

Self-Guided Discovery™:

Customized Employment Planning Tools for Individuals & Families

Griffin-Hammis Associates



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**“Discovery consists of seeing what everyone has seen
and thinking what nobody has thought.”**

Dr. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Self-Guided Discovery™ - Planning Guide

The process of securing employment, regardless of the methods one chooses, consists of four distinct but interconnected phases:

1. Assessment
2. Identifying and contacting potential employers
3. Learning a new job (including how to get there, what to wear, etc.)
4. Continued planning for career development or advancement

We at Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC, focus our attention on a particular set of tools and methods for assisting people in finding employment that fits who they are, what they know and can learn, and provides them with the opportunity to grow as employees and as productive citizens. That process is called “Customized Employment.”

Customized Employment (CE) is a flexible process designed to create a personalized employment relationship between a job seeker and a business in a way that meets the needs of both. It begins with the process of Discovery, which identifies an individual job candidate’s strengths, work conditions, and interests to better match the business needs of an employer. CE uses unique methods of identifying and contacting potential employers, forsaking many of the sales-oriented approaches used in conventional job development or placement. Customized Employment takes a systematic approach to helping the new employee learn the job and acquire new skills for career advancement. Customized Employment is an individualized approach to employment planning and job development - one-person-at-a-time and one-employer-at-a-time.

Cary Griffin and David Hammis made the case for Customized Employment approaches in their 2012 article: *“The Three Vocational Themes: Going Where the Career Makes Sense.”*

Another major issue is our understanding of community and business. Much of the employment data, practices, and policies surrounding disability systems are faulty; they are based on a big-business view of the world that does not exist. No one is suggesting that IBM, GM, GE, and other Fortune 1000 companies do not have a major impact on our economy, but at the local, functional level, CE is best implemented in the ubiquitous small companies that populate the countryside and contribute over 85% of all new jobs. In fact, according to the Kaufman Foundation for Entrepreneurial Leadership, big business generated no new net jobs from 2008-2012. With over 20 million single owner-operator firms out of a total 34.5 million businesses in the United States, and only 34,000 of these businesses having more than 500 employees, small business is the place for employment. But why?

1. *Because most small business is under-capitalized, which means they could use talent that helps them generate more revenue. Using a Resource Ownership (Griffin, et al.,*

2007) strategy that provides tools, skills, and technology that make an individual more productive, is easily funded through SSA Work Incentives or Vocational Rehabilitation for instance;

2. Because most small businesses do not have Human Resource managers or written job descriptions that have to be changed or circumvented as in larger companies;
3. Because in smaller companies it's much easier to reach the decision maker;
4. Because small business owners and managers gravitate towards job seekers with similar interests, whereas in bigger companies the HR manager, who likely does not have a shared interest with the job seeker, often stands between making this connection to the production floor. Hiring is personal in a small company. And, people with similar interests are more likely to mentor and coach one another. Artisans, after all, run most small companies, not MBAs. Artisans have and share skills that help employees grow competent, leading to better jobs in the future.

In this planning guide, we discuss the phases of employment using a customized approach, but most of the discussion revolves around the lynchpin of Customized Employment – Discovery. Discovery is a functional assessment designed to learn “who” someone is, takes inventory of that person’s skills, interests, experiences, relationships, etc. and creates a positive personal employment profile. That positive profile underlies the plan to contact businesses where the job seeker and company both benefit when the individual becomes an employee. Or, in some cases, Discovery may lead someone down the path to self-employment as the best option. As mentioned previously, this can only be done one-person-at-a-time. Individualization is what makes the process customized. In many instances, people may require assistance from someone who is trained and skilled in these techniques to help them discover their personal genius and assist them in connecting with a business that could benefit from having that person as an employee. Discovering Personal Genius™ (DPG) is the name given to the Discovery process developed by Griffin-Hammis Associates (GHA). GHA’s work builds on the approaches put forth by Marc Gold Associates and others who made foundational contributions to person-centered employment approaches.



The Phases of Customized Employment:

- Discovering Personal Genius
- Cultivating Employment Opportunities
- Engaging Employment Supports
- Ongoing Support and Career Development

Not everyone requires a great deal of support from an employment consultant to discover his or her own personal genius. In many cases, Discovery (or DPG) can be done effectively by the individual job seeker with minimal guidance and support from an employment consultant, friend, or family member. For instance, self-directed discovery may be applicable for:

- People with a previous career who have recently acquired a disability
- People with a disability who have a college degree, technical certificate, or advanced training
- Veterans with disabilities who were trained in specific skills in the military
- People with sensory disabilities who may fall into one of the categories listed above
- People with Asperger's
- Job seekers in the Workforce System who have a disability but may not qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation or other government assisted employment services

Self-Guided Discovery™ is also effective for families with sons or daughters ranging from early childhood to their School Transition years. One benefit of Self-Guided Discovery™ for families is the ability to engage in the process over the course of several years. The process can guide families in teaching their child functional skills that are valuable later in life and that enhance employability. The process also guides educational efforts including work experiences, academics, skills training, after-school employment, and school to work transition. Self-Guided Discovery™ is an effective way to put the control of one's career development squarely in the hands of the job seeker or family.

This manual provides a step-by-step guide through each stage of Discovering Personal Genius™ and highlights the ways a self-directed or family-guided approach may differ from a guided or facilitated approach. The similarities between the two approaches are also explored.

Self-Guided Discovery™ begins via an initial consultation with someone fully trained and competent in Discovery. That person provides the job seeker or family with the framework and necessary materials to get started. That initial consultation also includes an overview of the DPG™ process and how DPG leads to career or small business development. As the employment seeker or family embarks on their Discovery journey, the Discovery Guide is helpful in reviewing information and generating ideas and other support strategies as requested by the individual or family.

Although we are referring to this as “Self-Directed or Self-Guided Discovery,” success is enhanced when there are a several people assisting with or reviewing the process. Individual job seekers or families might consider inviting strong allies to be part of a Discovery Team. The Team serves exclusively in an advisory role and contribute by: providing information, generating ideas, reviewing the Discovery Staging Record (DSR), linking the employment seeker with community resources, etc. This does not require a team of professionals, in fact, we recommend minimizing the number of human service professionals on the team. Instead, think about friends, family and other community members who might be able to aid in the process of Discovery.

The Components of DPG

- Personal Profile
- Financial Goals
- Exploitable Skills
- Ideal Conditions of Employment
- Draft Profile
- Touch Base
- Divining Vocational Themes

As you go through this workbook, fill in the blank spaces. When completed, you will have the foundation to begin your career search. So, let's get going!

Building a Personal Profile: Home and Neighborhood Observation and Talking to Others

The purpose of this step is for you, the job seeker, to take a good look at the people, places and things that surround you. Who are the people that are most important to you? They might be family or friends.

They might be former co-workers or teachers. If you are a church-going person they might be other members of the congregation or the pastor/minister/rabbi/imam, etc. If there aren't a lot of people in your life, don't worry about it – there isn't a standard for how many people should be on the list.

Think about people willing to help you and to provide honest feedback along the way. They might remember events or accomplishments you have forgotten or take for granted. You never know where a kernel of information might lie that provides the spark igniting an idea. Another reason people are important is because they may become support team members as you begin Discovery. They might offer suggestions about your progress, assist in discovering your Vocational Themes, help you maintain a positive attitude and brainstorm ideas when you begin the actual job search.

Things to consider when completing this step:

Where do you live? Briefly describe the neighborhood or part of town. Are you close to public transportation? What services or amenities do you commonly use in your community (barber, grocery store, gas station, etc.)? Are you a "regular" at these places? Are there neighbors around? Do you know them and have regular interactions with them? Do you know what they do for a living?

SELF-GUIDED DISCOVERY FACILITATOR CONVERSATION POINTS

The following Probes/Questions/Conversation Points may be helpful in developing a vocational profile, understanding family dynamics, jump-starting discussion, and illuminating an individual's life story, especially during the initial home visit. These items can be considered by both the Employment Seeker and Family members to augment other Discovery information. Remember to weave selected points from this list (*not all of them!*) into the conversation and be sure to practice **Smooth Listening**. It may be best to collect this information in several short conversations than in one first, long session. Ask, "What happens next?" or draw out conversation by remaining quiet but attentive to the speaker.

- Informal Supports: family, friends, neighbors
 - Tell us who lives in this home
 - Tell us about People in your daily life
 - Tell us about your extended family
 - Tell us about your friends.
 - Tell us about your neighbors.
 - How often do you see each person?
 - If you needed help, who would you call?
 - When something exciting happens in your life, who do you call?
 - What do the people closest to you do for a living?

- Intermediate Supports: structured, community-based activities
 - Tell us about what your son/daughter does with their spare time
 - Tell us about Activities you and your child participate in out in the community
 - What do you and your son/daughter enjoy about that activity?
 - Tell us about formal and informal associational groups (Church, Service Clubs, People 1st, VFW, et al.) you belong to
 - Tell us about what you do for a living

- Formal Supports: medical, therapeutic, public assistance services
 - Tell us about the services/education your son/daughter receives
 - Tell us about progress you see resulting from these services
 - If you feel comfortable, tell us about medical services/providers
 - Tell us about public benefits received such as SSI/SSDI, VA benefits, etc.

- Tell us how your day begins
- Tell us about how this time of day goes. If I were a fly on the wall, what would it look like?
- Discuss these 6 items (below) for each major part of the day (morning, daytime activities, after school/work, evening, etc.):
 - What is your son/daughter doing? (Reminder: If the person is self-guiding, then this probe becomes: “What are you doing?”)
 - Describe what everyone else is doing
 - How your son/daughter participates in this time of day
 - How independent your son/daughter is during this time of day
 - How your son/daughter communicates during this time of day
 - Please rate your satisfaction with each time of day (a 1 to 10 scale or other measure is appropriate)

- What would you (Family members) like to be different during this time of day?
- What would you (Employment Seeker) like to be different during this time of day?
- What would you (Family members) like to see happening during this time of day?
- What would you (Employment Seeker) like to see happening next during this time of day?

- After this discussion use these probes to help set direction and next steps:
 - Do you have enough time for yourself and important people in your life?
 - If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?

- When you lie awake at night worrying, what is it you worry about?

- Recap the information and concerns raised throughout the interview

- Write and prioritize goals for the next steps in Discovery and who will work with the Facilitator to move Discovery forward

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Training and Development Specialist
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Describe your neighborhood:

What services or businesses do you regularly use (stores, barber shop, church, etc.)?

Who are your neighbors? What do they do for a living?

Describe your home or apartment. How do you decorate your space? What pictures, works of art, memorabilia, etc. do you keep around you? What sort of entertainment do you keep around you (TV, stereo, computer, etc.)?

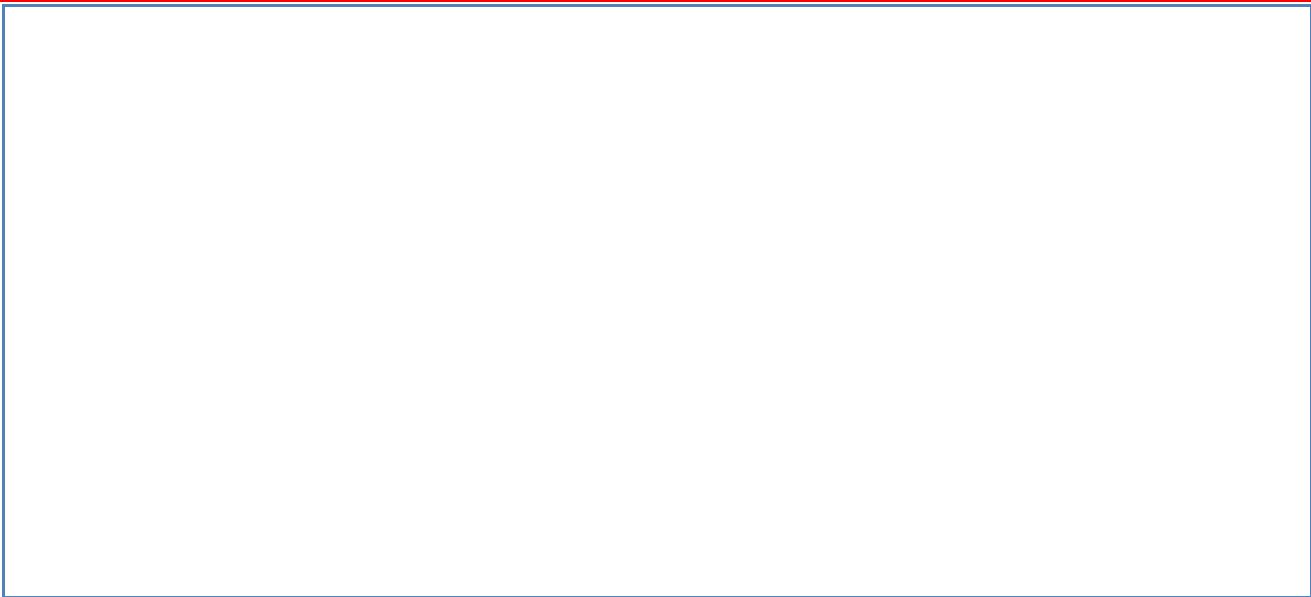
Do you have tools that you regularly use? Carpentry, mechanics, gardening or lawn work, electrical, etc.? When did you last use any of them? When you are using tools, which ones do you prefer?

What chores and activities do you do around the house? Mow the lawn? Do the laundry? Do you do general housekeeping? Cooking? Fix-it projects? Gardening?

When you are most at ease or “in flow,” what are you doing? Where are you? Who’s around?

Are there family traditions or events that you look forward to? What are your contributions to these events?

After considering the above questions, how might you briefly describe yourself, the employment seeker?



It's About Relationships

Relationships play a key role in Discovery and Employment. During Discovery, the people who know you best can help you craft your personal narrative as well as offer advice. Others you know can help you discover community connections, as well as other people who share your interests and talents. In the Customized approach to employment you learn how to create this relationship chart and use it as a tool to help with your employment development.

This is different from networking. Instead of asking who do you know that's hiring, you are asking who do you know that may share the same Vocational Themes, Interests, and Work Preferences. A critical element of Discovery is getting advice from people who are interested in the same things as you, or who do something you know how to do or are interested in doing. The chart helps direct you to people and places where your interests, talents and conditions of employment may be present and valued. By talking with many people you are more likely to come up with better ideas about work than you could on your own. The bottom line is we need other people to support us in becoming successful.

Most employment is found through some type of relationship or connection to others. There are direct relationships such as a family member or close friend, and there are also indirect relationships including friends of friends, etc. An important step in the process of Discovery is making a list of people you know, their relationship to you and what they do for a living.

Name	Relationship to Me (<i>friend, family, acquaintance, customer, etc</i>)	Career/Trade/Interest	Contact Information

Please review this chart and note the people who are most important in your life. Begin your Discovery process by talking with them. Find out what they do for a living, how they got into that line of work, what education or training they received, what advice would they give to someone who wants to pursue a career in that field, etc. Asking for advice is a critical component of DPG. Many people do not know how to help you, but they do know how to give advice, and by doing so, they are actually supporting your career plans.

Establishing Financial Goals

What is work for? The answer seems obvious: “The pay!” However, there is something more important and fundamental involved. The word “work” implies effort towards gaining something or achieving some desired result. We work to attain substantial personal benefit. We work to change lives (ours and those we love), to transform our material circumstances, and so that tomorrow may be better than today.

Specifically, we use work to meet our daily needs, to gain access to the resources needed to pursue our life’s goals, and as a means towards self-sufficiency and financial security. All human beings have the same basic material needs: to not be hungry, and to have access to a safe home and medical care. And while there are slight variations on “the good life” that we wish for ourselves and those we love, most of us agree that the basics of this life involve the freedom of financial options and choice, building and maintaining relationships, and being respected for our contributions to our communities. Some common features of the “good life” include owning a home, a car, starting a family, and going on vacations. We are far more likely to get these things with financial resources and financial security.

Secondary reasons for work include keeping busy or productive, being engaged in meaningful activities, and working with others. These are important considerations, but they are frequently used to justify settling on an employment outcome that does not resemble typical expectations regarding earnings and hours worked. Discovery will account for these and include them as part of your Ideal Conditions of Employment.

Spend some time reflecting on the opening question and a related question: “Where do I want to be financially?” This will provide the purpose and clarity needed to set and maintain direction during Discovery and Customized Job Development. Doing this at the beginning of the Discovery process will assist in the creation of short-term and long-term financial goals, focus attention on the amount of employment earnings needed to pursue these goals, and highlight concerns and misconceptions regarding interactions between public benefit programs (SSI for instance) and paid employment.

Use a financial education and planning tool to assist in the creation of your financial goals. There are many tools to choose from, including the “Financial Stability & Work Incentive Counseling” workbook by Molly Sullivan of Griffin-Hammis Associates, “Hands On Banking” from Wells Fargo,” and “Money Smart” from the FDIC (a resource list is provided at the end of this manual).

You’ll find that typical Financial Planning steps include:

1. Engaging in Financial Education
2. Applying Financial Literacy concepts to personal circumstances by creating a Savings and Spending plan
3. Reducing and Eliminating Debt
4. Building Credit
5. Building Personal Net Worth

If you receive government benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or Veterans Benefits it is wise to understand how those benefits factor into your financial goals. There are abundant resources available to help you understand Social Security benefits and explain how employment interacts with them. In some states, online estimators (see: <http://db101.org/>) assist people in planning their employment futures and understanding the relationship between benefits and earnings. There are similar resources available to veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs and other organizations (see our manual on Veteran’s Benefits here: <http://vets.syr.edu/pdfs/benefits-guidebook.pdf>).

All employment seekers who receive SSA benefits should obtain their Benefits Planning Query (BPQY) from Social Security and seek out benefits planning assistance from a Certified Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC) or through their local Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) project. A list of such resources is located at the end of this manual.

It is also wise to consider the risks of continued dependence on these benefits. There are clear trends towards Americans shouldering ever more personal financial responsibility: student debt; employee contribution retirement plans instead of pensions; and years long Medicaid waiver wait-lists across the United States.

In most cases, people are better off and have more money by working as opposed to relying solely on government benefits. There are also a number of work incentives that build personal assets. The most common are: matched savings accounts called Individual Development Accounts (IDAs); Plans to Achieve Self Support (PASS) and Property Essential to Self-Support (PESS) through Social Security; the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program offered by local housing authorities; and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

For families of young people under age 18, it is important to start setting financial plans now. Planning for the future and understanding benefits and employment help to relieve some of the anxiety when thinking about employment and the future. It is also important to note that you can proceed with Discovery before you have all your benefits information. In some cases it may take several weeks to collect all the relevant information regarding benefits, but keep moving; Discovery is a process that works best when done at a quick and steady pace.

The path out of poverty and toward wealth and financial security must involve paid employment. Bringing employment and poverty to the center of the conversation is an antidote to the “impoverishment of expectations” which most often leaves individuals dependent on systems with fragile futures. Indeed, a 2008 article of Journal of Consumer Affairs titled “What is the Goal of Financial Education?” references a General Accountability Report that states “we can no longer assume that current federal entitlement programs will continue indefinitely in their present form.”

Employment is the only way to get resources under your control. Self-sufficiency and financial security involves building assets and personal wealth to avoid lifelong poverty and also lessens dependency on publicly funded safety net programs like Social Security, housing, healthcare, and food benefits.

Exploitable Skills

All of us have skills we learned along the way. Or we received specialized training in a particular line of work or discipline. Some skills are complex like fixing a car, while others may be as simple as making toast. In this section, you begin listing all the things you know how to do. It’s important to focus on “doing” skills rather than “knowing” skills. You’ll get to the knowing part later, but it’s best to start with the most basic skills and work your way to the more complex tasks as you build your list.

Exploitable Skills Worksheet

An exploitable skill is one that potentially helps you earn money; it is valued by an employer paying your wage or a customer buying your product. Use the following worksheet to list your exploitable skills. As mentioned in the previous section, you’ll want to differentiate between the “doing” skills (typically involving your hands) and the “knowing” skills (typically involving your brain). Consider how you learned the skill and who taught you. This is important for both the doing and the knowing skills. For instance, you might know how to speak another language. Did you learn this at school, at home or some other way? When it comes to “doing” skills, think about tools or other equipment you know how to use. Keep in mind that no skill is insignificant. The more skills you list, the better.

Exploitable Skills – Doing	How did you learn this?	Who taught you?

Exploitable Skills – Knowing	How did you learn this?	Who taught you?

What is your highest level of education?

What diplomas, certificates, or technical endorsements do you have?

As you complete your lists, think about which of these skills you prefer using and which ones are your least favorite. For instance, you may know how to change oil in you car, but don't like getting messy. It's a skill you have, but would prefer not to use it regularly.

Preferred Skills

Least Favorite Skills

If you were in the military, what skills (mechanical, technical, academic) did you learn that can be applied in civilian life?

Prior Work Experience

List your prior work experiences. Go as far back as you can, even to part-time jobs that you had as a teenager. As you reflect on these, think about what aspects of the jobs you really liked and which parts you didn't enjoy. If you haven't had many work experiences, that's fine. Any information will be good information. If you are about to embark on your first job, skip this.

Job	What I liked	What I didn't like

Ideal Conditions of Employment

Everyone works better under the right conditions. In this section think about the situations, people, activities, environments and other factors that, when present, make you more productive or feel better about your work situation. We call these "The Ideal Conditions of Employment" (See Callahan & Condon in Griffin, et al. 2007, *The Job Developer's Handbook*). Keep in mind that these conditions are useful in matching you to an employment situation that uses your unique skills, personal attributes, and prior experiences to benefit you and your employer. In some instances, the information gathered in this process may lead toward starting your own business (self-employment), or possibly using Resource Ownership as an employment strategy. Regardless, we're not looking for a "perfect match." Rather the goal is to connect you with employment opportunities that fit you pretty well and lead you on a career path. The better your conditions of employment blend with your skills and knowledge, the better your chance of success.

The following is a list of typical conditions of employment. This list does not represent all possible ideal conditions of employment, but serves as a good starting point.

Typical Ideal Conditions of Employment

<p><i>What are your preferred work environments?</i></p>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loud or quiet • Busy • Clean • Orderly
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting (soft, incandescent, fluorescent, natural, dimly or brightly lighted, etc.) • Windows • Hard or soft surfaces • Preferred Colors • Plants • Stairs or single level • Other?
<i>Wages and Benefits:</i>	<p>How much do need to earn?</p> <p>What benefits do you want?</p> <p>Other thoughts?</p>
<i>What kind of work pace do you prefer?</i>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick pace • Slow and easy • Tight deadlines • Quality more important than speed • Other?
<i>How do you prefer to dress for work?</i>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business attire (shirt and tie, dresses, etc.) • Business casual (No tie) • Casual (jeans) • Work clothes (includes safety shoes, etc.) • Uniforms • Caps/hats/headwear • Facial hair allowed • Visible tattoos, piercings, hair coloring • Other?
<i>Preferred tasks</i>	<p>Do you prefer sitting/sedentary tasks?</p> <p>Do you need to be moving around?</p> <p>Do you prefer using your hands? Tools?</p>

	Do you like to learn new things?
<i>Distance from home</i>	How far are you willing to travel? How do you get around? How close is public transportation?
<i>Schedule</i>	What is your preferred time of day? Morning, afternoon, evening Days of the week you are prepared to work? Other schedule considerations?
<i>Supervision and co-workers</i>	What do you look for in a supervisor? What do you look for in co-workers?
<i>Health Considerations</i>	Are there health issues that need to be considered? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allergies • Noise • Lighting • Dust • Strong scents • Stamina • Other:

We could on and on, but you get the point. Don't worry about coming up with a comprehensive list in one sitting. Once you begin thinking about your conditions of employment, more ideas follow. It's also a good idea to think about situations or conditions that you dislike or make you less productive. Put these on a separate list entitled, "Situations to Avoid."

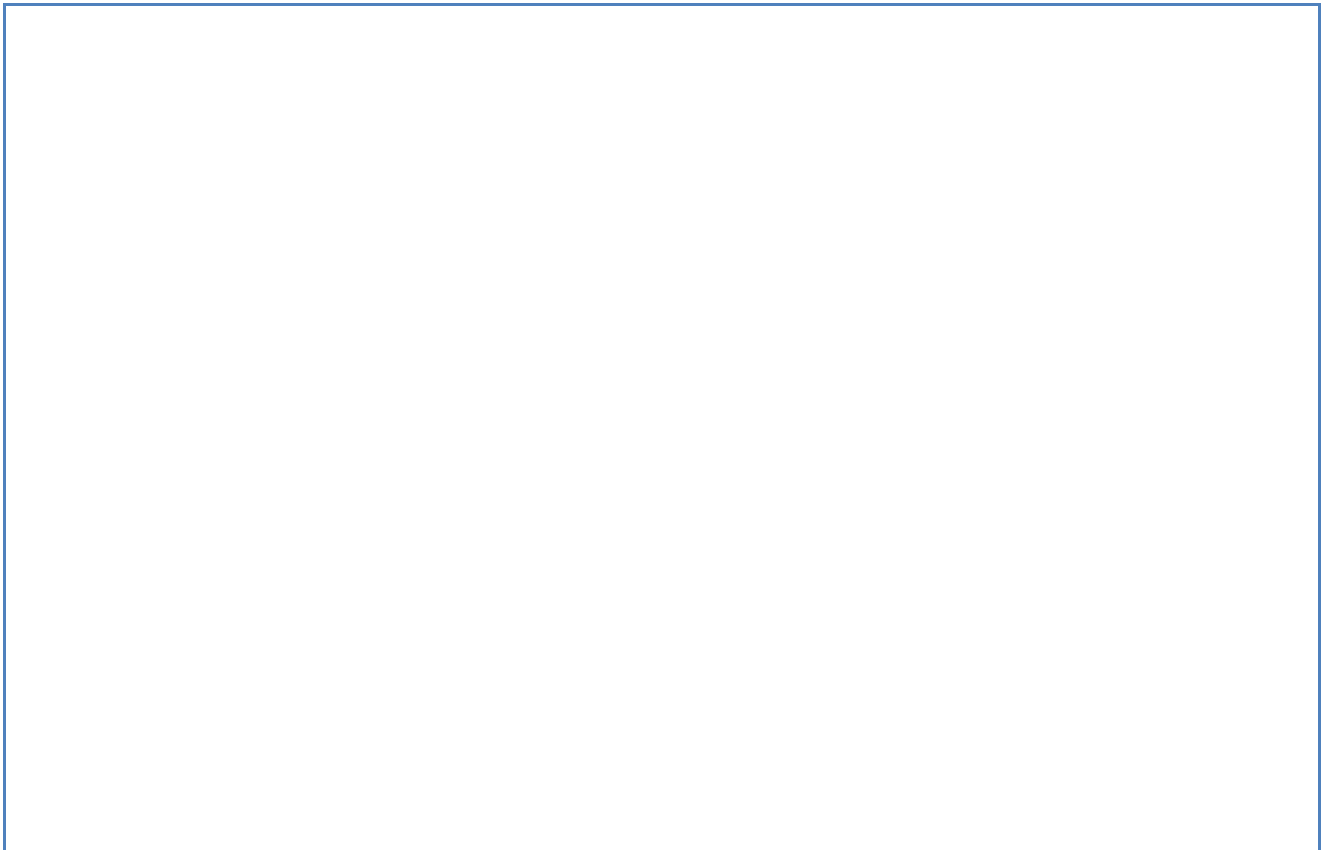
Touching Base

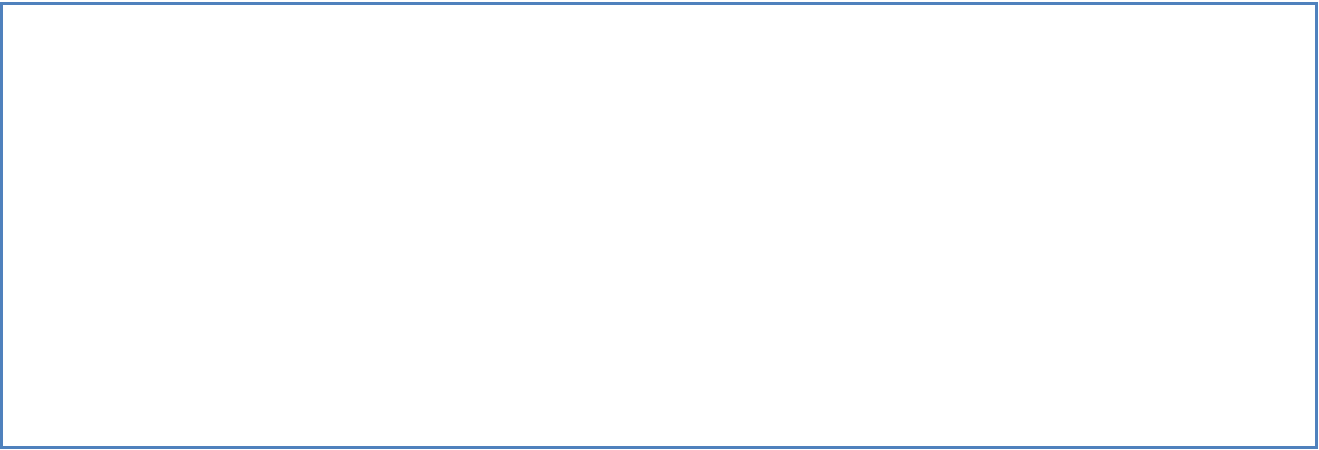
Whether you are doing Self-Guided Discovery or someone is guiding you through the process, it is important to touch base with a trained and experienced “Discovery Mentor” along the way. Nobody really succeeds on his/her own. We all need the advice and input from trusted allies and advisors. Everyone is bound to miss something as they go through this process. Therefore, sharing your progress with others at various stops along the way helps assure greater completeness and a well-rounded profile.

This is the first “official” stop along the way. At this point, share your worksheets and staging record with your Discovery Mentor/Guide. You may wish to share your progress with other trusted allies or team members as well. The purpose is to get additional input or advice. At this point you begin to craft your initial narrative. One of the distinguishing elements of Discovery versus conventional forms of vocational evaluation is that Discovery is designed to find out “who you are.” One of the products of Discovery is the “Story of You.” As you meet with prospective employers or people from whom you are seeking employment or career advice, you will have to tell them your story. This part of the process is where you craft that story using much of the gathered information.

You will also use this stop to follow up on incomplete information, or you may be introduced to new questions you hadn’t considered.

Build your most positive and compelling profile:





Finally, review next steps with your Discovery Mentor. The key to successful employment is moving through the stages quickly and with purpose. Keeping the momentum going improves your chances of success.

Vocational Themes™

One major difference between Discovering Personal Genius (DPG) and other forms of assessment is the identification and development of Vocational Themes™. Conventional assessment and job development strategies often lead to job descriptions or labor market positions. Job Developers waste countless hours scouring the want ads or Internet postings for available positions matching the results of traditional vocational testing and evaluation. We know that *there are unlimited ways people make a living* and that the vast majority of jobs never appear in want ads. Following a job description path generally leads to a dead end or in the job seeker being asked to adapt to an available position rather than finding an employment situation that best fits the person. DPG tosses all this aside and uses the information being gathered to identify and verify themes that lead to employment taking full advantage of the individual's talents, interests, skills and personality. In this section, we discuss the process of identifying themes and how to use them in an employment search.

Job descriptions typically list required duties and qualifications. One benefit of working with small businesses is that many don't have formal job descriptions or an HR department that develops and maintains them. Most job descriptions don't fully include all the aspects of a job, nor do they describe what really goes on in a business. Avoid larger companies, because often, job descriptions are used to screen out applicants.

Vocational Themes are overarching in their capacity and hold almost unlimited numbers of job descriptions. A culinary theme is much larger and contains many more options than does the job description of dishwasher or prep cook. Themes also offer a path toward career advancement and development. Exploring Themes lead to places where a "career makes sense." Themes also lead to places where other people who share similar themes work, or to a business owned by someone with a similar theme.

Divining Vocational Themes takes a little time and effort. Begin Theme development by using the information gathered to date. The major elements of themes include:

- Activities
- Preferred Tasks
- Interests
- Skills
- Ideal Conditions
- Personal Attributes

Review the information you've gathered and start looking for trends or similarities. Are there tasks or activities you do that involve the same sorts of tools or knowledge? For instance, do you often find yourself in situations where you are using power tools? Do you seem to find yourself in leadership positions? Are you always fixing things? Are there any trends in the types of jobs you have had and the tasks associated with them? These considerations represent what you take into consideration as you search for themes.

Please identify at least three broad vocational themes – one is not enough. If you only have one theme and start down that path later to find out you were wrong about the theme, you're back at square one. Three themes gives you more options and if one is wrong, you still have the other two. Three also offers the opportunity to mix or cross themes. For instance, someone with a transportation theme and a fashion theme might find themselves connected to the funeral industry where they have nice cars and dress in suits. You never know.

Testing the Themes

While developing themes, it is important to verify them. You do this by conducting informational meetings (interviews) with experts in that field. We sometimes call this "finding the nerds." In this context, nerd is a term of endearment. You want to have a conversation with someone who is passionate about the thematic area to get an idea of whether you're on the right track. It is also important to go visit places of employment that match your themes; perhaps set up a quick work trial; find out about their processes, technology, and work conditions. For instance a young woman with emerging Art and Culinary themes arranged to work with a cake decorator. The activity included decorating cupcakes with different colored frosting.

In another situation, a young man with an emerging Entertainment theme briefly volunteered his time with an inner city youth group to choreograph a musical number with 20 kids ages 8-16. He proved that he did indeed have skills in this area and his experience led him to a job at a local YMCA teaching dance and exercise classes to young children.

It is a good idea to find 2-3 places for each theme to either interview an expert or perform some tasks. Remember that you are not looking for a job at this point. You are gathering more information and advice related to your themes. You will do a similar but more focused activity when it comes to contacting businesses during the more active job seeking stage.

Theme Testing Worksheet

Emerging themes that meld Interests, Talents, and Skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Identify 3 places for each theme where people with similar themes work:

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

Arrange informational meetings at one location for each of the Themes. *It is important to note that this type of informational meeting is focused on testing the theme and the ideal conditions of employment (ecological fit). Although it is possible for a job to be offered, this is not the intent of this stage. Should a job offer be made, explore the idea and if it makes sense, follow up. A possible lead-in with the business owner or manager might be: "I am exploring my career options and getting advice from several successful people around town who share many of my interests and skills. Can you tell me about your career and give me some pointers on steps you might take, if you were me and just starting out?"*

Notes from interview:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which themes seem strongest?

Were any new interests/talents revealed to you?

Arrange further informational interviews and/or short (up to ½ a day) work experiences at the following places:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What did you observe or learn?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Create Your Story

Everything to this point has been about gathering and testing information to create your personal employment profile. The employment profile is essentially your story. It will be the foundation of what you will tell prospective employers about yourself. As you are building the narrative, it is important to think about other tools and assists you can use to enhance or illustrate your story.

Pictorial or Representational Portfolios

Pictures speak louder than words, so start taking pictures of you doing the things you know how to do. A great deal of time is spent on creating paper resumes for people with little or no work experience. In these cases, a resume is ineffective. However, putting together a digital pictorial portfolio that highlights your skills and interests is a much better representation of who you are and what you can do. This digital product is similar to the hardcopy picture books many of us used in job development before the advent of personal computers and digital devices.

Short videos may also be used to illustrate your skills and competencies. The advent of smart phones with built in video and still cameras makes the process of assembling a representational portfolio much easier than in years past.

Information on portfolios is found at <http://www.griffinhammis.com>

Work Samples

If you are someone who makes something, sews something, cooks something, etc., then you might consider having samples of your work available when you meet with prospective employers or advisors.

Paper Resumes

People who have work histories or have completed higher education or technical training may still benefit from creating a paper resume in addition to a representational portfolio. People who seek careers in the arts for example typically present a prospective employer with both a paper resume and a pictorial portfolio of their work, so it's not out of the ordinary. Do what makes the most sense for you and for what your profile indicates may be the best path.

Congratulations! You are now ready to take the information you gathered and your Employment Profile and begin discovering and connecting with businesses that will lead to your future employment.

Traditionally this step is called Job Development. The conventional means of job development rely heavily on sales and marketing, scouring want ads or the Internet, or doing labor market research. Conventional job development also uses tools including written resumes and completing job applications during the job search.

We prefer to take more casual approach to job development in which people learn about the myriad of businesses, both large and small, that exist in their communities. A recent study by the Kaufman Foundation on Entrepreneurship estimated that there are over 34.5 million businesses in the United States. They found there were 22 million single owner businesses and over 11 million businesses with 1-19 employees. What is surprising is that there are only about 38,500 businesses in the US with more than 500 employees. Many of the national and state employment initiatives seem to focus on the smallest number of American businesses (500 or more employees) while overlooking the vast majority of small and medium sized companies. It is those companies, many of which are part of the Artisan Economy that we attempt to discover and cultivate. We're not saying that working for one of the 38,500 large companies is a bad thing, but they are much harder to get into than the smaller companies that are right around the corner or down the street from you. So, how do you begin?

Cultivating Employment Opportunities

1. Create the Lists of Twenty™
2. Schedule Informational Meetings

3. Conduct Informational Meetings
4. Determine if Wage or Self-Employment Is Indicated

Create the Lists of Twenty

You have completed a Discovery Staging Record (DSR) form and you have your profile that includes your ideal conditions of employment and your vocational themes. You know your skills and your preferences. Creating the Lists of Twenty consists of taking each of your three themes and identifying twenty places nearby where that theme is present or valued. You will also consider the conditions of employment and skills when building your lists. An effective way to help you tease out places for the list is to take a theme and brainstorm a list of the things that are associated with that theme. For instance, we were working with a young man who had a theme of “death.” No, he didn’t want to die or kill people, but he was very interested in things related to death. In the brainstorming session, his team came up with over 30 ideas of things related to death. Some of the ideas included: taxidermy, automobiles (shiny Cadillacs and other cars), music, makeup, gardening (particularly flowers), clothing, headstones, movies, Halloween, etc.

It is important to point out that this exercise is best done with a group of people (team) who are committed to the success of the job seeker. Engaging a few people increases the potential for many ideas and we all know that in order to get a great idea, you need a lot of ideas.

Repeat this for each of the three themes. Once you have completed the brainstorming and have the initial list of things related to the theme the next step is finding places in your community where that thing is done. People we have trained to use this exercise have found it to be very effective in generating lists.

You can use a simple format like this to create the lists.

Job/Business Development Plan (The Lists of Twenty)

List of Twenty Places where people with similar Vocational Themes Work:

Theme 1:	Theme 2:	Theme 3:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.

9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.
11.	11.	11.
12.	12.	12.
13.	13.	13.
14.	14.	14.
15.	15.	15.
16.	16.	16.
17.	17.	17.
18.	18.	18.
19.	19.	19.
20.	20.	20.

Schedule Informational Meetings (Interviews)

After your lists are created, it's time to go out and meet people at the places you have identified. We call these informational meetings or interviews, however we have learned that when they are called interviews they are often confused with a "job interview." These meetings are far from that, because the goal of an informational meeting is information and advice. You will already have done some informational meetings as you were testing the themes to see if you were on the right track. This is pretty much the same, but now you'll be more intentional about the places you are going.

You'll want to talk with the owner, manager or a key employee to seek advice from that person about the profession they are in and what someone like you can do to learn about it and perhaps pursue the same line of work. People are usually happy to give you advice but tend to be leery of someone trying to sell them something.

This process attempts to circumvent the HR filter. Human Resource professionals are fine people but they sometimes know very little about the specific work that is done or how it is done. Only the person who actually does the work can tell you that. In most small businesses the owner, manager, co-worker, the person who makes the hiring decisions is the same person. That is the person we want to reach.

Here are some suggestions for setting up informational meetings.

- Start at the bottom of your lists. You will have done some pretty good thinking to get to items 15-20 on the list, so they'll probably be some of the most interesting places.

- Call the business/employer (or go visit) and tell them that you are seeking information about how peoples' careers evolve and gathering ADVICE from employers (ask for managers or owners) on how someone would start a career in their field or line of work.
- As previously mentioned, we prefer to seek out smaller, artisanal business for this because we want to talk with someone who is actually engaged in the work.
- Ask for 20 minutes of seat time. Also add, "If there's time, I'd love a tour." We almost always get the total tour. However, it needs to follow the seat time otherwise the chance to bond won't happen and you never get in the back room where most of the tools, techniques, and technology is used. Asking for only 20 to 30 minutes seems to loosen the employers up, and of course, it's all about asking for "their advice." These sessions almost always end up taking 60 to 90 minutes.
- Ask if there is anyone else in town they recommend you talk to. It is quite common to get a referral to another similar business or a supplier or customer from this initial meeting.
- When you get a referral – follow it even if it means deviating from your list. We have found that the initial Lists of Twenty change frequently because of these referrals. As in sales, it is always preferable to follow a “warm” lead.
- Sometimes it possible to try to perform some of the tasks at a business to see what it's like. Maybe not today, but a time might be scheduled for a try-out. Don't be afraid to ask.
- Thank the person with whom you met and follow up as appropriate.
- Try to schedule 3-4 meetings per week. The more you do, the more likely you'll run across something that makes sense.

The enemies of a Discovery-based Customized Employment approach are delay and inactivity. The more you can do and the sooner you can do it, the better. Be careful not to take shortcuts. A common error people make is starting to do the formal informational meetings before they have fully developed themes. You don't want to start down a path only to learn that it's the wrong one. The time invested in developing themes that lead to the Lists of Twenty is an important investment for success.

Informational Meetings for Students or Youth

A great advantage that young people and students have is time. We all grew up with ideas of what we wanted to do when we became adults. Very few of us actually became what we dreamed about as kids. Our ideas changed as we learned more about what was really out there in the world and how certain professions and tasks fit us better than others. Exposure to a lot of things and opportunities to try out different jobs sets the stage for future employment options. We should be careful not to push a young person into choosing a career path before they have ever had a job. The more you do and experience, the more likely a career path that makes sense will be revealed.

The usual way young people learn about the world of work is through part-time jobs after school, on weekends or during breaks. The great thing about these jobs is that they seldom become life-long employment. They teach us about being an employee, about supervision, responsibility, interacting with co-workers and more. We use those lessons to set the course for our career exploration, training, and employment. Young folks with disabilities should travel that same route, but how?

It all begins with learning to do things. Parents and families should start teaching their children with disabilities to perform tasks at a very early age. No skill is irrelevant so teach kids how to make a bed, mow the lawn, do laundry, or make toast. We know that all people can learn, but it may take some folks longer than others. Expect that children with disabilities will have chores around the house. They may start out needing extra help, but the level of assistance is likely to change over time. Low expectations may be the biggest barrier to employment for people who experience a disability. Starting young with high expectations – the same expectations you would have for children who do not have a disability – increases the potential for employment success.

If you need help with powerful teaching techniques for a person who has difficulty learning or experiences a cognitive disability, explore the tools and techniques of systematic instruction. These are strong teaching strategies that almost anyone can master. (See the on-line class here: <http://griffinhammis.academy.reliaslearning.com/creating-community-careers-online-courses.aspx>)

Most of us started working as teenagers. This is a good time to engage students with disabilities in career exploration. Two exercises that families and teachers can do with young folks are variations of the informational meetings discussed earlier.

The first exercise is for the young person to interview 10 people their family knows about what they do for a living. This can include family members, but we suggest that it not be exclusively family members. Be sure to include some friends of the family as well. The interview would consist of these questions:

- What do you do for a living?
- How long have you done it?
- How did you get your job or get started?
- What training or education did you have?
- Is this what you thought you'd be doing?
- What advice would you give someone who is interested in the same job or profession?

The responses should be video or sound recorded or outlined with written notes.

The next exercise is very similar except that this time the young person will be interviewing 10 local business owners. It is preferable if the businesses are those that the family frequents (hair salon, mechanic, baker, etc.). Do not go to more than one of the same business. For instance if you know a local baker, one bakery will be enough. Ask the same questions as above. You can always add a question or two about being a business owner or starting a business, but the main thrust is to learn about the ways that people make a living. Record the responses.

These two simple exercises have the potential to expose the young person to 20 different professions or careers. These represent more options than typically presented to young people with disabilities before they leave school. In some instances, businesses have offered a part-

time job to the person. You never know what might come of it, but we do know that if you do nothing, nothing will happen.

Post Informational Meeting De-Brief

Following each informational meeting it is a good idea to record what happened. If you're not too good at writing, you can use a voice recorder or get some help. The following form may be useful in keeping a record of your informational meetings.

Informational Interview De-Briefing

Name of Business:
Name of Person Interviewed:
What does s/he do there?
What does this business do?
How long has it been around?
How did the person you interviewed get into this line of work?
What skills did you observe being used?
What skills are important to be successful in this industry or line of work?
What did you learn about: Competitors: Trends: Expansion/Technology:

Who else can you talk to about businesses like this?

Wage or Self-Employment?

Although the primary target for this manual is wage employment (working as an employee for wages), Discovery can indicate self-employment or micro-enterprise as an option. As with wage employment, themes, conditions of employment, skills and interests must be considered when going down the self-employment path. A valuable resource on self-employment is: [Making Self-Employment Work for People with Disabilities](#) by Cary Griffin, David Hammis, Beth Keeton and Molly Sullivan.

Remain Focused and Stay on Track

There is no way to predict how long it might take before getting a job offer. You could be lucky and land a job quickly, but for most people it takes some time. The Lists of Twenty will help you if you let them. The places on the Lists are there because they make sense based upon your themes, your conditions of employment, and your skills and interests. Don't give up. That job may be waiting at the next business you meet. If you need help or encouragement, check in with your team or your Discovery mentor or advisor. You CAN do this and be successful.

Engaging Employment Supports – Optional Section

Discovering Personal Genius establishes the foundation of Customized Employment. It is a functional community-based assessment strategy that is designed to get someone into the workforce relatively quickly, into a job that makes sense for the job seeker and leads to career advancement. It does that because unlike traditional assessments, DPG is connected to each phase of the Customized Employment process. DPG identifies conditions of employment, skills and interests, and vocational themes. It also reveals the supports both on and off the job that an individual may need to be successful. No assessment can identify all the needs a person has, but DPG identifies many of the supports a person needs to be successful. Because of this thorough, functional assessment, DPG guides job development. DPG and the Customized Employment strategies will take you to places where the themes and career makes sense. Because of that approach, many of the anticipated employment supports will already be in place. There will always be specific conditions for every job and work environment. A useful tool to help think about employment supports is a Job Analysis Record. **Not everyone needs this level of analysis, but it can help organize thoughts about what happens before and after you begin your new employment. This is an optional section of the manual but may be helpful in anticipating workplace supports, technology, and instructional needs.**

Job Analysis Record

Instructions: This form is used to capture the major task steps of each job or project. The recorder should pay particular attention to how the tasks are typically performed, any accommodations (enhancements), technology or specialized training strategies that should be

employed with the new employee. The tasks sets are to be recorded as “projects” so that a discrete training format can be established for each. (For a complete form see griffinhammis.com or [The Job Developer’s Handbook](#))

Name of Worker:

Date initiated/Date Completed: / /

Company:

Contact Person/Supervisor:

Phone/E-mail:

Person complete JAR:

Proposed Job Title:

Major Tasks or Projects:

Proposed Work Hours/Days per Week:

Anticipated Pay Rate/Benefits:

Comments/Considerations:

Culture of the Company: Record observations regarding the rites and rituals of the company: e.g. dress code, commonly used language/slang that may be helpful to understand, work hours, break times, lunch behavior, initiation rituals for new hires, social interactions, car pooling, etc.

A. Project/Task/Job One Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

B. Project/Task/Job Two Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

C. Project/Task/Job Three Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

D. Project/Task/Job Four Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

E. Project/Task/Job Five Description:

Task Steps:

Quality Measures:

Tools Required:

Speed & Accuracy Considerations:

Natural Instructors/Supervision:

Task Duration:

Task Acquisition Concerns:

Ongoing Support and Career Development

The final phase of Customized Employment is Ongoing Support and Career Development. Most Americans will have several jobs during their employment lifetime and perhaps a few career changes along the way. Your profile doesn't end when you've completed the Discovery phase. In fact it grows and changes during each step of the process. As you learn more about yourself or your loved one, this information should be added to the profile. As an employee, you will learn more about your preferred conditions of employment, supervision, co-workers and company cultures, your profile will change accordingly.

While on the job you may be assigned new responsibilities and tasks. Should you need help with learning those tasks, you will know where to turn and those who might help you will have a good idea about how to teach you.

You may find a different job or a new career track is in order. Your profile will help you with either of those because it will be current. Conventional assessments happen once and stay with you forever. The profile created through DPG and the Customized Processes change as you change.

Good luck. If you follow these steps you will have a much better chance of achieving your goal of quality employment and a better quality of life.

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CWICs and WIPA: <http://choosework.net/resource/jsp/searchByState.jsp>

GAO report: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/210/202486.pdf>

Hands-on Banking: <http://www.handsonbanking.org/en/>

Money Smart: <https://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/index.html>

SSA Trustees Report: <http://www.ssa.gov/oact/trsum/>
article of Journal Affairs piece: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2008.00101.x/pdf>

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