Sign Language; he was a committed supporter of the ADA for many reasons, including the fact that his brother Frank

was deaf. After serving in the House of Representatives and Senate for 40 years, Senator Harking retired in January 2015. In his farewell speech on the Senate floor on 19 December 2014, he called the continued unemployment of people with disabilities 'A blot on our character'. To see change occur, it is critical to aggressively implement innovative programs that promote relevant and marketable career competencies for people with disabilities, programs that provide the foundation for career success. In addition, we need to create a work team that includes academic and business partnerships, gaining needed 'buy in' and support for students and opening the doors of opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the workplace. If we do not try—the blot remains.

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