



Customized Employment Tool: Interviewing

INTRODUCTION

Conducting interviews is usually a part of providing employment services to individuals with disabilities. Typically, there is an intake interview during which people seeking services are asked about their goals for employment as well as other relevant information. Interviewing is a way to learn about a person's experiences. What meaning do these experiences have for the person, and how will they impact employment? Interviewing should not be used to "evaluate" the job seeker with disabilities, which is a very important distinction when using interviewing as part of customized employment services.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews can take a variety of forms such as structured with a list of pre-determined questions to more informal conversations with open-ended questions. Typically, interviewing for employment services has involved having a list of questions that the interviewer uses with little deviation from the "script." However, using a script to conduct a conversation with a job seeker

Conversation: an informal, usually private, talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged. (Source: Cambridge Dictionary)

does not necessarily lead to a *meaningful* conversation.

How questions are asked and how follow-up questions are phrased will impact whether the answers provide any insight to assisting a person in finding a job. The right questions may lead to

"discovering" information that will assist in getting to know the job seeker. They can help the employment specialist uncover factors that facilitate employment as well as issues that may be barriers. Being interested in the job seeker is fundamental to providing effective customized employment services. This involves putting aside any preconceived ideas or assumptions about the individual and listening to the person.

LIFE EXPERIENCES AND INTERVIEWING

Taking into account the job seeker's life experiences, the person may have very limited information on which to base their answers to questions. It is not unusual for an employment

specialist to ask a job seeker, “What do you want to do for a job?” Some job seekers are able to describe what they want to do. However, many job seekers, for whom customized employment will be a critical service, will have no idea what they want to do. The only work experiences that this person may have are adult day programs or facility-based services or – “nothing.” As an example, everyone in Mrs. Smith’s class goes to the fast food restaurant to clean tables and help with stocking the condiment containers. Or, everyone who is receiving services goes to the local diner for a situational assessment cleaning the dining area. The person with disabilities who only has experiences with janitorial tasks or other service positions may respond that they want to clean at the fast food restaurant. Or, individuals who have only participated in facility-based programs may answer “no” when asked if they want to work in the community. These individuals simply may not know how to answer the question: “what job do you want?” They have “poverty of experiences,” and they simply do not know what they can or want to do.

Do not fall into the trap of talking too much when conducting interviews. Don’t rush to fill up silent pauses. Wait for the other person to answer a question. Don’t assume if the person pauses that he or she does not have an answer. The person may simply be thinking about the response. Rushing ahead to another question may be a missed opportunity to learn more. Also, don’t interrupt the other person, which may be interpreted as lack of interest in what the individual is saying.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Asking “What do you like to do?” provides a place to initiate a conversation, but it is only the beginning of getting to know the individual. For instance, a person might say that she likes to go to the store with her mother. This response really doesn’t provide much information about the individual’s interests or skills for employment.

Another consideration is to ask questions that are open-ended rather than those that can be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Questions that can be answered with a yes or no response are referred to as closed ended questions. Asking “What do you do in your free time” may provide more information than asking, “Do you have hobbies?” Open-ended questions may include words such as describe, explain, give me examples of, tell me about, and so forth. Consider using the words: who, what, where, when, how or why when asking open-ended questions.

The employment specialist must be cautious, because some people have interests and hobbies that they don't want to do for a job. Making sure that a person's interests relate to the tasks they want to do is incredibly important. Following up with additional questions might provide insight into whether aspects of going to a specific store could be an employment theme, or whether the person just likes going out with her mother. The following provides some examples about asking questions to get to know the job seeker's interests.

Sample Questions

The person states that she likes going to CVS with her mother.

- Tell me what you do when you go to CVS?
- What do you like the most about going to the CVS?
- What is your favorite aisle (section) of the store?
- Have you ever gone to CVS with anyone other than your mother? Tell me about that.
- What else do you like to do with your mother? Can you give me an example?
- Tell me about other stores where you like to go.
- What is best thing you remember about going to _____?

The person responds that her favorite section of the store is make-up (cosmetics).

- Tell me more about what you do in the make-up section.
- What would you buy in the make-up section if you could buy anything that you want?
- Tell me about the last time you went to CVS and got to buy make-up.
- How did you pay for the make-up? How much money did you have?
- What is the best thing about being able to go to the make-up section of CVS?

SUMMARY

Employment specialists may wonder why asking job seekers about their life experiences or daily activities is relevant to employment. As mentioned previously, a person may have little experience with work and asking questions about work may yield very little information. For instance, an employment specialist might ask the person what time of day he or she would like to work and not receive an answer. Alternative questions may include asking what time the person gets up in the morning, goes to bed, or participates in regularly scheduled activities. If the person always meets friends at the gym on Thursday and Saturday from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, then scheduling work at that time may not be a good idea. The person may be unhappy that she

cannot see her friends and “sabotage” working. As another example, the person may say that he likes to play games on an iPad. “Playing games” requires a wide variety of skills from simply looking at the iPad to interacting with other people such as playing scrabble word games that require reading and spelling skills. Learning about the job seeker’s daily activities can provide a great deal of valuable information about the person’s skills as well as about the supports that people in the person’s life provide.

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