



Unseen Pressure: The Burnout Crisis in VR Job Coaching During Inclusive Orientation

Imagine playing chess with several opponents at once, for hours, without a break. Now imagine doing this day after day—not on a board, but at a job site, where you're responsible for supporting multiple unskilled individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), each in need of personalized guidance, emotional support, and hands-on coaching.

This is the daily reality for vocational rehabilitation (VR) job coaches assigned to simultaneous inclusive orientation sessions. According to the *AMSI Standard EVI1 – Eligibility Verification and Inclusive Orientation*, this phase is critical for ensuring that individuals are adequately prepared for success in competitive integrated employment. However, when too many parallel sessions are scheduled at once, job coaches are placed in high-stress, high-demand situations with little recovery time.

Often, these assignments come from supervisors at SEMP (Supported Employment) provider agencies who lack training in the emotional and cognitive demands of this work. As outlined in *AMSI Standard VRJ1 – Vocational Rehabilitation Job Coaching*, job coaches must maintain individualized support while managing diverse behavioral and training needs. Yet their own emotional well-being is frequently overlooked.

This disconnect—between what VR job coaches *must* do and what their supervisors *understand*—creates a work environment where burnout is inevitable. Whether due to incompetence, indifference, or toxic leadership traits, the result is the same: an unsustainable system in which coaches are cycled out quickly, while supervisory staff remain unchanged for years. The DSW workforce pays the price, and so do the individuals they support.

At the core of AMSI's *Work (Service) Quality* model is the principle that quality is a **shared responsibility**—between the individual with IDD, their job coach, and the coach's supervisor. When supervisors overload job coaches without considering their capacity, they violate not only ethical expectations but also the person-centered responsibilities set out in the *CQL Basic Assurances* framework. This is especially concerning when the SEMP provider is *CQL-accredited*, as managers are expected to apply the person-centered approach not only to individuals with IDD, but also to the Direct Support Workers (DSWs) who serve them.

This article does not offer immediate answers—but it urges a deeper investigation. Key questions include:

- How can we define emotionally sustainable caseloads and session loads during inclusive orientation?
- What competency standards or ethical requirements should supervisors meet to be qualified to oversee SEMP programs?
- Can accountability mechanisms and staff protections be embedded into service provider operations through enforceable quality standards?

The *AMSI Standards VRJ1* and *EVI1* represent the first steps toward defining what quality looks like—for the individuals supported and for the professionals who serve them. Now we must ensure these standards are applied in practice, not just theory.