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Gaining Access to Employment: Removing Barriers For Individuals with Disabilities

By Heidi Dirkse-Graw
DCC Director

In the States of Oregon and Washington, only 4 out of every 10 people with disabilities between the working ages of 16-64 years-old are employed, almost half the employment rate compared to same age peers without disability. (2006 American Community Survey). In addition, certain disability groups have higher unemployment rates than others. For example, individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing are unemployed at a rate of 90% in the United States.

There is no doubt that people with disabilities experience barriers to employment. Issues may include, but are not limited to:

- Discrepancy in skills and education needed in the workplace
- Problems managing symptoms of disability
- Lack of knowledge of vocational strengths and limitations
- Perception of disability by the individual and/or employer
- Lack of job search skills
- Problems with communication

There are many ways that individuals with disabilities can begin to remove barriers to employment and open up access to suitable jobs. Below are some tips on how to find success:

Develop a Job Goal:

- Explore your vocational interests with the help of a vocational/

career counselor...they may provide you with an interest inventory or on-line resources

- Read the newspaper classified job ads and see what is available and with what qualifications... compare your interest and skill level to what is required...build a plan with a vocational counselor to get the skills you need
- Use websites like www.qualityinfo.org/olmisj or www.onetcenter.org



- Ask friends and family what they see as your personal strengths... ask about areas of reliability, communication, motivation, and skills
- Ask friends and family what they see as potential areas that you need to stay clear of in a job...this could be a job task, certain people interactions, certain environments, etc.

Understand Disability Related Needs that Impact Employment:

- Make a list of what you need to manage your disability...start to put these into place if you haven't already
- Challenge yourself about your personal attitudes about your dis-

ability...are you limiting yourself? With the right job match, a lot of limitations from a condition or impairment are minimized

- Research common job accommodations for your disabling condition(s) with the help of a vocational counselor and/or through www.dol.gov/odep/programs/job.htm

- In interviews understand that you don't need to disclose that you have a disability unless you need to request formal accommodation to apply for the job or to perform the main job tasks. Formulate your answers to show how you would perform certain duties if you think the employer has concerns that are unspeaken.

Start Job Search:

- Learn about how to look for work...a vocational rehabilitation counselor or an employment specialist at the Employment Department can help you. There are websites like OLMIS and Washington Worksource that can help, too.

- Make a plan with specific tasks that you want to accomplish...set a goal for how many jobs you want to apply to in a week...ask yourself about the steps to do reach your goal

- Practice interviewing by writing down answers to interview questions. Your job developer should have a list of commonly asked questions or you can Google interview...Continued on Page 2

INFORMATION
OR REFERRALS,
PLEASE CALL:

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...skills and find questions and tips via the web. When you are thinking about how to answer the questions, make sure to back up your answers with examples from your experience and focus your answers on how you can meet the employer's needs.

-Write down times where you have had conflict, on-the-job, and how you handled the situation...was it resolved in a productive way? If not, consider seeking out some skills training or counseling to help you learn to assertively and productively communicate

-Assess whether or not you are willing to do what it takes to face the rollercoaster of a job search...talk about your concerns with a trusted source and build a plan to move forward

Remember that to overcome any barrier it takes work. It won't happen by itself. Make sure to get support in the process. Surround yourself with people who can build you up and cheer you on! Take the time to see what happens and find the job for you!

DCC Staffing Changes

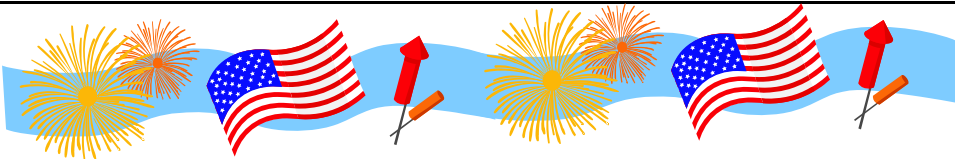
DCC says goodbye to two team members after two years of service. Frances Alonso and Izabella Lewandowski both leave DCC with proven records of helping individuals with disabilities and cultural barriers to find and maintain employment. Both accepted specialized teaching jobs in Vancouver, Washington which will start in the fall. They will be missed, but we wish them well in their new endeavors!

New Hires:

In April, DCC welcomed back Susan Ayres, B.A. as a Vocational Consultant. Susan left the company in late 1999 to raise her children. Her background previous to working as a successful job developer with DCC was firmly established in Human Resource Recruiting. Welcome back Susan!

Also in April, DCC hired Laura Schaffer, B.A. in a dual role as an Administrative Assistant and Vocational Consultant. Laura earned a bachelor's degree in communications and has ample experience working with diverse people. Welcome Laura!

On August 1st we will welcome our NEW Bi-lingual (Spanish/English) Vocational Consultant, Jason Miller to our team. Jason comes to DCC with a solid work history in field of career transition/employment counseling and is excited to provide services to individuals with disabilities whose first language is Spanish. Welcome Jason!

**Coming Soon!**

A survey team from CARF* will be visiting our premises in November-December 2008

We invited the CARF surveyors to evaluate how well our services meet international standards for quality. The survey team will be looking at many things about us and our services. The survey will tell us what we are doing well and ways we might improve. As a result of this survey, our services may earn or continue CARF accreditation.

As part of the survey, the surveyors will interview people who use our services, their families, our staff, and others. Some questions the survey team members might ask people are:

- Are our services provided in a clean and safe setting?
- Do you receive the services you need and want?
- Are you treated with respect?
- Do you take part in planning your services?
- Are you told what you need to know about your services?
- Are your questions answered in a way you understand?
- Do you know where to go with questions or concerns?

If you would like to talk with one of the CARF survey team members or want to learn more about CARF, please let one of our staff members know. You may also contact CARF directly.

- Internet: www.carf.org
- E-mail: feedback@carf.org
- Mail: CARF, 4891 E. Grant Road, Tucson, AZ 85712
- Toll-free telephone: (866) 510-2273
- Fax: (520) 318-1129

*CARF is an international, not-for-profit organization that accredits human services providers. Founded in 1966 as the Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities, the accrediting body is now known as CARF.

Tips for Hispanic Individuals to be Successful in the American Workplace

*By Frances Alonso
Bilingual Vocational Counselor*

- Your primary goal needs to be to learn English. Start by locating a private tutor. This person could be either a professional or a friend that knows English well and is willing to conscientiously dedicate time to study with you at least once a week for a minimum of two hours per session. It is important that the location of the meeting be quiet and conducive to study. This may be at a public library or, weather permitting, in a park. If either of the parties' homes are quiet and void of distractions, this may be another choice.
- Reading English is of utmost importance. Due to its peculiarities in spelling and grammar, very unlike Spanish, the student would benefit from seeing the language written as much as possible. The newspaper is a fine choice. If you have children enrolled in school, familiarize yourself with their textbooks and ask them to discuss what they are currently studying – in English!
- Buy an English grammar workbook to take to work and do on your lunch hour. Sitting with others during breaks will also invite assistance and feedback. Plus, it is a big bonus if the employer is aware that you are making the effort to learn English. Any new vocabulary should be written down. Be sure to always have paper and pencil on hand so you are ready to jot down any new words or phrases heard throughout your day. The best way to memorize new vocabulary is to take a piece of paper and create two vertical columns: one side in English with the Spanish translation on the other side. Review weekly by folding the paper in half and having someone test you. Have them check off the words or phrases you have memorized and rewrite your list without these words. The process of rewriting the list will further help your recall and give you new space for new words and phrases.
- If time and finances allow, enroll in classes taught in English. These do not necessarily need to be ESL classes. Keep in mind that ESL classes tend to offer only basic English instruction. You could actually move along much faster on your own if you are motivated and dedicated enough to your private studies. Look for more special interest classes such as photography or arts and crafts; basing it on a hobby will keep you motivated longer and give you a pleasant diversion from your private studies.
- Watch the news in English and switch the channel to watch programs in English. This will be difficult at first, but with time you will become more familiar with proper pronunciation and the rhythm of the language itself. You will quickly find yourself repeating commonly used phrases. Remember to add them to your new vocabulary list!
- Oh, and one more thing: change your personal message on your telephone to a bilingual one. This way, your employer, particularly, will feel more at ease leaving you a message.

Consejos para que los Hispanos tengan Éxito en el Lugar de Trabajo Americano

*Por Frances Alonso
Consejera Profesional Bilingüe*

- Su objetivo primordial necesita ser aprender el inglés. Empezar por encontrar un tutor privado. Esta persona puede ser un profesional o un amigo que conozca el inglés bien y conscientemente quiera dedicarle a Ud. el tiempo para estudiar por lo menos semanal y por un mínimo de dos horas cada sesión. Es importante que el lugar del encuentro sea callado y que sea propicio al estudio. Esto puede ser en una biblioteca pública o, si permite el tiempo, en un parque. Si cualquiera de los hogares de las partes es callado y desprovisto de las distracciones, esto puede ser otra opción.
- El leer en inglés es de extrema importancia. Debido a sus peculiaridades en la ortografía y gramática, muy distinto al español, el estudiante beneficiaría en ver el idioma escrito lo más posible. El periódico es una buena elección. Si Ud. tiene hijos matriculados en la escuela, familiarícese con sus textos y pídale que discutan lo que están aprendiendo corrientemente – ¡en inglés!
- Compre un cuaderno de ejercicios de la gramática en inglés que pueda llevar consigo al trabajo y estudiar durante el almuerzo. Sentarse con los demás durante los descansos también invitaría la ayuda y reacción. Además, es una gran ventaja si el empleador se entera de que Ud. está haciendo el esfuerzo para aprender el inglés. Cualquier vocabulario nuevo se debe escribir. Asegúrese de siempre tener papel y lápiz a mano para que pueda anotar cualquier palabras o frases nuevas escuchadas durante el día. La mejor manera de memorizar el vocabulario nuevo es tomar un pedazo de papel y crear dos columnas verticales: un lado en inglés con la traducción en español al otro lado. Repase semanalmente doblando el papel por la mitad y tener a alguien que le de la prueba. Pídale que tache las palabras o frases que Ud. se ha memorizado y vuelva a escribir su lista sin incluir éstas. El proceso de reescribir la lista le ayudará aún más a recordar y le dará espacio nuevo para las palabras y frases nuevas.
- Si el tiempo y los recursos financieros permiten, inscríbese en las clases enseñadas en inglés. Éstas no necesariamente tienen que ser clases de ESL (estudio del inglés como segundo idioma). Tenga presente que estas clases tienden ofrecer solo la instrucción básica en inglés. Ud. podrá realmente avanzar mucho más rápido solo si es una persona motivada y dedicada lo suficiente a sus estudios privados. Busque clases que sean de más interés especial como la fotografía o artesanía; basando la clase en un pasatiempo lo mantendrá motivado por más tiempo y le dará una distracción agradable de sus estudios privados.
- Véa las noticias en español y cambie el canal para ver los programas en inglés. Ésto será difícil al principio, pero con el tiempo se familiarizará más con la pronunciación adecuada y el ritmo del idioma mismo. Pronto se encontrará repitiendo las frases más comúnmente usadas. ¡Acuérdese de añadirlas a su lista de vocabulario nuevo!
- Oh, y una cosa más: cambie su mensaje personal en su teléfono a uno bilingüe. Así, su empleador, especialmente, se sentirá más cómodo con dejarle un mensaje.

Tips for Employers in Working with Hispanic Individuals

*By Frances Alonso
Bilingual Vocational Counselor*

- Many Hispanics, primarily adults, have limited proficiency in English. While youth quickly learn English in school, adults have less opportunity to gain English skills due to long work hours and irregular schedules; ESL classes only offer basic English instruction. Encourage your Hispanic employees to learn English by offering incentives such as providing reimbursement for any study materials. Consider enrolling them in work-related courses or specific training in English.
 - Differences in educational levels, language skills, income levels, and cultural values among Hispanics need to be considered. Even though Hispanics share the same language, their cultures may vary considerably. Learn what these are and respect the differences.
 - Hispanic families instill in their children the importance of honor, good manners, and respect for authority and the elderly. Therefore, as a sign of respect, an employee may look down or make minimal eye contact while being addressed by someone in authority. They will also tend to be reserved about speaking too much because of their heavy foreign accent and unfamiliarity with the English language.
 - Information is passed mostly by word of mouth. Grocery stores and churches are the main places people meet, visit and exchange information. Sometimes mediators are used to convey messages, particularly in the case of bad news.
 - Conversations are held in closer proximity than with non-Hispanics. This demonstrates both friendliness and trust. Particular attention should be given to gaining and maintaining trust. Physical proximity is also much closer when sitting or standing next to one another.
- Moving away from an employee who seems too close to you can be considered an insult. Therefore, face-to-face communication should be maintained regardless of the presence of an interpreter.
- Hispanics tend to be more relaxed and flexible about time and punctuality than Americans. Set strict guidelines from the start. Arriving 15-minutes late to work is unacceptable.
 - Some Hispanics may feel low self-esteem due to a history of poor job opportunities, discrimination, access to education and how they feel to be perceived by others. Include your Hispanic employees in company meetings or informal gatherings, even if you may feel that the English language poses a communication barrier. In this way, they will feel more of a sense of belonging to the group and be more inclined to participate.
 - When a family obligation conflicts with a work obligation, the family usually takes precedence. Individuals within a family have a moral responsibility to aid other members of the family experiencing financial problems, unemployment, poor health conditions and other life issues. Do respect this but, at the same time, uphold and reinforce company policy of providing the employer with sufficient notice of an absence or tardiness.
 - Bear in mind that Latin America is a cash-oriented society. Cash usage and saving patterns are such that basic living expenses and major purchases are paid with cash. The safety and convenience of a checking account is simply unavailable in many Latin American countries. Economic instability and political corruption in many countries have generated a low reliance on, and lack of trust in, banking institutions. Therefore, direct deposit may not be an option.

How Long Does it Take to Find A Job?

By Heidi Dirkse-Graw, DCC Director

When someone is out of work, the thought of “how long will this take?” demands to be answered. Depending on how long you’ve been out of work, the demand for your occupation where you live and/or your level of work experience most likely determines the length of time to find new employment. However, with that said, knowing how and where to look for work and being able to sell your skill set are often the keys to a shorter duration of unemployment.

In the United States, the average length of unemployment in May 2008, was 3.8 months. This means most people can expect to put in a good amount of effort to find the right job. But what if you have a disability? How does that impact time to employment? That is a good question. Data was not found in my search on this subject. What is known, however is that vocational vendors like Dirkse Counseling & Consulting, Inc. keep records of length of time to job placement. It is important to understand the individuals who receive services are referred because they have barriers to employment that make it difficult to find suitable work in the competitive job market.

DCC records reveal that the average length of time to hire when working with our firm is 3.5 months, slightly below the national average. When individuals experienced a diagnosis of MR/DD the length of time increased to 4.3 months. Other disabilities averaged placement in 2.7 months.

Perhaps a better indicator, however, of the time it takes to get a job when working with an agency for job development, is the *Number of Hours to Job Placement*. This is important because the hours that DCC is authorized to work with a given client is pre-determined and in some cases is limited to a certain number per month. Overall, however, in the year 2007, 70% of all clients were placed within 20 hours of direct service delivery. The other 30 % saw a dramatic jump in the hours needed to help secure a job, mostly linked to lack of work history, severity of disability and/or need to carve out a position.

What can you do to get a job as quick as possible? The answer, I believe, is to be willing to work hard and be a bit uncomfortable. Job search takes effort and vulnerability as you put yourself out there to have your skills evaluated by business. If you are working with a job developer make sure you are an active part of your own team. Most companies, like DCC, have a documented plan with tasks identified and who is responsible. Make sure you are doing your part and check in to see how the job developer is doing. There are some things you can do to help yourself no matter what other tasks you have been given: practice interviewing, have your clothes ready, get into a regular sleep schedule. The more you are prepared and rested, the better equipped you will be to win over the employer with your presentation of your skills. Make all your time count.