

## **IDVR Counselor Training Series**

### **Job Readiness and Employment**

#### **Welcome**

Welcome to the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Training. This training is provided by New Hampshire Department of Education, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Interwork Institute of San Diego State University. It is part of the Agency's effort to provide readily available training support to vocational rehabilitation counselors. For further information contact: [shannon.wilcox@vr.idaho.gov](mailto:shannon.wilcox@vr.idaho.gov)

#### **Introduction**

In this module you will learn the importance of properly preparing a participant for employment and techniques to assist vocational rehabilitation job seekers in planning and completing job search activities. You will come to understand the role and responsibilities of job developers and will learn ways to collaborate with employers to promote the employment of participants with disabilities. Finally, you will learn the importance of staying in contact with clients who are employed and provide services to assist them in maintaining employment and achieving successful employment outcomes.

#### **Preparing for Employment**

##### **Focus of the Section**

Effective case management and counseling practices, which focus on employment, are important aspects of preparing a participant for successful employment.

##### **Initial Interview**

Focusing on employment in the first meeting will set the stage for a participant to develop the attitude and skills needed for employment. During the intake, VR will **ensure the participant is interested in achieving an employment outcome**. Some applicants have misconceptions regarding VR's purpose and the services VR provides. It is important to clear up these misconceptions. The team member conducting the intake should explain VR's focus on employment, the VR process, and the roles and responsibilities of both the VR counselor and the applicant.

## Focus on Employment

At every stage during the participant's case, employment should be the focus. Consider which resources will be most beneficial in promoting employment. Explain how the participant's decisions and attitude may affect the employment outcome. Reinforce the participant's positive actions that will enhance employment opportunities and assist the participant in developing plans to overcome barriers to employment.

## Developing Work-Ready Skills

It is important that VR services **assist participants in developing the skills needed for employment**. Employers expect employees to have work-ready skills. This includes the "hard" or technical skills particular to the position and the "soft" skills that are applicable to any occupation such as arriving to work on time and having a positive attitude. Services should address both sets of skills.

## Job Readiness

While the feasibility of the vocational goal has already been explored during the comprehensive assessment and IPE development, work settings will also affect a person's ability to be successful.

To prepare for a job search, the client and counselor should consider factors such as:

- The person's ability to work under stress,
- the need to work alone or in groups (with or without supervision), and
- other factors of possible work environments, such as, the ability to work in a smoke-filled room, around loud noises or in extreme temperatures.

Addressing job readiness may also include identifying the essential functions of the job, accommodations that may be needed, and the key competencies required for the position.

Essential functions of a job are **fundamental to the position**; the position exists to perform these functions. Essential functions of a job include functions that help define the position in terms of description, classification, salary, and contributions to the organization, functions that cannot be assumed by another employee, and special requirements or working conditions that are elements of the position. An applicant must be able to perform these functions with or without accommodations. If accommodations will be needed, those should be identified in advance, if possible, so they can be described to the employer if the applicant is hired.

Requesting an accommodation includes disclosing some information regarding disability and functional limitations. The VR counselor needs to discuss with the client how and when this disclosure should occur. In some cases, the client may do this independently, but a VR counselor or job developer could also handle or facilitate the disclosure.

**Key competencies** may include:

- the specific knowledge, skills, or skill sets necessary for performing critical work activities,
- the specific behaviors or characteristics necessary for performing critical work activities, and
- the competencies needed to handle real on-the-job situations.

## Job Seeking Skills and the Job Search

### Focus of the Section

Once participants have successfully demonstrated developed necessary skills to prepare them for employment, they join the ranks of “job seekers” and are ready to find an appropriate job. This is a significant milestone for many participants. IPE services should include services to assist VR customers become “job ready”

### Providing Counseling and Guidance

Counseling and guidance remain a vital component in this stage of the VR process. Searching for a job may require significant changes in routines and life style. It may require extensive effort and could be discouraging at times. Counselors should strive to **provide job seekers the counseling and support** they need to successfully manage these challenges. Job seekers may also require **guidance when making important decisions** such as whether to disclose a disability, how to request appropriate accommodations, how to manage family factors, or how to deal with a loss of benefits or limited work experience.

### Developing Job Seeking Skills

The job search is often a **collaborative effort** among the job seeker, the counselor, the employer, friends and family members, and other professionals that specialize in placement services. However, to the extent possible, **the job seeker should take the lead** in finding employment.

Searching for employment can be a complex task. Job seekers who are capable of doing at least some job search activities independently or with assistance must know how to perform an effective job search. They must understand appropriate protocol, how and where to look for work, how to interview effectively, when to disclose a disability, and how to ask for appropriate accommodations, if needed.

Job seekers may be able to develop or strengthen job seeking skills through VR counseling and guidance, a formal job seeking skills class, a job club, job search books and materials, and one-on-one job search assistance. Counselors may provide direct feedback and assistance to participants in developing these skills and/or refer them to community providers for these services.

## Job Search Methods

To the extent possible, **job seekers should learn how to access the job market**. This may include utilizing the Department of Labor offices, networking, using the Internet to locate openings and research potential employers, making cold calls, and utilizing traditional job search methods such as responding to help wanted ads.

## Job Applications

In addition to locating job openings, the job seeker may need assistance with learning how to complete job applications. They may need to develop sufficient computer skills to complete online applications. Job seekers should develop a master application to refer to when filling out various online and paper applications.

## Resume Development

Many job seekers require assistance with resume development. Aspects of resumes that are often overlooked by job seekers include choosing an appropriate resume format, determining an appropriate resume length, and highlighting **specific skills** and abilities. Counselors and job seekers should also understand how the use of **key words** and phrases may be used for screening purposes. Ideally, resumes will be tailored to each job description rather than being generic and non-specific.

## Interview Skills

During the interview, job seekers have the opportunity to demonstrate why employers should hire them. Many job seekers benefit from **coaching, practice, and role playing** to effectively negotiate the interview. Job seekers who learn how to make a good impression in the interview gain an advantage in the hiring process. These skills may include:

- Learning how to dress appropriately,

- Arriving on time,
- Presenting a positive attitude,
- Researching a potential employer (and describe how the job is a good fit for the employer and job seeker)
- Answering traditional interview questions
- Describing past work experiences
- Presenting relevant knowledge and skills

Some job seekers may need assistance with learning how to present “negative” information such as a lapse in employment, a series of short-term jobs, a conviction, or losing a job. Some job seekers with visible disabilities may need to become proficient in discussing their ability to perform essential functions of a job.

## **Managing Job Search Stress**

The VR counselor can assist the participant with managing the stress of the job search by putting the job search in perspective, teaching stress management techniques, and explaining that finding employment may take time and numerous attempts. The counselor can help the participant turn an unsuccessful interview into a learning experience and can suggest other positive outlets for dealing with discouragement.

## **Working with Job Developers**

### **Focus of the Section**

If provided the right skills and support, many job seekers are capable of conducting their own job search. However, some participants may need to utilize job developers for individualized job search assistance. In this case, the VR counselor should discuss the following with the job seeker and use the information to complete a draft of the Job Placement/Support Service Agreement:

- What support they will need in communicating with employers
- Their preferences regarding disclosure of disability and accommodation needs
- The geographical area where they are willing to work
- The transportation they will use to get to work
- Arrangements for childcare, if needed
- The days and times they are available to work
- what level of help they expect to need with job applications, resumes, cover letters, and interviews.
- Their wage expectations

## Choosing a Job Developer

When the job seeker requires the assistance of a job developer, it is important to keep in mind the principle of informed choice. The decision on which job developer to use should be made by the job seeker. The VR counselor should provide the participant with adequate information to make an informed decision, including job developer's specialization (if applicable), placement rate, customer satisfaction, and capacity to accept new clients.

VR customers should be given the opportunity to interview various job developers as part of the informed choice process.

## Working with Job Developers – Expectations

Once a job developer has been selected, the counselor will authorize for and schedule an initial staffing with the client and the job developer. During that staffing, the the Job Placement/Support Service Agreement is finalized and signed by the job seeker, the counselor, and the job developer. This document will clearly establish the client's vocational goal(s) and the expectations of each party. The counselor should ensure that the job seeker and job developer understand that VR will only pay for services provided to locate a job consistent with these goals.

The job developer should focus on activities that VR customers cannot reasonably do for themselves. Job developers are required to maintain regular contact with the counselor and job seeker, and also submit monthly reports documenting their efforts including contacts with potential employers. Job seekers should participate in all aspects of the job search to the extent possible.

Ensure the job developer understands and will follow expectations agreed on at the initial staffing. This may include assisting the job seeker in completing applications, contacting employers, and accompanying the job seeker to interviews.

## Case Study: George

**Employment History and Goal.** George was determined eligible for VR services due to impairments from a back injury. He was a plumber for 15 years, **but he can no longer perform the physical requirements** of the job.

George has been working with a job developer to obtain employment as a **sales representative**, a field consistent with his current functional capacities. The job developer contacted George with a lead. The position is a **maintenance worker** at the hospital. Although George may be at risk for further injury, he decides to accept the position.

## Knowledge Check

To check your understanding of this lesson, click this [link](#) to complete a knowledge check before moving on to the remainder of the module.

## Working with Job Developers: Counselor's Role

Counselors should **stay actively involved** in the case during the participant's job search. The counselor can support both the job seeker and the job developer by providing encouragement and guidance, addressing the lack of sufficient activity by either party, and facilitating the relationship between the job developer and job seeker. The counselor can also ensure that both parties clarify the responsibility for and frequency of their contact since this may be overlooked and can become an issue between the job developer and job seeker. In some cases, the counselor may need to help the job seeker select a different job developer.

## Partnering with Employers

### Focus of the Section

Counselors can significantly enhance both the quality and quantity of their placements and assist job seekers by developing relationships with businesses and agencies within the community who hire individuals referred by the state VR agency. The VR agency plays a key role in coordinating services for both the employer and the job seeker to promote the success of the placement.

## Initiating Contact with Potential Employers

There are several ways for VR counselors to initiate contact with potential employers. These include attending chamber of commerce, human resource management, and trade meetings. Counselors may also partner with community agencies that have relationships with employers. They may also frequent job fairs, network with people who make hiring decisions, and make cold calls.

## Approaching Employers

Employers will want to know the **benefits** of meeting their recruitment needs through the state VR agency. VR counselors should be prepared with a short but flexible script when meeting with employers and making cold calls. Make inquiries into the employer's recruitment concerns and needs. Determine if there is a way VR can assist employers to meet their needs and, at the same time, benefit job seekers referred by VR.

Useful material may include a description of customary **VR services**, information on businesses that have successfully partnered with VR, examples of **success stories**, and a list of **job ready candidates** for the employer to consider.

## VR Services for Employers

Counselors should be prepared to discuss services that VR can provide that employers typically do not get when using traditional hiring practices. These may include disability education and sensitivity training, recommendations regarding appropriate accommodations, work incentives such as tax credits, customized training for participants interested in difficult-to-fill positions, assessment to facilitate a good job match, and follow-along and support services to promote the success of the placement.

## Maintaining Relationships with Employers

Once an employer has agreed to use VR services, VR staff must **provide appropriate support and adequate follow through** and **fulfill promises**. Counselors should refer only job seekers who are likely to be a **good match** for the employer and the job. The success of this match not only affects the job seeker but may also impact the hiring of subsequent individuals with disabilities. Referring candidates that are not job ready may deter employers from using VR services in the future. Once a successful match has been made, a counselor should **maintain contact** with the employer even after the participant's case has closed successfully. This will help the employer to keep VR in mind when future openings occur. It often takes fewer resources to maintain a relationship than to develop a new one.

## New Section: Employed Status

### Focus of the Section

Gaining employment is a notable accomplishment for the VR counselor and the participant. Both parties have put forth significant effort to achieve this milestone. Once significant IPE services have been provided and the participant has obtained appropriate, stable employment the case is ready to move to employed status. It remains important to keep up the momentum and continue to promote movement of the case to successful closure.

### Employed Status: Maintaining Contact

Even if a job developer is providing job supports, the VR counselor must **maintain contact** with the participant. The counselor should provide advocacy, counseling, and additional services, if needed, to help the participant retain the job. If the employer or

participant requires additional support, the counselor should keep in contact more frequently to promote the success of the employment outcome.

## **Employed Status: Providing Support**

Some participants have not worked before, or have not worked for a long time, and may initially require **consistent encouragement** and support from the VR counselor to help them adjust to the new job. If the placement turns out to be inappropriate, the VR counselor should be prepared to assist with **additional services**. This could include authorizing additional job placement services or completing a new assessment of rehabilitation needs.

## **Preparing for Successful Closure**

Once the participant has been employed in a job consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, and they have demonstrated the ability to maintain employment without additional VR services for at least 90 days, the case can be closed successfully provided that all closure criteria have been met.

Before closing the case successfully, it is important to ensure that:

- The individual has achieved the employment outcome described in the IPE. If the individual is working in a different, but appropriate job, the IPE will need to be amended to reflect the new goal.
- Significant VR services have been provided and additional VR services are not needed.
- The participant is satisfied with and performing well in the employment position without the need for core VR services
- The counselor can verify continued employment through objective means.

## **Conclusion**

Once a participant has developed the necessary work-ready skills and is prepared to accept an employment position, he or she is considered job ready. The counselor continues to play a major role during this stage of the VR process. Even when job developers are utilized, the counselor should remain highly involved in the case and provide the job seeker the support he or she needs. In a number of instances, the counselor can directly facilitate high quality placements and improve the quality and quantity of successful placements by developing relationships with employers and advocating on behalf of the job seekers.

Successful employment is the culmination of all VR services. Counselors can take great satisfaction in the role they play in preparing individuals with disabilities to engage in meaningful work activities and to find employment that enhances their independence and quality of life.

## **Lesson Completed**

You have completed the lesson for this module. Click this [link](#) to access the end of module quiz. You will need to achieve a passing score of 80% to move to the next module.