
Effective Strategies for Fading Job Coach Support

Since supported employment became a concept, almost 50 years ago, fading of the job coach has been a recognized part of best practice service delivery. Fading doesn't mean suddenly abandoning people and their employers. **Fading means carefully planned, incremental, reductions in job coaching support over time, occurring at a reasonable pace as the job coach successfully trains and supports the employee to gain the skills, independence and confidence to do their job.** Fading of the job coach signals many positive outcomes including: the employer fully embracing the person with a disability as their employee; a good job match; the person with a disability achieving an optimal level of independence from paid services; and the job coach freeing up time to work with other supported employees who need them. Fading also makes supported employment a cost-effective service option, even though the reimbursement rates for individual supported employment services are higher than other day/employment services *due to the complexity of the work involved in effective delivery.*

The role of a job coach is to support the success of both employees with disabilities and the businesses who hire them. How this is done may or may not align with best practices. When a job coach assumes responsibility for training and supervising an employee with a disability, fading job coach support can become challenging. To support optimal workplace inclusion and fading, job developers and job coaches must support, not replace, employers in fulfilling their typical responsibilities. Only when needed do job coaches augment this with specialized, job coach-provided supports.

The ability to fade job coaching begins in job development.

The ability to fade job coaching supports begins in job development. The importance of the job match cannot be understated, along with the job developer ensuring all involved, including the employer, have an accurate understanding of the purpose of job coaching and the expectation that fading will occur. When employers are told not to worry because the job coach will train the person and always make sure the work gets done, too much responsibility can shift from the employer to the job coach. This can negatively affect how the employer engages with the employee and create

Developed by Dr. Lisa Mills and Shannon Webb for Incompass Michigan

The development of this publication was made possible by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) with federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA).

unrealistic expectations for the job coach to never fade. Instead, best practice requires the following:

- Retraining of job developers and job coaches on best practices in supported employment including fading and how it is planned for and accomplished. Mentoring and coaching to ensure the job developers and job coaches are **applying** the best practices as they do their job.
- Teaching job developers how to identify a person’s strong interests, transferable and learnable skills, and conditions for success to guide better job matches. A good task match is important but a good job match is more than that. Employment success happens when job developers find opportunities that match a person’s skills *as well as their strong interests and conditions for success*. A person’s conditions for success can include the physical and social environment, the culture, how employees are recognized, the pace of work, and so much more.
- Ensuring job developers are maximizing employer engagement by using informational interviews, employer needs analyses and Customized Employment job development and negotiation strategies. Job developers who are skilled at requesting and conducting informational interviews and employer needs analyses with employers have more opportunities to get inside businesses to see firsthand whether workplace conditions match with their job seeker. Customized Employment job negotiation strategies provide an advantage for job developers to create win-win solutions for job seekers with specific contributions to make and employers who have unmet needs.
- Ensuring job developers and coaches are prepared and comfortable with clearly explaining the role of the job coach to employers, individuals, families/guardians, and support coordinators. They should share examples of success. Job developers and coaches should be prepared with talking points and handouts for employers that emphasize the importance of employers providing the same training, supervision, and co-worker supports as would be provided to any other employee filling the position, with the job coach supporting and augmenting only as necessary.

Identify and always start with “natural ways, natural means, and natural people.”

Marc Gold and Associates’ **Seven Phase Sequence**¹ provides clear direction for whomever is providing the initial job coaching for a new supported employee. **This direction ensures the use of the employer’s natural ways, means, and people from the first day of employment.** When the

¹ The Seven Phase Sequence for Balancing Naturalness and Individual Needs by Michael Callahan, 1991
<https://www.marcgold.com/s/SI01SevenPhaseSequence.pdf>

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job developer does an analysis of the job (existing or created for the job seeker/employer), they should identify the natural people and the natural means.

- Those who typically onboard and train new employees are the **natural people**. Those natural people should provide the same onboarding and training experience to the supported employee as they provide any new employee, with the job coach in a support and facilitation role.
- The natural people should use **natural means**. These are the typical ways they onboard and train new employees. They should use these natural ways with the supported employee, again with the job coach in a support and facilitation role.
- What the supported employee learns in onboarding and training is the **natural ways**. These are the ways the business expects the work to be done. Natural people (i.e., trainers, co-workers, supervisors) are the best and most appropriate people to teach the supported employee the way the employer expects the job to be done. ***This is because each business has its own ways they expect the work to be done.*** The job coach observes and supports, as needed, while also learning how this particular employer expects the job to be done **and** how the employer typically teaches a new employee to do their job. This ensures two things:
 1. The job coach learns the way the employer expects the job to be done (the natural way) and follows this in coaching the supported employee. This is critical for avoiding job coaches starting with their own ideas of how the job should be done or bringing in a method from another business that is not how this business trains its employees to do their jobs.
 2. The job coach can also provide reinforcement of the training as needed, using the same teaching methods of the business (using natural means). This creates consistency, which is critical for the supported employee's learning and success. This approach ensures that, as the job coach fades, if natural supports are needed, they use the same teaching methods that the initial natural trainer and the job coach used, and they have the same expectations for how the job should be done (natural ways).

Using this approach empowers employers to provide the supported employee with the training and support they would provide any employee, without adding agency-provided supports too early or where it may not be needed. Consider requiring your job developers and job coaches to read about and receive training on why and how to implement the Seven Phase Sequence. Use mentoring and coaching to ensure they effectively put this method into practice.

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Consistently use task analysis and systematic instruction.

Systematic instruction is a well-established **evidence-based practice** for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, supported by decades of experimental research and multiple literature reviews demonstrating its effectiveness in teaching academic, **vocational, and daily living skills** (Browder et al., 2014; Spooner et al., 2017; Almalki, 2016).²

What is systematic instruction?

Systematic instruction refers to a structured, planned teaching approach that includes:

- Breaking skills (task performance) into smaller, teachable steps (task analysis)
- Using specific prompting strategies to facilitate skill acquisition and successful task performance
- Provide corrective feedback only when needed
- Documenting performance to be able to track progress and make adjustments to teaching approach if needed

Behavioral Skills Training, which is one form of systematic instruction, can be used to teach soft skills and appropriate workplace interactions.³ With sufficient training in systematic instruction, **job coaches learn how to teach** consistently and effectively so they avoid getting stuck in overhelping, using habitual prompting, or focusing on just getting the task done in the moment.

Consider these best practices:

- Provide comprehensive systematic instruction training to job developers and job coaches. Resources for training are listed at the end of this best practice brief. Consider developing one or two staff into lead systematic instruction trainers within your organization who can mentor others and ensure fidelity with systematic instruction practices. These staff should ideally be people who will be using systematic instruction regularly in their work.
- Develop internal documentation systems for using task analysis and tracking supported employee performance to ensure consistency across coaches.

² Browder, D. M., et al. (2014). *Evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities*. CEEDAR Center. Spooner, F., et al. (2017). (cited within Walker et al., 2022). Walker, V. L., et al. (2022). *Special education teachers' perspectives...* Browder, D. M., Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., et al. (2011). *Evidence-based practice for teaching academics... Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*.

³ Laugeson, E. A., Gantman, A., Kapp, S. K., Orenski, K., & Ellingsen, R. (2015). *A randomized controlled trial to improve social skills in young adults with autism spectrum disorder: The UCLA PEERS® program*. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

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Increase independence with assistive technology.

In addition to good job match, everyone expecting fading, use of natural ways, means and people, assistive technology (AT) can play a major role in reducing reliance on job coaching and increasing supported employee independence at work. AT ranges from simple, low-tech tools like visual aids, timers, color coding systems, grips or reaches, to higher-tech options like phone apps, wearables, smart devices, and video supports. Consider these best practices:

- Provide routine AT training to job developers and job coaches. Reach out to the [Michigan Assistive Technology](#) program to inquire about training resources and information to support individuals to acquire AT.
- Encourage job developers and job coaches to support people to view information about Assistive Technology on the [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) website and to talk to or message a JAN AT specialist.
- Become a [Tech First agency through SHIFT](#). SHIFT is a nationally recognized leader in advancing Technology First standards and best practices by providing education, certifications, and organizational accreditation.
- Consider AT opportunities in every job seeker's employment planning process. Learn about the person's preferences and potential with AT, spark new ideas, and identify funding sources with the planning team.

Develop active, written fading plans.

Fading is much more likely to happen when a plan for achieving fading is written down, started early, and reviewed often. Fading plans should be individualized and developed with the person, employer, and support team. The plan should include clear, measurable goals for fading, timelines, and the specific strategies that will be used to fade the job coach over the identified timeline.

Fading plans should be in place after the first week on the job rather than months later. Progress should be monitored regularly. The plan is updated with progress and adjusted as needed. Consider these best practices:

- Begin developing active, written fading plans with all new supported employment referrals. Check out the example templates linked at the end of this practice brief.
- Conduct current workplace supports analysis at all of your long-term supported employment job sites. This will allow you to see what is really happening with job coaching and where you can make changes in order to set individualized, achievable fading goals and strategies with each person. Make this process manageable by conducting the analysis at only two or three job sites a month until you get through them all. A current workplace support analysis template is linked at the end of this practice brief.

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Challenges beyond the workplace

Supported employment service providers face fading challenges beyond the workplace. These include loss of funding in fee-for-service payment structure, lack of new referrals to assign job coaches to after they have faded, resistance to fading from families and planning teams, and transportation barriers in some parts of the state. Addressing these challenges requires service providers to work proactively with funders, case managers, families, and other partners to align services with actual support needs and goals.

Job Coaches with unbillable time as a result of fading.

To prevent job coaches from having unbillable time, supported employment providers must strategically manage funding and staffing as well as collaborative systems with funders to ensure fading efforts are coupled with efforts to get more people into jobs. Consider these solutions:

- Promote pathways to competitive integrated employment within Community Living Supports (CLS) and Skill Building Assistance services by supporting meaningful community contribution, employment exploration, and skill development.
- Partner with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) to provide job coaching services.
- Temporarily use job coaches to fill vacancies in Skill Building or CLS.
- Right size the agency's job coach capacity by promoting a promising job coach to a job developer position and not filling vacancies if the hours are not needed.

Resistance to fading from support coordinators, parents, or guardians.

Supported employment service providers must be prepared to address resistance to fading from support coordinators, planning teams, and parents or guardians, particularly when individual service plans include arm's-length or line-of-sight supervision requirements. Consider these solutions:

- Agency leadership can engage the CMH contract managers to educate service coordinators understanding of supported employment best practices, clarify expectations for fading, and ensure that heightened supervision requirements are used appropriately and not by default.
- Share the agency's track record with fading and explain the specific methods job coaches use to fade support successfully.
- Involve planning teams and families directly in developing fading plans that include clear goals, timelines, and methods.
- Encourage conversations about the dignity of risk. Risk planning should be part of service planning conversations so teams can distinguish between legitimate safety needs and overly cautious practices that may unnecessarily limit independence and workplace inclusion.

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Substantial safety risk of the person or others, or court-ordered supervision.

When ongoing support is driven by a legitimate need for safety, behavioral, medical, or legal needs rather than the need for a job coach to teach job skill acquisition, providers should work to align the support with the actual need. Consider these solutions:

- Request CLS service authorization and use CLS staff to provide health and safety supervision on the job. This service is a more appropriate and cost-effective option that allows the service provider to use job coaches where they are most needed.
- When relevant, ensure the person has a Positive Behavior Support Plan for the workplace the job coach or CLS staff has been trained to implement.
- If the person has medical needs, ensure the CLS staff, job coach or private duty nurse have been provided proper training for workplace support.
- Employ a person’s family member, only if necessary and appropriate, and ensure they are provided with adequate training to provide workplace support.

A job coach is present because the person needs transportation to and from work.

Transportation barriers also require system-level problem solving, especially when unnecessary job coaching is used simply because transportation cannot otherwise be funded. In these cases, providers should work with CMH contract managers and transportation leads to identify cost-effective alternatives. Providers can also advocate with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to create policies that unbundle “non-medical transportation for CIE” from supported employment services so that job coaching is used only when it is truly needed.

Key resources for service providers

Systematic Instruction Training

- [Systematic Instruction Series with Teri Johnson Part 1](#) (free, archived webinar)
- [Systematic Instruction Series with Teri Johnson Part 2](#) (free, archived webinar)
- [Best Practices with Systematic Instruction with Janet Estervig](#) (free, archived webinar)
- [Instructional Strategies for Acquisition and Maintenance of Customized Job Tasks with Tim Riesen](#) (free, archived webinar)
- [Marc Gold & Associates Systematic Instruction Short Course](#)
- [Training Resource Network On Demand Course: Job Coaching & Consulting](#)
- [Incompass Michigan runs a Job Coach Virtual Training Series](#)

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Tools and Templates

[Current Workplace Support Analysis](#) tool for coaching team to identify opportunities to improve systematic instruction, use assistive technology, and begin developing fading plans

[Example Fading Plan](#) and [Fading Report](#) Templates

Marc Gold & Associates Templates and Articles:

- [Systematic Instruction Blank Task Analysis Data Form](#)
- [Systematic Instruction Blank Task Analysis Form](#)
- [Job Analysis Form](#)
- [Job Analysis Sample](#)
- [“Job Analysis: A Strategy For Assessing And Utilizing The Culture Of Work Places To Support Persons With Disabilities”](#) by *Michael Callahan and Melinda Mast*
- [“Job Site Supports: Suggestions for Supporting Persons with Disabilities on Job Sites”](#) by *Michael Callahan*
- [“Natural Supports: A Delicate Balancing Act”](#) by *Michael Callahan*
- [“The Seven Phase Sequence For Balancing Naturalness and Individual Needs”](#) by *Michael Callahan*

Check Out the Archived Webinar:

The Art of Standing Back and Stepping Back: Fading Employment Supports with Skill and Intention with Dr. Lisa Mills and Shannon Webb

<https://incompassmi.kdp.io/public-catalog/products/85>

Assistive Technology Resources

[SHIFT TechFirst Training](#) online training and accreditation helps disability service providers build knowledge and implement Technology First best practices to support greater independence and community inclusion.

[Bridging Apps](#) is resource site and app database that helps people with disabilities, families, and professionals find and use mobile devices and apps to support individual needs and goals.

[Michigan Assistive Technology Program](#) provides information and access to low-tech and high-tech assistive technology options for people with disabilities.

[Explore AT Center](#) helps people learn about and explore different types of assistive technology and related supports.

[JAN's Assistive Technology in the Workplace](#) is a free introductory training from the Job Accommodation Network that explains workplace assistive technology, common product types,

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and resources for using AT as a job accommodation.

[JAN Solutions Showcase Video Playlist](#) from JAN features examples of workplace accommodation tools and strategies that show how specific solutions can be used on the job.

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