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The Way to Work: How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition

By Richard Luecking Ed.D. Ed.D.



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Employment is one of the biggest contributors to quality of life for people with disabilities—and that means well-planned work experiences should be an integral part of transition preparation for every secondary and postsecondary school aged youth. Make that happen with this practical guide, developed to help educators, transition specialists, and employment specialists facilitate individualized, person-centered work experiences and jobs for high school students and young adults with a wide range of disabilities.

Readers will get the specific, ready-to-use guidance they need to

- uncover students' strengths, needs, and interests through **formal and informal assessments**
- **recruit and retain employer partners** who gladly host youth in their workplaces
- help students decide when and how to **disclose a disability** to an employer
- guide students in **advocating effectively for accommodations** on the job
- **support students and employers** in making the most of work experiences
- **involve families** in supporting the work experience
- **collaborate with other professionals** to develop and sustain work experiences
- and much more

To help with every step of facilitating meaningful employment, readers will get examples of model programs, stories that illustrate what works and doesn't work, more than a dozen photocopiable tools and forms, and end-of-chapter "Learning Labs" with reflection questions and thought-provoking activities.

Teachers and transition specialists will rely on this strategy-filled guidebook to connect students with the early work experiences they really want—and make lifelong career satisfaction the rule, not the exception, for people with disabilities.

Includes helpful tools & forms!

- Positive Personal Profile
- Work Experience/Job Search Plan
- Inventory of Employer's Needs and Tasks
- Work Experience Proposal Template
 - Youth Performance Feedback Form

- Satisfaction Questionnaire for Employers
- and more!

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Editorial Review

Review

"Outstanding . . . easily the most practical how-to book available for transition specialists faced with how to help their students get and hold a job before school is over. [Will] have immediate application in schools across America."

(Paul Wehman, Ph.D.)

About the Author

Richard G. Luecking, Ed.D., is the President of TransCen, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Rockville, Maryland, that is dedicated to improving education and employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Dr. Luecking has held this position since 1987, when he was charged by the Board of Directors as the organization's first employee to create improved linkages between schools, employment service providers, government, business, and families so that youth with disabilities experience improved post-school employment outcomes. During his tenure with the organization, he and his TransCen colleagues have been responsible for the design and implementation of numerous model demonstration and research projects related to school-to-work transition and employment of people with disabilities. He is the author of a range of publications on related topics, including the book, *The Way to Work: How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2009).

JD Hoyer is President of the National Academy Foundation.

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Meredith Gramlich, M.A., has worked with TransCen, Inc., since 1992 in a variety of capacities helping youth and adults with disabilities find successful career opportunities. She has worked throughout Maryland to facilitate business education partnerships and collaboration among disability service providers in their business partnering efforts. Ms. Gramlich has contributed to expanded customized employment opportunities for people with disabilities who access MontgomeryWorks, Montgomery County's One Stop Career Center. She has also written and contributed to a number of publications about business-education partnerships, customized work opportunities for people with disabilities, and workplace mentoring.

Karen Leggett is a writer/journalist in Washington, D.C. As an advocate for improved special education services, Ms. Leggett chaired PTA special education committees throughout her daughter's school years, edited newsletters, and wrote newspaper articles. Currently, Ms. Leggett serves on the Montgomery County Special Education Continuous Improvement Team and chairs the Transition Work Group, an organization of parents and service providers working to improve the transition to adulthood for young people with disabilities in Montgomery County, Maryland. In 2006, Leggett wrote *The Parent Mentor Partnership: A Toolkit* (Southeast Regional Resource Center, 2006) about a groundbreaking mentoring program in Georgia public schools.

Christy Stuart, Ed.D., is a senior research associate at TransCen, Inc. Dr. Stuart has more than 18 years of experience in the fields of special education, school-to-work transition, and employment of individuals with disabilities, especially those considered to have severe disabilities. She began her career as a teacher assisting transition-age youth with disabilities and their families to coordinate and acquire services and supports as they make the transition from school to postschool environments. She has applied this experience to consulting with various school districts in Maryland and Florida as they strive to improve transition services. Currently, she is the technical assistance coordinator for the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative, a statewide initiative to improve postschool outcomes of students with disabilities requiring postsecondary support services. She has published professional journal articles as well as developed numerous products on topics that include disability disclosure and entrepreneurial activities for youth with disabilities, as well as various web-based training materials focusing on accommodations, inclusion, disability legislation, and job development.

George P. Tilson, Ed.D., is Senior Vice President of TransCen, Inc. He assisted the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities in creating its youth career program, "Bridges . . . from school to work," and subsequently became the national director. He has co-developed and directed numerous innovative demonstration and research projects and written numerous articles and book chapters on such topics as career

counseling, job development, and accommodation strategies. He is the coauthor of *Working Relationships: Creating Career Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities Through Employer Partnerships* (with Richard G. Luecking and Ellen S. Fabian; Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2004). Dr. Tilson has conducted training nationally and internationally to corporations, employment service agencies, school systems, student and parent groups, and government agencies. He serves as an adjunct professor of education and human development at The George Washington University. Prior to joining TransCen in 1989, Dr. Tilson was a high school English and special education teacher, career counselor, and program evaluator.

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By Richard G. Luecking, Ed.D., with invited contributors
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Introduction

Work is good! Every effective transition professional knows this. In fact, anyone who has watched youth blossom in self-confidence and skill as they perform in an authentic workplace can attest to this phenomenon. Not surprising, a large body of research also agrees with this premise. Ever since school-to-work transition became a federal policy priority (Will, 1984) and transition planning became a legal requirement (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] of 1990, PL 101-476; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA] of 2004, PL 108-446), we have become increasingly aware of the value of work experience and work for youth with disabilities as they prepare to exit publicly mandated education. We have known for a long time that it is critically important for youth with disabilities to experience learning in work-based environments, that is, situations in which they spend concentrated and structured time in actual work settings provided by cooperating companies and employers. Work experiences, of course, are not the only factors that contribute to postschool success, but it can be argued that they are among the most important.

There have been an abundance of studies on youth with disabilities making the transition from school to work and adult life. In spite of the fact that few of those studies represent classic research rigor and empirical validation of specific interventions, they nevertheless have produced general agreement among researchers and practitioners on key interventions that promise positive impact on transition outcomes. Consistently, the most prominent factors shown to be associated with successful postschool employment outcomes are paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of secondary school and the completion of a high school diploma (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Johnson & Thurlow, 2003; Luecking & Fabian, 2001; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Other factors suggested by the literature include training in specific vocational skills, transition planning and coordination, self-determination training, and family support (Johnson et al., 2002; Newman, 2005; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Recent attempts to synthesize what works so that the features of effective interventions can be applied and refined in practice have emphasized these findings. The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASSET), consisting of more than 30 national advocacy groups, professional organizations, and education associations, conducted a thorough review of extant research on what youth need to succeed as they make the transition from secondary education. Using this research synthesis, NASSET (2005) produced a set of standards and quality indicators as a useful structure for identifying the critical needs for all youth, including those with disabilities. These standards consist of five general areas of intervention:

- *Schooling*, that is, academic instruction and targeted curriculum
- *Career preparatory experiences*, including vocational training and work experiences
- *Youth development and youth leadership*, especially as it relates to self-determined transition planning
- *Family involvement*
- *Connecting activities*, that is, those activities that enable youth to be linked with organizations and services that complement their transition services and/or enable necessary postsecondary supports.

Drawing from the NASET framework, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y) conducted its own extensive review of research, demonstration projects, and acknowledged effective practices. From this review, NCWD/Y (2005) developed a practical tool, called *The Guideposts for Success*, for practitioners and policy makers alike to conceptualize optimum service delivery for youth with disabilities. The guideposts include more or less the same areas highlighted by NASET but slightly reconstituted:

- School-based preparatory experiences
- Career preparation and work-based experiences
- Youth development and leadership
- Connecting activities
- Family involvement and supports

Both the NASET standards and the NCWD/Y guideposts represent attempts to identify practices that are universally accepted by education, transition, and youth service professionals as useful and effective in helping youth achieve better education and employment outcomes. This book touches on all of these factors, but the obvious thrust of this book is on work. The other features of the NASET standards and the NCWD/Y guideposts are discussed intermittently as they relate to making work experiences and work successful. Many publications are available that highlight aspects of all of these factors, but few exist that exclusively address how to help youth learn how to work and how to build their employment portfolios so that they begin their adult careers *before* they exit school. This book is intended to begin filling that void.

NEED FOR A RENEWED EMPHASIS ON WORK

Since the mid 1980s, research has shown that youth with disabilities who participate in work experiences, especially paid work, while in secondary school are significantly more likely to hold jobs after they exit school than those who do not have these experiences (see, e.g., Colley & Jamison, 1998; Hazazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Luecking & Fabian, 2001; National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, 2006; Wagner, 1991). Simply stated, youth benefit from frequent and continuous exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years and beyond.

This same body of research has also demonstrated that work experiences during secondary school years are valuable for any youth with a disability, regardless of his or her primary disability label, race, gender, relative need for accommodation and support, or any other descriptive characteristic. This is also the case regardless of the intensity, location, or nature of the special education services youth may receive. In other words, it could be argued that work experience and work during the secondary school years are among the most, if not the most, important predictors of adult employment success for all youth who receive special education services. Predictors of success need not, nor should not, be determined by a label or demographic descriptor. A case could be made that the nation's educational system can only be deemed to have achieved its aims when the climax of students' educational experience is the beginning of a productive adult life. For most people this means a job or, even better, a career.

There is every reason to expect, therefore, that youth with disabilities and their families can look forward to the day when these youth enter the workforce for what ideally will be the start of a long career. The statistics,

however, suggest that this expectation is still not the norm and that employment is still an elusive postschool outcome for many youth with disabilities. In fact, it is clear that we can certainly improve the way in which special education transition creates and offers to students important work experience opportunities and how work experiences are integrated into curricula requirements so that public education culminates in productive postschool employment. Hereâ€™s what we know:

- The latest national survey of youth with disabilities making the transition from public education to adult life indicates that these youth continue to experience employment rates that do not approximate that of their peers without disabilities (Wagner et al., 2005).
- Postschool employment support services are not sufficient to meet the demand from transitioning youth, and the quality of these services is widely variable (Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 2003; Wehman, 2006).
- Youth with disabilities are much more likely than their same-age peers to drop out of school and to be unemployed and experience poverty as adults (National Organization on Disability, 2004).

The news is particularly disappointing for some categories of youth. Consider these findings pertaining to youth with intellectual disabilities:

Experience higher rates of criminal activity and substance abuse than any other group of youth (Bullis & Fredericks, 2002) Less than optimal postschool employment outcomes could be cited for all categories of youth with disabilities including mobility disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, and multiple disabilities. We may be moving in the right direction, but we are not there yet. **EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL?** Many of the studies cited previously suggest that all of these circumstances could be addressed, at least in part, by focused work experiences throughout secondary as well as postsecondary education. Carefully organized and supervised work experiences, where opportunities are provided to receive guidance and feedback on work performance, would go a long way to mitigate the continuingly disappointing postschool outcomes. Furthermore, these experiences serve as career building blocks as adolescents exit school, especially when adolescents require supports that will help them continue to pursue the work and career opportunities to which they were exposed during secondary education. Thus, this bookâ€™s purpose is to offer strategies essential for creating opportunities for successful work experience, for integrating these experiences into curricula requirements, and for bolstering the likelihood that publicly supported education leads to productive postschool employment. The good news is that youth and their families do not have to be satisfied with historically disappointing postschool outcomes. It has been repeatedly shown that work-based experiences such as job shadowing, internships, cooperative work placements, service learning, and unpaid work sampling experiences are effective and important prerequisites to successful postschool employment success. Moreover, when *paid work*, the â€•gold standard,â€• so to speak, of youth in the workplace, is paired with education, either as an ancillary activity or as an integral aspect of curriculum, youth are considerably more likely to obtain and retain employment as adults (Wagner et al., 2005). This book is thus framed by the belief that the culmination of publicly supported education for youth with disabilities can and should be real adult employment. This book shows readers how to help youth choose and pursue work experiences and also provides approaches for identifying, developing, organizing, and monitoring work-based learning opportunities in authentic workplaces. The experience of my work at TransCen and that of committed colleagues around the country has led to the driving philosophy of this book, the belief that every youth who wants to can achieve an adult life of productive and successful employment, regardless of disability label, need for support and accommodation, intensity of special education services, or even the economic vitality of his or her community. The approaches described in this book can be applied to help all youth achieve this goal. This book shows how work experiences can be more than mere adjunctive afterthoughts to curriculum, but rather essential features of contextual learning so that postschool employment becomes the rule rather than the exception for youth with disabilities. **Users Review From reader reviews:**

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