

## Ask Me Anything Webinar with Joan Rapp, March 10, 2015

**David Blair:** Well, good afternoon, and welcome to Ask Me Anything About Employment with Joan Rapp. My name is David Blair, and I'll be your moderator for today. This webinar is not a presentation, but an interactive question and answer period. For the next hour, Joan will take your questions about engaging in the vocational process, job search skills, employer support, retention, and career development. Joan is a psychiatric rehabilitation specialist with 45 years' experience, of which 37 years were with Massachusetts state vocational rehabilitation and mental health agencies. Today's event is a part of the National Resource Center on Employment jointly funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and the Center for Mental Health Services. The content of this webinar does not represent the views or policies of the funding agencies, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government. During the registration for the event, you were given the opportunity to submit questions in advance. Over the course of the webinar, we will alternate between questions submitted in advance and the ones you have today. To ask a question over the phone, please indicate that you would like to in the chat box. When called upon you will press star star on your phone to unmute yourself. You may also type your question in the chat box, and I'll read them to Joan on your behalf. Your participation now is critical to the success of this event. As a reminder, if you've joined us by telephone, please make sure to mute your computer speakers before asking a question. It will cause an echo sound that is not pleasing to anyone listening. Welcome to the webinar, and I hope you enjoy the next hour. We'll get started with questions submitted during registration. Joan, we received a number of very similar questions about choosing, getting, and keeping employment. The questions were received, the questions we received dealt with issues about applying online and never getting a callback to handling gaps in employment. I'm going to read you one question in particular. "I have not held down a stable job in the last six years. I keep losing jobs around the winter time and will be unemployed until the springtime. Once I do find work, I hold onto the job until the fall where I have a mental or emotional relapse. How do I prepare for this time?"

**Joan Rapp:** Ok, thank you, David. And by the way, David has done a remarkable job as the engineer of this whole webinar, so I appreciate his help. We're launching together five questions that handle, that represent different problem areas, and I'm going to start out by proposing recommendations to deal with all five questions, and then I'll handle some of them individually. Ok, so getting access to an employment specialist or a rehabilitation counselor, a job coach, whatever you want to call this person; somebody who helps you to choose, get, and keep a job. This really is an extremely valuable resource for people. The person who wrote this question, I just had the feeling that they were doing it on their own and struggling with it, without the benefit of people who have the expertise to help them along. So, if you don't know where to find such a person, we can help you if you send me the town and the city that you're in, we will try to track down what the resources are for you. But they would be somebody who works in a supported employment program, a clubhouse program, a state rehabilitation

counselor. Sometimes there are job specialists in homeless shelters and other places, but it's really important to have that support instead of just, it's hard enough to be out there looking for jobs when you don't have a psychiatric disability or any disability. But you add in some of the barriers to employment, and it gets really tough. So let's presume that you have such a person behind you that is going to make it a lot easier. Starting the application process, I know the frustration of the electronic applications, and in many cases, those applications don't even make it to the employer. They're just going to a third party, who's looking for certain words to screen you out. So if there's 300 applicants, they might choose five to be interviewed. So that's really tough. And there are a number of websites; we could direct you to them, if you want to that give you tips on how to do an electronic application, so you don't get screened out at least. There's also, if you have an employment specialist or a rehab counselor, they can find ways around that. They can work with employers to say, hey, this person is having a hard time with the Internet version of this application, can we do a paper one? So I have a lot to say about electronic applications, but I don't think my words would be appreciated by Boston University. But anyhow, it does make it very difficult. In terms of the people who were dealing with issues like frequent absences, only able to do seasonal work, relapses that cause interrupted employment. Again, I think having the employment specialist/rehab counselor person to help you through that maze is going to help address some of each of those problems. But you may also need to do some work with the individual person around relapse prevention. There is an intervention called, Illness Management and Recovery. It's been researched heavily. It was offered by our director, Kim Mueser, and colleagues. And there is a module in that IMR, it's referred to, and relapse prevention that would be well worth considering as a way to help people. So it doesn't turn out that every February you end up unable to leave your house or in the hospital losing jobs and so forth. You want to interrupt that cycle of relapses, and work is one of the best remedies for it. I mean the right match for somebody can really help them to reduce the number of barriers and reduce those relapses and absences. I think the right match the person matched to the right job is perhaps one of the best treatments that one can have for preventing relapses. The other thing, which is pretty widely available is the Wellness Recovery Action plan. And you know, we can't pay enough attention to how important it is to take care of physical and mental health both, in order to improve job retention and make people feel like they have meaningful work. So while this Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) it's known as, a different kind of Rapp! Mary Ellen Copeland is the author, and there's websites, and it's very inexpensive. And there are many, many groups all over the country, generally facilitated by peers, and people seem to just love it. And extensive research was done on WRAP in the state of Ohio, so it has evidence-base behind it. That's my way of sort of lumping all these questions together, and I hope I have answered some of them. I'm just going to take a quick look here to see.

**David:** I think you really did capture a lot of it, Joan; and if anyone out there listening has a follow up question or wants to ask something specific, please indicate the chat box below, and we'll be happy to take your question. And I really want encourage all of you to ask the question

today, even if you don't think it's perfect, we'll be happy to take it. And I see someone's typing at the moment, and as they type and see if they have a follow up.

**Joan:** The last question of those five, somebody who's been looking for a year, and I don't think has even had an interview. And again, I think if you hook up with somebody that can help you do an active job search. The longest and strongest research ever done in vocational rehabilitation, the EIDP study was done in 17 different places, and the conclusion is if you have this active job development going on and not just the person all alone struggling along, the outcomes are 500% better. So I don't think we can argue with that.

**David:** Joan, we have a question from Tyler. He says, "Specific requirements or track to get into relapse prevention method?" That's the question.

**Joan:** I think that probably different provider agencies that provide the IMR intervention would have some kind of requirements, and they might be a little different from place to place. But if you send me, or you know, if you write to me, I can talk to Kim about it because he is a lead researcher from the country and stays in touch with all of these programs. And tell me what city and town you're from, and we'll find out if there's something going on where you are; and if there isn't, we can at least get the materials from IMR about that relapse prevention module.

**David:** Great, thank you for that. Let's move on to a second previously submitted question, until we have one from the audience right now. This one is from Kathy, and she writes, "Do you have advice for clients who want a job and have a criminal history?"

**Joan:** Well, this is always a really tough one because people with psychiatric disabilities already come in with so many barriers to employment, both physical and mental, and then this adds another layer of challenge. But, we really have to take this question seriously since about one quarter of people who are incarcerated have a mental illness. So we have to really take it seriously. The first thing I say is get your own CORI, find out what it says because often people are guessing about what it says, but they don't know what it says. And depending on how long ago the person's charges were, it may or may not show up on the CORI. So that's the first thing, find out first of all what does he have to worry about. Then there's probably layers of answers to this question, but one is that they have work on policy development that helps reduce these barriers. I know in Massachusetts we've had CORI reform project going on for several years now, and for example, that reform says that for a misdemeanor after five years it disappears, so won't show up in a CORI. For a felony after 10 years, it doesn't show up. There's something called, Ban the Box, which means that that is illegal to have a box asking if you have a criminal record on a job application. That's great as long as the company is a Massachusetts company. If it's a national company, then it might fall into a different track. Florida Child and Family Adult Forensic Mental Health Services has created a whole system that tries to expedite the process and reduce the number of days that a person is incarcerated and help them move along into a vocational track. There are forensic ACT teams, if you know what ACT is, Assertive Community

Treatment can wrap around that person (whoops the picture disappeared), wrap around the person and follow them 24/7. There are forensic ACT teams that specialize in working with folks that have a criminal history. And those teams always have two vocational specialists; they're not designed for employment, but they include employment. And then, there's a little growing cadre of forensic peer specialists. So people who have been self-incarcerated have come out have become trained to become peer specialists and are working themselves with persons who have a similar background. There's a woman in New York, she works for the Howie the Harp Center, which I love the name of that program, Howie the Harp, who was a fellow's name, who lived in New York and was a great advocate especially for the homeless. And her name is Lavern Miller, and I can give you her phone number. She probably will kill me if she knows I'm giving out her phone number. But you know, if you're out there doing something great, then people should know about you. And I know that in some states also they have they're really working on how to tweak the system to make it work better for people with a criminal history. The only thing I would say is be selective about the job categories you work with people on. You know obviously, there's more barriers in the human service field for people who have felonies, and selectively, there might be people here or there who can do self-employment where some of these issues don't come up so much. But I know that also that depending again a person's history, that even in human services that waivers can be applied, if you can demonstrate that this person is a good choice, a good match and a good choice, and that is worth worthwhile using the waiver. That doesn't always work, but sometimes it works. So I don't really have a great answer for this question. I wish that I did, and maybe some other people who were here in the room with us have some ideas about this, but it's something that as they say with one quarter of people incarcerated having a major mental illness, I think it's time that we start tackling this.

**David:** Thank you, Joan. We've started off a flood of questions that is great, so we're going to go right into that. Georgina asked, and she writes, "In spite of advising students not to discuss personal issues during interviews, I often find following an interview that they discuss personal issues, if they feel welcomed by the employer. How else can I imprint the importance of not bringing up such topics?"

**Joan:** I know what you mean. Sometimes it's even more than bringing up personal issues. You know, we had situations where people just kind of walk in and they're so worried about their label that they blurt it out. They practically wear a t-shirt saying "I am bipolar" or whatever. So I think if you haven't tried it, I would say practice do practice interviews with the person yourself as a counselor or the employment specialist. And the other thing is see if you can get one of your employer friends to do an informational interview where the person does sort of a mock interview with them, and then the employer gives them some feedback. And if you remind them before that informational interview to keep it professional that might work. And if they forget, then maybe the employer can give them their feedback. You know, you did good at this,

this, and this, but this part you should leave out. I don't know if I can answer that question, but I think that's how I would tackle it.

**David:** I agree, Joan. I may move right along to the next one. Edward writes, "Are you familiar with the Dartmouth model?"

**Joan:** Yeah. I'm going to be talking about that as we get a little further into that question because we have, you know, we have a question about somebody not getting quick placements. But we're going to get to that. I'm very familiar. Our director again came from Dartmouth. Ok, David.

**David:** And then a third one here, and then after this one will go back to a previously submitted one. Now I apologize for pronouncing this wrong, Chitra writes, "During my work, I find job matching as the most critical part of the process. Can you give some tips about how to do this matching? And then right after Stephanie follows up asking following Theresa's comments. Do you have any advice on how to get an employer to job carve an open position for someone with psychiatric disability? So, tips on the match making process and carving a job."

**Joan:** Well, I think the most important thing about a match, and some people like doing paper and pencil tests and doing test batteries and so forth to find out what people's interests are. I think really getting to know the job seeker that you're working with and spending time doing reflecting paraphrasing to make really sure that you understand what it is they're looking for and what it is they are not looking for. I mean, so many times somebody will come and say can you get me a job. Well, what are you looking for? I'll do anything. And then as you go along, you find out you know 90% of the things that you could think of, they're not willing to do. Don't want to work outside, don't want to do small this, don't want to work where it's loud. And it's, you know, it's getting to know the person really well and to know what they're comfortable with, what they're not comfortable with, where the compromises might be. And then similarly, a new employer, and we're going to talk more about this as we go on. You know, start out with the employer with a lot of open-ended questions. You know I teach a course here at BU, which is an online course for people anywhere in the country, and you're all welcome to take it the next time we give it. Keep it in mind, if any of these things interest you. But, we start with these open-ended questions where is the job specialist is interviewing the employer to really get to know them and get a handle on what their values are, what the environment is like, what's important to them, what's not important to them. And then you're in a better position to match the person with the job environment because you've got to know the person and you've got to know that the employer. And then over time as you cultivate employers that are your buddies, and you take them to lunch and you really get to know them. Then with that relationship that you have with the employer and that relationship that you have with a job seeker, this is where you can match. And sometimes you don't know, you just don't know if it's going to work out. And so if your relationships are solid, then trying it out is okay, trying it out and maybe this one doesn't work and that's okay. But to the best of your ability try to get to

know the person and get to know the employer and then see where the match comes in. Okay. And the second part of that question, David, or the other question?

**David:** The second part of the question was about job carving in an open position for someone with psychiatric disabilities.

**Joan:** An open position. This gets into, I think, customizing employment and making pieces of the job out and structuring it for an individual person. It's kind of the same principles that I just mentioned that really understanding what your job seeker can and can't do. And then, getting to know the employer to see where you think they can, what are they willing to do to optimize that person's job performance as well as keep, just a second, make it work. And it can be really, you know, you just have to be creative. It can work really well, if you can figure out what pieces to carve out that make it more efficient, more effective for the employer as well as, you know, working right for the individual job seeker or more than one employee, and you can figure out who does what best. And you know, there's some really great creative solutions to carving it up. But I don't think I can say there's a particular job title that lends itself to that. It can be done for low-level jobs, it can be done for professional highly-skilled jobs. It's really just being as creative as possible, but knowing both ends, you know, the employer and employee, perspective employee. I don't know if I answered that well, but I have somebody I could call about that to get a little bit more information, if that would be helpful.

**David:** And I'm sure at the end of this, if she still has questions, she could email you as a follow up. Moving onto one of the previously-submitted questions, Yolanda writes, "What are some ways to get individuals engaged in the process of finding employment? I work with individuals with serious mental illness. They have a tendency to lose interest in the employment process."

**Joan:** That's a great question. I'm going to have to go back and repeat again, that if the person is working with an employment specialist an employment program where somebody is guiding you through this and helping you make these connections, that can involve maintaining the interest and enthusiasm and work that window of time that you have people have, you know, psychiatric disabilities, medical problems, substance abuse problems, sometimes that window in which you can make the connection is a very small window, and you have to really be ready to jump. And you get involved in the long drawn out evaluating this and evaluating that. These folks have been evaluated so many times, in so many different ways, that I'm not saying don't assess people, you have to know kind of what you're working with. But you know, we really need to be respectful to people in terms of not dragging us out so that they that they lose interest. I want to get back to having active job development, find employment specialists working with person. All right that's going to short circuit a lot of the problems. Somebody mentioned supported employment, where the emphasis really is on quick placement and using that placement as a way of evaluating what it is people need as opposed to doing a lot of talking about working. Their approach is just get them working. And remember what I said about 500% better. So I think that argues for people not trying to do it on their own. Ok, so

moving on from there. What I wanted to say, and we talk about this in the course that we have, 3 Ps. And there's a parallel that's happening between the jobs, the employment specialist, and the job seeker have a parallel job here because the question is really about what does the job seeker need to do differently. So we're going to talk about a parallel course. So, starting with employment specialist, who is in the community, and they're one of those of obnoxious sales people that talk about their love for their work with everyone they meet. Sitting next to somebody on the bus, you're playing tennis with somebody, you're at your gym, you're at church, wherever you are; wherever the opportunity presents itself, you say, how are you? I'm great. You know I really helped somebody who hasn't worked in five years get a really good job at the Marriot, or wherever. And you know, in that one half a minute or a minute, and you do your pitch, and everyone who works selling something is doing it. So employment specialists and rehab counselors are no different. While you're doing that and talking about how much you're enjoying your job and how great it is to, even when the economy goes up and down, or you're working in a city that has a tough economy, you're still able to make these connections that are helping people. And you're excited about it, and your enthusiasm and your confidence is what's going to make the difference. So parallel that, the job seeker is doing the exact same thing. They're talking to people in their network about well, you know, I'm really happy because I'm going to be going back to work, and this is what I want to do. And what is the purpose of these two parallel things going on? You're not talking to that person particularly about looking for a job for somebody, you're talking about, your hope really has to find a lead. Your hope isn't even to have an employer at this point, your hope is to get a lead, or maybe it's to get somebody to give an informational interview. And then the employment specialist makes an employer contact, maybe through that pitch and connects with an employer. And this is where they do the presentation, which begins with open-ended questions. It doesn't begin with, I work for the Smith Company, and we work with people with mental illness or disabilities. It's listening to what the employer wants, Part 1. Part 2 is talking about the services that you provide and how you can benefit the employer, how it's doing good business. We know we don't do these heartthrob presentations anymore about we're helping people who are handicapped or disadvantaged or homeless or whatever. We talk about people who are ready to go to work, maybe they have some barriers to employment, but we don't play that disability card right off the bat. As they get to know you, they know who you are and who you serve, and that's great. And then at probably some future time, the employment specialist does a proposal, where they are talking about the individual person they are working with and how that person would be a good match with that particular employer. So maybe I have overstated the case, but I think, you know, it's just so important for people to have support going through this job finding process because it's very, very difficult, and it's very stressful, and it can be discouraging. I have a nephew that I think the world of, who had graduated from a great college. He had been taught for a while, and then he got a job with a company that went bankrupt. And so he really needed to start over again. And he spent a whole year, every day, all day job hunting, and finally, he decided that he needed to go to graduate school, maybe make a career change, which he's done, and he's now happily doing what he wants to do. But he spent

a year every day, all day, and he's very capable and has no disabilities. So, when we think about what people that we're talking about with psychiatric disabilities attempting this. This is not easy. And he really, really needs the support. Ok, David.

**David:** Great, thank you, for that answer, Joan. One of the questions that we got here today, Melody asks, "What strategies would you suggest to change the culture of a mental health center or the mental health system to be more focused on employment?"

**Joan:** Oh, I should write a book about that! This represents most of my life. Mental health system and mental health agency would be more focused on employment. Well, I think if you look at all the different ways to make organizational change, all the different ways to change culture. And today, at least in the places that I know about, there's great power in families and there's a great power in people in recovery having a voice in their services. And when I look at practically every survey that's ever been done of people in recovery about what they want and what they need, at least around 70% of people say they really want to work, but they don't know how to do it. They don't know how to go about it. So there's a whole group of people who say they want to work. And if it doesn't often come out as the number one thing, usually something like housing or rights, you know it's the number one thing because it's traumatic. But I think as families NAMI has done a wonderful document recently, you should go online and find it. They are sort of white papers on employment. And you know, if you get family members and you get people, the clients that you serve, their voices on a committee or on a board to do any kind of policymaking or do focus groups or whatever. It can raise the awareness of what or how important employment is for people, what value does it add to their life to be employed. It is just astronomical. There's also this increasing cadre of people who are peers in the workforce. People who are working in the mental health system, and they are great spokespeople from what difference it makes to them to have a meaningful job. And we really need to see what they have to offer. You know, it's taking the administrators who don't get this, who haven't made it a priority. You know, let them visit programs where they're doing a great job of employment, and let them see what it's like, let them talk to the people who have found employment, to people who work in these programs, to the employers that are there and get together. Whatever ways he can do organizational change, and there's many different ways of doing it. Sometimes it's sneaking a little word into a document that wasn't there before. I guess I tried them all, but that's a longer discussion. I would say get as many different kinds of voices saying that this is what's important. And if you don't have some great programs in your state, well, get some people out to visit programs in another state or another region where they're doing a great job and have them come to you and do some teaching and motivating. And there's a lot of that because you know people when they're doing a great job and they're having a lot of success, they really want to be out there. SAMHSA has just sponsored 6 states to work with Dartmouth on replicating supportive employment. And they have lots of people who go out and do this kind of training, consultation, technical assistance. And there's technical



assistance centers in the country, we could teach you where they are. It's probably 20 answers to this question. That's it for now.

**David:** Well, thank you Joan. The next question comes from Benito, and they write, "One third of my clients are with mental health, are with mental health court, and all have felonies. Do you know of any resources? I heard there is a company that specializes in finding felons work."

**Joan:** That has probably has a local answer. I don't know what state you're in or what region or city you're in, but I believe that there are such programs that specialize in that. I know that there was a program for the homeless in Boston that had a great way they coach people, get done some classes, they take them to a place where they could get a whole wardrobe for free, and they coach them on the interviews etc. And they were doing a great job helping people who had prison and homelessness in their background, but it's pretty much part of on a local level. And maybe if you tell me what your city and town is, we can try to help you find someplace. But I don't know, like nationally how that plays out. But we'll try to find something, if there is such a place in your area.

**David:** One last follow-up that was from Stephanie, who asked a question earlier, and she says, "Also one of my clients is interested in reconnecting to a past employer. They did not leave on bad terms, but left because of medical reason. Do you have some tips on what the person could say to her past employer?"

**Joan:** She left for medical reasons. Presuming that her medical, she's medically stable now, that actually could work very well, and I think has worked well for many people to go back to their former employer and say, you know I really loved working here, and I reminisce about the day, my days with this company and I'd so love to get back here. You know this is why I had to leave. This is what I've done in the meantime. These are the other options I looked at, but I keep coming back. This is the company this is where I really want to be, and do you think there's a match for me here? Or do you think there's a position that you would consider me for because you know I'd love to be here.

**David:** And she does write that, Stephanie writes, that she does have a disability now, this individual.

**Joan:** But it's stabilized so that she feels like she can work. And if it's a disability that requires an accommodation, we'll be talking about that in a few minutes. If it doesn't require an accommodation, she can just say you know I can do whatever within my job field, I can do practically anything. But if she requires an accommodation, we're going to be talking about that in a minute.

**David:** And I guess we can move into that next question that we received in advance about accommodations, and Caesar writes, "How do I approach my supervisor and discuss reasonable

accommodations for a mental illness? For example, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, in addition to being visually disabled.”

**Joan:** Ok, great question. The first thing is to know what accommodations that you would consider helpful and which would allow you for your best performance. If you were the person with a disability or disabilities, you'd probably want to talk this over with your employment specialist or your peer support worker or somebody that you know and trust to try to figure out what would make the most sense for you. And this is an area where it can be really creative. You don't have to just go by what everyone else has done for accommodations. But you can think creatively about what would really make a difference for you. Sometimes it's an environmental thing for people with mental health conditions. The vast majority of time the kind of accommodation is a relationship accommodation. Sometimes there's some flexibility needed, but it's primarily, I would say supervision is the number one most important thing to have a regular supervision with somebody who can give you both positive feedback and can help you with the areas in which you need to improve. But for first of all, know the accommodations you need, both physical, and sometimes it's a physical accommodation for a mental health problem. You might need to change the environment in some way to accommodate a mental health condition. Sometimes the accommodations are the same as they are for people with physical disabilities. It may be a parking space, etc. So once you have decided what the accommodations are you believe will be most helpful to you. Let's say that you decide that you need to have once-a-week supervision and a certain kind of supervision that you can describe a certain way of both positive and negative that you need to have instead of having one break in the afternoon and you have two shorter breaks. This might be helpful to you. If you have a co-worker that can give you some extra support as far as learning the job. Whatever you decide are the accommodations, try to relate to what you see as your disability. The second thing would be to have the documentation that you need. You need to document that you have a disability. And it's helpful, I think, if you have in that documentation the accommodations that will be helpful. For example, a person with a visual disability might say that he needs a certain computer enhancement or staff meeting notes in a certain font, but you don't actually have to say your diagnosis in that documentation. But the employer asks for it, then you have to give it. You are not required to give it up front, but if they ask for it, then you probably should give it. It can even be, you know, a little bit general. You can talk about depression, you don't have to give the exact diagnosis up front. The other thing I would say is go to: [www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org), one of my favorite places. It's a wonderful website and will tell you practically everything you want to know about job accommodations. So I think once you've done those couple of things: knowing the accommodations, getting the documentation, then you can approach the supervisor and say I want to talk about what I think will help me to be the best employee that I can be and be the most productive. So, those would be the steps. We do have, and we can give you this this reference, but we did a literature review of 20 years of research on job accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities, and we have our own website, called Disability Right to Know, in which they summarize what job accommodations

were most frequently used and interesting. What I find interesting in that research is that the more accommodations people had, the better they did. So like, if they had e accommodations, and these not really fancy, expensive things. These were fairly simple kind of accommodations. The people tended to do better. David, there was a related kind of question, which I think is related, and can I answer that one now, too?

**David:** Sure, go ahead, and please read the question to everyone.

**Joan:** I'll let you read it. It's the one from Diane about environmental safety.

**David:** Oh Diane, she asked environmental safety, "How can we define it in a social context?"

**Joan:** Right. And what I would say is a company that generally treats its employees overall well and shows some flexibility, but still expecting high quality work, these are the best employers. I think the really good psych rehab programs are the ones that want the best employers. They're not just looking for, you know, somebody who's got 10 openings, so let's hurry up and slam some people in there. They're looking for the best employers. These are companies that really have worked on their policies as a company to promote diversity, to actively look for many different kinds of employees, and who I think put effort into the relationship between the managers, the supervisors, and the employees. United States Business Leadership Network is across disability agencies that I think has really dedicated itself to cultivating companies and to becoming this kind of an environment. But to answer Diane's question better, I would say if you have a very clear job description, honestly I don't know that I ever have in my life, but having a good clear job description is one of the best ways to make a job positive, make the environment positive. When people don't know what they're doing, or when that job description changes, you don't really know that it's changed. It happens all the time, changes supervisor, suddenly your job changes. Or change in funding, suddenly your job changes. So having a clear job description and make those changes when the job changes. Try to keep it clear what it is you're supposed to do. The single most important thing is the excellent supervision of somebody who is going to work with you, put some effort into you as an employee, who understands your strengths and your problem areas, and is going to put some time into that. Those are the ideal environments that I consider environmentally safe. We used to have an organization dedicated to employment of people with psychiatric disabilities, and one of our rules was a safe table. And I think a good employer-supervisor-employee relationship is a safe table, where both parties can talk about when they need to talk about without being afraid, afraid that you're going to hurt somebody's feelings, afraid you're going to lose your job, whatever. So that I guess to answer the question about environmental safety.

**David:** Rachel asks, "How do you suggest a vocational rehabilitation specialist should approach an employer when trying to get a job on behalf of a veteran. And she means by herself, you know if she goes on her own to do this. And she asks, What position should the specialist take,

if the veteran is also present? So one doing it on her own, and the other with the veteran there as well.”

**Joan:** Ok, that's a good question. First of all, I think that for the most part people have a positive view about hiring veterans that they think that's a good and honorable thing to do. So I think he's starting, you know while the press might have a disability that counts as a barrier, I think if they've been a veteran that counts as a plus. And maybe sometimes that cancels each other out. So, but I think starting off with a profile of a veteran, then that's a good thing. I think an employer would see that as a good thing. Many of the things that the employment specialist does on behalf of the job seeker, can actually be done invisibly. So you might lead the person, guide that person to an employer, but not disclose that you have any connection to that person. You might drive them there, you might even wait downstairs for them, you might meet with them afterwards and go over the interview, you might sit with them when they call the employer, you might help them with the job application. You might do all of the things that you would do with them, but in a sort of behind the scenes kind of way. If it's very important to that person to not come to the employer as a person with a psychiatric disability. I'm assuming that's maybe why they want to do that on their own, might not be, but I'm assuming that. So, you can find them, you can help them do research on the company, so they know what they're going into. If you have a relationship with the employer, you can tell them a little bit about what that employer tends to be looking for. You can sort of groom them for that particular company working behind the scenes. That tends to be a strategy, particularly if the person is working in a higher level skilled or professional job. I think people are much more reluctant to disclose upfront, if it's a higher level professional job, and it's understandable. If you were going with the person, and they're there with you, I think that works really well, because if you go in alone and you're talking to an employer about hiring people with barriers to employment or even hiring people that have mental health conditions, I mean they're mind immediately goes to late night movies, psycho killers, or some other stereotype they might have of people with mental health conditions. So you've got somebody right there who is, you know, a regular person with flesh and bones, and who has some strengths to be presented that makes all of those stereotypes kind of go away. So, if they go along with you, I would just introduce the person and let them be the interviewee, add something if you're asked, and thank the employer when you're done.

**David:** Alright, we're rounding up with our last few questions here, Joan, we're almost out of time. Kayla asks, “I recently experienced an application directly asking if I have a felony without being able to explain it in person. Do you feel this is a disadvantage? Also, I have seen an increase in employers putting on applications: Do you have a disability and then listing various disabilities? Do you believe that disclosing the application puts you in an advantage or disadvantage?”

**Joan:** I would say, well, one of the reasons that they asked is because maybe because of tax credits. Because I have been through a bunch of electronic applications with people, and they're asking all these questions, which match exactly to the tax exemption categories. So I'm thinking this is why you may see an increase because in some of those categories have changed. I'm thinking this is one of the reasons why it's showing up on there. As I mentioned in Massachusetts, we've banned the box so that the question about felony can't appear on the application. However, the person still required to do a Cori check. So, if they have things that are showing up on their Cori, they're going to know anyhow. Do I think it's a disadvantage to put it on the application? Yes, probably it is in the case of the felon. In the case of disability, if they're asking you what is your disability, that's kind of really out of sync with the times. And people can leave it blank. They used to have a question, you'd see a question: Have you ever had a nervous breakdown, and we would always tell people to answer no because your nerves don't break down, so there's no such thing. We used to tell them to answer no, and then as you get to know the person and it's the right time to disclose, you can disclose.

**David:** Going off that vein, Virginia asks, "Do you believe that is better for someone to disclose their mental health disability during an interview or after starting a job?"

**Joan:** I would say that's a very, very individual decision. There are many factors that go into when you disclose. If you are working with an employment specialist, that's an automatic disclosure because the employer knows that you are a person who comes from an agency where the people you're working with are generally have a disability. They're going to know that, not in any detail, but they're going to know that there is a disability. Going on your own, that's a different situation. Again, it depends on many factors. It depends on the culture of the company, it depends on skill level, so many factors. But if I were to say generally speaking, if you're not coming through an agency, if you're going in on your own, there's no automatic disclosure, it's probably best to wait till after the job is offered to you. And even then, the really only reason to disclose is if you need an accommodation. If you don't need accommodation, what's the point of disclosing? If you're working from an agency, that automatically happens. But if you don't need an accommodation, what would be the point of disclosing? I don't know. But, it's a very individual thing. And what we encourage people to do is to have a disclosure plan, not to just wait until they're on the job interview and try to figure it out then, but have a plan with your employment specialists of what are you going to do about disclosure? Some people tell me that they're thrilled to be able to disclose on the job because then it's out, they don't have to worry about it, or have to obsess about it, they're not going to stress out about it. It's done with, and they're out there, and then they feel more relaxed about it. Other people say they would never, never disclose because their fear of discrimination.

**David:** Thank you. And I think this will be our last question, Joan. We only have a few minutes here. Kathy asks, "Would you say marketing and advertising your clients are the same thing?"

**Joan:** Marketing and advertising your clients, did I understand that correctly? Marketing and advertising your clients, I not sure exactly what she means by that. Do you want to unmute her, and let her ask?

**David:** Kathy, can you press star star on your phone? If you're listening still?

**Joan:** I'm going to assume that what she needs is what we would call the proposal, presenting the person with their, why they're a good match to the employer or to several employers. You think that's what she means?

**David:** Let's give that a try. I think that's the best we can do.

**Joan:** Ok, advertising and marketing. I'm not sure that advertising is the right fit. I'm thinking about this. But what we talked about before with the pitch, the presentation, and the proposal; the three Ps. I guess that's how you'd be marketing your person with employers, and you might do that with several employers and see which one worked out. I know an agency here in Brookline had a situation where they had a group of employers that got together on a regular basis, and they would bring some of their folks in, and they were from a VR agency. And they would spend some of their folks in, and the employer would have a copy of their resume, and they would get to ask pressing questions. And they actually did quite a job placement doing it that way. So there's not only one way to do it. There are many approaches. You know, I get back to relationships, we don't have any poster children in mental health. So it's just really all about the relationship you have with the individual job seeker and the relationship you have with the employers, and then you use those to the max. You try to see the yenta, I guess you could say, he's like a matchmaker, like a yenta. You're a vocational rehabilitation yenta.

**David:** Thank you for your answer, and thank you for your time, Joan. We're out of time now. I know Joan has volunteered, and this may be to her dismay, to try to answer all the questions that people submitted in advance. And if anyone still has a question that we didn't get to because I know there's a couple out there, you can e-mail her directly at [joanrapp@bu.edu](mailto:joanrapp@bu.edu). I've typed it in the chat box for everyone, if you want to just click on that. We will be sending out a survey and announcements for the next Ask Me Anything webinar sessions. If you have any questions about this session or the next, you can also email the center directly at [psyrehab@bu.edu](mailto:psyrehab@bu.edu). Thank you and have a great afternoon everyone.

**Joan:** Thank you. We also are going to send you along with the evaluation, we also are going to send you some links that you would hopefully find helpful, to different sites and resources that you might find helpful. Ok, thank you so much.

**David:** Thank you. And all of those links will be going out to everyone's e-mail addresses, so if you don't receive something from us, please email [psyrehab@bu.edu](mailto:psyrehab@bu.edu), and we can send it to you directly. Thank you, everyone.