

transition

tools



Finding a Job: A Guide for Special Needs Individuals and Their Families

By Melanie G. Snyder

Looking for a job is an exciting prospect, yet it can be nerve-wracking too. Taking time to assess your own interests, skills, preferences and needs can help ensure that your job search will lead to a work opportunity that's right for you.

Assess Your Interests

The first step is to take stock of your interests, to determine types of jobs you might find most enjoyable. An "interest assessment" tool can help. The books listed in the Resources sidebar offer various interest assessments, or you can try these online assessments:

- http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/career_self-assessments2.htm - Interest Assessment from Career and Employment Guide for Job Seekers and Employees With Disabilities (Portland Community College, Portland, Oregon) (hereafter referred to as PCC Guide).

- www.iccweb.com/careerfocus/index.asp - Career Focus Interest Inventory covering 18 different occupational fields that make up most of the types of jobs in the US. A bar graph will show your potential level of interest in these fields with information on how to explore fields of greatest interest to you.

Identify Your Skills

Next, document your skills — or what you're good at. For instance, are you good at organizing? Problem-solving? Are you good at helping people or at fixing or building things with your hands?

Skill assessments can be found in books (see Resources) or at these Web sites:

- www.acinet.org/acinet/skills_home.asp - America's Career InfoNet Career Profiler is a three-part assessment tool that helps you identify your skills, learn what occupations use those skills, then assess whether gaps exist between your skills and skills needed for jobs that interest you.

- http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/career_self-assessments4.htm - Work Skills Assessment and http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/career_self-assessments5.htm - Personal Skills Assessment - both from the PCC Guide.

Work Environment and Work Style Preferences

Think about what kind of work environment you might like best or might work best for you. Do you prefer to work by yourself or with other people? Would you prefer to work indoors or outdoors? Do you like lots of activity going on around you or do you prefer a calm, quiet setting? For a complete set of work environment questions, see:

- http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/career_self-assessments3.htm - Work Condition Preferences assessment from the PCC Guide.

Determine Your Needs

Different jobs have different requirements — and you'll need to be clear about your own physical and other needs to determine whether a given work setting will work for you. For instance, consider whether you would be able to work in a job where you'd be on your feet most of the day. Would you be able to do a job that involves a lot of reading of detailed documents? What about a job that requires lifting or carrying?

The PCC Guide offers a Functional Work Skills Assessment and Disability Considerations worksheet to help you determine your needs: http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/career_self-assessments8.htm.

Network to Discover Possibilities

The previous steps will help you identify the types of jobs and work settings that may be right for you. The next step is to talk with everyone you know about what you're looking for and ask them for suggestions about where to look or who to talk to about jobs that might match your interests, skills, preferences and needs. This is called "networking". It may help to prepare a brief written summary of your interests, skills, preferences and needs, so that you can give copies to people you talk with. Your "network" should include members of your family, friends, neighbors, people at school and church, and people in any clubs or organizations to which you belong. When you talk with people in your network about what you're looking for, be sure to ask them if they will keep their eyes and ears open for possible opportunities for you, even if they don't know of any at the moment.

