

Vocational Rehabilitation —Value Added: Explaining What We Do, Craig Bock, MA, CRC

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If you have an injury at work, do you know what happens next or how you would navigate the Workers' Compensation system should you need to? What does RCW 51.32.095 (state law) and WAC 296-19A-070 (administrative rules) mean to you? If you could not return to your job and had permanent physical or cognitive restrictions who would help you explore your return to work options at your current employer or in a very unsecure, ever changing labor market?

Work is one of the most important ways we define ourselves. Even if work isn't always enjoyable, it's our way of contributing to society. For those who have a disability that makes work and chores difficult, rehabilitation counselors are there to help. Unbeknownst to most Washingtonians, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are an integral part of the injured worker's rehabilitation efforts and successful return to gainful employment. Rehabilitation counselors work with clients who have a physical, mental, or emotional disability. Often, we work with people who were born with a disability, but not always. We may work with people who, after an accident or illness, now have a permanent disability. The goal of our counseling is to help clients live and work as independently as possible.

As a registered Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the State of WA, under RCW 51.32.095, we take on the following roles:

- Counselor
- Helper
- Employment Consultant
- Professional Employability Assessor
- Job Analyst
- Revised Code Washington (RCW) and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) interpretation expert.
- Safety Specialist
- Ergonomic Resources Analyst
- Reasonable Accommodation Expert

Part of rehabilitation counseling is working with others in the community to help the disabled worker. We often work with families, doctors, social workers, and other therapists as we develop treatment plans. We interact directly with the worker's coworkers and managers to advise them on how to best help the injured worker. We also work to identify potential problems, such as a physical barrier, so that necessary changes can be made.

Utilizing this holistic approach to rehabilitation and return to work, vocational rehabilitation counselors serve as behind the scenes coordinators enabling claims to be adjudicated and resolved. During an injured worker's time in a Workers' Compensation claim, a vocational rehabilitation counselor is the one that all claim participants (injured worker, medical community, claim manager,

employer, third party administrators, and the Department of Labor & Industries) rely upon for accurate, objective, and complete information. During the claim process, we work with employers and workers to identify potentially recurring unsafe work practices so that the worker and employer can avoid repeat injurious exposures by changing how work place activities/essential functions of specific vocations are performed.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors facilitate return to work and for those who cannot; we help design appropriate retraining programs for a new line of work. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors resolve barriers that allow for injured workers to get on with their lives and for industrial insurance claims to close. By doing so, the goals and intent of the Department Labor and Industries' Workers' Compensation system are met, insuring appropriate benefit allowances for the workers and employers that it serves.

For more examples of worker's comp in the public eye, follow this link to an opinion piece in the News

Tribune by Assistant L&I Director Bob Malooly.

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/opinion/othervoices/story/657795.html>.