



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

The DSP Chronicles



Dave Bergeron, left, and Chris enjoy the newspaper.

Dave Bergeron:

ECCO's Kommes Says He Has A Certain "Something" In His Role As DSP/Supervisor

By TOM KING

Dave Bergeron entered the offices of ECCO Inc. for the first time on Nov. 10, 2008, for an interview with Vicki Kommes, the agency's Staff Development Coordinator. He was an out-of-work blue-collar worker, a victim of these hard economic times, and he needed a job to support his wife and three kids.

"I remember that interview so clearly," Kommes says. "I've been at ECCO for 26 years and started as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and I've been the Staff Development Coordinator for 10 years, so I have what I think are great instincts about people who apply," she explained. "I do the initial screening, show them a video about the real job and work and ask them some real basic questions and watch their reactions."

What did Kommes see and feel about this 39-year-old man that she had just met for the first time? "I knew this guy was a keeper, although he had no background for this work at all. And I was right. His skills blew us away. He's quiet and unassuming, calm and collected and he's very thoughtful and reflective." After more interviews, including one with two of the men he now supports, he was hired and began work on Nov. 24th.

Her instincts were spot on. Today, Dave Bergeron supports three men in a community-based apartment setting and supervises five other DSPs who help support them. He also wrote a Mission Statement for the men he supports. Kommes says: "Even with no experience or knowledge in the field, Dave has that certain something. Within his first few weeks here he wrote a mission and goals statement for his area." When she asked how he developed this, he said: "The College of Direct Support lessons got me to thinking, and the rest I did on my own."

Kommes and ECCO's executive director, Norm Jerke, were so impressed with the document that they have incorporated his missions and goals into the agency's main Mission Statement.

ECCO is in Madison, S.D., a town of about 6,000 people tucked into the state's southeast corner, 40 miles from Sioux Falls. Bergeron worked for a local manufacturing company that is Madison's largest employer, which had laid off 200 workers while he was in Arizona helping a friend for several weeks.

When he returned in the fall of 2008, his job had disappeared along with 200 others.

Which begs the question: How did he find out about ECCO? "Someone at our church told me about ECCO and said they thought I'd be a perfect fit, that it was about time I had a job that I was born to do," he said. "As it has turned out, they were right."

On that first day of work, Kommes says, Bergeron began taking lessons in the College of Direct Support (CDS). They worked out a 30-day orientation schedule for him that included study time for the CDS and she got him started on the CPR/First Aid and Medication lessons. Since then he has completed a vast majority of the CDS curriculum as well as all courses in the College of Frontline Supervision and Management (CFSM). "The luxury of the CDS is that the material is so good and easy to work with that you can take someone like Dave and give them the basic training to get them going in the right direction," Kommes said. "A whole new world has been opened up for him."

Bergeron said the CDS courses challenged him and led him to write his mission statement for the men he supports. "I really enjoy the CDS classes and courses. I look forward to them because I am learning so much from them about this field. It's all new to me and one thing I really like and appreciate about it is being able to learn at my own pace. If I need to go back and review the course or lessons, or see a video again, I can."

And what does he say about this new career path? "This is a calling, not a job, and everyone here comes to work for the right reasons. Everyone here truly enjoys their work. Me included," Bergeron said.

What has he learned from the men he supports and about being a rookie DSP? "They are teaching me to simply enjoy life as it comes, to laugh when you feel like laughing and to get excited when you need to be excited," he said. "The biggest thing they've taught me is to realize and respect that everybody is a person. I had never worked with or known anyone personally who had a disability. I was probably like a lot of people - I never had the desire to get to know any of them. Now, I have found a home, a career, something I really love. I am supporting my friends."

At A Glance

Name: Dave Bergeron

Age: 39

Home: Madison, S.D.

Position: Direct Support Professional /Supervisor

Where: ECCO, Inc.

Number of People He Supports: 3, and supervises 5 DSP's

Key Quote: "I had never worked with or known anyone personally who had a disability. I was probably like a lot of people - I never had the desire to get to know any of them. Now, I have found a home, a career, something I really love. I am supporting my friends."

How a Colleague Describes Him:

"I knew this guy was a keeper, although he had no background for this work at all. And I was right. His skills blew us away."

— Vicki Kommes

If you would like to nominate a Direct Support Professional to be profiled in *The DSP Chronicles*, please send your correspondence to Tom King at tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com. Please briefly explain why you are nominating this person to be featured.

The Job, The People & More from Dave Bergeron

How did you find ECCO? How did you hear about it? “As I was looking for a job, someone at my church who works at ECCO suggested that I might enjoy working there. At the time, I had no idea what ECCO was about. I went to the first interview not knowing what to expect. After it was explained to me what ECCO was about, I felt it was something I wanted to be a part of.”

What did you do in your previous job? “I pretty much worked blue-collar jobs my whole life. I started out operating and working on equipment and driving a truck. I’ve worked security for K-Mart and Wal-Mart. I’ve done electrical work, framed houses, welded, and several other part-time jobs in between. I’ve lived in six different states and since leaving my second job, which I had for 12 years, I have not found a job that was worth committing to – until now.”

Do you have any family members or friends with a developmental disability? “No. Prior to working at ECCO, I’ve never known anyone on a personal level who has a disability.”

Why do you enjoy the work so much and the people at ECCO? “We are helping people. Everyone here is compassionate and caring and they seem to enjoy coming to work. It is nice being a part of an organization that is more interested in how much they can give rather than how much they can get. I really like getting to know everyone who is at ECCO. The employees are great people and have made me feel very welcome. They all deserve recognition for doing a great job of helping the people we support live happy and meaningful lives. I have learned something from everyone I have talked to. I’m not sure, but smiles and laughter must be a job requirement around here.”

Do you plan to stick with this? “Yes. This is the type of service that I can see being a part of for the rest of my life.”

What types of supports do you provide and for how many people, and in what setting? “In my area, we work with three great guys. One lives in his own apartment, and the other two are roommates in an apartment in the same complex. We help them with transportation when needed, assist with meal preparation,

help them keep track of finances, and help with shopping and cleaning. They are very good at doing everything they can on their own and are willing to learn more.”

How did you benefit from the CDS curriculum? “CDS helped me to understand people with disabilities in a new way. It was very enlightening, considering I had absolutely no experience in this area. I was able to see the vision of what Direct Support Professionals are trying to achieve. It took many of my beliefs and philosophies about life and focused them

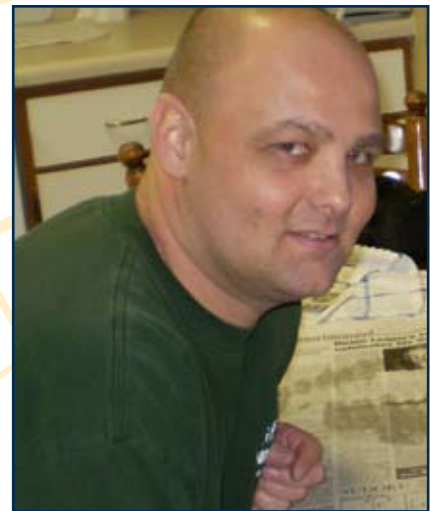
on one specific group of people in our society. I felt very prepared to do what was asked of me after going through CDS.”

Tell us about the people you support. “Chris is an outgoing, fun-loving guy. He likes music and is somewhat of an Elvis impersonator. He wants to be at every event that is going on in the community and will talk to anyone who will listen. Don is a little more introverted, but once you get to know him he will talk your ear off. He is proud of his Native American heritage and likes to attend Pow-Wows with

his family. Leroy is a gentle man who seems to be known by everyone in town. He is very well organized and sticks to his schedule which includes working at a recycling center. He does not speak much, but uses his communication book well. All three of them get along great together and frequently eat out and go to movies together. They like playing basketball, being outside, and fishing, which is perfect because those are three of my favorite things. They are very easy to work with and they get along well with all of the staff.”

What is the hardest part of the job? “Finding time to just hang out with the guys. Sometimes paperwork, documentation, meetings, and daily chores get in the way. Sometimes, it is hard to get everything done in time to just sit with the guys and get to know them better. It is nice to have that time to just goof off with them.”

What is the most satisfying part of the job? “Seeing the guys laugh and laughing with them. Watching their reactions when they interact with others. Talking to them and seeing life from a new perspective. Learning and growing with them.”



The DSP Chronicles

This publication introduces you to Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) from around the country and chronicles their stories as they go about the important work of direct support. They discuss the job: the challenges, the success stories, how they work with those they support and the unique ways they get the job done. DSPs are America’s quiet and unknown heroes. Their dedicated and hard work improves the lives of those they support. Many work more than one job. They are devoted to the DSP profession and to those they serve.

The DSP Chronicles are archived on our website at www.collegeofdirectsupport.com and also on the website of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals – www.nadsp.org. If you would like to nominate a DSP to be featured, please contact Tom King at 1-877-353-2767 (toll free) or email him at tking@collegeofdirectsupport.com.

CDS Partners
RESEARCH AND TRAINING
CENTER ON COMMUNITY LIVING
The College of Education
& Human Development
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA


INFORMATION

111 Center Park Drive, Suite 175 | Knoxville, TN 37922 | tel :: 877-353-2767 (toll-free) | fax :: 865-531-4708
www.collegeofdirectsupport.com