

Informational Interviews

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Jobs Behind the Jobs

- DPG illuminates vocational themes that allow for a broad collection of possible jobs.
- Most jobs are unknown/unseen to the public
- Connect by shared interests
- CE circumvents the HR filter – connects directly to the business owner or manager
- Employers are always hiring
- Skills matter

Sales Skills and Discovery

- Sales skills are involved
- Discovery coupled with job exploration and job analysis creates a logical path of mutual benefit
- Discovery reduces the traditional reliance on sales and the negative stereotypes associated with selling

Are Dream Jobs Really Nightmares?

- Dream jobs are very unique and rare.
- Dream jobs assume very little vocational interests
- Dream jobs suggest one time career placement
- The experience and talents of professionals limit dream jobs
- There are unlimited ways to make a living
- Dream jobs reinforce the idea that people with significant disabilities are one-dimensional

Go Where the Career Makes Sense

- Discovery
- Short work experiences
- The List of 20
- Filling out applications is a waste of time
- Get past the world of entry level positions
- Find the jobs behind the jobs

Casual Job Development

- A subtle and effective means of creating jobs
- A series of informational interviews is arranged following DPG
- Compliment and refine the emerging information as the employment specialist gets to know the person
- Mixing and matching vocational themes
- Information and not a job is being sought
- It's OK to suggest to the employer that a job would be a terrific opportunity as well

Examples of Questions

- Are there competitors challenging your market?
- What technological advances are coming?
- Do you have difficulty finding and training new employees?
- Are there products or services that you are not providing, either because you cannot afford the investment (in personnel or equipment) that you believe your customers desire?

Tips

- Use simple and leading questions
- Practice “smooth listening” just as in DPG
- Practice gathering information without the use of rapid fire questioning
- The goal is to elicit open-ended responses rather than yes or no answers
- Closing the deal is still a critical element

Social Capital

- “The goodwill and reciprocity inherent in relationships”
- Knowing others and sharing their interests, neighborhoods, cultures, ideals and values
- Social Capital is the underlayment of networking – purposeful connection to others for mutual gain

Job Developer and Job Seeker Networks Remain Weak

- Rehab. is a charitable cause - not expected or encouraged to participate in the business activities of the community
- Employment specialists tend to be young and unsettled with limited community connections
- Job seekers are disproportionately poor and lack the mobility to participate
- CRPs and the people they serve are often isolated physically and psychologically from the mainstream of the community

Relationship Charting

- Each member of a DPG Team draws up a list of everyone known to them
- Most people they know are employed – their careers and places of employment are known
- Search for matches that are related to the job seeker's vocational themes
- “Mine” networks to reveal potential connections
- Have all the agency staff complete one too

Skills and Tasks

- Describing someone as skilled is crucial
- Skills are the accumulation of tasks a person has mastered
- Job development requires the identification of individual task competencies
- Work is sought that matches the tasks and skills of the job seeker
- Complete the following exercise:

Sales Tactics and Materials

- Basic sales skills are important
- Interest-based negotiation, listening, problem solving, handling objections and personal management are essential
- Present yourself in a manner that signifies competence and confidence
- Language gets in the way of communication

Top 12 Personal Job Development Skills

1. Be prepared
2. Job development is personal
3. Hiring is personal
4. Listening is more important than talking
5. First impressions count
6. Handle objections professionally
7. Accept that sometimes employers say no
8. Stay in touch
9. Be succinct
10. Get a referral
11. Manage yourself
12. Offer high quality customer service

Informational Interviews

- A great way to develop work experiences, build a job placement network and to discover new tasks and jobs of interest to the job seeker
- A way to introduce yourself and your organization to employers and to build the data base for employment ideas

Process

- Getting an appointment for an informational interview is usually easier than for a job development meeting
- Casual conversation
- “Can I see your business?”
- People love to talk about their business
- Follow-up soon
- Request 15-30 minutes
- You are seeking information about the business

Setting Up Informational Interviews

- Call the business/employer (or go visit) and tell them that we are doing career exploration, helping a variety of people access employment.
- You are studying how peoples' careers evolve and gathering ADVICE from employers (ask for managers or owners) on how someone would start a career in their particular field.

Simple and to the Point

- Ask for 20 minutes of seat time.
- Also add, "If there's time, we'd love a tour."
(We almost always get the total tour. However, it needs to follow the seat time otherwise the chance to bond won't happen and you never get in the back room where all the cool stuff is.)
- Asking for only 20 to 30 minutes seems to loosen the employers up...and of course, it's all about asking for "their advice." These almost always end up taking 60 to 120 minutes.

Where to Go

- We really prefer small employers – artisans – no chain stores or fast food – no Wal-Mart or Target. Here are examples of the types of businesses we've used in past:

Powdercoating
Video production
Cheese making
Custom Hat Making
Luthier
Sculpture
Bronze or Metal Foundry
Custom-made Headstones/Memorials
Weaving
Book Publishing/Book Binding
Gunsmith
Consumer/Citizen Advocacy
Herb Growing and/or medicinals
Aviation Company (flight training; aircraft maintenance, etc)

TV and Radio stations
Recording studio
Glass Blowing
Architectural Restoration
Metal Fabrication
Brick Making
Chrome Plating
Shoemaker
Butter Churning
Bamboo Fly Rod Maker
Boat Maker/Restoration
CD Copying Service
Canoe Maker

Format

- Brief discussion

“Can you tell us a bit about the history of the business (products, services, evolution)?”

“How did you get into this line of work?”

- Let them talk about themselves

Informational Interview Questions

- Where do you find/recruit employees?
- How are people trained in their jobs?
- What are the prerequisites for working here?
- How or where do your employees gain the experience required to work here?
- What personal characteristics do you look for in an employee?

Informational Interview Questions

- What are the pay and benefits rates?
- What are the work hours? Is there shift work? Does the company allow for flex time or other job accommodations?
- What impact is technology having on the industry?
- What are the current forces for change in this industry?

Format

- Tour with questions asked by the job seeker and employment specialist
- Wrap up by thanking the person for their time and ask for any advice they have for:
 - Career plan
 - Other businesses that should be visited
 - Get a referral?
- Make your exit and promise to stay in touch

Tailoring the Fit

Interest-Based Negotiation

- Customized Employment is defined by the negotiation of worksite tasks and elements of employment that benefit both worker and employer.
- Negotiation is not a battle to see who gets the best advantage
- Negotiation in CE must be mutually beneficial and this is why an interest-based negotiation style is utilized

Why Negotiation?

- Negotiating a job increases the potential of conflict arising from the adaptation of a work environment that better suits the employee's personal attributes.
- Interactions must be managed through thoughtful use of negotiation and communication to minimize potential conflict.
- Individuals with complex lives do not often succeed using comparative hiring, justifying the use of a negotiated approach to job carving and creation.

Interest-Based Negotiation

- People with complex lives don't do well in comparative hiring processes
- Creating the opportunity to illuminate mutual interests in one of the first steps in staging job creation negotiations.
- Employers are always hiring – people with the potential to create wealth and profit.
- People with disabilities are not instantly recognizable as “exploitable.”

A Win-Win Proposition

- Employers need workers
- People with disabilities want to work.
- Negotiation requires that we communicate with someone different than us.
- Both parties believe that what each wants is different, when in fact they may want the same.
- Employers know they need to change – they don't know how to change.
- Interest-based negotiation and proper job development techniques demonstrate that mutual gain is possible.

Shut up and Listen!

- Sales, job development and negotiation traditionally emphasize talking more than listening.
- Employment specialists should be consumed by information gathering.
- Talking negates listening and learning.
- Create conversational environments to gently make the case for hiring based on the potential for mutual gain.

Commonly Negotiated Items in a New Job

- Responsibilities regarding particular tools and equipment
- Resource ownership details
- Safety
- Co-worker support and quality checks
- Supervision, correction and quality improvement
- Equipment modifications
- Worksite accommodations and accessibility
- Assistance with personal needs (bathroom, eating, etc.)
- Transportation

Many of these work-related components are faced by every employee and should be handled in as natural a manner as possible.

It's a tough employment market out there. But then, it's always been tough for people with disabilities. Go where the career makes sense, emphasize tasks and skills, and negotiate for mutual benefit.



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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

GUIDE FOR TRAINING ACTIVITY

Informational interviewing is a great way to develop work experience settings, build a job placement network, to discover new kinds of jobs, to introduce yourself and your services to employers, and to build the mental database that all of us rely on for employment ideas when beginning a job search with someone.

Getting an appointment for an informational interview is usually much easier than setting up a job development meeting. A casual conversation with a prospective employer at the monthly Chamber of Commerce “Business After Hours” social or at a service club meeting (e.g. Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, et al.) can lead to a probe such as, “I’ve never seen your operation before, would you mind if I called you to set up a time for a tour and a bit of a chat?” Most folks love to talk about their business and since you are not pressing them, setting up a phone call is considered low-risk. Make sure to follow-up soon, before the conversation is forgotten, and to illustrate commitment.

Generally a request for fifteen to thirty minutes works well because it signals respect for the person’s time, and it indicates that you are busy as well. In our experience, fifteen minutes always becomes thirty to sixty minutes once the discussion and tour begins.

On-site, the job developer or employment specialist is seeking information about the company, its hiring practices, what opportunities exist to create or carve jobs, and getting insights into the company culture. The general format of an informational interview is:

1. Brief Discussion prompted by the employment specialist asking something to effect of: “Before we tour, can you tell me a bit about the history of the business, the products and services, and how the business is evolving?” And, “Tell me how you got into this line of work.” People want to know that you care, so give them a chance to talk about themselves.
2. Tour, with questions asked at appropriate times and of various people performing the many tasks along the way.
3. Wrap-up by thanking the person for their time, indicating that you may have someone interested in this field as a career or even possibly working there now or later. Make your exit and promise to stay in touch.

Throughout the process, opportunities to ask questions conversationally exist. Since this is not a job development visit, do not press someone for a job. That comes later in the relationship. For now, the tour is answering questions about the varying tasks and duties people perform, the values and culture of the company, and needs the business has that your organization or workers can address.

The tour provides an opportunity to witness, for instance, the level of natural support that may be available to someone with a disability. Keen observation reveals whether co-workers and supervisors help each other out during a typical day; it reveals who does the training and how an employment specialist might structure the initiation period so that the employer takes significant responsibility for supervision and training right from the start; it reveals what is valued on the worksite, such as muscle, brains, humor, attendance, speed, quality or other worker traits. These are important considerations, of course, when designing a job match that minimizes on-site training and consultation.

The interviewing process, as well, reveals opportunities or red flags if the place of employment does not provide a good working environment. Some standard questions for an informational interview, again, asked in a conversational and not an interrogative tone, include:

1. Where do you find or recruit employees? (This is asked in case you now need to refer to Job Service if they do all the hiring searches for this particular employer; to identify your competition; and to create an opportunity to discuss the service you provide).
2. How are people trained in their jobs? (This gives information about natural training means and methods that can be sculpted into a job match and training plan, especially one that recognizes that in most cases business already trains its employees and that the support you offer is customizing their training, not replacing it).
3. What are the prerequisites for working here? (This points out the various qualifications, certifications, etc., that might be needed).
4. How or where do your employees gain the experience required to work here? (Another question that gets at qualifications and that seeks the advice of the “expert.” This also gives the job developer a list of other similar companies).
5. What personal characteristics do you look for in employees? (This gives insight into the kind of candidate the employer seeks; provides information on what to highlight in a resume or interview; and gives a glimpse inside the culture of the company regarding the most valued skills and attributes).

6. When employees leave, what other industries or businesses do they go to? (This starts getting at issues of staff turnover, which might be an indicator of a great place to work in the case where no one leaves, to an indication of poor management in the case where there is high turnover. It also provides the job developer with information on related industries and possible opportunities for someone interested in similar work).

7. What are the pay and benefit rates?

8. What are the work hours? Is there shift work? Does the company allow for flex time or other job accommodations? (This gives the employment specialist insight into the flexibility of management and the company's policies on work hours and expected work effort).

9. What impact is technology having on the industry? (This is a common concern for most businesses today and provides an opportunity for the job developer using Resource Ownership strategies to propose a job for someone who can use or bring with them a piece of essential technology that can be purchased through a Social Security PASS Plan or through Vocational Rehabilitation).

10. What are the current forces for change in this industry? (This question often leads to a lively discussion of how the market is changing, how personnel preparation and training is evolving, and how the competitive market is adapting).

All these questions and their answers breed add-on questions and discussion points that provide opportunities to solve labor problems or to innovate in the face of emerging trends in hiring. Informational interviews are a low-tech, high-touch option that provides insight into the inner workings of business. Knowing what goes on in a given company gives the employment specialist or job developer an added advantage when creating employment or responding to an employer need.

