

Partnering For Placement



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Our Mission

Abilities, Inc. is a non-profit agency dedicated to facilitating integrated employment and full participation of persons with disabilities in their work and living communities. Employment is accomplished through direct service to youth and adults with disabilities and to employers, insurance carriers, schools and colleges and other rehabilitation programs. Services are delivered, when possible, in diverse community settings in response to consumer and business needs and legislative mandates. Abilities, Inc... is committed to developing and demonstrating programs and services of national excellence.

Lessons Learned on the Job

By Judy Young

Our current PWI staff much like its consumers represent a diverse group of individuals in terms of age, gender, race, educational background and prior work experience. Some are relatively new to the field of vocational rehabilitation while others have personal experiences with disabilities and employment barriers. Regardless of background, however, there are several common threads that bind our staff together: a desire to help others, dedication to the job, and a willingness to learn. These qualities are brought to light through the articles in this issue of our newsletter. There are several key words and phrases that should be highlighted upfront to summarize the valuable lessons our staff have learned on the job and which they practice on a daily basis in order to make a difference in the lives of the consumers they serve.

- * Success is a combination of small steps and persistence.
- * Listen, understand, and have patience.
- * Open mindedness, compassion, understanding

- * Redefinition of the meaning of disability.

Every consumer and employer are unique, therefore, the lessons are constantly changing.

The most important asset you bring to your job is your willingness to accept constant change and your ability to adjust, move on, and thrive under new and challenging circumstances.

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CAREER OPTIONS: A Career Development Model For Projects With Industry

Compassion and Perspective

By Liz Krumenacker

I remember the time I had to commute an hour back to Long Island from Manhattan with a dizzying fever that had come over me during a meeting. The struggle to get from the office to the train station had me walking in a very slow, unsteady, un-New York-like daze. People around me were oblivious, bumping into me, getting impatient walking behind me because I was taking so long to walk up the stairs. At one point, I was frustrated, depressed and embarrassed. The next minute, though, I was flooded by the thought that this is nothing! I know of people who experience this and so much more every day.

That tiny tip of the iceberg of compassion changed my perspective. I had heard from consumers many times about their issues with a particular commute or nervousness about a new situation. And I typically try to get them past those feelings; it's about getting the job.

For me that was a lesson, a reminder, a wake-up call. In the hot pursuit of the next job opportunity, it's very easy to want to rush the

process and say to a consumer here it is, just go after it. Given my changed perspective, the kind of approach that might have seemed encouraging and motivating, instead seemed out of step with someone else's reality. Yes, we need to continue to be supportive and sometimes we all need that one person who can nudge and push us through what we might fear or what makes us nervous and apprehensive. As Placement Specialists we do that all the time. Bringing a deeper level of compassion into it though, that is, a learned understanding of how complex the situation can be helps us to know a consumer even better than we thought we did. I remember learning that lesson from the fevered walk to the subway and from my consumers on a regular basis, who have really only been asking that I understand them.

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BRIGHT NEW FUTURES

Lessons Learned: My Perspective

By Gina Sahin

When my 8 year old son comes home from school, I will routinely ask him, "What

did you learn today at school?". The usual answer is "nothing" or "I don't know". By the

good grades on his report card; however, I know that he absolutely is learning something even if he is unaware that it is happening. Learning is a process that can be quite subtle and it can happen without even realizing that it is happening. Like a child who realizes that last year's work is now "too easy" or its "baby work", adults can be unaware that they are learning something too.

When asked to write this article, "Lessons learned on/ from the job?", I believe my eyes glazed over and I put on a blank face. What do you mean, "Lessons learned?" I know that I learned something, but like a child, I couldn't put it into a sentence without sounding....well...childish. On a simple level, I have learned things like: resume writing, cold calling techniques, the do's and don't of the interview and writing case note/progress reports. I can do job placement, job coaching and conduct Job Hunt Club. Even though I technically have mastered these skills to a satisfactory level, I am keenly aware that the *learning never ends and that I can learn something new every day.*

The most meaningful yet difficult lessons that I have learned have not been related to the actual tasks of the job but to the relationships that I have with the consumers and the employers. For me, the real lessons are interpersonal: learning to communicate

effectively, motivating consumers, turning a bad work situation around, mediating between employer and consumer, not missing an opportunity to secure an interview and not underestimating the consumer's abilities. Most of the above is subjective and can be improved upon everyday. Every consumer and employer is unique; therefore, the lessons are constantly changing. What works for one consumer/employer may not work for another, so it is hard to settle in on one way of doing things.

We learn from our mistakes. Being open-minded to constructive criticism and doing self-analysis is key to learning from a mistake. Stubbornness and defensiveness won't lead to change or growth. I believe that life is a series of lessons and that most mistakes are really lessons waiting to be learned.

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By Any Measure of Success

By Robert Childers

One afternoon in 2003, I received a phone call from a man claiming to work for the Center for Independent Living (CIL) of Mid Michigan. He wanted to tell me about a program called Michigan Assistive Technology Clearinghouse (M.A.T.C.H). At the time, I had never heard of the CIL, let alone a program called M.A.T.C.H. But in our conversation the

word "job" kept coming up, and that is why I agreed to meet with him to talk about the program, I have had a disability from polio at an early age, then later in life I developed a heart condition. I had been unemployed for nearly two years and unable to find a job, but after doing an interview and intake for M.A.T.C.H., I was called back and asked if I

would be interested in working for the CIL as a Program Assistant. So to make a long story short, here I am.

This was my first experience working for an organization such as this. I have had a disability all my life, so I figured I knew what being disabled was all about. I could not have been more wrong. The first thing I learned was that I had to redefine my definition of "disability". Disability comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, and in many degrees of severity. Up until now, I had only thought of my disability in terms of how it affected my life and me. So, to understand the needs of our consumers, I realized that I would have to try this with each and every person. But where do I start? Since I was hired as an Assistant, personal interaction with consumers was often limited. I found that it wasn't enough to rely on just the information a consumer gave me. In short, I have learned that personal interaction with your consumer is vital when it comes to matching up jobs to their abilities. Resumes and records can only take you so far.

I have also learned that for many consumers, transportation is a huge stumbling block. In an economy such as ours here in Michigan, it is difficult to find employment for

consumers who are unable to travel out of their local neighborhoods. I have found that the transportation issue is one of the largest, most difficult parts of a job search to overcome. There is no easy answer to this problem but I have learned that providing information about public transportation choices has been extremely helpful.

And finally, one additional thing I have learned it to collect information from each consumer about their hobbies or special abilities. I have found that many people don't even consider things they enjoy when it comes to making a list of job skills. I keep in mind these hobbies and abilities in my job searches and sometimes it makes all the difference.

The huge smile on a consumer's face after landing a job says it all. It proclaims to everyone that even more is possible tomorrow.

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Being, Having, Doing: A Lesson Learned

By Kathy Herron

Why do I do what I do? What is my purpose? How do I behave? What do I want? Why do I have these skills and not others? How did I get to this place in my life? Where do I go from here? Do I create my own reality? If so what reality do I want? What role do my thoughts and actions play in finding a job? How will I know when I'm in the right place? Who do I expect to be there? How long do I stay if I'm not happy there? What is healthy

for me? What have my previous experiences meant to me and to others? What's next, and next and next? So much uncertainty!

These are all questions and ponderings that motivate and inspire us to move forward to find our calling. What I've learned is that so many of the individuals I work with are uncomfortable asking these questions. There is a belief that one must look for and take a job

that's out there even though there is no interest or calling to do it. It's a job and its better to have a job than not. Make some money. Pay some bills. Improving the quality of life doesn't even come into question.

It is so much better to ask all the right questions and get into a place that feels good first. Then, feel directed. Then, take action. Seek out your dream. One must start where one feels the best. It may not be the ultimate feel great dream, but a small step in the right direction. Live what you feel inside. Create your reality.

So, Always! Always! Always! When seeking jobs, start with the question "How do I want to be?" Then write for example: to be, alive, energetic, excited, comfortable, powerful, awake, productive, focused, rich etc. Then really feel it.

Then ask, "What do I want to have?" The list may look something like this: a car, a job that I love, a new computer, an office with a phone, new clothes, money in the bank, all my bills paid in full, etc...Then, really feel that!

Now ask, "What am I doing today?" Perhaps the answer is: going to a meeting to explore new possibilities, talking to my rehab Counselor about training, going to lunch, looking in the paper for jobs, telling my kids I love them....etc.

Take a few minutes at the start of each day to ask yourself:

How do I want to Be:
 What do I want to Have:
 What do I want to Do:

This stops the fast paced "we go to do...do...do. mentality" and leads to inspired action rather than frantic action. Asking

consumers to identify how they want to feel/be first, before they do anything else, takes the focus off what they don't have (a job). It allows people to zero in on the feelings they will have when they get a job. Then, acting as if you already "Have" what you want makes it so much easier to "Do" the things that will attract a job to you.

We all want to feel good about ourselves, have wonderful things and do those things in life that contribute to others. If we feel good...we will do what is right for us. This process leads us to use our skills to their highest potential. Ultimately, feeling good and serving others are being our highest.

Most folks in the world do the opposite. We "Do", so we can "Have", so we can "Be". I say "Be" first. If you can be alive and happy, then your desires are on their way. If it's true that like attracts like (and I believe it is), your job is on its way to being here. It's only a matter of time.

I tried this process with one of my consumers...James. He started to tell me what he had been "Doing". He was tired and depressed as he spoke. When I asked him how he wanted to "Be", he didn't know. So we listed the words. Then we got his resume together, made some phone calls and met with an employer.

James has since started a 90 hour training program with an employer that hopefully will lead to full-time employment upon completion. His attitude (and mine) changed from lack of to hope and inspiration to a belief in real possibilities. James will be working soon...it is just a matter of time.

So...I've learned to begin with "Being" first...It's the only way to have what you want so you can do what you do. And, it's inspiring,

a great way to meet deadlines for paperwork and attract employers.

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ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

A Successful Challenge

By Elizabeth Cooper

Just look around and listen to the world of today. There are styles and choices for almost everything. But beware!!!!

“Everything in life can change before your very eyes, and all within the same day.”

“Nothing will ever stay quite the same.”

We have heard these “clichés” over and over, so much so that we have taken them for granted which is truly a terrible mistake.

For the many persons living with a disability, things are never taken for granted. The necessary essentials in life are equal to everyone, however; we see diversity in the methods of delivery. People with disabilities tend to see various attitudes, opinions, negative demeanors, and the closed door effect with the nothing available scenario. The feeling sorry and pitiful atmosphere grips your ever being. You become surrounded with no where to turn for a rescue. Where do I get the strength to overcome?

We are all capable of becoming disabled at some point in our life. Disability is something

that can happen to anyone at anytime. And, as I have discovered, boundaries are unfairly set for the disabled person sometimes not giving them enough credit for making important life decisions. Education is one way of addressing our fears toward disability and our lack of knowledge to disability issues.

For many persons living with a disability, their skills, abilities and attributes become more focused. Education, knowledge and stability on the job are the standard goal for all persons regardless to disability. There is a constant need to prove a sense of value and self-worth to others. This desire to demonstrate a particular self-worth can be more pronounced due to the characteristics of the disability. You will often hear a person with a disability say “I can do it, if you give me a chance”. This is not a cliché, but a real life dilemma. We all need to step aside and see ourselves in another person’s shoe. Now that is a cliché, easier said than done. Do we even dare?

To listen, to understand, and to have patience is the foundation for all good communication. Knowing “what to say” and “how to say it” makes all the difference.

Sometimes, all a person may need is for someone to listen, the problem will solve itself in time. To do nothing is sometimes the best response to a situation

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Journeys of Discovery

By Barbara Davis

I am writing this on the last day before I go on medical leave for hip replacement surgery. As I try to get things “caught up” before leaving, I have had many moments to reflect on the different consumers I worked with in the PWI program. It has been a journey of discovery not just for them, but for myself as well.

Teenagers who didn't know they had skills learned they did Displaced workers learned how to transfer skills from one profession to another. I learned I can enjoy teenagers as long as they aren't my own. I've watched consumers who have been out of work for a long time struggle with low self-esteem, and as soon as they begin some type of volunteer work, begin to fly. Some consumers have improved their skills or gained new ones by using our typing tutor or taking free library courses that have been recommended to them. Still others have learned to develop resumes and cover letters and improve their job interview skills. The greatest joy for me has been watching the four consumers with autism go from not being able to interact with people at all to gradually beginning to make eye contact on a job interview and interacting with others in a work or social setting.

Our consumers are not the only ones who have grown through this program. I find

that often the consumers teach me more than I teach them. I have learned new signs in ASL, discovered innovative techniques for accommodating visual impairments, learned to manage my MS better and improved my resume developing skills. I also learned what an oral interpreter is. And here I am, telling my consumers they need to learn to ask for accommodations, but I never remember to ask for an oral interpreter when I need one.

Recently a consumer called to let me know he found a summer job. I asked him to contact me when he was ready to enlist my help again. He informed me that he didn't think he would need my help. He said I had taught him what he needed to know in order to find a job on his own. He sounded really proud of himself.

As I hung up the phone, I realized that he had just shown *me* what an Independent Living Center is all about.

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GETTING STARTED

Never Judge a Book by its Cover

By Michael Dolan

So if I were to tell the tale of a lesson learned, it would be that most jobseekers, regardless of experience to past work history, have the same fears to anxiety about the job search process.

What I have learned is that every person we meet wants a job, of course. But they also want guidance, someone to point them in the right direction. A candidate, for example, has a limited background on paper may have interest and abilities that do not appear on a resume. A good Job Developer should find out about a person's interest (i.e. the music they like, books they read, etc.). Before you know, you probably have the person opening up to you and providing information that may lead to a new direction in the job search. Like the spokesperson for the New York State Lottery says, "Hey, you never know".

When we are meeting a person for the first time, it is important that we convey a sense of confidence. Our consumers have many questions. Now we do not have all the answers, but it is our job to help them get those answers.

So in conclusion, what have I learned? I guess one thing would be not to judge a book by its cover. I also learned to give the jobseeker hope by exuding confidence in your presentation to them.

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Putting Your Best Foot Forward

By David Romero

One thing I have learned is that when establishing a new consumer and/or employer contact, making a favorable impression is the key component to ultimately gaining the results you wish to achieve. This process of making a favorable impression can begin from the initial contact with the receptionist and culminating to the final meeting with the interviewer.

In one instance, I had two candidates interviewing for the same position. The interview was conducted in a group setting. It was apparent that one of the candidates was

clearly a stronger, better-fitted individual for the position, as he possessed all the relevant skills. On the other hand, the second candidate was less experienced and did not possess the relevant skills required for this position. This seemed obvious but what was not so obvious was that the first candidate, who obviously was more qualified, did not possess the soft skills necessary to make a good impression. The next morning, I received a message from the employer and was pleasantly surprised that they chose to hire the less qualified candidate. A couple of days later, I questioned this

employer as to why they chose this less qualified candidate and they responded to me by stating that this candidate was hired due to his politeness, well-mannered behavior and eagerness and willingness to learn.

This was an eye opening experience for me as a Placement Specialist. The fact is all employers have their own reasons why they choose to hire one individual over another. But

on thing is for sure: putting your best foot forward is the key to success.

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The Essentials of Job Placement

By Dhalia Weiss

While my official job title is “Job Placement Specialist,” I have learned that this job is so much more. Working with my students has been an enriching and rewarding experience and has taught me some very important lessons. Ultimately, success is a combination of small steps, persistence and motivation.

The very first lesson that I learned was that it takes small little steps to reach one big goal. Many students are looking for their first job. Whether it is part-time employment to complement their schoolwork, or a full-time opportunity in a field in which they majored, students had to prepare themselves for the challenging job search. This includes the process of resume writing, interviewing, personal presentation and negotiating. Many students have to overcome a number of barriers to complete these steps. I have been happy to take part in this process, working with the students from the beginning to the end.

Second, persistence pays off. I have found that students are very focused on the end goal of obtaining a job. However, the road to that opportunity is not always direct. For example, many students are interested in computer sciences – one of the most competitive job markets. While working to

fulfill their dreams, several have used their computer skills in a different way, which ultimately led to finding their desired position. Several students have initially opted for short-term temporary assignments to establish themselves in a particular organization before being offered permanent employment. Others have taken positions outside their field to serve as work experience, and help them build up employment history. Whatever route the students took, their persistence in attaining their end goal helped them to secure the desired outcome and realize their potential.

The third thing I learned is that students are managing difficult aspects of their life, and motivation to find a job is often something that comes and goes. Students try to negotiate hurdles that they face, but sometimes other aspects of life overcome. Motivation is the key to success and comes in many different forms. I have often found myself encouraging students to think beyond traditional job-searching methods. Quite frequently, I have found that students simply need someone to believe in them when they face obstacles and help them find reasons to continue the job search when they are discouraged.

I am fortunate to learn from these lessons, and be reminded of the keys to success in the job market, with each student

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News from NBDC

New Research Study Reports That Employees With Depression View Illness as Barrier to a Successful Career

Submitted by Laura Francis

According to a study conducted by the University of Michigan Depression Center (UMDC), employees who are fully treated for depression have greater symptom control, which significantly improves productivity and optimism about career advancement. Unfortunately, while 89 per cent of employees with depression report having some form of mental health coverage, they do not seek assistance. Statistics show that three out of four employees with depression delay seeking help and 38 per cent remain only partially treated.

The survey explores employee and line and benefit management perceptions of depression and how it is addressed in the workplace. The results clearly highlight the difference between company perception and employee reality:

- 65 per cent of benefit managers report providing an employee assistance program (EAP) for depression, yet only 14 per cent of employees have ever used one

- 85 per cent of middle managers believe assisting employees with depression is part of their job, yet only 18 per cent have received the training necessary to identify depression and intervene with employees effectively
- 83 per cent of benefit managers feel their companies have taken steps to ensure employees with depression are supported by their co-workers, yet only 37 per cent conduct proactive depression educational programs
- 78 per cent of benefit managers believe loss in productivity due to depression is more costly to companies than treating it, yet only 11 per cent facilitate employee screening.

Despite broad access to mental health benefits, depressed employees aren't getting the help they need and this result is bad news for employers, who lose an estimated \$52 billion each year from depression-related absenteeism and reduced productivity.

Thomas Carli, MD, a psychiatrist and member of the University of Michigan Depression Center says, “Before employees can be treated, they need to first understand that they have an illness. Implementing proactive, relatively inexpensive initiatives, such as screening, disease education and manager training, can have a tremendous impact on worker productivity and overall employee well-being”.

For additional information on how to create a more supportive, stigma-free environment, which may encourage employees to feel more comfortable about accessing the

mental health services available to them, visit the University of Michigan Depression Center at www.med.umich.edu or contact NBDC Information Services at 516-465-1519 or email francis@business-disability.com.

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We Focus on Ability

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