

Job Development and Job Retention for Persons in Recovery.

Special Interview Issue

Recovery & Rehabilitation Newsletter

Fall, 2013

Revised July, 2015

Vol. 13 Number 3

Employment Specialists and Rehabilitation Counselors who rely heavily on the good will and sympathy of employers to help the people they work with get a job, are missing the point.

The task of matching the right employer with the right job seeker is similar to the position of a matchmaker. Would a matchmaker convince someone to select a marriage partner on the basis of "compassion"? The important message is that hiring persons in mental health recovery is just good business.

While there are many programs designed to match employers with employees, it is the staff who often need training and support with the daunting task of job development and job matching. Joan Rapp, Training Associate at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and President of the Massachusetts Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, has led the design and delivery of a blended distance learning course entitled: *Job Development and Job Retention for Persons in Recovery*.

This course is tailored specifically for Employment Specialists and professionals whose jobs involve helping people to acquire and retain meaningful employment. It has run continuously since September, 2013 and is currently in the tenth class.

Rationale for the Course:

The purposes for developing this course, which is a blend of online components and personal interaction, include the following facts:

1. The high unemployment rate among persons in mental health recovery results in persons in recovery being part of a culture of unemployment (NAMI, 2014).
2. There is a low rate of retention in jobs (Kinoshita, 2013).
3. A strong job development component in a vocational program increases employment outcomes by about 500 percent (Cook, 2007).
4. By offering the course as a distance learning option, it can reach more Employment Specialists, as well as include those who do not typically have access to employment related training.

Course Overview:

The course, Job Development and Job Retention, is taught online through slides, videos, audio interviews and text. It also provides an additional 160 links for finding related information. Web meetings are held after each module and at the end of the course. There are five modules:

1. Engaging the Job Seeker
2. Looking through a Cultural /Diversity Lens
3. Making your Pitch: A Win-Win Situation
4. Job Development & Marketing to Employers
5. Retention: Strategies for Employer Collaboration & Worker Support.

Engaging the Job Seeker:

The course begins with a discussion about working with potential job seekers at their own stage of vocational decision making and in places that are convenient and comfortable for them. The three primary aspects of this initial "getting-to-know-you" stage of the relationship-building are described as:

1. Initiating the relationship (informal and formal)
2. Supporting the partnership
3. Managing challenges to the partnership.

The partnership-building process includes:

- sharing information
- helping with motivation
- helping with inspiration
- providing feedback to the job seeker

Through a Cultural Lens

Employment Specialists are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural heritage, as well as that of each job seeker, as it relates to employment. Each culture places a different value on employment, and expectations may differ. There is a wide range of beliefs, motivations, values and priorities regarding work. For example, cultures that stress individual achievement will be more concerned with obtaining a job that is best for the individual (e.g. might accommodate the person's hobbies or sleeping habits). Cultures that focus on family or community, look at how work can best support the family's needs or the needs of a group. For example, the job seeker might have to consider resources for day care, or might have to determine how helping elderly family members fits into his/her work schedule. Three specific "groups" are highlighted in this module: veterans; rural populations and transition age youth (age 16-25).

Employment for youth is an important investment. Job matching becomes especially challenging when a young person is on benefits. "Once they have that check it's very hard to give it up," Ms. Rapp observes. People with mental health conditions experience a culture that says: "Don't work; Don't lose your benefits." Unfortunately, the message is flawed as people often get incorrect information about the impact of work on benefits. In most cases, work results in overall greater income and there are several ways to maintain or purchase low cost health benefits, two areas of common concern.

Job Development

At times those trying to "place" persons with disabilities in jobs have played the "disability card" with prospective employers. They might begin by saying that they work with individuals with disabilities, and may imply that it is the employer's civic duty to employ the disabled. The business and industry communities, however, are typically more interested in whether or not someone can work, will show up when expected and can perform the required tasks without problems.

The course details three stages of job finding (or the “three P’s”) which are

- **The Pitch:** having conversations with community contacts, not necessarily employers
- **The Presentation:** listening to the employer and then summarizing services offered
- **The Proposal:** discussing a profile of the individual with an employer

Learners are taught to make a very short pitch to members within the broader community, using a short story. The job seeker is also expected to deliver “The Pitch” within his/her own networks.

In the “Presentation,” the Employment Specialist practices listening skills and attempts to understand the needs of the employer. Once this has been done, they present information about the services that are provided, as well as benefits of the partnership, linked to the identified needs.

The “Proposal” occurs when it is appropriate to match a job seeker with a particular job or an employment setting, giving the employer the opportunity to learn about the individual’s specific skills and interests.

Retention

After the job is secured, Employment Specialists need to consider many other factors to support retention such as stress management, problem-solving and accepting supervision. In addition to finding the right match, skills and supports are the two most important elements of keeping a job.

Explicit skills in employment are those defined by the employer, such as duties in the job description or other direct communications about job tasks. Implicit skills (or “soft skills”) may not be mentioned by the employer, but they are also critical to job retention.

Implicit skills, such as the ability to communicate with others and to fit in socially, may be the most problematic area for persons with psychiatric disabilities. Implicit skills are not required by the employer, but are vital to the employee’s success and satisfaction in the workplace.

In addition to skills, supports are equally important for retention. Supports can be given by an Employment Specialist, a Job Coach, or a Rehabilitation Counselor either on or off the job site, depending on what is needed. These professionals usually belong to employment support programs. Finally, job accommodations, such as a flexible

schedule, more regular supervision, job duty check lists and others can be very helpful in maximizing job performance and minimizing stress. Success also depends on the amount of support one receives from family, friends and clinicians.

The various support systems can help the individual to identify job requirements, explore strengths and develop skills. It is also important that the supporters/treatment providers give consistent messages to the individual about work goals.

Collaboration

When clinicians, case managers or family members disagree about the person's ability to work or the type of employment, the situation may cause unwanted stress for the individual. Post employment supports are important and work best if professionals and family are united.

One key to successful job development is participation in networks, including networks of providers of mental health and rehabilitation services, as well as employers. In collaborative situations, the Employment Specialists view one another as potential resources for ideas, tips and leads rather than as competitors. Examples of collaborative efforts include co-hosting job fairs and sharing employer information for job openings or informational interviews.

The blended course entitled *Job Development and Job Retention for Persons in Recovery* continues to be available to Employment Specialists and Rehabilitation Counselors who are working to help people to get and keep jobs of their choice.

References

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The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Independent Living Research and the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration through grant #90RT5029-01-00