

Five Tips for Overcoming Reluctance about Job Development

Recorded by Jessica Jonikas

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Hello. My name is Jessica Jonikas, and I'm the Associate Director of the UIC Center on Mental Health Services Research and Policy. Today I'll be sharing key strategies to overcome the natural reluctance that many IPS Employment Specialists feel about making cold calls to employers. Good job development means being comfortable with approaching employers without prior notice to talk about how your clients can meet their workforce needs. Even the phrase "cold calling" can strike fear in many people's hearts. But, with good advance preparation, reaching out to employers doesn't have to be stressful. Let's consider 5 key strategies that can help build your confidence.

First, do your research about the employers you'll be contacting. If what you say during your first call is generic, meaning it's the same information you could give to any employer, the person on the other end will notice. Your first contact is not only about gaining the employer's interest, but also building trust in you and your agency. So, before you even get on the phone, do your research about the employer. Know what they provide, offer, or do. Know some of the history of their company or organization. Know the general size of their workforce, and how your clients might meet their needs. Visit their web site to find their mission statements or value statements, especially those related to affirmative hiring of people with disabilities. Also check the web site to see whether they have a commitment to diversity in the workplace.

While you won't necessarily be addressing disability or employment services in your initial contacts with employers, you will incorporate some of the information you found into your first conversation. Consider the difference between these two opening statements. First,

"Hi, my name is Jessica. I work for an agency here in town that helps people get back to work. I'd love to set up a time to talk more with you about how our clients can meet your needs."

Versus this statement:

"Hi, my name is Jessica. I work for an agency here in town that helps people get back to work. Corner Cafe is a pillar in our community. I'd love to set up a time to talk more with you about how our clients can meet your current hiring needs for kitchen and wait staff."

Doing this kind of research takes time, but it makes your pitch more personal. It also will build your confidence in being able to deal with questions or curveballs from employers about how your agency can meet their needs.

The second strategy to overcome reluctance to engage employers is being prepared for their skepticism. Unfortunately, scams abound in our society. Employers will naturally wonder if you and what you're offering is legitimate. Thus, your first 2 or 3 contacts are about building relationship. These initial contacts are devoted to getting to know the employer and its workforce needs. You certainly should be ready to answer questions about your agency, but the focus of the initial meetings is getting to know what the employer does and the types of workers it hires. You aren't worried about saying the perfect thing about your agency or clients. Instead, you're focused on asking good questions and listening to the answers. Right away, this takes the pressure off of you to have the perfect pitch. It also helps to address employer skepticism when they see that you're interested in them, and not trying to get them to commit to anything right off the bat.

Third, practice makes perfect. The more times you deliver your pitch, the more confident you will feel. You can develop this confidence initially by practicing with coworkers, family, or friends. Short of that, practice with a mirror. Hearing what you're going to say and seeing your facial expressions while you say it helps you to improve your approach. Practicing it also helps you to speak assertively and naturally. Believe it or not, it also helps for you to stand up and smile when you're making your first call to an employer. A smile actually changes the tone of your voice to more friendly and confident.

Fourth, be prepared for rejection. Now, I know that sounds counterintuitive, since the major reason people hate cold calling is that they don't like rejection. But, if you get over the fear of hearing "no" and accept that some people just aren't going to be interested in your agency, then you'll be more comfortable with cold calling. There's no need to see the rejection as personal when you know it's just part of the process. It's helpful to log all of your calls and what happened with each one. This information helps you see the characteristics of employers who want to learn more versus those who don't. You also may see that something you've done differently has led to more yes's than no's.

Finally, reward yourself for the number of employer contacts you make, rather than the number of employer yes's you receive. If you measure your success only by how many employers express interest in working with your agency, you will probably continue to dislike job development. But, if you reward yourself for making multiple contacts each day, you'll feel better about this part of your job. The more employers you contact, the better, so focus on that initially. Over time, you'll build your skills for getting employers to say yes more often than no.

You can learn more about job development in IPS by watching our webinar, called Key Concepts for Effective Job Development, which is located on the IPS Webinars page where you found this podcast.

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