

RETAIN Kentucky's New Job Analyst Helps Align Essential Job Functions with the Right Accommodations So Workers Can Return to Work Safely

November 2022 RETAIN Success Story

RETAIN Kentucky's job analysis service helps employers and workers recognize the essential functions and demands of their jobs so they can make informed decisions about safe stay-at-work or return-to-work options following an injury or illness.

BACKGROUND

RETAIN Kentucky is adding even more value for its workers, employers, and health care providers through its new job analysis service. How? RETAIN Kentucky's new job analyst reviews the essential duties and functional demands of jobs to help employers and workers make informed decisions about stay-at-work and return-to-work (SAW/RTW) options and identify potential job accommodations when needed. The job analyst also helps employers establish transitional job duties so workers with injuries or illness can be assigned temporary, productive work options while they recover.

CHALLENGE

RETAIN Kentucky found that many workers do not have access to functional job descriptions or know the essential duties of their jobs. Workers, employers, and health care providers need accurate descriptions of essential job functions and demands so they can assess readiness to safely stay on the job or return to work. These descriptions can also help determine whether reasonable job accommodations may be needed, which helps employers retain valuable workers who have an injury or illness. Functional job descriptions also help employers to better recruit qualified candidates for available positions.



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: Job descriptions often lack information about the essential duties and demands of the job. This can make it difficult to assess how workers can return to work safely and what accommodations they may need.



Action: RETAIN Kentucky's job analyst works with employers and workers to create functional job descriptions, define transitional work duties, and develop productive SAW/RTW options and potential accommodations.

Results: In just a few months, RETAIN Kentucky has introduced its job analysis service to more than 500 Kentucky employers, coached more than a dozen workers to proactively request job accommodations so they can safely return to work, and identified transitional work duties for several employers, helping to build a more inclusive workforce across Kentucky.

RETAIN Kentucky’s job analyst, Michele Laur, explained that a worker must be able to perform essential job functions even if they need reasonable accommodations to do so. A well-written job description usually includes three to five essential functions. Functional demands go further: They include physical, mental, psychosocial, and environmental factors. For example, a job may involve climbing ladders (physical) and planning and problem solving (mental) while managing a heavy workload (psychosocial) in all outdoor weather conditions (environmental).

ACTIONS

Recruiting and hiring a qualified job analyst. RETAIN Kentucky hired a skilled job analyst in the summer of 2022 to create functional job descriptions that reflect the physical, mental, psychosocial, and environmental demands of a job. Laur has extensive experience assessing essential job functions, safety, and accessibility. She interviews human resources staff, supervisors, and workers to develop comprehensive job descriptions and SAW/RTW options.



Creating strategies for workplace accommodations.

When helping workers and employers consider reasonable accommodations, Laur weighs the job’s essential functions and its functional demands. She then coaches workers on how to propose accommodations to their employers. In her first two months in the position, she has assisted workers with more than a dozen accommodations. Recently, Laur

helped an employer update a job description to identify a change in an essential job function. “Fifty-pound sandbags were replaced with 35-pound buckets. This changed the function from a heavy physical demand level to a medium physical demand level and opened the job for others who may not have been able to perform that task previously,” Laur said.

Defining transitional work duties. The job analyst can also help employers define transitional work tasks for workers who are returning to work but are not yet ready to resume all their tasks. The analyst can draw from a bank of transitional tasks to create a temporary position that is tailored for the worker and contributes to productivity, safety, and morale. For example, a car mechanic is a position that typically requires heavy physical demands. However, the job analyst identified tasks like updating documentation, cleaning out the breakroom, reviewing and updating safety training, and calling customers for follow-up surveys as transitional duty tasks. An employee could return to work and safely perform these tasks while recovering from an illness or injury.

Spreading awareness of RETAIN Kentucky’s job analysis service. Employers are interested in strategies that help them recruit and retain valued workers. As RETAIN Kentucky conducts outreach to employers, they emphasize how their job analysis service can support

these efforts and enhance an employer’s SAW/RTW program. Since hiring Laur, RETAIN Kentucky has introduced this valuable resource to more than 500 employers through webinars, email, social media, and virtual and in-person meetings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

- RETAIN Kentucky developed a job analyst position that defines jobs by their physical, mental, psychosocial, and environmental demands so employers and workers can develop plans and reasonable accommodations for safe, productive return to work.
 - Employers can use these functional job descriptions to recruit from a broader pool of people and support an inclusive workforce.
 - The job analyst helps employers develop a list of transitional job tasks, which can be combined to create temporary, customized positions for workers returning to work after an illness or injury. Employers then have a bank of productive, meaningful job tasks available for workers who may need them in the future.
 - The job analyst coaches workers on how to propose and implement reasonable job accommodations with their employers.



Kentucky is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health care providers, and other key parties to help newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce. The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation leads RETAIN Kentucky, together with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute and committed project partners, including the Council of State Governments. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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