

# Florida Provider Network



University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support  
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## FEDERAL MINIMUM IMPACTS WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

### Minimum Wage Now \$7.25 per Hour

On July 24th, Florida's minimum wage was synced with the federal rate and increased to \$7.25 from \$7.21. This increase will present an opportunity for workers with disabilities to increase their earnings, which have traditionally lagged far behind other workers. The change also presents other issues for workers, either because of income increases that impact benefits, or for those earning under special wage certificates pegged to minimum wage.

Calculating the impact of wage increases on public benefits can be complicated. There are other publications and materials available that discuss these issues in detail, such as the Social Security Red Book at <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook>. If an individual's income increases as a result of the minimum wage increase, remind the person that they need to report the change in income to Social Security and any other public benefit programs that require them to report income changes. Service providers should assist the people they support in this process as necessary.

## Setting Integrated Employment as the Expected Outcome

### Employment First: APSE Works to Establish a National Agenda

APSE, the Network on Employment, has released a white paper to help support a national initiative on "Employment First." The term refers to setting integrated employment as the priority outcome ("the first option") for state funded day services for people with disabilities. In Minnesota, for example, employment first means "*expecting, encouraging, providing, creating, and rewarding integrated employment in the workforce as the first and preferred option of youth and adults with disabilities.*" (Minnesota's Employment First Manifesto, 2007). The following article is excerpted from the paper.

In recent years, there has been a growing grass roots movement to establish Employment First initiatives (Tennessee, 2002; California, 2005; Indiana, 2005; Minnesota, 2006; Georgia, North Dakota, Wisconsin & Missouri in progress). Many of these states have worked with their state APSE chapter to secure input from all stakeholders.

Employment First is about raising expectations. The real engine of social change is not money but rather expectations. Of course, we need adequate public resources to obtain high quality education and integrated employment outcomes. However, without higher expectations, individuals with disabilities and their families often settle for programs or services that do not encourage them to participate fully in the mainstream of community life. This is confirmed by the fact that a majority of working age adults with significant disabilities are supported today in programs that offer segregation and long-term dependency regardless of the cost.

How can Employment First initiatives increase the demand for integrated employment? This objective can be accomplished through better public education and policy advocacy. Individuals with disabilities and their families must be made more aware of the exciting integrated employment opportunities available to them. It is particularly instructive to share employment success stories of others to create hope, stimulate imagination, and

Continued on page 2

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# Employment First: Toward a National Agenda

increase expectations of all stakeholders. When individuals with disabilities and their families recognize the clear benefits, their expectations will change and they will choose work!

## Build on Communities

Think globally, but act locally. Successful initiatives work to establish “Community Action Teams” with goals of advancing an Employment First vision. This would logically include local coalitions of federal, state and local organizations as well as individuals who are willing to work together to get things done in a targeted geographic area.

The teams should be comprised of business leaders, job seekers, educators, family and disability advocates, employment providers, workforce development professionals, county representatives, vocational rehabilitation professionals, and other interested community members.

The “ticket” to belonging to a successful Community Action Team is a commitment to action. The team’s overall performance will be gauged by the implementation of better practices and measurable increases in integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.

## Clarify “Employment” and “Employment First”

Establish a clear and uncompromising definition of “employment”. For most Employment First initiatives, this means a focus on real jobs, real wages, and real business settings. It also means the launch of self-employment and micro-enterprises. It is critical for everyone to be working from the same set of assumptions. Stay focused on this one, simple concept. If you can maintain a singular focus on a simple idea, your initiative will not be lured into distracting arguments.

Employment First is all about fundamental rights. Who can be against people with disabilities having an equal opportunity to get a good job, use their talents and skills, earn competitive wages, increase their self-support, and contribute to the prosperity of their communities?

## Distinguish “Qualified” and “Quality” Employees

A common rejection tactic by unenlightened rehabilitation providers and employers is to focus only on job qualifications. Yet, in some job recruitment situations, qualifications may be secondary to the “qualities” an employee may bring to a business.

Once again, negotiating jobs based on identified strengths changes the job development landscape and can offer a new perspective concerning the qualities of a person seeking the job. Stated simply, strengths-based employment changes what it means to be “qualified” because all jobs and tasks are negotiated with employers (customized) and built to fit the interests and strengths of a job seeker (supported).

## Emphasize Real Systems Change Policies

Our country spends millions of dollars on secondary education, adult community services, Social Security disability benefits, transportation, and comprehensive health care of Americans with disabilities. Unfortunately, many of these resources do not encourage or reward integrated, community-based employment. Resolving our national unemployment problem will require a shift in policies and “rebalancing” of many existing resources.

The most successful initiatives, therefore, recognize that the core charge is to thoughtfully and methodically address policies that encourage and support integrated employment outcomes. This vision for change needs to be reflected in all appropriate public policies impacting education as well as adult health, disability, and human services. To the extent possible, public policies need to be unmistakably clear about expectations as well as provide for flexibility to rebalance existing resources.

Of course, this means moving aggressively to develop new policies, amend existing ones, and reallocate funding to promote an employment first approach. Everybody means everybody! No one wants to erect disability service “silos”, but be wary of designing a workforce system that is too generic and fails to deliver critical job-related supports. Although we would love to see individuals with disabilities employed using the same methods and processes as everyone else, individuals with more significant disabilities are universally overlooked.

There are many initiatives throughout the country aimed at the employment of individuals with disabilities, but when push comes to shove, individuals with more significant disabilities are either pushed to the end of the line or shoved out of the line altogether. This may seem like a contradiction, but we have learned that negotiation practices and strengths-based approaches are essential tools in the integrated employment of individuals with disabilities – especially for those with complex lives and situations.

Employment First initiatives tend to lose a lot of people as well as opportunities when they go negative and fail to recognize local strengths. Make the effort to showcase those parts of the system that actually promote and encourage an Employment First agenda. Celebrating the positives and rewarding great work, supplies a boost of energy, offers hope, and builds new alliances needed later to tackle the most stubborn obstacles and barriers.

Establishing a National Employment First Agenda, Bob Niemiec, Don Lavin, & Laura A. Owens, APSE: The Network on Employment (2009).

To download the complete document:

<http://www.apse.org/docs/Revised%20Employment%20First%20paper%20709%5B1%5D.pdf>



# Solving Problem Relationships for Workers with Disabilities

By Dale DiLeo

George was beginning to have job difficulties at the hotel where he worked. He was responsible for a number of cleaning and maintenance tasks. At least three supervisors were giving him different jobs and directions, while none was aware of the others' instructions.

As a result, George was completing few of his jobs and was getting more and more frustrated. He also was beginning to spend extra time in the bathroom and break area to "escape."

When each supervisor observed George, each saw a "problem" employee with a "poor attitude" not following through on work assignments. But it was the pattern of supervision by "multiple bosses" that was the source of the problem. This was not a difficult employee, but a management issue.

## Not All Work Relationships Are Positive

Relationships on the job are the basis of training, work support and social support. When these interactions are positive, the benefits are mutual. But when exchanges are problematic, individuals can become depressed, angry or confused and lose motivation and productivity. Some negative relationships are described in the box at right:

## Reactions to Difficult Interactions Vary with Each Individual

When confronted with a challenging personal relationship on the job, we all react differently. These range from passivity to aggressive confrontation.

Responses at either extreme seldom resolve the situation.

For the employment specialist, there is even more complexity. On-the-job conflict resolution requires balancing multiple roles. This means developing work supports and acting as an advocate, while at the same time not interfering with a natural work setting.

The job coach must begin by carefully observing the work situation. It is difficult to know all the factors influencing a problem. But the more information you have about the setting, demands,

*Continued on next page...*

## Types of Problematic Work Relationships

- **Difficult Supervisor...**  
When the boss has unrealistic expectations, a demanding style or an unpleasant attitude. This could be the result of new demands from management, a new job, misperceptions about the employees or simply personality.
- **Controlling Co-Worker...**  
Tries to manage the work environment, may attempt to "take advantage" of others through manipulation, giving orders or avoiding unpleasant tasks.
- **Parental Co-Worker...**  
Overprotective or strict, can encourage the person to act like a child, tends to hover about the person at work.
- **Multiple Bosses...**  
As in the example above, when too many supervisors give orders that conflict.
- **Conservative Veteran...**  
Person who is threatened by an accommodation, sees innovation and change as disruptions, prefers to keep things the way they've always been.

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# Solving Problem Relationships

Continued from page 3

organizational structure and the people who make it up, the more likely you can help the person find a resolution or coping strategies. Some suggestions for how to do this appear in the box below.

Even when providing social support, sometimes relationships simply do not improve. Here are some considerations when “all else fails.”

- Consider direct advocacy at the management level when and where a difference can be made. (Use with caution, as this strategy may backfire and give you a negative reputation among co-workers or other employers.)
- With his or her input, determine if the job is worth the aggravation for the individual. If it is, help the person learn to handle the stress through relaxation exercises, stress management or other coping strategies.
- If a personality conflict is making the supported

employee miserable, and if all advocacy efforts are fruitless, review with the employee possible alternatives for an employment change.

In the example we have been using, George’s frustration was obvious to the job coach, who knew George was capable of doing the job. After talking to a supportive co-worker, the job coach approached management with a simplified supervision proposal - one person would be responsible to set George’s schedule. Any other supervisor who had a job to be done would go through this person. They then reviewed all the tasks, set work priorities and conveyed completion projections to all concerned.

As a result of this intervention, George was able to perform well, remain employed and feel satisfied about his job, co-workers and bosses.

## How to Cope with Problems Relationships of Workers with Disabilities

- Model appropriate social behaviors at the worksite.
- As a consultant to the supervisor, suggest supervision and training strategies that work well for the supported employee.
- Convey realistic task expectations to co-workers and supervisors.
- Encourage the supported employee to respond to a person during an uncomfortable interaction by stating how the exchange makes them feel.
- Don’t take on the role of the supervisor and give other employees directives.
- Don’t lecture co-workers or supervisors, instead act as a resource.
- Build networks and bridges to those in the work environment who are supportive.
- Don’t contribute to misperceptions of the employee needing adult protection by your own language, posture, materials or tone.
- Help ensure the supported employee is not isolated from other workers as a means to resolve social issues.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 expands the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program to include 2 new target groups; Unemployed Veterans and Disconnected Youth.

For more information on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit:

<http://www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/optax>



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