High-Quality Vocational Evaluation Tools for Students with ASD

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Facts about Adults with Disabilities in the US

- The Workforce Participation Rate of Adults with Disabilities
  - 19.5% versus 67.9% for Adults without Disabilities (Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2016)

- Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders
  - 9 out of 10 are either unemployed or underemployed, regardless of their IQ or education level. (Autism Speaks, 2014)
  - 500,000 children with Autism will become adults over the next decade (Autism Speaks, 2014)
  - Only 55.1 percent of young adults with autism held paying jobs during their first six years out of high school, the lowest percentage among the disability categories examined. (Shattuck, 2012)
  - Of the new jobs created in the last several years, the vast majority are low wage jobs that perpetuate the cycle of dependence on the government and family members (Carley, 2016).
Autism Specific Job Programs

- Great programs such as Specialistern, Aspiritech, Elephant Ventures, Nonpareil Institute, ASTEP, Microsoft’s Autism Program, SAP-Autism at Work
- Brilliant ideas, but with a few big problems…
  - Serving 100-200 People a Year out of the 2.6 Million Needing to be Served (Carley, 2016)
  - Location Specific and Concentrated Mostly in Northwest and Northeast
  - Limited industries
  - Usually just for the highest functioning portion of the spectrum
- What about company-wide efforts like Walgreens?
  - Top down approach rarely works because it rarely gets from the top to the bottom consistently.
- What do we need?
  - System wide initiatives focusing on entire companies, organizations, and industries, but not just the Fortune 500. Small business can do much more, much faster, across a much wider area. Stronger government financial incentives and more funding/grants for Autism specific employment models, VR programs, and school to work pipelines. In short, make hiring adults with Autism not just the right thing to do, but the best thing to do!
What is the Job Market Like?

- Where do people really work in the US?
  - Elementary/Secondary Schools
  - Food Service Industry
  - Hospitals
  - Employment Services
  - Grocery Stores

- Myth—Everyone needs a bachelor’s degree in our workforce. No, we actually need more people to pursue technical trades (plumber, HVAC, electrical)

- Important to understand job market trends and local factors
7 Habits of Highly Successful Employees with Disabilities

1. **Self-Advocacy**
   - The ability to communicate one’s talents, skills and needed accommodations to others….” (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p.2)

2. **Self-Determination**
   - The ability to choose and enact choices to control one’s life - to the maximum extent possible - based on knowing and valuing oneself, and in the pursuit of one’s own needs, interests, and values. (Campeau & Wolfman, 1993, p. 2)

3. **Motivation**
   - The internal, super power of any great individual with or without a disability. Can be encouraged and explained, but not forced upon anyone (Williams, 2016)

4. **Accommodations**
   - School or on-the-job adjustment or adaptation

5. **Disclosure**
   - Full or partial disability disclosure

6. **Soft Skills**
   - How you relate to and interact with other people, aka Social Skills

7. **Hard Skills**
   - Teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify, i.e. Degrees, Training, Experience
James’ Study: What and Who I Looked At?

- This correlational study investigated the relationship between parental factors and the successful employment of adults, age 26 and older, diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the United States.

- The researcher studied three different types of independent variables, specifically, the demographic, behavioral, and psychological factors of a parent with an adult child diagnosed with ASD.

- 92 Parents from across 48 states, including Hawaii and Alaska.
James’ Study: What I Learned?

- **Parental Characteristics**
  - In this study, parental demographic characteristics did not have a meaningful relationship with successful employment. Previous studies investigating this relationship have had varied findings.

- **Parental Expectations**
  - In this study, parental expectations did have a meaningful relationship with successful employment. Based upon the findings, it can be concluded that a parent’s positive expectations may increase the likelihood of their adult child achieving a successful employment outcome.

- **Parental Behaviors**
  - In this study, parental behavioral characteristics did not have a meaningful relationship with successful employment.
The Need for Vocational Evaluation

- A meaningful vocational evaluation empowers an evalee and their family to make informed decisions about post-secondary employment, college, and training.

- Regardless of the instruments used, a vocational evaluation should be used for effective transition planning and intervention with every student.

- Some instruments can be performed by anyone to generate data, however a full Vocational Evaluation with a comprehensive interpretive report should be used to provide concrete, actionable guidance a student and their family can utilize immediately.
Who Should Conduct Vocational Evaluations?

A high-quality vocational expert is an expert where disability and employment meet because they can help bridge the gap between an individual’s dreams/ideas and realistic goals based on their skills, needs, and the local job market.

They should not only be able to help them set a current vocational goal, but also long-term career plans.

Graduate-level professionals with formal training in vocational evaluation, vocational rehabilitation, job placement, supported employment, and/or vocational adjustment.

Preferably a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor with extensive experience in vocational evaluation, recent job placement, and disability knowledge.
What Tools Are Out There?

- A multi-battery assessment which includes various instruments, including psychometrics, multiple perspectives, a review of past data and testing, and a situational or environmental work assessment.

- Examples of Instruments:
  - COPS System-Interests, Abilities, Values
  - WRAT-Achievement
  - VARK-Learning Styles
  - BDEFS-Executive Functioning
  - CALS-Adaptive Living Skills
  - ESTR-Transition Rating
  - BWAP-Work Adjustment
  - WSA-Work Styles
  - Purdue Pegboard
  - Minnesota Manual Dexterity
  - Vocational Social Skills
  - Transferable Skills Analysis
  - Labor Market Survey
  - Functional Capacity Checklist
  - Situational Work Assessment
What is NOT a High-Quality Vocational Evaluation?

- Performed by a professional without formal training in vocational evaluation, vocational rehabilitation, job placement, supported employment, or vocational adjustment.
- A assessment report that just summarizes the data because it should provide much more than that, such as goals, recommendations, and interpretations of the results from a qualified professional.
- One interest checklist, survey, piece of paper, or assessment measure.
- A single question of “What they want to do when they graduate”?
- A drawing of a job they like.
- Attending a career fair.
- Telling their parents and teachers that they want to be a video game designer/park ranger/Disney cast member because it sounds fun.
- A assessment report that just summarizes the data because it should provide much more than that, such as goals, recommendations, and interpretations of the results from a qualified professional.
How to Find The Best Fit?

Uninformed Choice

- Based on Interest Alone
  - What sounds cool?
- Based on the Colors Alone
  - People don’t pick UT for that reason! 😊
- Based on the Football Team Alone
  - Tempting, but no!
- Based on Proximity/Location Alone
  - May mean leaving the state or area
- Based on Cost/Loans Alone
  - A cheap school/program that you can’t get a job from can still be a waste of time and resources
- Based on Friends Alone
  - They have different interests, skills, abilities, so their fit may not be yours.
- Based on a fun “College Experience”
  - Doesn’t get you a job, a degree, training, and experience do.

Informed Choice

- Based on multiple reasons such as:
  - Employability after completion
  - Availability of a position in the area(s) you’re able and willing to live.
  - Low cost of attendance compared to employability and earning capacity after completion
  - Level of support provided by the SDS/Program Office
  - The program/college’s employment rate after graduation (if they will tell you, if not, not a good sign)
  - A Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation/Transition Plan/PCP
A Great Program Model: CASE

- True degree earning program, not just a college experience
- Addresses the whole student-Wraparound
- Uses research-based vocational evaluation-Birkman Method
- Focuses on steering student’s towards marketable degrees/careers/internships
- Works with state VR to fund their program
- Utilizes 3 amazing mentors with extensive experience and education
- Provides social activities and leverages the entire campuses resources for their student’s
- Easy Online Application and Reference System
- Very reasonable cost
We Are Hosting An Institute!

- **When:** November 8th and 9th, 2017
- **Where:** Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
- **Cost:** $200 before October 20th, $250 after
- **Why:** To spread what we’re doing, learn from each other, and hopefully create more options nationwide!
- **Flyers and the registration form are up front.**
Questions/Contact Information

- Dr. James Williams, CRC, ACAS
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  - If you are looking to develop or strengthen the vocational assessment or services aspect of your program, I would love to help, collaborate, do research, or just talk with you!

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