

Ask Me Anything about Employment webinar with Debbie Nicholellis

David: All right, well, good afternoon everyone and welcome to Ask Me Anything about Employment with Debbie Nicolellis. My Name is David Blair and I'll be your moderator today.

This webinar is not a presentation but an interactive question and answer period. For the next hour, Debbie will take any questions you have related to engaging people with psychiatric disabilities, employment and vocational recovery. Debbie has 30 years of experience with training, consultation, program management and service provision in supporting employment, career exploration, psychiatric rehabilitation, and recovery-oriented systems and services. Debbie currently serves as project director and lead trainer for the Advanced Practitioner and Peer Support Training Project and engaging people with psychiatric disabilities in employment and vocational recovery at the Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, which teaches vocational rehabilitation, mental health and peer support personnel about concepts and skills relating to engaging adults in meaningful and vocational activities. Debbie has authored curricula, journal and newsletter articles, and a book chapter on Psychiatric Rehabilitation and related topic areas, and is an experienced trainer and speaker. It's quite a mouthful.

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During registration for the event you were given the opportunity to submit any questions in advance. Over the course of the webinar, we will alternate between questions submitted in advance and the ones you have today. You may ask questions now by typing them into the chatbox or letting me know you would like to ask it by phone. Well, welcome to the webinar, and I hope you enjoy the next hour. And welcome, Debbie, I know you had a little introduction you want to share with us, so why don't you go ahead and do that now?

Debbie: Sure. Well, I'll just add to that very kind introduction that you gave, David, that the webinar that we have today is in essence based on a course that we are offering right now as a part of our grant from SAMHSA and NIDILRR to improve outcomes, employment outcomes for people with psychiatric disabilities. And so this presentation today, or this Asked Me Anything, is really intended to be focused on how to engage people with psychiatric disabilities in employment and vocational recovery. So the focus, maybe mostly on engagement strategies. How do we engage

people in employment? What does vocational recovery look like? How do we support people around their motivation for employment and vocational recovery? How do we help people make choices about employment so that they can better engage in the employment support process, employment itself, vocational recovery for the long-term. So that's what I'll add, and I'm really looking forward to talking with you all. Thank you for being here today.

David: Thank you for spending your time with us, and me and the questions I'll have and the questions everyone has brought with us. We're going to start with something really broad and poignant. **What is vocational recovery, and in general, how do I engage people in it?**

Debbie: Right. It's a big question, isn't it? So what is vocational recovery? Vocational recovery is a newer term. A lot of people say, "No, I haven't really heard that term before." But when we talk about vocational recovery, we're not just talking about getting a job. A lot of the focus on employment services is very justifiably getting people into a job. So when we talk about vocational recovery, we're talking about more than the job or a job. We're really talking about a trajectory, a path, a lifetime of vocational experiences and a lifetime of kind of honing who I am as a worker and as a productive citizen in the world. So vocational recovery probably has a variety of definitions, and we all might come up with our own, but I really think about it as, a lifetime of, exploring and identifying and living out a life of a meaningful vocational activity.

So with that pretty broad definition, I think you asked David, how do we engage people in that? And I think one of the first things that we need to recognize is that people with psychiatric disabilities, people in mental health recovery, people with, psychiatric or mental health challenges can and do work, that that possibility for a meaningful vocational life is real, is possible. And that all people can have a life of meaningful vocational activity or experience. So there are many pieces to involving people in that. But I think it really starts with believing that people can. And that will even believing that people with some serious challenges and people who really struggle with the idea of work or struggle with symptoms and struggle with other life challenges can work. That we're probably not, as a field, talking about employment enough. And, that's why I'm so delighted to see so many people with us today because we're probably not talking about employment enough in our services, in our support, in our peer support, in our mental health treatment support. And hopefully in our employment and vocational rehabilitation supports. But that idea that we really, we start with a belief that people can work and that it is possible to engage people in a lifetime of meaningful work.

David: Great. You know, you mentioned your course, Amy in the room, just asked a question kind of tangentially related to the chance to talk about that too, but she asks, "What courses or workshops you recommend for supported employment specialists to take to increase our success with clients for vocational recovery?"

Debbie: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's a great question and I'm sure there are many. So I can't speak to them all, but I can speak to some of the ones that I know about that we offer. I'll point people to some of the ones that we have going on now. If anybody is interested in learning more about engaging people in employment, and I know, and I'm guessing people can hear me right now. David, can you hear me?

David: There we go. I'm trying to fix a feedback we're getting.

Debbie: Sure. Sure. Yeah. Well, thank you for working on that. Thank goodness for David, is all I'm saying! So, if you're interested in this particular course, the APPS course, APPS stands for Advanced Practitioner and Peer Support skills in engaging people with psychiatric disabilities in employment and vocational recovery. We are offering that course on a somewhat limited basis right now through the grant that we have for free, and so if you're interested in that course, email me. For this year we'll be able to offer it for free, so it'd be happy to involve you in that course if you're interested in it. Our website, which David can post, in a little bit in the chat box (<https://cpr.bu.edu/store>) also offers some courses in psychiatric rehabilitation, in engaging people in different ways. The other piece that we have are some products, and I don't mean this to be a sales pitch, but I'm thinking about courses that I know of offhand that can support you in your work, in engaging people in employment.

There are some products that we offer that are relatively cheap that are downloads, that may be helpful. The Self-Directed Psychiatric Rehabilitation tools can be helpful. There's some pieces in there that are really meant to do by the person they're meant to be like a workbook for the person, but that can be done with a support person, so a supported employment specialist or a peer specialist, a family member can do it with the person and really think through, what are, where am I in my motivation for, I'm thinking about work, and how do I make a choice about what I want to do in the whole world of work out there. How do I know what direction to go in? And how do I figure out what skills and support so I'm going to need? And things like that.

So there are some products that we have on our site, and I'll ask David to post the site, and we can also post my email address. I'll do that now, debbien@bu.edu, is my email address. You can email me if you're interested in the course that we're offering. I think there's a couple of people, who are attending today who just took that course. So we're happy to have you. And there are certainly other classes out

there to support you, but those are some that I know that we offer, and we try to keep things really low cost or free, if we can offer them for free. Thank you David. I can see that our website on there. Great.

David: Yep. And I'm pretty sure you mentioned that your course is free of charge.

Debbie: It is right now. It's free. That's right.

David: Okay. Carla asks, "What is the first step, and I'm guessing this is engaging people around employment, so it's the first step?"

Debbie: In engaging people. Well, I would say the first step beyond believing that people can, is to develop a real partnership with people. So one of the first things that I know we teach in our class is how do we develop a real partnership with people. Part of that is really thinking through and learning with the person about what they're interested in, who they are as a person, and really honing our listening skills and our partnership skills to be able to pay attention to what the person brings into the process. A lot of times, we have a process in mind and we bring our paper or a book or workbook, and we have a process that we intend to lead the person through, but that process can be hollow if the person is not fully in there with us. So the very first thing that I would recommend doing is developing a real partnership with the person no matter what your role is. And sometimes that's hard to do. You only have a certain amount of time with people, but it's really key to involve the person as fully as you can in the process, but they are taking ownership in the process and that you're not pulling the person along. I hear that even in our last class, people were saying, "I think if I find that I'm doing all of the work that things aren't going so well." And I would say, "That's true." We want to engage people in ways that they want to be engaged in the vocational process and involve them as full partners in this process. So, that can mean really finding out what parts of the process they already know about? What have they done? What are they good at? What are they not good at? What do they not know? And varying the process that we involve people in depending on where they are, which sounds pretty simple and organic, but it takes a lot of work, as you know. So if you've been doing this where you know that that can take some time, that can take some effort, really on both sides. But what that can do is to have a participant who's rearing to go, who is interested in and who knows about the process enough to be able to participate in it. And I'll add that in order for the person to know about the process, we have to also introduce people to the process, teach people about it, teach people about what's coming up, teach people how to participate in the process. So engaging people in employment and vocational recovery is in part sharing the process with the people that we serve so that they can participate in it and so that they can not only participate in at once, but have this as their own process.

I was talking with a friend of mine, who has been through a process like this, about what was the process like for her back in the day, and she's now a researcher and is working very successfully. And she has said, "It's really learning how to determine for myself how to assess each experience. whether it was successful or not." And she'll be the first person to say, "I was fired. I was let go. I didn't always want the experience that I had, so I'd leave." There were a lot of experiences that she had. She said, "I learned how to access each of those experiences for myself and start to determine what worked for me, what doesn't, what do I like, what do I not like so that I could make better and better employment decisions." And now she's been a worker for a long time, highly successful, and really looks back on that process of being involved in a really key way as the basis of her success now, or at least one of the bases of that success.

David: Okay. During your answer there, you've mentioned a number of times about varying the process, and so what I'm gathering is you have a plan, but if what you're presented with doesn't fit that mold, that step-by-step thing, and sometimes you just have to abandon the plan and respond to that moment. Is that the right idea or am I off base?

Debbie: Absolutely. Absolutely. People come into the process in different places. Not everybody comes in not having had employment experience or not knowing anything about the vocational support process. Some people have a lot of experience with that. Some people were very successful workers at some point and now want very specific parts. My best example of this for myself, and anybody who's in the course probably heard this example, is a guy who came into our services at some point, and he said, "I'd like to learn how to get a job." And I said, "Well, great. we have all of these services that we can offer you. We can help you determine your readiness for a job, and we can help you choose the kind of job you want. We can help you keep the job." And he'd say, "Well, I'm really just looking to learn how to get a job." And I was like, "Okay, so you really know what you want, and we can help you choose which job that is." And I had a process in mind that I was going to offer this guy, and he must have said about seven times. "I really just want to learn how to get a job." And when I finally listened and said, "So you want to learn how to get a job." I was finally able to not only, knock on myself and say, "Listen, Debbie, listen." But really tailor that process and teach him and learn myself in some ways, all of the different skills that he needed in order to get a job. And then when we did that and really tailored that process to suit exactly where he was, he went out and got a job. And when he told me about it, I said, "Oh, that's great. If you want help keeping the job, we can help you do that, too." And he said, "No, thank you very much. This has been great. I'm going to go to work now." So we really have to tailor it to the person where they are, what they want, what they're good at, and what support they want us to offer.

David: Sure. I'm going to skip around with people's questions because they're related to this process that you're talking about right now. Someone asked in the room, "How do you suggest explaining the process to those individuals who may have a dual diagnosis of intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health diagnosis?"

Debbie: Yeah. And this question comes up a lot. Everybody has a different challenge. Everybody has different cognitive abilities, different people. We, at BU, tend to be kind of wordy, and so we have a lot of workbooks and books and things like this, we're university folks, but nothing in the vocational rehabilitation process, the employment support process, even our wordy books and such cannot be tailored to the person. And I think the real challenge, and there's no one answer for this, so I recognize that the person who's asking this question probably has a particular person in mind, and there's never really one answer for it. But feel free to take those materials, take the process, and make it available to the person. So if that means engaging the person with pictures, then engage them with pictures. If it's more about action and doing, then tailor it with more activity. If it's showing the person, and then supporting them to do it, then use that method. You can always tailor it to sort of help the person understand. And that's, I guess the real key is whatever we have to do to help the person to understand and be as much of a part of the process as possible. Now one of the things that comes to mind is, organizations that have oriented people with developmental disabilities, for example, who were part of committees and such by color coding the materials that they would hand out and go over as part of their committee work so that the person who had a developmental disability could catch up with the piece of paper that they were working on. By knowing that everybody's working right now in the green paper and be able to easily maneuver through colors, through support, it can be even helping people with prompts. So whatever people need in order to feel a part of the process and to be a part of the process.

David: Thank you. You know, I'm going to skip back to some of these questions that were submitted in advance just to give people who took the time to type it before a fair chance at asking. But I'm not forgetting about those in the room. I will be asking back and forth. Christian, who's a vocational spell specialist, asks "How do I support someone who is sometimes motivated to work and then when a work opportunity becomes available, says he doesn't want to work?"

Debbie: Right. Yeah, so I bet that's a familiar one for a lot of folks. I think I've done that a time or two. Making a change, like work, gets scary. When we're talking about employment, we're talking about making a change, and making a change can be challenging in all of the ways that making a change can be challenging. It can require resources, it can require skills that we may or may not be sure that we have. It can

be nerve wracking, it can challenge us on every level. And I think, the people we serve also have those challenges, right? And they may have them at levels that we're not dealing with them. So, the question is how do I help people with motivation? And one of the things that I think about a lot is that, it's hard to motivate people. I try to take that out of the equation, but it is possible to help people to assess their own or explore their own motivation. We call this different things depending on what piece of material you're looking at. Sometimes we call this Assessing Readiness. Sometimes we call this Exploring Motivational Foundations or Exploring Motivation or Engaging Motivation. But what it comes down to is exploring with the person, to what extent do I have a need to make a change now given my satisfaction or the lack thereof with my current situation. So one of the things that could be happening for that person is that they may be feeling pressure from one place or another to make a change in their work status. But, may actually feel pretty satisfied with not working. So that could be one piece that we're not aware of. I know I've run into that in my work, and have experienced that myself. Not so sure I want to make that change because I'm actually happy with the way things are now.

Another piece can be the belief that somebody has. So do I believe that I can make something like this happen? Do I believe that I have what it takes to make this happen? Is this really a change that I want? Do I think I want that? Do I believe that I have enough support and the kinds of support that I need in order to make a change like this happen? Things like that can make a difference, too. So if we haven't explored these questions, those might be kind of going behind going, kind of behind the scenes and may stop the person from actually showing up at that interview, or continuing to work with you.

Other things that can come up are things like, do I know enough to really start thinking about this stuff? And do I know enough to start this process with you? Do I know enough about the world of work? Do I know enough about myself as a worker? Like, do I feel knowledgeable enough to even enter this process?, can be another question.

So these kinds of things can be really key, kind of question marks. I often think about it as if we can unearth some of the question marks that a person has. The person might even have questions about, if I get a job, what's going to happen to my Social Security? And am I going to lose my health insurance? And I've been told that blah, blah, blah. I've been told that I'll never get back on. I've been told that I get cut off immediately, whatever it is. And so if we can start to unearth the questions, whether they're kind of deep, do I need this? or deep, will I lose my Social Security kinds of questions? We can then start to help the person to answer those questions and help them to feel like they're on more solid ground. Because if the person is feeling like

they're on sandy ground or shaking ground, they're less likely to take the leap and continue with the process.

So we recommend really exploring the motivational foundations that a person might be considering in the background that we might not even know, and then helping the person to develop those beliefs, that knowledge, that support, and even the need, if the person would find it helpful, for example, to be introduced to a possibility so they can really see a possibility for themselves, they can see a future for themselves, and start to be introduced to the possibilities are some of the ways that we can address some of those question marks.

Another way to address them if the person has questions about what happens to my benefits is getting them to benefit from counseling, that kind of thing. So that is my recommendation, and if you want more information on that process, there's a couple of places on our website where you can get books on that, workbooks on that, and even our course that I mentioned before addresses this piece as one of the modules. So this is an interesting piece that we have to offer. Yeah, go ahead.

David: Sure. And so there are questions here that I'm going to try to ask them with the engaging in employment bend as best I can. The first one is Natalie, and she asked, "Is there any vocational assessments or vocational exploration exercises that you can recommend for this population, or any particular handouts that you can think of?" I think she's looking for ways to help guide people, things she can give them. And if I'm overstepping I like, please let me know. I'm just trying to make it generic enough that Debbie can answer.

Debbie: And you said vocational exploration, David?

David: Yes.

STOPPED: 45.24

Debbie: Okay. So that sounds to me like how do we help people to make a choice? And, there are, the simple question of are there handouts, are there worksheets? Yes, there are a couple, Self-Directed Psych Rehab Activities is one that's out there on our website. Again, that's a possibility that has worksheets, it's all worksheets. It's really meant for the person to kind of work through them through the process themselves. But a simple way that you can just use a piece of scratch paper, is to think the about kinds of experiences that the person has had, so to have a conversation with the person about what are their past experiences. And I think this is one of the more powerful pieces that people who got to Module 4 in our course really experienced. It's having a conversation with people about their previous experiences and not just what have you done before, but really looking into depth

around what did you like about that experience? What did you not like? What were you good at? What you not so good at? And have people even write something about it. We sometimes call that a vitae or the resume that you'll never hand in to an employer. But it's really just a sense of, what kinds of tasks did you do? What kinds of things did you do? What was the environment like? What were the people like? And what kinds of things did you like, not like, good at, not so good at? And start to translate those experiences and those likes and dislikes into preferences for the future. So I think this is one of the more powerful things that psychiatric rehabilitation has to offer the field of employment, is helping people to make a choice about what they want to do. It's one of the things that kind of turns more traditional vocational rehabilitation on its head a little bit, in that we used to sort of say, so what can you do and let's place you there. And in psychiatric rehabilitation we say, what do you want to go and how can we help you get there? And it's a very different thing, and I think it's important for people who have traditionally been left out of decision making, or had choices taken away for a variety of different reasons who have just not had the opportunity sometimes to be participants in choices like this to be able to say, in essence, what would you like? But not just asking that question, that's too big of a question. It's almost like taking, somebody who's never been to this country to the cereal aisle at your local grocery store and say, which cereal would you like? It's too big a question. There's too many and the person may not know enough to know which one is which. So, the question is really, given what you've done in the past, even if you've had very little employment experience, could be experienced in school, it could be experience with volunteering, it could be taken care of a sick family member, could be military experience. Given the experiences that you have, what have you learned about yourself and the world of work and what does that mean for you as you think about moving forward? What kinds of things would you like to see again? What would you like to do again? What kind of people would you like to work with? And what kinds of things would you not like to see it again? And how can we translate that into something that you're looking for? So that's a really simple thing you can do on scrap paper, but kind of help people to be a participant in a choice like that.

And David, before you asked me the next question, I'll say that I know I've had people say to me after participating in a process like that say, "Do you mean that I have a choice about the jobs that basically I don't just have to take whatever jobs people have for me?" Yes, you also are a decision maker here. That's the key.

David: So, a lot of what I'm hearing you say is it's about, more than any worksheets, it's getting people to think about what they want, to talk about what they want, and then you as the specialist to really listen and respond and help them look for that. And by doing that, by engaging them in that process, you can help people become interested in working in, really seeking out, instead of just along for the ride.

Debbie: Right. And that's not to say that everybody's, all of their preferences are going to be found in the perfect job everywhere. That's not, that's not the idea. But the idea is to really listen for what the person is looking for, and the next obvious step is to take a look at what is out there. If the person is looking for jobs, what jobs are out there in your neighborhood? If the person is looking for a training program, what training programs address that? It could be the person is just thinking about what field they might go into, and then therefore, what do I need to do next? But to look at some of the realities, right of what's out there and see which one is the best match. The most important piece I would say is that preference piece because once you have that, you can take a look at what's out there evaluate those according to the person's preferences, and then support the person to make the best choice for them. And it's often an involved process. It can be a difficult process. It can be a process that takes a little time because you're researching the possibilities. But it also can be very rewarding. And again, involve the person from the get-go in figuring out what makes sense for them. And you're right, David, by doing that, we have buy-in from the person. It's hopefully going to be a better match because it's really associated with what the person is looking for. It's sort of like what we do all the time. It's sharing that process of, if you're looking for a new house or a new apartment, you think about how much light you want, what kind of kitchen you want, how many bedrooms you want, whatever it is. We think about, given my past experience with this, what do I want now? And who has the closest to my perfect vision, and is that enough? Can, do I want that thing?

David: Sure. You talked a lot here about finding what the person wants. And Evan in the room asks, "I've met a number of people who had professional-level jobs but have been out of work for awhile. They find when they try to reenter the workforce, they have trouble finding services that will help them get back to the level of employment they had previously. Services tend to provide help for getting entry-level positions, but not above that. Can you tell me if there are any services in the, for Evan in the Boston area, that help people recover secure and secure more advanced levels of employment?" And I guess more generally as well, not just Boston, but for everyone else listening from North Carolina or California.

Debbie: Yeah. No, I think that's such a great question. One of the things that we tend to think about is that people traditionally have been placed in, what's become known as the five or six or seven. So food jobs, "filth" jobs, right? Cleaning and stuff, flowers, folding, filing. There's a bunch of F's out there, and you know that really there's a lot of jobs out there that really work for a lot of people, but it doesn't work for everyone. So if somebody was an accountant before or a researcher or a business owner, what makes sense for me now is the great question. And I think that's true of a lot of programs sort of say, well we have, and this is, I'm not trying to put down any particular program, but here the jobs that we have, which one would you like?

And that comes out of working with employers and trying to find employers who will hire some of the people that they serve. But you're right, Evan that it's not tailoring the process to the people who are walking through the door, and you're really looking to do that. There probably are services in Boston. There probably are some services across the country that do that. And I think I'll put out a call to everyone to really pay attention when people are coming in with a lot of experience, we have to really think about, so how do we help this person rejoin the workforce? And it is a little bit hard to find, but how do we help this person to rejoin the workforce? I know, we taught this process in a class with folks who were thinking about work, and one of the people with somebody who had very high-up job in a publishing company as the last job that they had and was really discouraged about what the possibilities were, and "I'll never work again." It was just a huge cloud hanging over this person's head and through going through this process to really just thinking through what is, what are my preferences given my experiences? Even just exploring what was the good, the bad, and the ugly of my last experiences was actually really helpful because then this person realized that not every piece of that experience was bad, that there were some things that they really loved and actually figured out a whole new career. And took that into a new career, got some training, started working. I don't know what they're doing now, but really took that and translated their experience into, "I'm not trying to get back to where I was, but given all of that and the truth is I kind of hated it. What do I want to do now?" And really thinking about career development for people who are, with a high level of experience.

David: And drawing upon one of our previous sessions with Len Statham, he said as the vocational specialists try to build their network, it is the smaller employers, not your big name employers, but the smaller employers, who are more likely or more willing to take a risk. And so as a vocational specialist, build that network with those small employers in your town and maybe opportunities for them will present themselves instead of a large corporation.

Debbie: Yeah, yeah. Right. I love it. I want to mention to David that I think we have some of those previous AMAs, Ask Me Anything archives. Is that true? Can people access those if they're interested in hearing more from Len or from any of our previous speakers?

David: Oh yeah. Actually they're all online. I'll post a link for everyone in a second. (<https://cpr.bu.edu/resources/ask-me-anything/>). And the transcripts of them are up, too, so you don't have to listen to the whole thing. You can read or search for what you want in it.

So I'll ask the next question from Scott and he says, "How important is focusing on one education level? Many positions we see in New York City mandate to high

school diploma or a GED. How would one address both the educational aspects in developing skills that to obtain employment?" So really, as you engage them, the fears they face of I'm not qualified for anything. So how does one engage that I didn't get around these educational requirements?

Debbie: Yeah. Yeah. It's a tough one isn't it? And a lot of employers now have a lot of weeding out tools that they're using to, everything from software to HR itself. Just weeding out anybody who doesn't match those criteria. So I have a couple of thoughts on that. One is that it kind of ripping off what Len Statham said about the smaller employers. One of the things that we can do, if a person does not have the educational requirements to meet a lot of the jobs that they're interested in, is to start to partner with employers who are interested in quality help, who may or may not have that background. There have been a lot of people in the world who are very, very bright and very good workers who didn't have the educational qualifications that one might think they needed to have, or something like that. So working with employers who are interested and who have a need, finding out what employers actually need, not only looking at the job descriptions that are out there, but maybe even talking with employers about what kinds of jobs are unfilled, what kinds of things are stretching their employees so much that they can't get other work done, that maybe they can carve out a piece of a job that somebody could do who does and doesn't need a GED for. Those kinds of things can be really helpful to people to help employers identify the kinds of jobs that they have that they could hire people for without that kind of educational requirement.

The other plug I'm going to give is for education. So, if we can help people to get that education, if they're interested in it, boy, that takes people places. The higher the education people have, the better. They often do both financially and in terms of a career. So I really recommend finding the programs in your community that help people get their GED, that help people to get basic education, that help people get higher education because that can often take them places. So that might be another thing to either add into the pile or to help people to think about, consider getting that education since they can get the kinds of employment that they want, so a two-sided piece there.

David: Would you say with respect to education that in this conversation about engaging people in employment, that they do education first and then work on jobs? Or is it one of those co-occurring things, like you're working on getting a job, and at the same time you're improving your skills? Is it something, is it too much, is it the right choice?

Debbie: It's really going to depend on the person, isn't it? Some people are going to want to get that GED first before they can even consider a job. Other people need a job now;

they need the money, they need to be productive, they need to be doing something. And I say need because either they feel like they need it, or they may have an external force that's kind of pushing them into work or both. Some people might want to do both, do some part-time work, and take a class at a time kind of thing. Everybody's different. Everybody has different capacities. Everybody has different desire for and sort of room for the amount of stuff that they want to take on. Different people experience work and school differently, so the challenges may vary. Some people may think that school is too big a thing to take on right now, and other folks may think that work is too big a thing to take on. Some people will be excited to do both. So I would pay attention to what the person gets really excited about, what they want to do first. Sometimes hard to tease out, but to start to explore the possibilities, looking at the very real situations that people are in, and helping them to make the best decision that they can make at that time.

David: And I'm going back to one of these things from before. You've mentioned a lot about things where people seem to show an interest and have a direction, but what in the question is, "What do I do with people who don't seem to have a particular employment goal or a particular direction that they're going?" I think there are people who might end up in this process simply because someone suggested it, and they didn't say "No."

Debbie: Right, right. What brings you here? "My case manager told me to come." Yeah. That just happens a lot, right? "Or my mom suggested it, or I don't know, I thought I'd see what you do." Yeah. So if the person doesn't know, again, I would start with the motivation question and that's not to say are you motivated? That's not the question, but the question is to see with the person, where is your motivation? Do you feel a need to make a change now? Do you, is this something, is making a vocational change something that you want? Does it have, do you think it has enough benefit for you that it outweighs any risk that it carries, or do the risks outweigh the benefits? Do you believe you have support for this? Is this something, you know a lot about? Really start to explore some of those motivational factors, and help the person to really develop any that are tricky for the person. And then helping people to make informed vocational choices, I think can be a really beautiful thing. Some of, sometimes people need experience in work in order to even start to be able to think about making a choice. They may not have any experience with work at all. So one of the things that we can do to kind of develop motivation for work is to help people to experience work, which sounds a little bit backwards, right? But the reality is that if a person doesn't have a lot of experience with work, we can help people to have a series of experiences with work. My old mentor used to call it a series of successful experiences, which has a whole lot of S sounds. But if, it's a good point, helping people to try out work, see what they like, what they were good at, and then keep trying out different pieces to start to really hone a vocational

identity for themselves, hone their knowledge of the world of work, and to start to really decide for themselves, is this something that I want in my life? And if so, what would that look like?

David: Sure. I'm going to the next question we have on the list, and I think this is one we get a lot, it's around disclosure. Lauren asks, "About returning for work for a person with a psychiatric disability, do you disclose diagnosis upon the return to work or not? And what are the kind of pros and cons of this, and what your approach, and what do you recommend in your opinion?" And, before you answer that, I'll give the general answer that I've heard time and time again, is that it is up to the individual to decide if they want to disclose or not. They do not have to disclose, but if they want protections and accommodations that the law provides for them, they have to disclose, and quite honestly, they have to disclose before they need the accommodation, and they should do it in writing. Even if they presented to their boss in person, they should follow it up in writing. That way there's a documented trail with it. So kind of what that groundwork laid for you, what's your approach to disclosure?

Debbie: Yeah, I agree with the personal decision piece, and there's a lot to the decision about whether or not to disclose, when to disclose, who to disclose to, where to disclose, under what circumstances to disclose. I can say is that when not to disclose is probably the day that you're getting fired. "You can't fire me. I have a disability." Not going to work. It doesn't, at least you don't have protection under the law for that. But if you're looking for more information about the ins and outs of disclosure, the ins and outs of accommodation, you might even be wondering what the heck is an accommodation, or what's one for people with psychiatric disabilities. I really recommend two things. One is askjan.org, and David, if you could write that in there, askjan.org is a website for the Job Accommodation Network. They are the resource for a disclosure and accommodations and Americans with Disability Act information in this country. They are tremendous, and they have a whole section on psychiatric disability. You can look up the accommodations by, like diagnosis or kind of disability. So they have tremendous resources in there. They have forms that you can use to give an employer, if the employer doesn't have one already. They have information about how one can disclose, you can just tell an employer in real English, what you need. So there's a lot more information that they have. And I believe, David, since you've been the host of all of these, that the head of the Job Accommodations Network did one of these AMAs some months ago. Do I remember that right?

David: I don't think it was the Job Accommodations Network. Lou Orslene. I forget what is his job is. Oh, he's a director of JAN.

Debbie: Yeah. So, he did one and we have that archived. (<https://cpr.bu.edu/resources/ask-me-anything/>) So you can also hear Lou talk about these issues on an AMA just like this, and then go to the website for a lot more information. So I'll not trying to be your key informant about that, but allow JAN to do that because they are really a wonderful resource.

David: Okay, sure. And just kind of following up and just wrote in there. And is there, it is my understanding that there is no legal requirement to disclose prior to requesting an accommodation, although it would be a good idea. And also we're not lawyers, but we just have the experience of having seen these questions a bunch of times. So, these are the general guidelines, the askjan.org is the type place to go for the exact legal questions and how to approach it. And, the links in the room.

And Carla asked, this is a while ago, "What about individuals with criminal background barriers to employment." And this was, I believe, related to, people who don't have the academic qualifications. I just wanted to say because I know we're running out of time here that there's an entire Ask Me Anything about hiring and recruiting peers with Laverne Miller, and in that, she really gets into people with criminal backgrounds, forensic backgrounds, and how to approach it. But it's really just the summary of what happened. Is it believing that you can work, that you can make meaningful contributions and owning and accepting what your background is, but not letting that determine what your future is. I think that's the summary of the advice she had to give, and that approach you can just take forward. So I'm not the expert here today, but a lot of questions outside the scope that I wanted to make sure we at least get some answers for people.

Debbie: I recommend pulling up that archived AMA, it's just an hour, and she's a really great resource. And I listened to that one. It was wonderful. So I recommend it.

David: Sure. So, the next question is, "How do I support people who seem to be unmotivated for employment?"

Debbie: Well, this might be a good way to wrap this session up. I'll say that, what looks sometimes like a lack of motivation could be a lot of things. It could be resignation to my fate, so to speak. You know that feeling of, "Well, if this is as good as it gets, well then I guess I'll just stay here." It may be that we, as a system, have done such a "good" job at teaching people how to be "good" patients that people might not be kind of pushing against the status quo and saying, "I want to work and you need to help me figure that out." And it may be that people are, change is a huge thing and that just saying, would you like to go to work maybe well, it may be kind of a scary question and to help people to break that down into sort of bite-size pieces and explore that motivational foundation kind of piece, that readiness piece. Do I have a

need for this? Do I want it? Do I believe in it? All of these pieces can really help people to decide for themselves. And I will say lastly, share the process with people so that they understand what it is that you're interested in doing with them and that they can take it on and learn it for themselves. I think that will get us beyond the "this person isn't motivated" kind of question. The person may have motivations we don't know about yet.

David: Well, Debbie, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to answer everyone's questions today. I know we didn't get to everyone, and if there is some burning question you have, please email psyrehab@bu.edu. I'll type it in the room, and we'll pass that message along to someone who will try to help you out or point you to someone who can answer your question. The next Ask Me Anything webinar about Employment is coming soon, and you'll receive an announcement by email by virtue of having signed up for this webinar. In the next few days, you'll also receive a survey about your experience. We'd love to get your feedback about this event. Thank you again, and we look forward to having you join us in the future.

Debbie: Thank you everyone. Bye.

David: Bye. Thank you, Debbie.

Debbie: You're welcome.