

Excerpted from Chapter 8 of *The Job Developer's Handbook: Practical Tactics for Customized Employment*, by Cary Griffin, David Hammis, & Tammara Geary

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"Susanna is a 28-year-old woman with severe mental retardation and a full-scale IQ of 38. She is referred for vocational evaluation, with the referral noting concerns about her ability to work in the community. She recently lost a supported employment (SE) job after 2 years. Records indicate ongoing performance issues at the job and ongoing support visits required every other day. The SE staff at Carter Vocational Options have been trying to determine if there are any good jobs or industries for her. Her history demonstrates a significant lack of success in both school and work. She left school without completing her special education certificate. Records indicate she was challenging in the classroom, often refusing to participate. There were several serious behavioral outbursts in school. Behavioral management plans were only mildly successful. She attended the Carter Vocational Training Center (CVTC) for 6 years, working on various contracts. Records indicate that she was often unwilling to work. Her production rate was 15%. She was frequently off task and would not remain in her work area.

She presents well, has good hygiene, and is neatly dressed. She is pleasant and talkative but has been unable to adequately describe past work experiences. She admits that she did not like school, the CVTC, or her job. Susanna says she wants a job but cannot identify a job she wants. She indicates that she likes to go outside. She appears confused by many questions, is unable to sequence events, and frequently responds in ways that seemed irrelevant to the question. Her mother and sister have been providing support. Evaluation and testing revealed good matching skills, simple counting skills, basic letter recognition, minimal word recognition, and absent reading. She is frequently off task but is generally cooperative. She frequently asks to go outside or just gets up to go. She is unable to follow even simple directions and her attention span does not allow completion of all tests. In general, Susanna appears to need constant redirection. In this evaluator's opinion, she has a limited potential for success in the community workforce without regular supervision. This evaluator would recommend some sort of arrangement where there is constant supervision and direction. Perhaps one of CVTC's lawn crews would be appropriate, given her demonstrated desire to go outside. "

Susanna's report and history are not all that unusual. In working with over 200 employment sites across the country, and through years of direct experience serving people with disabilities, we have encountered numerous job seekers who, though

unique individuals, have had experiences with similar issues and recommendations. Needless to say, community employment providers are not lining up to serve people with such limited recommendations and perceived ability and whose work skills and potential are not readily apparent. It is likely that readers are at least somewhat familiar with this concept.

We have often been asked to help providers figure out how to serve many individuals who present real or perceived work challenges. In the words of one site director, "We just can't figure out how to serve him, and we haven't done a good job of it." For many people, the solution lies in job carving, with its foundation in the discovery, planning, and job development processes.

Job carving is not new; the concept has been around for many years. It is probably safe to say, however, that it is underutilized as a strategy for creating well-fitting jobs for people with disabilities while providing benefit to the workplace.

Job carving is a process of analyzing the duties performed in a given job, or the duties of several different jobs, to identify discrete tasks that could be combined to create a job that meets the specific aspirations and support needs of an individual (Griffin & Sherron, 2006) while meeting the needs of the business. Job carving seeks to maximize an individual's gifts, skills, interests, and contributions to a workplace and is therefore distinctly different from traditional approaches to developing jobs for individuals, in which the focus is on the labor market (Griffin & Hammis, 2003a). Here the approach has been to look at the local job market, determine what businesses and jobs exist, and provide training and other strategies with the goal of making the individual fit the job. Based on the continuing high unemployment rates of people with disabilities, it is clear this approach has not been successful. Furthermore, years of using a labor market-driven approach to job development has not produced much variety in the types of jobs secured by people with disabilities, particularly those with developmental disabilities. There is a high incidence of placement in stereotypical jobs, such as janitorial, food service, retail, stocking, greeting, grocery bagging, laundry, and hotel housekeeping. These jobs are in industries with which providers are familiar and are not necessarily ones that represent the best fit for an individual.

Carving jobs expands opportunity through true customization, selecting essential tasks performed in a workplace to create a job that contributes critical functions to the workplace and at the same time is highly focused on the individual's abilities, interests, skills, preferences, and general support needs. With skillful carving, the jobs that are created also create profit for the business.

## **THE UTILITY OF JOB CARVING**

Job carving is useful in a variety of situations. Its ultimate utility, however, is in creating the right employment situation for people with disabilities. Some people receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and others considered hard to serve, will likely find it very difficult to find a form-fitting job in the community. Carving allows a person who wants to work, but who is unlikely to find an existing job and description of duties that he or she can successfully perform, to create a job in which he or she can be successful.

While it is perfectly appropriate to carve a full-time job, carving can be an ideal strategy for people who may be seeking part-time employment. Although the provider should always strive to meet the individual's goals for hours of work per week, there are many reasons a person may need to limit hours to part time. Physical disability, psychiatric illness, intellectual capacity, medical fragility, available supports, and choice represent some of those reasons (Griffin & Winter, 1988).

Further, job carving allows an individual to maximize contribution, something that should be at the heart of any job search or creation effort, as well as integral to small business development. Contribution refers to any individual's specific sets of skills (existing and potential), personality traits, and potential assets that are *exploitable Resources* for an employer (Callahan & Garner, 1997; Griffin & Hammis, 2003b). In this case, the term *exploitable* refers to usable or profitable resources and should not be mistaken to refer to the more negative connotations of the word, that is, gullible or easy to take advantage of. The more exploitable resources a person has, the more marketable they are. Commonly, existing or off-the-shelf jobs do not include a set of tasks that take advantage of an individual's contributions. They just don't fit an individual very well. Job carving allows a person to work in jobs that fit; ones that maximize use of his or her unique resources and contributions, offering clear advantages for both the job seeker and the employer. It is important to note that exploitable resources are not only limited to skills, but also include personality, relationships, tools, or other qualities that create profit or enhance the workplace.

### **Considering Susanna**

"Susanna spent several years in a sheltered workshop doing whatever was assigned to her, based on whatever contract work was in house. Until recently, she spent 2 years in SE working in a laundry room at a local hotel, requiring high levels of ongoing support for the duration. She was never really good at the job. She made lots of mistakes, such as mixing up sheets and towels and folding improperly. She was frequently late coming back from breaks, and often said she got lost in the back hallways of the hotel. Nonetheless, she liked having a job and getting a paycheck. Co-workers and supervisors liked her, saying she was pleasant and fit in well, but they were increasingly irritated by her slow pace, mistakes, and inconsistency. She was

getting more frustrated, too, but continued to go to work. She finally admitted that she did not really like the job at about the same time her supervisor let her go.

Susanna; her mother and sister; a few friends; various support staff, including her case manager, employment consultant, and a few additional staff from the employment provider organization formed a team to learn more about Susanna with hopes of creating or carving a job that fit her. Through the discovery and planning process, several of Susanna's attributes were identified and developed. It turns out Susanna had been taking care of people's pets in the neighborhood for a few years. Her mother or sister help her go in and out of houses, but Susanna has learned to walk the dogs, feed them, clean up accidents, bathe and brush them out, and she frequently performs those tasks on her own for her neighbors shortly before they return from trips. She also takes care of cats and changes litter boxes. Before the owner's return, she vacuums and cleans up with help from her sister or mother. Her mom and sister both agreed that Susanna could probably do this herself, but they just wanted to make sure everything gets done and the house gets locked.

She walks the dogs in the park next to her neighborhood. As a result, she is fairly well known in her small community, and she often stops to chat with other dog walkers and moms watching their kids at the playground. People seem to enjoy her. Despite the obvious fact that she is essentially running a small business already, and that she would like to keep taking care of her neighbors' animals, she doesn't want that to become a regular obligation. She'd rather work part time for somebody else and continue to enjoy her neighbors' animals on her own time. As part of her job-planning process, she starts to volunteer for a dog rescue and adoption group a few evenings and most Saturdays. She has an easy way with the animals and is able to work with even the most distressed and neglected among them. She is well liked and pretty good at drawing people in to take a look at the animals on Adoption Saturdays. After a while, Susanna believes that she would like to work for a veterinarian who offers some additional services, such as boarding, daycare, and grooming."

Take a few minutes and consider this: What are Susanna's exploitable resources? Remember to consider not only her existing, but also her potential, exploitable resources.

### **Some of Susanna's Exploitable Resources**

- Dog and cat care skills (e.g., walking, feeding, bathing, drying, brushing, playing with, and cleaning up after dogs and cats) (existing)
- Other skills may include additional grooming (e.g., hair trims, nails, ears, teeth) and other care-related tasks (potential)

- Caring for other types of animals (potential)
- Ease with dogs and cats, including injured and distressed ones (existing)
- Provides thorough and extra services (e.g., clean-up and bathing when she cares for animals) (existing)
- Is friendly, chatty (but not too much so), and well liked (existing)
- Can draw people in and attract customers (existing)
- May be able to purchase some tools for her job (potential)
- Network of people with pets (e.g., her neighbors, the dog rescue shelter) (existing)

This is just a start to a list of existing and potential exploitable resources. There are probably more. It is also important to note that many of these attributes, both existing and potential, may require on-the-job training and further development to solidify particular contributions. It is, therefore, critical to consider training and support strategies in the process of creating jobs based on exploitable resources. The identification of contributions and exploitable resources is the foundation of solid job carving.

Recall that solid carving creates profit for the employer. Now take a moment to consider how Susanna's contributions would benefit a veterinary business.

### **Veterinary Business Benefits from Employing Susanna**

Here are just a few ways that a veterinary business might profit from employing Susanna.

- Susanna loves to work with dogs and cats and is motivated by the work
- She is motivated to do little extras that enhance customer service
- She has quite a few existing skills and the potential to develop several others
- She likes to do a variety of tasks
- She could assume responsibility for specific billable services (e.g., bathing, caring for boarded animals, playing with and walking boarded animals), allowing the business to maximize volume and profit

- She could take care of many different support tasks (e.g., preparing exam rooms; retrieving and returning animals to and from crates and delivering them to the groomers and trainers; preparing monthly reminder post card for mailing), which are essential tasks that directly produce revenue
- Susanna is able to draw people in to look at dogs on Adoption Saturdays, so she likely has some natural sales skill that may be put to good use
- Susanna may be a good up-seller, that is, she may be good at getting people to buy little extras (e.g., an extra plaything, a blanket or bed for boarders, a special treat, some gourmet biscuits, collars, toys), which increases business revenue
- She knows many people who trust her with their animals

Susanna will surely bring in many new customers. People she knows will be glad to have their pets go to a place where the pets are familiar and comfortable with staff. New customers are a clear profit to businesses. Susanna's contacts could be particularly valuable to a new veterinary clinic or to one that is expanding or adding services.

## **JOB CARVING**

As mentioned earlier, job carving is a process of analyzing the duties performed in a given job, or the duties of several different jobs, to identify discrete tasks that could be combined to create a job that meets the specific aspirations and support needs of an individual (Griffin & Sherron, 2006). While the carving is focused on creating a collection of tasks that suits the individual, the selected tasks and negotiation with the employer ensure that the business benefits as well.

Many use the terms *job carving* and *job creation* interchangeably, while others draw distinctions between the two (Geary, Griffin, & Hammis, 2005). For the purposes of this book, the terms are used interchangeably to refer to the host of carving, creation, negotiation, and self-employment development strategies that result in a customized employment outcome.

### **What Is Job Carving?**

Job carving is the process of sectioning out a portion of an existing job and creating a new one that allows the worker to contribute his or her strengths to the workplace and perform a job he or she likes and desires (Callahan, McLoughlin, & Garner, 1987; Geary, Griffin, & Hammis, 2005). While a carved job has to meet the needs of the

employer, the carving should be centered on the person and the goals set forth in the individual's employment plan.

There are many examples of job carving, and each situation is different. It is critical to be observant, sensitive, thoughtful, and strategic when figuring out, planning, and negotiating a job carve. The following is an example that highlights essential cultural considerations and a few strategies used to carve the position.

### **Marjorie's Experience**

"Marjorie, a young transition-age woman, wanted to work at a huge distribution center. She lived in an area where the majority of residents worked either at the center or at a very large factory down the road. Essentially all the work in this center involved various shipping tasks. The majority of the workforce did essentially the same task but on products of various sizes. Working from a list provided by supervisors, employees

- Requisitioned items from the various warehouses
- Confirmed the inventory upon arrival
- Packaged and labeled items
- Prepared items for shipping
- Confirmed shipping on all items on the list

In addition, there were substantial work culture routines, including

- Ride sharing
- Taking breaks at the same time
- Taking turns bringing coffee and doughnuts for the crew
- Playing poker and Crazy 8s during down time and breaks

From everything known about Marjorie, it was clear that her limited math and reading skills and the complexity of the requisition forms would make it very difficult for her to master the tasks involving paperwork, including requisitioning items, confirming inventory, and confirming shipments. She would, however, have no problem with the packaging and labeling, and she could master the shipping preparation with a slight

modification involving physically stacking boxes a certain way so they matched the order on the mail labeling sheets.

Ultimately, the employment specialist proposed that the packaging, labeling, and shipping tasks be pulled from the overall job description to carve a job to fit Marjorie, and a co-worker who really enjoyed the paperwork part would take on that responsibility. In return, Marjorie would assume responsibility for a portion of her co-worker's packaging tasks.

This was handled delicately to not upset the balance of the strong workplace culture. Restructuring a co-worker's job in order to accommodate somebody can backfire in terms of the individual's acceptance by the team, so it was essential that the employment specialist be thoughtful and observant while negotiating the job carve.

By conducting a thorough job analysis, the employment specialist was able to get a strong sense of all the tasks involved, including the flow of the work and the relationships between team members. By blending in well, she was able to observe the workplace culture. She was able to identify a person, who was clearly valued by the team and supervisor, who saw taking on the paperwork associated with Marjorie's workload as an advantage. The employment specialist did not want to approach the supervisors with a proposal without checking it out with the targeted co-worker, but at the same time, she did not want to ask the co-worker about the plan specifically, out of concern that the co-worker might really jump on the idea, only to have the proposal refused by the supervisors. This could unintentionally create disharmony for her and perhaps the entire unit.

The employment specialist decided it was critical to check this out with the co-worker before approaching the supervisor with a proposal. Realizing it must be done subtly, she asked the co-worker to show her a few steps and help her understand a few details related to the requisition process. As they worked, she started a conversation about the different tasks by commenting on the complexity of the requisition process. The co-worker indicated that she liked that complexity. Within a 5-minute conversation that started with the employment specialist commenting on the relative simplicity of the packaging and labeling, the co-worker revealed a preference for paperwork and a desire to be free of some of the packaging tasks. In general, the employment specialist followed the conversational lead of the co-worker, seizing on nuggets of pertinent information to learn more.

Having a fair level of certainty that the co-worker would be happy with the arrangement, the employment specialist presented a brief proposal to the supervisor suggesting the shifting of job responsibilities as outlined. She noted that she had reason to believe the co-worker would like the change in responsibilities, but she did



not want to pursue it if it was not desirable to the co-worker. In addition, the employment specialist highlighted a few potential benefits of the arrangement, including potential increase in efficiency, with Marjorie and the co-worker focused on specific tasks while essentially collaborating to complete two requisition lists. With less shifting of focus and tasks, it seemed likely that each could be more efficient, not just in terms of speed, but also in terms of quality. Also, the co-worker was very good at the requisitioning and shipping confirmation. Her low error rate, self-direction, and attention to detail were valued by everyone in the unit. The supervisor identified another benefit. He had heard rumors that this person was "burnt out" and was seriously considering quitting. He did not want to lose her and saw this as a valuable way to keep her.

Marjorie was hired in the carved job that met her needs, the co-worker benefited with a carved job that met her needs, and the distribution center benefited with two dedicated, longterm employees, increased efficiency, and quality. The team concept was subsequently used with other pairs of employees as a strategy to maintain interest, focus, and quality. Marjorie never became a decent poker player, so her co-workers pair up with her for games and give her a pair of dark glasses to help her 'master the bluff.'"