

# THE NEW WORKER

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**This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The New Worker* and  
36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEC Associates, Inc.**

Jasen Walker and Esther Weiss launched CEC Associates in 1983. Their goal was to start an organization that could provide its clients with state-of-the-art rehabilitation and disability management strategies. Over the years, the company has developed and offered a variety of services, including:

- Organizational disability management;
- Vocational rehabilitation;
- Forensic evaluation;
- Career assessment; and
- Continuing education for rehabilitation professionals.

CEC's expansion of innovative services has spawned and enhanced the professional growth of its staff members. Dina McAfee, Operations Manager, has been a central figure in CEC's continuing reliability. Lisa Ruth remains a leader in CEC's human resources management. Amanda Sizemore, a Supervisor of CEC's clinical staff with 10 years of experience, represents the next generation of vocational evaluator, psychometrician, and forensic expert. Beth McLaughlin has continued to make important contributions to clinical staff development. Of course, CEC would not exist without Esther Weiss's leadership.

For this particular newsletter, marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The New Worker*, we have turned to CEC staff members for their identification of our key literary contributions, which have served to inform and instruct them during their development within the organization. *The New Worker* consistently provides CEC's continuing education consumers and clients with information regarding new approaches to resolving occupational disability, facilitating vocational rehabilitation, managing organizational dynamics, and enhancing professional development. The first issue of *The New Worker* was made available in April 1989 and included a presentation on the role of rehabilitation consultants in workplace injuries.

We have abstracted a sample of the articles CEC staff members selected as helpful in their development as rehabilitation professionals. Below we provide a brief summary of each article and a link to visit the original in its entirety.

**The Difference Between Medical Impairment and Occupational Disability:  
Still Misunderstood**

(Fall 2018)

There are critical conceptual and practical differences between medical impairment and vocational disability. Unfortunately, these concepts are often confused and obfuscated during and following medical interventions, in the process of vocational rehabilitation and return to work, and as part of forensic analyses.

**Disability Without Disease or Accident and Disability-Prone Employees**

(April 1989 & Spring 2013)

We first wrote of “The Disability Process” in April 1989, when we reprinted the 1978 article written by M.R. Weinstein, a psychiatrist in San Francisco. He recognized the 1966 contributions of Drs. Behan and Hirschfeld, who were occupational medicine physicians treating injured workers from Detroit’s automotive factories. Weinstein and his colleagues describe the presence of “unacceptable” occupational disability even though no prior disease or identifiable trauma could account for it, and a biopsychosocial process that transforms the state of worker dysfunction (unacceptable disability) into an acceptable disability following an “explanatory event,” usually in the form of an accident.

**Explaining Acquired Occupational Disability**

(Summer 2005)

The “onset” of acquired occupational disability may appear to result from a single traumatic event, but absence from work following trauma often involves unrelated factors that must be taken into account when trying to understand lost time following trauma, or a so-called “explanatory event.” The occupational disability algorithm includes the worker’s general health, work environment, employer-employee relationship, self-esteem, and general psychological strength, among other variables.

**Application of the FCE by Vocational Experts (VEs)**

(Fall/Winter 2007)

In vocational disability evaluation, residual functional capacity (RFC) bridges the gap between the existence of medical impairment and the assessment of physical strength that predicts occupational disability and residual employability. RFC is best assessed with a formal functional capacity evaluation (FCE). Standardized FCEs hold significant promise in providing accurate and reliable data regarding a person’s physical capacities for work. When compared to the inevitable conjecture of a healthcare professional simply completing a checklist of the patient’s estimated capacities to sit, stand, walk, lift, etc., the FCE represents a substantial movement toward establishing empirical data for RFC.

## **The Function of Testing in Vocational Evaluation**

(Winter 2003)

A vocational disability assessment based on a record review analysis and an interview employing a transferability of skills analysis alone has the potential to miscalculate a person's residual employability and earning power. An evaluation that includes the use of standardized, objective vocational testing of the examinee's academic abilities, vocational aptitudes, work temperament, and interests – at the very least – is key for the vocational evaluator to more accurately assess employability and earning power.

## **Effort Testing in Forensic Vocational Assessment**

By: Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M., and Amanda Sizemore, M.S., I.P.E.C.

(Spring 2019)

Forensic vocational disability evaluation secondary to a person's diagnosis of mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) can be a challenge since the condition can be elusive even though most patients with mTBI recover within 3 months. Some individuals can experience, or at least claim to experience, continuing symptoms that may interfere with their employability. When assessing the occupational capacities of a person diagnosed with mTBI, comprehensive vocational evaluation with a battery of standardized tests, including measures of effort or test-taking validity, is a key component.

## **Ecological Validity in Vocational Assessments**

By: Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M.

(Spring 2012)

Through the professional reflections of Dr. Stephen Berk, the late esteemed neuropsychologist, ecological validity became an important concept to CEC Associates. Ecological validity is associated with "generalizability," that is, the extent to which the findings from a study realistically mimic (or extend to) activities and behaviors in life. The control created by the laboratory setting can potentially alter ecological validity. In the personnel and vocational rehabilitation assessment processes, ecological validity requires an understanding of the relationship among tests, inventories, and other available instruments employed in a laboratory setting, as well as the capacity of those procedures to predict behaviors or generalize to the workplace.

## **Occupational Inertia and Career Change**

By: Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M., with contributions from Brooke Palma, B.A.

(Spring 2016)

A transition-to-work strategy, with or without job accommodation, is the necessary force that needs to be implemented to keep otherwise impaired employees productive. Simply said, employers must be the rehabilitation force in occupational inertia or the cessation of work, as medicine alone is not sufficient. The notion of occupational inertia has a broader application to the world of work than absenteeism following employee injury and/or illness.

In career inertia, only an effort to “self-actualize,” to borrow [Abraham Maslow’s](#) concept, will prevent employees from becoming and remaining stuck. In this article, we present what can be done to facilitate individual development in those who become “inert” at work and in their careers.

### **Resilience as a Critical Factor in the Workplace**

By: Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M., and Fred Heffner, Ed.D.  
(Summer 2010)

A commonly accepted definition in psychology of “resilience” is “the positive capacity of people to withstand stressors and to cope with trauma.” Stress and trauma are especially critical in the workplace, where employees become weighed down by pressures of the job or by various life situations in general.

Any failure to respond to stress or tragedy with resilience can affect otherwise well-adjusted, productive workers. Although failing to adopt resilient means of coping and adapting can be contagious in the workplace, the courage found in developing and maintaining resilience can also be a contagion.

### **Finding Work-Life Balance Through Mindfulness: Keeping Our Millennial Employees Productive and Happy**

By: Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., and Fred Heffner, Ed.D.  
(Fall 2014)

We must recognize that work-life balance involves the integration of achievement and enjoyment; they are not mutually exclusive. We believe that achievement is the accumulation and application of knowledge. Enjoyment is the satisfaction derived from using that knowledge to benefit not simply one’s self, but others as well. In the integration process, we also advocate that in our affluent society, one adopt the philosophy, “Gratitude is the best attitude.” In this regard, the practice of mindfulness can be helpful.