



Job Site Fading

Why Job Coaches Find It Difficult to Leave Job Sites

by Dale DiLeo

Fading is a term used by job coaches and other trainers to describe a process used after a supported employee has learned one or a set of tasks. The job coach tries to reduce the person's dependency on those external support structures that the employee has needed in order to learn a task.

Unfortunately, the fading process is one of the most misunderstood learning strategies in human services. It is often viewed as the end point of a personal training model in which the job coach is the source of all the external support structures. This creates problems for the job coach, which are usually realized when fading efforts begin.

A traditional training model might look like this:

The job coach:

- learns the job from employer
- tries to teach the job to supported employee
- realizes the supported employee will need special learning strategies
- institutes special strategies by providing them him or herself (begins prompting, gesturing, redesigning, getting materials, helping finish, motivating, reinforcing, correcting mistakes, etc.)

After the person has “learned” the job, mostly with the assistance above, the job coach begins the fading process. This is usually defined as observing that the person is “Doing pretty well on his or her own, and now I should reduce how much help I give.”

After some attempts by the job coach to “fade” time at the job site, problems occur. The supported employee generally finds a way to need more

support that only the job coach can provide. This usually takes the form of job performance difficulties or problematic social behavior.

The job coach returns to try to set the situation straight. The supported employee remarkably improves performance or behavior, and the fading process begins anew. Unfortunately, the process tends to repeat over and over, effectively prohibiting any long-term job performance independent of the job coach.

Over-Reliance on the Job Coach for Training

If this pattern is examined carefully, some clear issues emerge. First, the job coach can become exhausted. Multiply the effort described above by three, five or 15 supported employees, and the likelihood of the job coach staying in a vocational career is reduced.

Also, the centralness of the job coach to success also can set her or him up as the key social relationship at a new job site for the supported employee. Efforts at fading are thus often felt by the supported employee as abandonment: “The only person I know and am comfortable with is leaving.”

“View fading as more of a building up of supports rather than a reduction”

Finally, the job coach role, when performed in this way, is viewed by others as a disability professional with specialized knowledge about being with a supported employee. Supervisors and co-workers often report delegating to the job coach the support roles they usually fill for each other.

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Evolve Your On-the-Job Approach to Solving Problems

The best way to resolve these issues is to evolve the “job coach as primary trainer” function. A job coach knows that helping a new employee succeed at a job is a big part of the job description. The reflex of being the initial source of training and support, with the idea of fading later, seems like the most straightforward way to begin, but actually produces a dependency that is resistant to fading.

One solution is to broaden the scope of the job coach role, and in turn view fading as more of a building up of supports rather than a reduction. What does this mean?

- In the initial job analysis, assess how new employees are taught their jobs. Remember, this can be a very informal process reliant on a veteran co-worker or the supervisor.
- Convey your role to the employer and co-workers as a consultant and resource to them, rather than as the trainer of the supported employee.
- Help supported employees learn their tasks, not just by providing direct training, but by giving advice and tips to co-workers and others on learning styles and how best to train the supported employee.
- Expand training of the supported employee to include such things as self-instruction, how to seek help if confused or in need of assistance, etc.
- Consult with the employer on practical styles of personal supervision for the supported employee.
- If you know the supported employee through career

planning and personal involvement, you have the advantage of knowing the person’s interests and experiences. Find and link the supported employee to others at or around the work site who share some of these interests.

- Don’t limit your role as an “attachment” to the new employee; expand your presence to support the job functions of the work setting so that the supported employee fits into the whole work culture.
- Don’t position yourself in one physical location so that people expect your presence in a defined territory – this leads to problems when trying to reduce your presence.

Fading: An Active Process

Fading does not mean leaving the employee alone by going away to read a magazine. Fading is an active process that requires you to build bridges of support for each possible area where a supported employee might need assistance. Whenever possible, you are looking for support that can become “self-sustaining,” rather than dependent on outside assistance.

The reduction of your time spent on a job site is not the process of fading, it is the outcome. If you succeed in building natural supports on the job over time, your presence on the job will become less and less needed.

Job supports evolve and change, of course, as new tasks and people are introduced, or as the employee determines it is time for the next step in his or her career. Providing ongoing flexible support to the supported employee and the work environment does not mean that fading was a failure, it is just part of the nature of supported employment.