

Reflection on the "Visibility" of Employment Support Services

As we work with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in employment, it becomes evident that these individuals are acutely aware of their disabilities. They understand their challenges and often go to great lengths to avoid situations where their disability becomes the focal point of attention. The desire to blend in with their peers—employees without disabilities—is strong, and they often seek to avoid any attention being drawn to their disability in the workplace.

This desire to maintain a sense of normalcy and avoid distinction is not about denial but rather a desire for dignity. People with IDD wish to be seen as capable individuals rather than as defined by their disability. In essence, they do not want to be treated differently just because of their challenges.

This brings us to the core of what support employment should strive for: invisibility. As per the reciprocity principle, “Treat others as you wish to be treated.” Employment support services, with the crucial role of job coaches and supervisors, should be designed in a way that they don’t make individuals with IDD feel singled out or different from others in the workplace. Instead, these services should blend seamlessly into the routine employment activities. Job coaches and supervisors work discreetly to assist without drawing attention to the individual’s disability. The goal is to notice the disability—yes—but in a way that does not make it “visible” to others in a way that disrupts or hinders the person’s role in the workplace.

By creating support services that are “invisible,” we foster true inclusion. Job coaches and supervisors provide guidance, support, and tailored assistance, helping individuals with IDD perform tasks to the best of their abilities without drawing attention to the additional support they may require. This approach ensures that individuals with IDD are not only included but are empowered to succeed without feeling stigmatized.

Ultimately, inclusion is achieved not through making the disability a focal point, but by providing seamless, respectful support that allows individuals with IDD to thrive in their employment roles. This reflects a true understanding of their needs, treating them as valued and capable employees, just like anyone else.