

Tips for Employer Relationship Building:  
A Guide for IPS Supported Employment Specialists



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## Introduction

This booklet is intended to augment job development training for IPS supported employment programs. The premise of the training is that employment specialists should take time to learn about the needs and preferences of employers, before asking employers to meet a job candidate. In this approach, the employer is viewed as a customer. So, although the employment specialist may go to an employer with a job candidate in mind, he might ultimately decide that the candidate is not a good fit for that particular employer.

Another important component of this type of job development is that the employment specialist makes multiple in-person visits to develop relationships with employers. Just as many people find jobs through networking, the employment specialist develops a network of employers that she can share with her clients. Further, the repeat visits demonstrate that the employment specialist is dependable and interested in a long-term relationship.

So, the first step would be for the specialist to go in-person to introduce herself to an employer and ask for a short appointment to come back to learn about the business. When she returns for the appointment, she'll focus on learning about the business and the employer's view about the type of candidates that he would like to meet. She will refrain from asking about job openings or conducting a presentation about her program. She will likely follow-up by sending or dropping off a thank-you note for the employer's time, and then would take time to reflect on the stage of the relationship. Is it time to begin discussing a candidate? Does the relationship need further work? Does it appear that she and the employer will be able to provide something useful for each other going forward? An employment specialist may decide to maintain the relationship even if the employer isn't hiring, or even if she doesn't have the right candidate for the job at that moment.

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Sample Questions  
To learn about an employer's needs

**Questions about the business:**

- Why do you like working for \_\_\_\_\_ (name of business)?
- What are your goals for (the business or department)?
- What is your vision for your company over the next year?
- What sets your company apart from others?
- As the manager for \_\_\_\_\_, what are you most proud of?
- Is there a time of year when your business is busiest?

**Questions about the right job candidates:**

- What type of person tends to be successful here?
- What qualities do you look for when you are interviewing job candidates?
- What are some of your hiring headaches?
- Describe the qualities of a person who would love to work here?

**Questions about positions:**

- Please describe your workforce.
- I see that you have \_\_\_\_\_ positions. What other positions do you have that I may not know about?
- What is a typical day like for a \_\_\_\_\_ (name of position)?
- What are some of the challenges that people have had in these positions?
- Do some positions have more turnover than others?

**Questions about the hiring process:**

- What is your hiring process?
- So, people should start with an online application. But you mentioned that you need people who are self-starters with outgoing personalities. If you had a friend who matched that description how would you advise your friend to go about applying for work here?
- How have you found good job candidates in the past?

**Ineffective questions:**

- Are you hiring?
- Do you anticipate job openings in the future?
- Are you laying off?
- What do you do here?
- Do you hire people with criminal histories?
- Do you hire people who have substance use disorders?
- What do you do here? (Learn this about the company before the appointment.)

## Questions You Have Found Helpful

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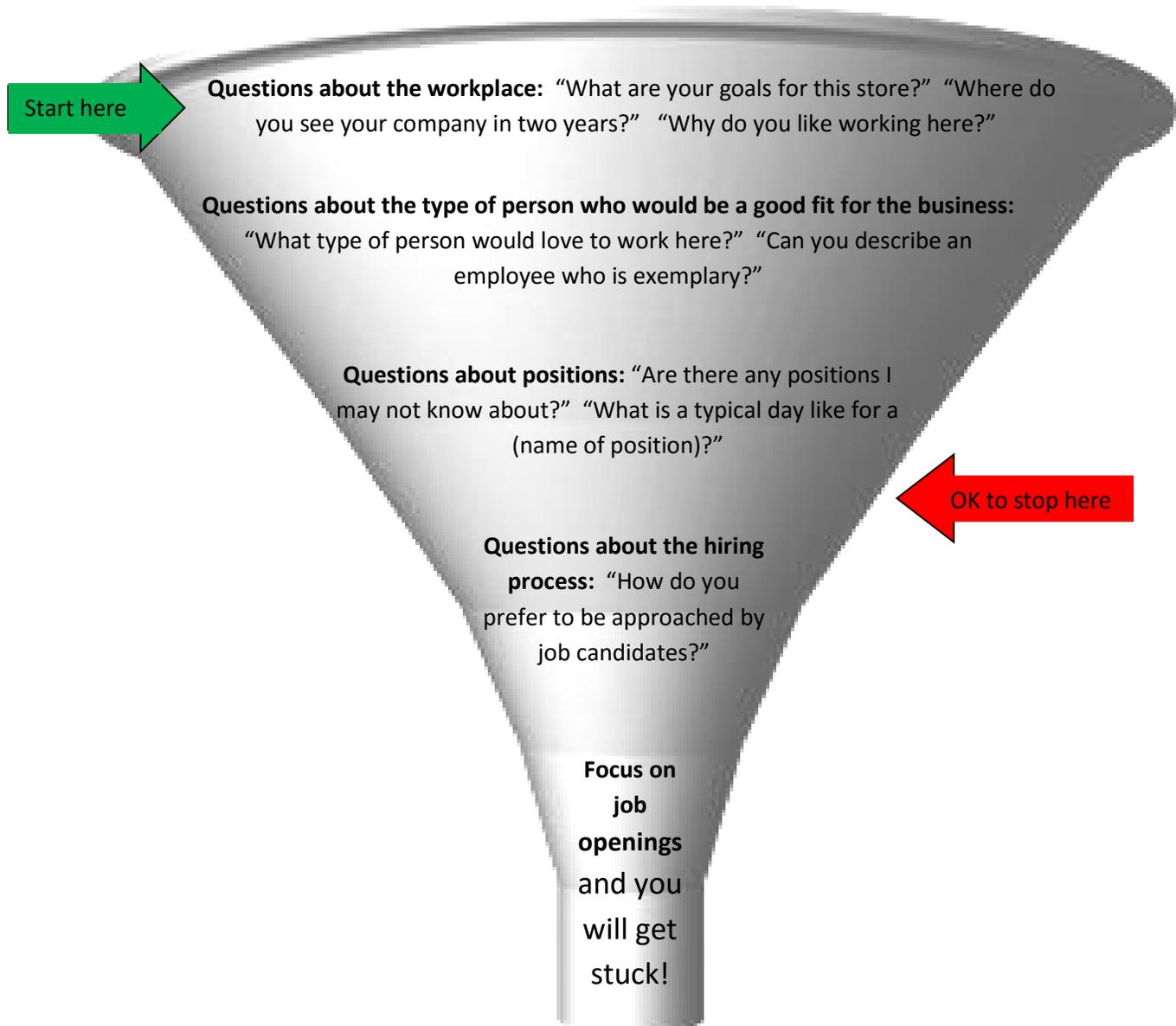
8.

9.

10.

## How to Structure a Meeting to Learn about an Employer (“Second Cup”)

The focus is to listen and try to understand the workplace from the employer’s point of view. Be curious. Ask open-ended questions, use reflections, etc. You will know that the interview is going well if the employer is doing most of the talking.



# Top 5 mistakes to avoid during meetings to learn about an employer

## 1. Asking about job openings

*Learn about the employer's business needs and build a relationship before asking about job openings or talking about a job seeker.*

## 2. Interrupting the employer

*Whatever the employer is talking about is what he or she thinks is important. So, listen! Be curious.*

## 3. Asking if the employer is open to hiring people with criminal histories

*If you ask this, employers may assume that everyone you work with has a criminal history. And, even if you do work exclusively with people who have legal histories, this is not the first bit of information that you want employers to know about the people you represent.*

## 4. Speaking at length about your program

*The goal is for the employer to do most of the talking. Answer questions about your program, if asked, and then return to learning about the employer.*

## 5. Neglecting to prepare for the meeting

*Demonstrate that you are willing to work at this relationship. Know the basic goods or services produced by the company. Consider looking up the company's mission statement. Have some questions prepared. Bring your business card, program brochure, and appointment book. Wear business casual or better—no jeans, t-shirts with logos, or athletic shoes.*



## After Meeting with the Employer

### 1. Write a thank-you note.

After you meet with an employer to learn more about the business, your first order of business is to send (or hand deliver) a thank-you note. Handwrite a couple of lines on a plain note card to let the employer know that you appreciate her time and that you enjoyed learning about the business. Consider keeping thank-you note cards in your car.

### 2. Reflect on the stage of the relationship.

Spend a few minutes thinking about your new relationship with the employer. Does she appear eager to work with you? Interested, but unsure about your program? Remember that you don't want to move faster than the employer. For example, you wouldn't want to return to talk about a job seeker if the employer is still unsure about working with you.

### 3. Plan your next step.

If the employer appears interested, but not committed to the idea of working with you, then you might think about how to deepen your relationship with the employer. For example, if there is more that you would like to know about the employer, you might return to ask if you can take a tour of the business or if you can ask a few more questions about the business. You might also ask for an introduction to another manager or the owner. Another strategy to learn more about the business would be to ask if you can return to observe workers during a busy period to learn more about their jobs.

If the employer seems like she might be interested, but it looks like she will not be hiring any time soon, she still may be able to help you by introducing you to other employers. For example, she might introduce you to some of her suppliers, or she may be willing to participate in a steering committee meeting to educate members about employer needs. Or she might be willing to help a client with a mock interview. These steps can help further your relationship with the employer.

If the employer appears interested in meeting people from your program now, or even at a later time when he expects to be hiring, return to talk about a person who might be a good fit for that business. "John, I've had time to consider your need to find people who are avid readers and would enjoy working with customers. I believe I do know someone similar to the person you described. Would you like to hear a little bit about her?" If you know the employer is not hiring, ask if he would be open to allowing the candidate to visit the workplace to learn more about that type of position—a 30-minute visit to observe workers and ask a few questions.

## Sample Thank-You Note

August 1, 2001

Allison,

Thank-you for meeting with me yesterday. I enjoyed learning about Chili by the Lake and appreciate your offer to introduce me to the kitchen manager. I look forward to meeting Carl next week.

George

## Maintaining Employer Relationships Over Time ("Third Cup" and more)



Stay in touch with the employer every four to six weeks. Each time the employer sees you again, it reinforces the notion that you are interested in a long-term relationship and that you are reliable—you keep showing up! Further, don't rely on busy employers to remember to call you when they have a job opening. Visit regularly so that you will hear about openings before employers advertise those jobs.

Keep a list of 12-15 employers with whom you are building long-term relationships. Next to each employer, jot down the date of your most recent visit so that you can remember when you should return.

- Return to share good news about your program. For example, an article in the paper about your program or a record number of job starts in the last quarter.
- Return to let the employer know that you are working with someone who is interested in \_\_\_\_\_ work. Ask if the employer would be open to allowing the person to visit in order to observe and ask questions about that type of position.
- Return to congratulate the employer about an article that you read about his business.
- Ask for a tour of the business.
- Ask to come in for an hour to observe workers at their jobs. This will help you better understand the workflow and the challenges for people in those positions.
- Stop by to give the employer the name and phone number of another employer who has worked with you (a reference).
- Return to ask the employer if she would be willing to provide someone with feedback about his interviewing skills or feedback about a resume.
- Return to ask the employer if he would be interested in attending a steering committee meeting to help members understand the needs of local employers.
- Stop by to say hello and to ask the employer how business is going.
- Return to let the employer know that a job seeker you know has submitted an application.
- Drop off a holiday card.
- Drop off information about the Work Opportunities Tax Credit or other hiring incentive.

- Return to share printed materials about your program, such as a brochure designed especially for employers.
- Return after a job candidate interviews for a position to ask the employer for her impressions about the candidate.
- Drop off thank-you notes for anything the employer has done to help you, for example, spending time to educate you about the business, reviewing a person's resume, visiting a steering committee meeting, etc.
- Ask the employer to introduce you to some of her suppliers.
- Ask to meet managers in different departments of the business.
- Return to let the employer know that you do know a candidate who would be a good fit for the business. "John, I know it's important to you to find employees who want to work here because they are interested in books, and also people who are friendly and outgoing. I do know someone who fits that description. Would you like to hear a little bit about her?"

### Your Strategies to Sustain Employer Relationships:

1.

2.

3.

## Tips for Keeping Track of Important Employer Information

Think about this: each manager or business owner has her own preferences about who she wants to hire, right? A manager at one retail store might stress the need for someone who knows about the product being sold, while a manager at a similar store may prefer to hire someone who has good customer service skills and a flexible schedule. Some hiring managers may even be willing to share information about the questions they ask during interviews and how they expect a good candidate to respond.



If you are out in the community talking to six employers a week, it won't be long before it becomes impossible to remember all of this information. But you want to be able to tell your clients about those interview questions. Or, when you go back to talk about a job candidate, you want to be able to use the same words the employer used when describing a good candidate, "Jack, I've had time to think about your need to find candidates who are outgoing, reliable, and good team players. I think I do know someone who fits that description..."

### So, how can you keep all the information?

- Take a few notes while the employer is talking. Be careful not to lose focus on the conversation—just jot down a few important ideas or phrases that you want to remember. As soon as the meeting is over, go to your car and add to your notes.
- Keep employer contact logs handy. For example, keep some in your car and keep some on your desk. You might also keep some in your appointment book so that you always have them handy. If you keep electronic logs, save the form on your desktop.
- If you are out of logs, call your desk phone and leave a message about some of the information that you want to remember to record later.
- Keep a folder on each long-term employer relationship in your car so that you can add to it over time.

A sample employer contact log follows. Remember, if it is a first contact just to make an appointment, the middle section of the log will be blank. You don't always have to fill in the entire log.

