

5. Employment

Finding a Job: Building on Strengths and Interests

By Jayne Dixon Weber

(Note: There is a vignette on the DVD based on this material.●)

Finding a job for your adolescent or young adult is similar to the process that everyone goes through to find a job. In this section, we will take you down the path we took to find 20-year-old Jesse the “real job” he had begun to express a desire for as he entered adulthood. Using a series of interview questions, we looked at the jobs he had in high school, his overall strengths, and found out what else, if anything, he was interested in doing. This led to the development of a preliminary list of “potential” jobs. From there, it remained for us to further evaluate Jesse’s needs, desires and skill set, while beginning, with his active involvement, to explore possibilities with real-life employers.

The first section below presents the interview questions and discussion process, followed by a summary. The second section is a blank form for readers to use in their own process. Feel free to copy this form and adapt it to the particular needs of your young adult.

1. Tell us about some of the jobs you had in high school, and what you liked and disliked about each job.

Jesse said he had done recycling at a three-story senior apartment building. The residents would put out the papers for recycling at 9 o’clock every Monday morning, Jesse would go through with a cart and put the newspapers in it. When the cart was full, he had to take the elevator down to the basement to dump it into a big recycling bin. It took about an hour to do the whole building, and then Jesse would go to the snack area and have a hot chocolate. Sometimes there were other people around. Jesse said the job was okay but that he did not have much opportunity to talk to people.

He also talked about a job folding boxes at a pizza place. He liked wearing the uniform, and while he could fold the small boxes, the large ones were very difficult for him. Since he only worked there once a week, he never got to know the other employees very well, and after a while, only the supervisor talked to him, and that was only to greet him and then to tell him what a good job he had done.

Jesse’s next job was washing buses at the city station. The actual job was a lot of fun, but there was not anyone to talk to and it was a real hassle to get to the station on a bus.

Another of his jobs involved working at a college bookstore. He really liked this job, because he was able to do many different things—from putting on price tags to stocking items. There

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were always many people around and they were always very nice. In addition, he got to dress up, which he enjoys.

Jesse also helped serve lunch at a senior center. He said he liked this job because everyone was nice to him, but they only needed him two days a week, and only for a couple of hours during lunch. He said he wished he could work at this job more often. We added this to a list we were creating of potential jobs.

2. What do you like to do when you are not working? What are your interests?

Jesse said he likes all sports—he had actually been the manager of the football team in high school. He also likes to play basketball and baseball, and go bowling. He likes to watch sports on television and in person. He also likes going to the movies and cooking, but most of all, he likes being around people.

Jesse asked if he could still be a manager for either the high school or local college football team. We did not know, but we added it to our list of potential jobs for him.

He had helped make pizzas at a restaurant one time for a fund-raiser and he had really liked that. That was also added to our list of potential jobs.

3. What are some of your strengths—what are you good at doing?

He is good at activities in which he knows what is expected of him, and which he can follow through on independently. He is good at activities that are based on a fairly consistent routine. Not only is he interested in people, he is good at working with them. Jesse has good communication skills and good work habits. He loves to get dressed up and wear uniforms.

4. Are there other jobs you are interested in pursuing?

Jesse said he wanted to work at a grocery store, so we added this to our list. He said he would like to help at a fire station. When we told him it might only be on a volunteer basis, he was fine with that. We added it to the list of potential jobs.

5. Do you want any more ideas for jobs?

When he said yes, we asked additional questions: “Do you like to work with animals—like at a humane society?” He answered that he was somewhat afraid of dogs. We did not put it on the list, but decided to make a note of it so that later we could possibly address this fear. “Would you like to work in a library?” He shrugged his shoulders and asked what he would do. We did not really know, but thought we could look into it if he was interested. We added that to our potential job list.

6. How much do you want to work? Every day? Full-time? Part-time?

He seemed to think that just mornings would not be enough, but was not sure about an entire day.

7. Would it be okay to have more than one type of job?

Jesse said he was fine with that.

POTENTIAL JOB LIST

Based on this detailed discussion, we shared with Jesse the potential job list off of which all of us could begin focusing efforts that would land him a job. The list included:

- Working at a college bookstore.
- Serving lunch at a senior center.
- Acting as the manager for a college football team.
- Cooking at a local pizzeria.
- Working at a grocery store.
- Volunteering at the fire station.
- Working at a library..

SUMMARY

Basic guidelines to consider in determining a person's ideal work environment include his or her personal talents and preferences, learning style, and tolerance levels for various stimuli such as noise level and social interaction. Job location as it impacts transportation needs and the level of supervision required are also important.

Before making phone calls to find out about potential jobs, make sure to identify your young person's learning styles. Based on conversations with Jesse and his care providers, we learned that he liked to have his job explained to him, to have it modeled for him, and then to do it side-by-side with a co-worker. Sometimes a picture schedule is helpful.

We also found out that while Jesse generally has good communication skills, he does not always ask for help when he needs it, so we had to keep that in mind during job training.

Environment also plays an important role in Jesse's day, so it will be an important consideration in the job or jobs we identify for him.

Our task was to consider each of the potential jobs and evaluate them in light of Jesse's skill set—including those skills he might still develop. We also had to consider the support he might need—both initially and in the long term. Then it was time to make the initial phone calls to find out if some of the jobs were actually a possibility, and whether Jesse could have a trial run to see if the situation would work for both him and the employer.

Even as we did our best to find a job that is a good fit for Jesse and the employer, we had to bear in mind that "things change" and Jesse will probably end up working at many jobs throughout his life. It is important to bear in mind that the perfect job may not be found right away. It is a far lighter load for everyone to carry that we look at jobs for Jesse that he will enjoy and thrive in—for now!

Interview Form and Checklist

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 Jayne Dixon Weber

1. Tell us about some of the jobs you had in high school, and what you liked and disliked about each job.

Job:	Likes:	Dislikes:
_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

2. What kinds of things do you like to do when you are not working? What are your interests?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. What are some of your strengths—what are you good at doing?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. Are there other jobs you are interested in pursuing?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Do you want any more ideas for jobs?

_____	_____
_____	_____

6. How much do you want to work? Every day? Full-time? Part-time?

7. Would it be okay to have more than one type of job?

Now summarize your child's learning style and ideal work environment.

Consider each of the potential jobs above and evaluate the skills your child has already acquired and which ones need to be developed.

JOB(S)	Skills Already Acquired	Skills That Need Development
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PRELIMINARY LIST OF JOBS:

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