

Talking to Employers: *The Fear Factor*

Lesson Summary

Job developers often complain that as soon as they mention “disability” the employer loses interest in hiring. Could the job developer have handled the situation better? Why is “disability” such a loaded term? This lesson focuses on building a deeper understanding of how employers feel about people with disabilities, how to recognize concerns, and how to ease the employer through his/her concerns.

Learning Objectives

- Build an understanding of the fears and concerns held by community business people when approached by a job placement person
- Build skills in recognizing employer fears
- Teach a simple method for surfacing and reducing fears

The Ideal Participant

- Currently makes job development calls on the local business community
- Works with individuals with significant barriers to employment
- Wants to establish good working relationships with employers

Prep activities and time required

- 10-20 minutes, including reading the lesson, making copies of handout exercises, and organizing.

Lesson length, other requirements

- 30- 40 minutes. Can be adjusted by eliminating or modifying exercises
- Does not require whiteboard, overhead projector, PowerPoint. All handouts are ready to use, or can be modified by user to meet specific needs.



The Fear Factor: In the employer's shoes



Introduction

Imagine for the moment that you run a small business. The economy is tough, and some days it feels like you'll never survive through the year. At the same time, hiring good help is not easy despite the high unemployment rate. You'd like to get a good worker to take some of the load off of your employees, but this doesn't seem like a good time to take chances.

Along comes the job developer, hoping to convince you (the employer) to hire an individual with a disability. Assume that you don't know a lot about people with significant disabilities. What concerns and/or stereotypes might you have about working with the job developer and job seekers with disabilities?

As a business person, what do you think about the following questions regarding hiring a worker with a disability? Circle the number that best reflects how you feel.

	I am <u>not</u> worried about this issue			This issue <u>concerns</u> me a lot!	
	1	2	3	4	5
Can a worker with a significant disability be really productive?					
Will supervising a disabled worker take a lot of extra time and effort?					
Will the worker scare away my customers or frighten my staff?					
Will accommodating a disabled worker be difficult and/or costly?					
What if he/she doesn't work out? Can I easily fire or get rid of him/her?					
What if the worker turns out to be odd, bizarre, or even dangerous?					
Will the job seeker actually have any relevant work experience?					
Aren't <i>they</i> happier when <i>they</i> work with <i>their own kind</i> ?					

Are there other reasons why you might be hesitant to hire?

Getting Past the *Veil of Disability*

"The starting point of vocational services is moving . . . toward discovery - discovery of who people really are behind the veil of disability and of what they want and what they might be able to contribute . . ."
-- Callahan & Garner

For most of the general public, including a lot of employers, meeting a job seeker who has a significant and obvious disability can be disconcerting. Often the disability overshadows every other characteristic of the job seeker. For an employer who is hiring to get work done, to reduce his headaches, and to make money, the job seeker with a significant disability probably looks too far off the mark.

If the employer appears to be “naïve” about the virtues of hiring someone with a disability, how will you handle the following?

- Keep the conversation going once you figure out that the employer isn't ready to consider hiring through you . . . yet?
- Assuming that the employer is a good person, what are your options for bringing the employer along to begin seeing the positive aspects of employing qualified job seekers who happen to have a disability?
- Can you expect to change employer attitudes in a single visit? Why or why not?

What are the ways to help the employer:

- Begin to see a particular job seeker as having vocational competencies?
- See the positive aspects of the job seeker's personality (assuming that it won't be obvious in a regular job interview)?
- Understand some of the advantages (and trade-offs) of hiring the job seeker?

Fear of Working with Social Service Agencies

Most of us buy from stores we can trust. Hiring is a lot like that, people like to hire someone they know, or hire from a source they trust.

Do some employers have misconceptions or make incorrect assumptions about Social Service Agencies? Do they see human service programs as having very different goals and/or cultures than the business community? Let's explore some of those assumptions.

Please form pairs or small groups to discuss the following issues.

- *What concerns might these employers have about the professionalism of social service job developers and/or job coaches?*
 - *What are three things we can do to reduce this concern for those employers?*

- *In what ways could incorrect assumptions by employers about the goals and culture of social service agencies represent a barrier to hiring?*
 - *Again, what could we do to address these misconceptions, or, are they true?*

- *What might employers assume about promises made by social service agencies? Do they have concerns about our follow through? Is trust an issue in the hiring process?*
 - *How is trust established? How long should it take?*
 - *Suggest at least three approaches that would build the employer's trust in your services and professionalism.*

- *If some people in the business community make incorrect assumptions about us, do we do the same thing about them? If so, in what ways?*
 - *What are some of the assumptions we make about the business community that may well be incorrect?*
 - *How do we do a better job of understanding their goals, concerns, culture, and problems?*

The link between *fear* and *risk*

Careful Risk Management = Staying in business

Fear and *risk* are closely connected. For a smart business manager, running a successful business is risky enough without taking stupid or unnecessary risks. What we social service people might interpret as fearful behavior may instead be *careful risk management*.

The perception that hiring any new employee has some risk makes sense, and this can work for, or against us. Employers will tend to make decisions that seem to them to be the least risky. We need to help them see why hiring through us represents the least risky approach.

Employer Concern

Hire an unproductive worker

Hire someone who is unqualified for the requirements of the job

Hire someone who will leave or need to be terminated soon (turnover is expensive)

Hire someone who sounds good in the interview but actually has some awful characteristics

Hire a worker who will undermine morale or create chaos

Hire someone who cannot communicate with anyone

Hire someone who starts off great but quickly becomes lazy or cuts corners

If we can address these types of concerns, would an employer be interested? How would hiring through our agency sound now, as compared to hiring from applicants who come in off the street?

Building business relationships: calming the fears



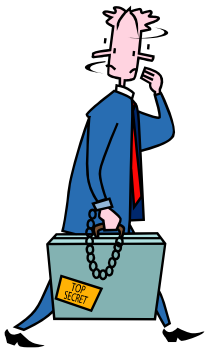
Sandy had several ideas of what it would be like to work with a job developer.

People change . . . but rarely as quickly as we think they should or wish they would . . .

The most effective way of overcoming an employer's fears or concerns about hiring workers with a disability – other than working around the individual – is to build a business relationship. The trick is to keep things moving along and to be successful.

Relationships grow from positive contacts over time. We're talking about basic human nature here, so you already understand what a "relationship" feels like. A business relationship simply has a context: this is someone with whom you'd be willing to open up business opportunities.

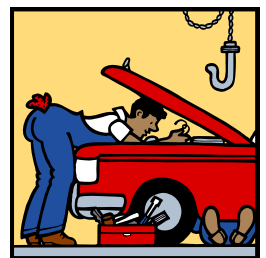
First meeting strategies



- Ask questions and be interested in this business. Try to be well enough informed about the business to demonstrate that you've done some homework on it. Try not to dominate the conversation, limiting your talking to less than half of the time.
- Until you know this business better, you are not in a position to make an effective sales presentation. Work on listening a lot.
- Try to get a sense of where this employer is on the scale of being open or closed to employing someone with a disability. Use this to determine where to go next. If the employer is very hesitant about hiring, don't go there until he/she is ready.
- Consider approaching the first meeting by asking to analyze a specific position within the business. Job analysis questions are rarely threatening, demonstrate your interest in the business, and give you a lot of information about the business.

Subsequent visits/meetings

- If the business has one (or more) positions that may match the needs of one of the job seekers you are supporting, build the relationship and learn more about the business through any of the following:
 - Asking for a tour
 - Asking to watch the work in one department



Building business relationships, continued

- Asking for an information interview, using the opportunity to learn about the work, the industry, what makes a good applicant, etc.
- Setting up a brief job tryout to see if the job seeker can perform the work, explaining that the information will be helpful in the job seeker's job search.
- Setting up a more extensive assessment, lasting a week or two, that involves the job seeker coming to the business and performing some sort of work

Keeping things friendly

- Remember that people like to do business with someone that they know, respect, and can trust
- Each visit offers the opportunity to build rapport with the employer and/or others in the business
- Low-risk interactions (tours, information interviews, etc) with job seekers who have disabilities can help employers see the person rather than the stereotype they may have imagined

Relationships are two-way streets

- Rather than always asking for favors from the employer, consider offering your expertise in the form of:
 - Short presentations to the employer's staff on serving customers with disabilities
 - Job analysis descriptions of positions, typed up
 - Dealing with diversity, ADA compliance, accommodations
 - Marketing to people with disabilities, e.g., attracting customers with disabilities to a hotel or restaurant. Big group with money to spend.
 - Ideas for supporting an employee who has experienced a disability, or the bunch of employees who are getting older and need accommodations
- Employers can be a good source of advice regarding the business world. Consider asking for the employer's advice regarding your leave-behinds, or a brochure.

Perry's Home Furnishings: *an exercise*

In this exercise, work in pairs or small groups to devise a strategy to help the employer become more open to working with you and to consider hiring one of your job seekers.

Perry's Home Furnishings is a long established, locally owned store serving the community for more than forty years. It sells upscale furniture and furnishings and has prospered as a result of great service, fair prices, good selection, and careful attention to details. The store employs retail staff, several office clerks, a team that provides furniture moving services and customer deliveries, and a small furniture refinishing team.



You've been working with Andy, an individual who is very interested in working in a store like Perry's, and may have skills and interests that match the tasks performed by the team that moves and delivers the furniture. Andy is willing to work hard, and yes, he has a disability that would be apparent in an interview. He has a pleasant personality. Assume that you believe he may be a good candidate for a position with the delivery team, based on the superficial level of knowledge you have about the store and the work performed there.

Your first visit to Perry's involved a twenty-minute meeting with Pricilla McBrindle, a rather proper store manager who clearly runs the show with a great deal of attention to detail and decorum. While your questions focused on learning as much as you could from Ms. McBrindle, it became clear that she just couldn't imagine someone with a disability being able to handle the work at Perry's. She wasn't hostile, just sure of her stereotypes. Luckily, you managed to finish the interview on a positive note, didn't press for access to a job, and left feeling like Ms. McBrindle would be willing to talk to you again.

Now you are faced with devising a strategy to help Ms. McBrindle want to look at job candidates who have a disability. While you could just cross the store off as a lost cause, there aren't all that many furniture stores, and besides, Perry's has the reputation for being a good place to work. What are you going to do?

30 Minute Lesson: Feedback Form

Please let us know what you think of this product, so we can continue to better meet your training needs. Fax or mail to Laurie Ford at 6912 220th SW, Suite 105, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043; Fax (425) 774-9303

Topic of Lesson _____

- Facilitator Version
- Participant Version
- Non-Facilitated Group Version
- Self-Study Version

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the relevancy of these materials to your job _____
(1 is worst, 5 is best)
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the positive impact of these materials on your professional skills, knowledge, and abilities (1 is worst, 5 is best) _____
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the positive impact of these materials on your organization (1 is worst, 5 is best) _____
4. What was the most useful part of the lesson?
5. What was the least useful part of the lesson?
6. How could this lesson be improved?
7. What additional topics would you like to see in a 30 Minute Lesson?