

**AtWork!**  
**Issaquah, WA**  
**Employment Team Retreat**

Expanding customized employment requires a high level of commitment and skill from the staff that provide employment supports on a day-to-day basis. Opportunities to participate in discussions about organizational development can help staff develop new skills and values. This will ensure that employment consultants share the same mission and values for promoting competitive, community-based, integrated employment options.

When AtWork was selected to receive technical assistance (TA) from T-TAP, the organization had an employment staff of 4 individuals. As part of the TA plan, one staff person was assigned to become the team leader of this group of 4. These staff members represented a broad range of experiences and perspectives on employment for people with disabilities. Many had worked as case managers, job developers, and job coaches. Most had long-term relationships with their consumers. In fact, several of these consumers needed their agency supports faded but attempts to do so had failed.

Team members were comfortable with their schedules, responsibilities, and general work procedures. This group that seemed eager to begin facilitating community employment outcomes was remarkably rigid about what they “could and could not change.” They also were not thrilled to have a team leader, since this “peer” group had different dynamics given the new structure.

The team leader struggled with the group. She saw much potential for change, growth, job development, and job restructuring, but the team would not budge. T-TAP staff recommended that time be spent building team spirit by developing a strategic plan. The suggestion was also made to hold a retreat away from the agency and all the usual interruptions of the day. A daylong retreat was scheduled and held at the home of one of the team members. A lunch was planned for a nearby restaurant, as well as time for a break at a local park to fly kites.

The goals of the day were to discuss and brainstorm the following issues.

1. What are we doing well? Are we getting people good jobs?
2. What do we need to improve?
3. What do you like to do? What is each of you best at doing?
4. What prevents you from doing these things?
5. Are there ways that we could think about reworking assignments to serve people better and get better employment outcomes?
6. Are there things that we need from management to do our jobs?
7. Are there things that we need from T-TAP to do our jobs?

The discussions of the day were fruitful. Several decisions were made.

1. As a result of the meeting, the staff re-worked their client assignment procedures.

2. The team leader was given more time for job development for those individuals seeking to move from 14 c subminimum wage to community employment.
3. A list of requests was presented to agency management to include:
  - a. Office space for meeting with consumers to plan community outreach activities.
  - b. A small resource room with computers so that consumers can work on their own resumes or marketing profiles.

This retreat gave the group new energy and enthusiasm. This restructuring helped the team leader identify who in the staff was and was not successful. Ultimately, some of the team members left the agency, and new staff members that embrace community employment replaced them. The retreat was a good first step to get all members “on board” to clarify the changes needed to facilitate community employment outcomes.

For more information on staff buy-in and training, please see the following resources on the T-TAP website.

Customized Employment Q & A: Changing Staff Roles:

<http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/changingstaffroles.html>

Customized Employment Q & A: Staff Development:

<http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/staffdev.htm>

Staff Training and Development for Organizational Change

Presenter: Interview with Nancy Brooks-Lane

<http://www.t-tap.org/training/onlineseminars/nbl/nblseminar.html>