



FEATURE ARTICLE



TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT ALTERNATIVES EVOLUTION AND PROGRESS

It is probably safe to say that providing opportunities for all individuals in the service of this association to experience personal growth, and to move toward fulfillment of their dreams is a value that we as staff members can all stand behind. Our adoption of consumer driven planning processes which encourage personal choices and exploration of alternatives is one reflection of that value. In accepting the right of individuals to choose their own directions, however, we must also accept that each change a person undertakes may change the way in which we will deliver our services. Our services must evolve to meet new conditions.

Webster calls evolution "the process by which, through a series of steps, something attains its distinctive character." We as individuals strive to attain our distinctive characters in all aspects of our lives; how we work, how we play, how we communicate with each other. We keep ourselves in a state of continuing change and development.

Swan Industries, as a vocational program, endeavors to address the unique needs and personal choices of individuals as they move through their own evolutionary processes. By providing a wide range of training environment alternatives we can give the opportunity for individuals to create vocational plans tailored to their own specific needs and desires. What is important about provision of these alternatives is that, to adequately serve peoples' unique needs, the system must be non-linear, and movement among the alternatives must not be criteria based. Rather, the steps of an individual's vocational evolution should be based on informed choice and sound planning.

It would be best to describe the whole system.

Entry into vocational services at Swan Industries requires, as always, an assessment period of six weeks. This period provides program staff with an opportunity to observe an applicant's suitability and possible skill development needs AND allows the applicant to determine if Swan Industries can satisfy his/her vocational needs. The assessment can take place in any or all of Swan Industries facilities, (Shops, Bottle Depot, New Generations, Daisy Fresh) and if possible, in community based worksites, exposing the applicant to as many options as possible.

At the end of the assessment period the development of a Vocational Plan may begin. A Vocational Plan can be offered alone or as part of a more complete Personal Planning Session. At this time a person may make choices from among several training and employment options available. These are Vocational Training, Supported Employment, Non-Supported Employment, and Sheltered Employment.

The option which most people currently at Swan Industries are involved in is Vocational Training. The basic goal of Vocational Training is to prepare individuals for entry into the competitive work force. Training in work skills and job appropriate social skills is provided to those who identify that need. Facility based training, and community based training and work experiences are employed to achieve each individuals goals. Individual Program Plans, Job Preparation Courses, and Inventories of Interests and Abilities are all parts of the Vocational Training package.

At any time that a person feels (s)he has received adequate training, (s)he may return to the Planning process and set the direction for another step. If that person's vocational training has included good experiences at community worksites (or if an individual identifies no need for community based training), one of the options in Community Based Employment may be chosen. Also, if a community work experience results in a job offer, this phase may be entered without going through formal planning. Community Based Employment may be Supported or Non-supported. Both may include interest/ability inventories, job search, job match (placement), and initial training. Individuals will become EMPLOYEES and subject to the policies of their employers regarding hours of work, pay, leave times, etc.

Where Supported and Non-supported employment differ is in the kind of service offered after initial placement and training. Whenever an employer or employee indicates a need for assistance from Swan Industries in work adjustment or social adjustment on the job, it will be provided. This support may be short term or long term, depending on the situation. Development of internal support systems at the work place will be encouraged as much as possible. If it is indicated by both parties that no support is required, the employee will be considered a non-supported worker and his/her file will be closed after three months. If in that period, however, assistance is provided, the three month period will begin again.

The other available option is Sheltered Employment. This is employment based in Swan Industries facilities, but not involving any active training program. Sheltered Employment is intended for those individuals who feel no motivation to train for, or work in competitive employment, but feel satisfied working at Swan Industries. Payment for work will be negotiated between the individual and Swan Industries Manager. This is an option that will not be encouraged, but must be respected.

The people this Association works to serve are making changes in their lives. We must all, in vocational, residential, recreational, or behavioral services be prepared to change our styles to accommodate the changing needs of OUR EMPLOYERS. This is our evolution.

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P.S.

I was originally asked asked to write an article about "Community Employment." It is plain, though, that community employment does not and can not exist as a program separate from the total vocational continuum. Likewise this article does not stand on its own. In ISSUE VII (July, 1987) of this newsletter Joe Gannon wrote an article entitled COMMUNITY INTEGRATION, AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS, where he outlined Swan Industries' progress since 1973. This is merely a report on further progress and directions. In closing that article, Joe posed several questions about the future roles of consumers and service providers in vocational services. It would seem that a lot has been done toward answering those questions.

The keys are now in our hands.
