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TITLE Memo to Supervisors: Your New Mentally Retarded Worker.

INSTITUTION President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE 80

NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adults: \*Employer Employee Relationship; Employers: \*Mental Retardation: \*Supervisory Methods: \*Vocational Adjustment.

ABSTRACT

The booklet is designed to assist supervisors in overseeing retarded employees. Advantages of hiring retarded workers are listed, including the training in job skills that the retarded individual has received. Principles of good supervision are outlined and five steps in relating to retarded workers are explored, including the use of simple language and the review and correction of mistakes. Statements from 10 employers who have successfully hired retarded workers are included. A list of 12 sources for additional information is provided along with addresses of agencies available for guidance. (PHR)

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**Memo to Supervisors:**

As a World War II Army sergeant, I knew that saying, "Follow me," gave me both responsibility and authority. Generals and field grade officers were necessary for strategy, but success or failure depended on non-coms and mainly on the troops we led.

Today, in business and industry, foremen and supervisors live by the words "Follow me." They have been in entry level jobs, have proven themselves, have been promoted. Their employers — the policy and personnel managers — expect the first-line supervisors to lead, to motivate fellow employees, to get the job done.

This common sense MEMO, hopefully, will help first-line supervisors help the retarded workers they supervise. Not surprisingly, they may find that these suggestions from a variety of successful fellow supervisors aren't all that different.

So, read on, and "Follow me!"

Harold Russell

Chairman,  
President's Committee  
on Employment of the  
Handicapped  
Washington DC 20210

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**Hear Ye:**

Chairman Harold Russell has told you about "Follow Me." I'd like to suggest that you hear from some of your fellow supervisors across America, men and women whose leadership ability in supervising retarded workers has received national recognition.

Every year the President's Committee and the National Association for Retarded Citizens solicit nominations for awards for the "Employer of the Year." The awards recognize outstanding corporations, companies, plants, shops, offices and private and public agency employers.

Many of the ideas and comments in this pamphlet came from spokesmen from the winning employers during recent years. The common thread running through most of the comments suggests understanding, patience and specific simplicity in dealing with workers classified as mentally retarded.

So, "Hear Ye," help the retarded to help you.

**Philip Roos**

**Executive Director,  
National Association for  
Retarded Citizens  
Co-Chairman, Committee  
on the Mentally Handicapped  
of the President's Committee**

*"What does the employer expect of any worker who is supervised?*

*Faithful attendance, careful workmanship, pride in performance, social skill in getting along with others, loyalty, perhaps some initiative."*



**Supervisor** — one who oversees, gives direction, or superintends.

**Employee** — one who works for an employer.

**Employer** — one who employs (both supervisor and employee).

Textbooks have been written and speeches have been directed at supervisors and employers. College courses have been devoted to helping supervisors and employers do a better job of motivating and leading workers. Employer organizations, middle management groups, and labor unions have been formed to improve leadership skills of their members.

Some of the language in these books and conferences gets a bit high-sounding or complicated. You won't find anything in this brief guide that isn't quite simple. Something that has been going on successfully for almost a generation in a variety of occupations and businesses in every state shouldn't be very complicated.

Once an employer has made a decision to employ qualified workers known to be mentally retarded, the first step has been taken. Once the employer has convinced supervisors that hiring qualified retarded workers will benefit the factory, business, trade or office, the process starts. The supervisor uses his skills, patiently, with the new worker as well as with other employees already on the job who may need extra information about retardation.

What does the employer expect of any worker who is supervised? Faithful attendance, careful workmanship, pride in performance, social skill in getting along with others, loyalty, perhaps some initiative.

What does the employer dislike most from any employee? Absenteeism, tardiness, unreliability, surly attitude toward company and fellow employees, unsafe work habits, disloyalty, anything else that destroys morale and undercuts production.

Many people say that supervision is a lost art in too many work places...that our permissive society has ruined discipline...that it is impossible

*"No job that was ever worthwhile didn't require skills like humor, patience, common sense, knowledge and imagination."*



for people in authority to be respected when they operate as "nice guys."

No job that was ever worthwhile didn't require skills like humor, patience, common sense, knowledge and imagination. These all have come into play in the successful experiences of thousands of supervisors of mentally retarded employees. Some of those experiences and insights will be shared here.


Some non retarded employees come fresh out of high school. Some have dropped out for one reason or another. They generally don't have skills and frequently no job discipline, having never really put in a full work week, having to show up on time and to do the necessary and expected.

*Bonus Number One in hiring a retarded worker:* A loose but tested network of workshops, rehabilitation centers and special schools have been "home" for many if not most retarded workers referred for placement by rehabilitation or employment counselors. In addition, considerable work has been done in developing and improving social skills to make it easier for the new worker to adjust to unfamiliar people, places and work.

*Bonus Number Two:* Of course, each person is an individual, so nothing can be taken for granted, but there are generally people back at the referring agency to call upon should a problem arise in the early training by supervisors. You'll be working with someone your new worker already trusts.

Your communications, management and human relations problems can be shared with someone who cares very much that you are successful as a supervisor of a mentally retarded worker. Some of these people are shared with you in this brochure.

*Bonus Number Three:* You won't have to take any college courses, subscribe to any management journals or worry yourself to death about unfamiliar people if you remember that the retarded workers you supervise have many more similarities to non-retarded people than differences, have the same basic human nature as all other employees, and



the same heavenly destiny. Supervising them is as simple as putting yourself into another person's shoes for a while and exercising patience. Very simple. At least that's what all good supervisors will tell you.

But, first, some thoughts about supervisors, since employees expect those over them to have certain skills and abilities. Dr. William R. Van Dersal in his interesting book, "The Successful Supervisor," lists seven principles basic to good supervision. Since these apply probably even in larger measure to supervision of mentally retarded workers, they are listed here:

1. People must always understand clearly what is expected.
2. People must have guidance in doing their work.
3. Good work should always be recognized.
4. Poor work deserves constructive criticism.
5. People should have opportunities to show that they can accept greater responsibilities.
6. People should be encouraged to improve themselves.
7. People should work in a safe and healthful environment.

Retarded workers are first of all human beings. They lack certain intellectual skills that other workers may possess. They may not have the same driving ambition some workers exhibit. But, with proper supervisory patience and personal interest, they can understand what they are expected to do, they can accept guidance, they can do good work and blossom when complimented, they can work hard to correct mistakes explained to them, they can move up promotion ladders and improve themselves, and they will work better where the work place is healthy and safe.

Those who have worked with retarded young people through early special education classes, workshop training, and actual job performance will vouch that retarded human beings have done and will continue to do their very best when placed in jobs suited to their capabilities. Managers don't hire people based on what they can't do, but on what

*"Retarded workers are first of all human beings."*

they can do. And, retarded workers in thousands of work places have proved their abilities to handle job after job after job.

Years ago when the Boy Scouts of America opened up the program for mentally retarded scouts, they came up with a list of what these young people wanted out of scouting. Not surprisingly, the list was the same as another one compiled for so-called normal boys.

Make a list of what supervisors want of their employees. Make another list of what supervisors want of employees who are mentally retarded. Both lists should be almost identical.

Just as all employees are human beings, so are all mentally retarded employees human beings — different, certainly, but truly wonderful men and women who will respond, time and time again, to patient supervision.

If you have been counting, we've used the word "patience" several times, five to be exact. It isn't a word that has come up every time a company or agency was cited nationally for hiring retarded workers, but it came up often enough to be a key word. That's why it has been used here.

However, one swallow doesn't make a summer and one word can't explain everyone's formula. It is a "granted" that structured supervision and clear guidelines are essential for any employee, particularly retarded workers. Firmness and fairness are also essential "givens."

In the President's Committee's "Guide to Job Placement of Mentally Retarded Workers" by Dr. William A. Fraenkel, some supervisory hints bear repeating. He says:

*"The employee should have an early opportunity during the first few days on the job to orient himself to his new surroundings.*

*"His immediate supervisor should be briefed on any special matters that might relate to his job performance. For instance, it might be wise to explain to the supervisor that this new worker will respond best to orders if they are given one at a time. Also, the supervisor should be reasonably*



sure the retarded worker understands the orders. If in doubt, he needs merely ask the new worker, "Now tell me what it is that you are supposed to do."

The author goes on to say that at the beginning it is important to be sure that the new worker knows what to do after completing the first assignment, whom to go to for new work or a new task. Of course, he should also know who to see when problems arise on the job.

Five steps are listed that are helpful to both employee and supervisor:

1. Use simple language in explaining what needs to be done.
2. Show how you want things done and let him see the exact steps to be taken.
3. Observe him perform after you ask him to do the task and have him tell you why he does the job and how.
4. Review and correct any mistakes, letting him be more and more on his own.
5. Taper off, but spot check performance, praising good work performance so as to build confidence.

*"Reliability and predictability are great assets and have been built into work performances of properly trained retarded workers."*

One executive with considerable success in placements, Tony Records of the District of Columbia Association for Retarded Citizens, remarks that employers in the custodial and food processing fields are not as concerned with initial speed as they are with good work habits. They know from experience that good speed will come in time.

Arriving on time, having good attitudes toward their work and their fellow employees and having social skills that enable them to win early acceptance are vital to good work morale. These skills and attitudes, developed during their training period at sheltered workshops or activity centers or in other training situations, make entry easy for retarded workers and certainly make life easier for supervisors whose major problem, too often, is the "people problem." Reliability and predictability are great assets and have been built into work performances of properly trained retarded workers.

Based on his own considerable skills, Records feels that "70 percent of potential supervisors can

*"There is nothing like seeing something done which your past experience would lead you to believe is impossible."*

benefit greatly from an on-site visit to a vocational training center or workshop where they can see actual workers performing on the job." There is nothing like seeing something done which your past experience would lead you to believe is impossible. We are all creatures of our own habits, associates and experiences. It takes actual on-site visual proof in many cases to convince even the most open-minded person that some things can be done by retarded persons (or blind or deaf workers for that matter) that perhaps the executive couldn't do himself.

Records also feels, along with many other successful placement officials, that it is important for supervisors to know that there is someone they can contact or go to if a placement goes wrong. Not all marriages are "made in heaven" and not all placements are 100 percent successful. But, unlike some marriages which end in disaster, placement problems can be solved or corrected. Discussion and special efforts by placement counselors and supervisors working together can help a fellow human being become what all three want—a successful worker!

But, now, let's share some thoughts from recognized firms and agencies who have proven successfully that the combination of supervisor, employee and employer can work well for all three when the employee is a qualified and trained retarded worker.

Fellow employees are also part of the success story, since a Gallup Poll asked a cross-section of American people the question: "Would you object to having a worker who is mildly or moderately retarded employed where you work, or not?" The common sense American answer was that 91 percent would not object, 4 percent didn't know and only 5 percent would object. Ninety-one percent is a great average in any league. And, thanks to that attitude endorsement, some 10 percent of today's workers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, have mental handicaps.

### From the President's Committee Files

A shop production foreman where electric harnesses are assembled reported: "There's a chance for 40 to 50 short-circuits in each harness if workers are careless. In the three years retarded workers have been doing the job, there hasn't been a single short-circuit."

The president of a brewery reported: "If we put a non-retarded worker in the job of assembling cardboard beer cartons, the cartons might have three staples or six staples or none at all. Our retarded workers always put in the right number. They're very conscious of quality."

A paper company vice president concerned with reforesting vast areas where trees have been cut down reported: "Our machines are faster than people until they come to odd shaped areas. Our retarded workers do a much better job than machines. They get in tight places where tractors can't go. They care about their work. They have pride in it."

### From the AFL-CIO President

"The AFL-CIO is committed to the principle that everyone should have full opportunity to achieve his maximum personal development and fulfillment. Unions participate in the establishment of training programs and other community service facilities to enable the worker who is mentally retarded to take his place as a wage earner and a positive factor in our economy and society."

### The City of Coolidge, Arizona—1978 National Employer of the Year Award Winner.

Since 1970, 25 mentally retarded persons have been employed by the city. The city entered into a contractual arrangement with a private concern for the upkeep and maintenance of city parks under staff supervision. The city personnel, from elected officials to work supervisors, have demonstrated a high level of concern as retarded people embarked on their first jobs. Most of them have progressed through employment with the city to other occupations.





**Horry County Ecology Commission, Conway, S.C.—  
1978 Winner.**

Supervisor Blease Gasque, head of the work program for beautification of county highway right of ways, says he has "experienced fewer problems with mentally retarded employees than with other clients." He bases his success on working with retarded employees on their attendance and on the importance of good work habits.

**Profera's Pizza Bakery, Dunmore, Pa.—  
1978 Winner.**

Ten years ago the Proferas, father and son, hired the retarded son of Joseph Profera, Jr.'s brother-in-law with such success that today their Institutional frozen pizza firm employs seven retarded workers in a work force of 24. Retarded employees have such a low rate of absenteeism that they are more dependable, more is expected of them by supervisors. "Their jobs give them a reason for awakening in the morning. They live their center around going to work," says Joseph, Sr. "On stormy days the retarded never report off; they don't have cars. They own boots and they walk to work."

**Randall Plating, Butler, Wis.—1978 Winner.**

For five years, all 10 of this firm's employees have been mentally retarded. They are chrome platers, polishers and grinders. Greg Randall says he's working with an untapped human resource. "I was looking for good dependable people. We had a lot of transients who just weren't interested in the business. I wish I could bottle the energies of the retarded people. I don't think there is a business alive that shouldn't hire them." He says that careful, patient training and counseling in more personal matters has paid real dividends in loyalty, trustworthiness and productivity.

**Woodward & Lothrop, Washington, DC—  
1977 Winner.**

This largest department store chain in the Washington area has 13 retail locations and two distribution centers and employs some 5,000 people. Through the leadership of Personnel Services Manager Fred Thompson and many supervisors, W&L employs more than two dozen qualified retarded workers. Woodie Simms, supervisor of the housekeeping staff, known for his down-to-earth relationship with employees, gives glowing accounts of these special workers: "Always present, never late, fine work performance, amazed at their eagerness and cooperation." And all this at a job that starts at 5:30 A.M.! "Some of my other workers could learn a lesson," he said. So enthused was supervisor Simms that he soon had many of the W&L departments hiring mentally retarded workers and he, himself, was speaking at local and national meetings and taking part in Special Olympics and local Association for Retarded Citizens meetings. Manager Thompson was featured in an award-winning film, "Come Work with Us," now being used nationally. The W&L success has encouraged many area firms to hire retarded workers.

**Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, ILL.—  
1977 Winner.**

The Residence Hall Food Service has successfully hired several retarded workers for kitchen sanitation jobs through a local rehabilitation agency which provided initial training. Unit supervisors for the various campus kitchens have gone out of their way to assure that these special workers get the best supervision. They go to union bid meetings so that the employees with lower communications skills have equal chance at shifts of their choice.

They work closely with vocational placement counselors to solve the on-the-job problems that come up. "It takes someone willing to spend time and effort—willing to not give up and be patient," Philip Harper, Residence Halls Food Service Program Personnel Manager, takes the time to explain the

nature and peculiarities of the state civil service system to counselors so that policies can better be interpreted to retarded men and women workers. He and his supervisors also meet with counselors to explain changes coming up in various jobs and what possible other jobs retarded employees are eligible to bid on. In spite of occasional failures, retarded employees are hired again and again to replace the few who didn't work out.

**Social Security Administration, Woodlawn, MD.—  
1978 Winner.**

Tom Doyle, the agency personnel management and selective placement specialist, says: "There aren't enough words in the vocabulary to describe our good experience in hiring retarded workers as control clerks, custodians, photo copy operators and card readers." He said that the results of initial hiring and mainstreaming has led to "real good and meaningful relationships" between the retarded workers and the 600 members of the supervisory staff.

Supervisors come to him and request additional referrals of retarded job-seekers since the program is one of the best recruitment sources in the agency. "I call on each supervisor before the agreed-upon placement. I make follow-up calls and patiently give any help and guidance needed. We have had absolutely no job failures and dozens have received quality pay increases and pay incentive awards." One 18-month employee received the agency's highest award, the Commissioner's Citation, in 1978. Retarded workers are even being tutored in basic math and English to help them with upward mobility.

**Columbus County Hospital, Whiteville, N.C.—  
1977 Winner.**

Ralph Rogers says that the service of the retarded the past several years has been of "such high quality that instead of our helping them they are helping us." Through an administrative aid, Walter Willis, Rogers coordinates the efforts of hospital supervisors who have almost 10 percent of the 260 employees working under the retarded program as nursing and

housekeeping aides and maintenance workers. Rogers gives department heads full credit for cooperation and encouragement. His experience has been that supervisors support the program since retarded workers have one common characteristic that compensates for anything they may lack, they make the extra effort.

**F. Wolkow & Sons, Louisville, KY.—1977 Winner.** Five workers with mental retardation are employed in a plant where the program has been successful for more than a decade. "We have no problems," Stella Colvin, plant supervisor, said. "Everything is OK."

**Anniston Army Depot, Anniston, Alabama—1977 Winner.**

Tom Smith, coordinator for selective placement, says that there has been a "real attitude change." At first, he had to sell the program, now supervisors come to him for more qualified retarded laborers, warehousemen and packers. Anniston has developed an unusual Supervisory Development Program which allows supervisors to "look at what a person can do, decide what the job requires, and then see if the person can match his or her abilities with the job requirements." He said that the supervisors like the special placement program for retarded workers because they have an option they don't always have with other workers sent to them by the personnel office. "We have better results through this selectivity process," he says. The results in retention, attendance, productivity and attitude have been excellent.

#### Some Additional Help

A short list of available printed materials has been compiled for supervisors wishing to learn more and build up a library for job use. Some of the thoughts in these pamphlets have been shared here. Others are worth more time than available here for short quotes. For instance, the pamphlet, "Hiring and Supervising Mentally Retarded Workers," by the Philadelphia Association for Retarded Citizens, stresses being

objective and patient with someone who may not verbalize well. It emphasizes fellow-worker acceptance as being vital, along with explaining general procedures and working conditions. It provides a check-list of 10 specific instructions on-the-job for new retarded workers:

Professor Rudd, in the "Supervisory Management" reprint listed, says: "People with mental handicaps do require careful training and supervision, but they can be effective and capable workers. In comparison with other workers, they generally have lower turnover and absenteeism rates and they are more highly motivated." His four-page thoughtful guidance includes suggestions for a "buddy system" since "many poor performances stem from poor relationships with fellow workers." He also suggests giving retarded workers opportunities to observe more productive workers since imitation frequently will aid in learning new job skills. Not surprisingly, he suggests treating handicapped workers the same way as normal workers, while spending time to build employee confidence.

The President's Committee three-fold flyer, "So You're Going To Hire a Mentally Retarded Person," has stood the test of time and numerous reprintings. It gives 10 "Do's" which, not surprisingly, could probably be found in any text book for supervising any employee. They all suggest, however, the patience and consideration that supervisors probably hoped for the first day they went to work years ago.

"This Isn't Kindness...It's Good Business," a two-fold flyer by NARC's On-The-Job Training Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor for almost a decade, summarizes some of the facts gleaned from hundreds of employers cooperating in the OJT effort. Retarded workers want to make good. They want to stay on the job. Their attendance record is usually better. They are willing workers and will stay on routine tasks. One last thought. If perhaps you are thinking "this is OK for the other fellow but not for my business," here are some of the jobs retarded workers have successfully handled: animal caretaker, laundry worker, building maintenance, li-



brary assistant, card punch operator, mail clerk, carpenter, medical technician, glass installer, messenger, nursery worker, dishwasher, office machine operator, elevator operator, painter, photocopy operator, farm worker, cook, porter, food service worker, teacher aid, forest worker, printing press operator, laborer, grocery worker, janitor, telephone operator, laboratory worker, meat packer, car wash attendant, engineering aid, furniture repairman, vehicle maintenance worker, sales clerk, landscaper, stock clerk, ward attendant, warehouseman and upholsterer. All those jobs, and thousands more, involve supervisors who had faith and confidence in their retarded men and women. The retarded people didn't let them down.

#### References

The following printed materials are available from the sources indicated:

1. Guide to Job Placement of Mentally Retarded Workers, 20 pgs. The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C. 20036. Free.
2. So You're Going To Hire A Mentally Retarded Person, Memo to Employers, The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, DC 20036. Free.
3. Affirmative Action for Disabled People, A Pocket Guide, 16 pages, The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Free.
4. Jobs for Handicapped Persons, A New Era in Civil Rights, 28 pages, Public Affairs Pamphlet #557, Available from the President's Committee, Free.
5. Supervising the Mentally Handicapped: The Procedures, the Rewards, 4 pages, Reprint from *Supervisory Management*, December 1976. Available from the President's Committee, Free.
6. "Disabled USA," magazine of The President's Committee, Free.
7. Your Rights as a Disabled Person, 8 pages, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, DC 20201 (HEW-391), Free.



8. American Rehabilitation, bi-monthly magazine providing latest information on vocational rehabilitation programs. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. \$11.75 annually.
9. "This Isn't Kindness... It's Good Business." 6 pages. National Association for Retarded Citizens, P.O. Box 6109—2709 Avenue E East, Arlington, Texas 76011. Free.
10. "Working Together with Mentally Retarded Employees." kit of 12 cards on various mental retardation subjects. National Association for Retarded Citizens. Free.
11. "Give an Opportunity—Gain an Asset." 16 page pamphlet by NARC's On-the-Job Training Project. Free.
12. Hiring and Supervising Mentally Retarded Workers. 16 pages. Philadelphia Association for Retarded Citizens, PARC Developmental Center, 2400 W. Westmoreland St., Philadelphia, PA 19129 (30¢).

#### Resources

In addition to the reference reading material included in this MEMO TO SUPERVISORS, the following agencies are available for help and guidance:

The local office of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, listed in the phone book under State Offices; or write directly to Director of Vocational Rehabilitation, your State Capitol.

The local office of the State Employment Service or Manpower Agency, listed under State Offices (ask for selective placement counselor); or write directly to Director, Employment Security Agency, your State Capitol.

The Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, attention Executive Secretary, your State Capitol.

The National Association for Retarded Citizens, 2709 Avenue E. East, Arlington, Texas 76011, can give you the location of the local association nearest you.