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JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT REPORT

for professionals who support employment for people with disabilities

Are You Operating from a Dual-Customer Model?

By Larry Robbin

Each year I train and consult with disability employment programs across the country. Participants complain about not being able to get employers to hire people with disabilities. They talk about employer discrimination and ignorance. I agree with this premise, but then I discuss a *different* problem. I ask them to compare the amount of time and effort they spend working with people with disabilities as opposed to the amount of time and effort they spend on working with *employers*.

What is a typical response? Since it's summer let me offer the analogy of a beautiful beach. Respondents' disability time would reflect a considerable stretch of the beach while their time with the private sector would be more like a single grain of sand! While the other problems they cite are valid, people in the disability employment

field often overlook their unintentional organizational bias toward job seekers versus a balanced view of job seekers and employers. This balance, if fixed, would lead to better employment outcomes.

A Single Customer-Focused Model

This bias stems from the fact that many disability employment professionals are inadvertently operating from a single customer-focused model. *In private sector terms, they have not come to grips with the fact that they have two customers of equal importance.* Those customers are: people with disabilities *and* the employers that will hire them. Disability employment programs are the brokers between these two customers much like a real estate agent is the go-between with a home buyer and seller. Great real estate agents understand *both* customers equally well.

The problem is that historically the vast majority of planning time in disability employment programs has been spent on a single customer when it takes a *dual* customer focus to get the best results. For many people in the disability employment community this statement may sound like I am saying abandon the goal of

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our work, which is to help people with disabilities get jobs. I respond by saying that I am simply *reframing* the goal of our work, which is to help people with disabilities get jobs and at the same time help employers get good employees. This dual-customer model brings the best employment results for people with disabilities. Until disability employment programs and their funding sources really embrace the dual-customer model, employers will always get short shrift of our attention and as a result, people with disabilities will not be employed in quality jobs at the levels we would like to see.

Aspects of a Dual-Customer Model

What does a dual customer model look like? For one thing it means that the management of disability employment programs and their funding sources must acknowledge that they know much more about people with disabilities than they do about private sector employers and work to address this discrepancy. Then they make a determined effort to allocate more time and resources to become as trained in the world of business as they are in the world of people with disabilities. They can do this in numerous ways:

- ❖ They immerse themselves in the private sector by doing research and becoming a part of the business community.
 - ❖ They take business classes at a college, university or online in much the same way as they went to school to learn about working with people with disabilities.
 - ❖ They closely examine private sector hiring practices, culture and values.
 - ❖ They hold informational interviews with business leaders to find out more about how this community thinks and operates.
 - ❖ They join business associations and become active members.
- Managers of disability employment programs also need to get more private

sector business people on their non-profit boards. They also need to hire staff with private sector work experience with a special emphasis on those with management experience. They need to read business publications like *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal* and others. They also need to get acquainted with the U.S. Business Leadership Network, a national organization of business people that promote the hiring of people with disabilities as a good business practice.

That isn't all. Managers of disability employment programs also have to talk with people with disabilities that either own their own businesses, or are in management positions. This enables disability employment managers to learn more about the for-profit world from the *perspectives of disabled persons*. They develop business plans that view their employment services as a personnel business and not a social service. In short, they immerse themselves in the work of the private sector just as they immersed themselves in the world of disability.

People complain this will take a lot of time. I remind them about all the time they put into learning about how to serve people with disabilities and developing the management skills to run their programs. They did not get this knowledge overnight. Why should they expect a shortcut to fully understanding the business community? The business community is a complex multi-dimensional world that is not easy to understand for outsiders. However, if you put in the time you can open doors for people with disabilities because now you are seen as an inside partner in the business world.

Benefits of the Dual-Customer Model

Dual-customer disability employment programs get much better employment outcomes in a lot less

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time. They not only get more jobs faster, they get much better jobs even in a recession. Dual-customer models lead to advanced relationships with businesses just like joint ventures do with other companies. In this case:

- ❖ Joint ventures mean innovative projects that could eventually include fundraising for disability employment programs.
- ❖ Joint ventures could involve business people donating staff to update your computer system.
- ❖ Joint ventures could mean mentoring and training your managers, staff and program participants.

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❖ Joint ventures means business partners that can connect you with the media and open the doors to other businesses.

Business partners can also introduce you to politicians so you can educate them about the benefits of increasing funding to support the employment of people with disabilities. The dual-customer model brings the power of the private sector to your program where you can use it to improve the employment outcomes of people with disabilities and the future of our field.

Summary

Some people worry about the influence of the private sector on our work if they use a dual-customer approach. This is a justifiable concern. However, I think we have to keep our mission in focus at all times and make sure that we do not lose sight of our values. It also means we choose our business partners *carefully* and not work with *every* company. Our business partners are our *partners* and not our bosses! They should not control us anymore than we should try to control them.

The dual-customer model *balances* our work in which we learn how to work equally well with businesses and people with disabilities. The model offers untold benefits to your organization, people with disabilities, and businesses. Make the commitment to pursue this model today. ■

Larry Robbin, Executive Director of Robbin and Associates, is widely regarded as a national expert in the disability employment field. He combines many years of disability employment program work with his private sector experience to help organizations improve their outcomes with people with disabilities and close the employment gap with the private sector. Larry also has several severe disabilities. For more information about how his services can help your program contact larryrobbin@aol.com.



Editor's Notebook

It's seldom easy to REALLY consider someone else's point of view. I am a journalist with years of experience in reporting both sides of a given story, and I even find this hard to do at times! It stands to reason, then, that professionals not trained in objectivity might find this concept even more difficult to put into practice.

Case in point: Larry Robbin's cover story about the "dual-customer model" in which he says integrated employment professionals should be as familiar with business needs as they are about the needs of people with disabilities. How we spend our time has a lot to do with understanding the views of others. If, for instance, I own a Ford and almost everyone I know owns Fords, I'm probably not going to know much about Chevys, am I? However, if I spend more time hanging out with

Chevy owners, it stands to reason that I'll get to know more about this make and the people who own them.

Similarly, Larry illustrates the importance of spending more time with business owners, not just people with disabilities and disability advocates. Maybe your agency already puts Larry's "dual-customer" model into practice. If so, great, but if not, what would it hurt to consider a dual-customer approach?

Getting back briefly to reporting both sides of a story, let us know what you think about the article on page 8 of this newsletter. Was our coverage fair and balanced? Send me an email and I promise a response. Until next time. ■

Mike Jacquart

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In the News

Webinar Shows Disability Employment Tabulation

More than 400 people recently participated in a webinar hosted by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the Census Bureau, to demonstrate how to access data from the Disability Employment Tabulation, which was released in March.

Sponsored by the Department of Labor (DOL), the tabulation draws on three years of data to assist in formulating effective education,

research and other policy initiatives to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The tabulation provides in-depth labor force characteristics of people with a disability, with more details on occupation, education, and earnings.

To access the Disability Employment Tabulation 2008-2010 tables go to <http://www.census.gov/people/disabilityemptab/data>. ■

Protecting Online Reputations

High school and college students across the country are graduating and embarking on their next step in life: *finding a job*. But what many young people fail to realize is that in today's world of social media, their online reputation can make or break their chances at landing a job.

TrustedID, a comprehensive identity protection and reputation management service, offers some easy tips for recent graduates to protect and manage their online reputation:

❖ **Delete digital dirt:** Many students' social media pages are littered with digital dirt such as incriminating photos or inappropriate links. Be sure to wipe this all clean before beginning a job search.

❖ **Privatize profiles:** Graduates can privatize their profiles on many social media sites to control who can view it. Remember that social media lives forever - just because comments and photos are deleted doesn't mean they are gone. It may be a private profile, but it's a public site. Always assume that what goes up will be seen by the world.

❖ **Google yourself:** See the top 10 results on Google for your name; often recruiters only view the first page of results. If a graduate sees negative results, they should consider creating new positive profile content that can outshine the harmful results.

❖ **Positive spin:** Potential employers can get an impression of a candidate's personality through their social media profiles. Graduates should highlight

achievements inside and outside of work and try to block any negative comments or photos.

❖ **Follow the leader:** Follow key luminaries or potential mentors in your field on social media. This will show employers that you are passionate about the job and excited to learn.

❖ **LinkedIn logic:** Create a strong LinkedIn profile since many recruiters use LinkedIn to fill positions. With over 200 million users, it is also a great way to establish and build business relationships in your desired field. ■



Fast Facts

Labor force participation

- ❖ People with disabilities: 20.7%
- ❖ People without disabilities: 69.1%

Unemployment rate

- ❖ People with disabilities: 13.6%
- ❖ People without disabilities: 7.0%

- Over 37 million Americans are classified as disabled; about 12% of the total population.
- More than 50% of those disabled Americans are in their working years.
- 8.8 million disabled wage earners, over 5% of U.S. workers, were receiving Social Security Disability (SSDI) benefits at the end of 2012.
- Approximately 90% of disabilities are caused by illnesses rather than accidents. ■

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor; www.disabilitycanhappen.org.

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Initiative to Help Women Vets Find Jobs

Goodwill Industries International recently announced a new initiative to significantly augment its support of military veterans. To address the challenges women veterans experience as they return home, Goodwill has committed to engaging 3,000 women vets over the next two years with services and supports that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Those announcing the new initiative were: Jim Gibbons, president and CEO, Goodwill Industries International; Assistant

Secretary Keith Kelly, Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), U.S. Department of Labor; and Juanita Williams, ophthalmologist assistant, The Bellaire Eye Care Clinic, Houston, Texas.

Ms. Williams joined the Navy in 2001 and served with pride until 2009. She struggled with emotional and psychological challenges, sexual trauma, as well as service-related injuries, and spent three full years actively seeking work, without success. At Goodwill, Ms. Williams was assisted with housing assistance,

job lead generation, and invitations to job fairs and hiring events.

Women make up an increasingly large part of our armed forces – and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that one in 10 veterans is a woman. Many women returning from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are struggling to transition to civilian life, with factors such as homelessness, childcare, disability, lack of licensing or credentialing and other challenges impeding their family's path to economic self-sufficiency. ■

Secretary Endorses Employment First

In a blog post earlier this summer, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy Kathy Martinez discussed the value of Employment First, a movement which holds that public financing should support integrated employment as the preferred option for youth and adults with significant disabilities.

"To support states in achieving major systems change, we launched the *Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program* in late 2011," Martinez wrote. "The program aims to

improve the employment outcomes and socioeconomic advancement of youth and adults with significant disabilities. It also will help us gather knowledge from real-world experiences that will inform federal public policy moving forward.

"I am not naïve about the overwhelming complexities that systems transformation of this size entails," Martinez continued. "But I am confident that the right ingredients of committed leadership, strong financial restructuring, consistently coordinated efforts across agencies and a modernized provider community

can lead to a better future for the majority of individuals with significant disabilities."

This post follows an earlier blog from Martinez regarding a Wage and Hour Division investigation that resulted in the revocation of special minimum wage certificates issued to a Rhode Island disability services provider for willfully violating the employment rights of workers with disabilities. ■

Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor. For more information about the Employment First mentoring program, visit www.dol.gov/odep/media/newsroom/employmentfirststates.htm.

Emilea – Using Resources to Start a Coffee Shop



Emilea lives in a small town in Iowa. She loves spending time with her family and her pets, CeCe and Harley. She also owns and operates her own coffee shop, Em's Coffee Company. With the support of her family, Emilea planned for a career and then used local contacts and several funding streams to start her own business.

What's Important

Emilea worked in a sheltered workshop, but she and her family were interested in community employment. They helped form a group of individuals with disabilities and their families who brainstormed potential job opportunities. The group discussed the option of self-employment. While owning a business can be daunting, Emilea's parents already were experienced at it since they owned a hardware store.

As Emilea, her parents and sister Ashlea thought about ways that self-employment could work for her, they considered businesses that were lacking in their community. One thing the community did not have was a coffee shop, and they knew that people missed the local

coffee shops that had recently closed. Emilea liked the idea of interacting with customers at her own shop. She also wanted to learn how to make coffee and ice cream.

Emilea's mother, a small-business owner and one of Emilea's strongest advocates, had a wide community network. A friend of hers, who worked at the Iowa Department of Human Services, put Emilea's family in touch with a benefits planner at Iowa Work Incentive Planning and Assistance. This individual directed them to funds that were available through vocational rehabilitation. They used the money to buy equipment for the coffee shop, and to pay for the training and technical support Emilea would need before she could open her business. The benefits planner also connected them with the family of another entrepreneur with a disability who could advise them about getting started.

At this point, Emilea and her family felt prepared to go ahead with the coffee shop idea. Emilea's parents purchased an office building formerly owned by the town newspaper and rented space in it for the coffee shop. Emilea used grant funds to purchase some materials and furniture. Her mother, assisted by a friend on the Board of Housing, secured another grant, this time from Resource Conservation and Development, a local division of the United States Department of Agriculture. This allowed Emilea to cover payroll for future employees, rent, and utilities.

The coffee shop has a 1950s theme, and Emilea accepted donated furniture that would match the decor. A room for private parties and

meetings at the coffee shop, *The Newsroom*, was dedicated to the town paper and decorated with newsprint tins and old papers.

Before Emilea opened the coffee shop, she used her VR funds to hire a job coach and pay for barista training at Espresso Partners in St. Paul, MN. The trainer and job coach made some minor changes to her equipment so she could do tasks more easily. For example, they placed a large sticker on the coffee grinder so Emilea could distinguish the caffeinated beans from the decaffeinated beans. Emilea also learned to listen for audible clues from the machinery while she worked.

Emilea's espresso machine was marked with orange paint so that she would know which button to push for the correct shot of espresso for a small or a large drink. The job coach and trainer also found smaller frothing pitchers and larger-faced thermometers that Emilea could work with as she learned to steam milk. Before opening the shop, the job coach designed flash cards with words and pictures that described each drink.

VR also paid for Emilea and her job coach to go to Madison, WI for ice cream training through the *Chocolate Shop*. There they learned the proper way to scoop ice cream and how to clean and maintain the ice cream freezer.

What Happened

Em's Coffee Co. held its grand opening in December 2009. The coffee shop is open Monday

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through Saturday, and Emilea works 40 hours a week. She arrives early each weekday morning to begin making coffee, clean off the chalkboard for the day's menu, and open the shop to customers at 6:30 a.m.

Emilea is active in every role in her coffee shop – from managing staff to running the cash register and talking with customers in person or on the phone. She has support from a job coach as needed. Her mother does the bookkeeping, and three other employees help with customers and keep the coffee shop clean; two of these employees also have disabilities.

Emilea's mother says that although there have been stressful

times, Emilea has grown a great deal from this experience. Her success has also inspired the family members of other individuals with developmental disabilities to help them pursue employment. This includes the town's newspaper editor, whose brother has Down syndrome, and a woman whose son has autism and wants to be a chef.

Lessons Learned

- ❖ Emilea and her family assessed the local community and selected what would be a viable business, as well as one that Emilea would be interested in running.

- ❖ Emilea's mother used her network to find resources such as grant funds and business contacts.

Emilea and her family were able to blend funding, including Medicaid waiver funding for job supports, VR and other grant funds to support startup, and donations of equipment and furniture from community members.

- ❖ Even small changes can make tasks easier to do. Emilea's job coach and trainer made slight changes to the equipment that allowed Emilea to do much more on the job. ■

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In the News

UCP Releases 'Case for Inclusion' Report

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) has released its annual report on "The Case for Inclusion" for 2013. The report ranks all 50 states and the District of Columbia on outcomes for Americans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Real improvements have been achieved. They include:

- ❖ The number of states serving 80% of individuals and dedicating 80% of spending to the community has increased from just 14 to the vast majority of states (38).

- ❖ A total of 27 more state institutions have closed, leaving just 149 open.

- ❖ The vast majority of states (34) participate in a uniform, comprehensive quality assurance program called the National Core Indicators (up from less than half).

Yet, the following troubling trends are also evident:

- ❖ The number of states with significant competitive employment accomplishments (one-third of individuals served working competitively) dropped from 17 to just 10.

- ❖ The size of waiting lists for services has doubled to more than a quarter-million Americans (268,000).

All states still have room for some improvement, but some states have consistently remained at the bottom of this list since 2007, including Arkansas, Illinois, Texas, and Mississippi. While these states need real attention, they are not reflective of the real improvement in inclusion for the vast majority of states.

Finally, the Employment First initiative is studied with model legislation and state-specific projections. The complete report is available at: www.ucp.org/the-case-for-inclusion/2013/images/Case_For_Inclusion_Report_2013.pdf. ■

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CEO Defends Use of Special Minimum Wage Certificates

Editor's note: NBC News recently aired a report that criticized Goodwill Industries, a multibillion-dollar nonprofit organization, and other nonprofit groups that are permitted to pay thousands of disabled workers far less than minimum wage because of a federal law known as Section 14 (c). According to NBC and Labor Department records, some Goodwill workers in Pennsylvania earned wages as low as 22, 38 and 41 cents per hour in 2011. Section 14 (c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which was passed in 1938, allows employers to obtain special minimum wage certificates from the Department of Labor. The certificates give employers the right to pay disabled workers according to their abilities, with no bottom limit to the wage. The complete NBC story is posted at: http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/25/19062348-disabled-workers-paid-just-pennies-and-its-legal.

Goodwill Industries International President and CEO Jim Gibbons made the following statement in response to NBC News reports on the use of Special Minimum Wage Certificates by some local Goodwill® agencies:

“**T**he Special Minimum Wage Certificate allows employers to focus on what workers with the most significant and multiple disabilities can do rather than penalizing them for what they can't do. It is a tool that some community-based Goodwill agencies use to provide a safe, nurturing environment where people with the most significant disabilities can advance to reach their full employment potential

— whatever level that may be. As a leading advocate for people with disabilities, we at Goodwill are always happy for a chance to further the discussion about the best ways to help people with significant disabilities enter the workforce and live happier, more fulfilled lives.”

Additional information about Goodwill and Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which allows for use of the Special Minimum Wage Certificate:

- ❖ Nearly 80% of people with disabilities nationwide are not part of the workforce because the market does not create opportunities for them.
- ❖ Goodwill is one of more than 3,400 employers nationwide that use the certificate to help individuals with significant and multiple disabilities to gain and maintain

employment. Others include Walmart, Comfort Inn, George Washington University, YMCA, and YWCA.

❖ Without the Special Minimum Wage Certificate, many, if not most, of these individuals would likely fall out of the workforce. In the case of Goodwill employees, they would also lose access to the wider range of services that Goodwill provides to its employees.

Of Goodwill's 113,000 team members, more than 30,000 are people with disabilities; that's nearly one-third of its entire workforce. Goodwill estimates that approximately 7,500 employees are paid using the Special Minimum Wage Certificate — fewer than 7% of Goodwill employees. These team members are people with significant or multiple disabilities. ■

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