Case Scenario: Alex

Alex is a 17-year-old student with autism. He receives special education services in a self-contained classroom in an urban high school. Alex receives instruction both in the classroom and in the community to improve his vocational, academic, and social skills. He is currently participating in community-based training in an office setting completing tasks such as data entry and spreadsheet development. He is diligent and methodical in completing the varied tasks assigned to him. Alex reads grade level texts independently; however, he demonstrates deficits in reading comprehension and oral expression. In elementary and middle school, he participated in general education math course and maintained a B average. In high school, he received two years of Teach Math, opting out of standard courses of Algebra I, II, and Geometry.

After school, Alex works part-time at a local office supply store entering numerical data to keep track of stock and services rendered by store staff. His behavior is appropriate at work and he has expressed that he likes working. He is punctual each day, and he is willing to stay late when needed. He really enjoys getting a paycheck and he usually spends his money on fast food and movies from the local video rental shop. Alex is detail-oriented and reviews each column of numbers several times before moving on to type another column. This results in slower production rates in comparison to other workers who complete similar tasks.

Alex is intimidated by his boss because he knows that the boss has the ability to fire him, a fact that his teachers at school presented during a unit about behavior in the workplace. Alex has perseverated on this fact, making him afraid to talk to his boss. Also, Alex knows that at times his speech is not understood by people he does not know, so sometimes he avoids talking to people he does not know well. As a result, instead of speaking to his boss, Alex usually tells problems or concerns to his school job coach who visits Alex at the job site each week. The job coach is concerned that Alex will not ask for help if an emergency occurs, and that a certain level of communication between Alex and his boss is necessary to develop a good working relationship. The boss views Alex as a valuable employee and is willing to provide opportunities for Alex to develop appropriate communication skills. The boss has also expressed an interest in employing Alex for more hours per week after graduation, if he continues to develop his business skills.

Alex’s mother has expressed that she will support her son in his job at the office supply store by helping him work on skills that are needed for the job, but she believes that he will need support to be successful in this employment setting, especially when new tasks are assigned. She knows that after Alex graduates, his school job coach will stop visiting him at work so she cannot depend on his continued help. Currently, Alex has no services from the local vocational rehabilitation agency, although his mother voiced an interest in this at his last IEP meeting.

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