

HOW SHOULD I FOLLOW UP WITH NEW WORKERS TO HELP THEM KEEP THEIR JOB?

Answer:

Getting a job is only the first step toward sustained employment. About a quarter of welfare recipients who go to work stop working within three months, and at least half are no longer working within a year.¹

Faced with this reality, many welfare-to-work programs have begun offering postemployment services, most commonly follow-up case management. Unfortunately, this is a relatively new and untested area. The most rigorous evaluation to date — the Postemployment Services Demonstration (PESD), a study of postemployment case management in four sites — found that the services had little if any effect on how long people kept jobs.² The results underscore the difficulty of providing job retention services. However, the lessons from PESD and experience from other programs offer some clues for best practices in this area.



Begin before the first job.

Preemployment services are as important to job retention as postemployment services. High-quality welfare-to-work services promote job readiness and build relationships that facilitate follow-up.³



Help people get the best job they can.

The quality of a job is a key factor in retaining it. Job search and job development should therefore focus on matching job-seekers with the best possible job, in terms of hours, wages, and benefits.⁴



Build on existing relationships

Maintaining contact with new workers is easier if staff already have a relationship with them. Have preemployment case managers continue working with people after they go to work, or structure the transition so that postemployment staff begin working with people before they enter jobs.



Make retention a priority.

Postemployment services require close monitoring and are labor intensive. Staff must be given adequate time for follow-up, which must be made a program priority.



Establish early and frequent contact.


Contact new workers every day the first week of the job, and then every week for the first month. Start with the congratulatory phone call, and establish a schedule for regular check-ins. After that, tailor the frequency of follow-up to the individual's situation.




Ask specific questions.

General questions like “How is it going?” may elicit only general responses and may not disclose problems. (See the box “Sample Questions for New Employees.”)

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 **Use your relationships with employers.**

When appropriate (for example, when you have a preexisting relationship with the employer or when both the employee and the employer agree), get feedback from supervisors regarding job performance, and encourage employers to contact staff immediately if a worker does not show up or if other problems develop. (See the box “Sample Questions for Employers/Supervisors.”)

 **Find creative ways to stay in touch.**

For example, Labor Connection, a job placement program in Los Angeles, has weekly dinner and group meetings. The meetings act as a support network and also provide a chance for staff to connect with new workers. Staff need to follow up only with those who do not attend.

 **Be prepared to address a variety of issues.**

Many factors can jeopardize new employment, including financial difficulties; lack of job-related and “soft” skills, such as being on time and

following instructions; breakdowns in support services; personal and family problems; and problems with supervisors and coworkers. Be prepared to assist new employees in all these areas, either directly or through partnerships with other service providers.

 **Make sure that new workers are getting transitional benefits and other kinds of support.**


Individuals who move from welfare to work are generally eligible for a variety of supports that can promote job retention, including transitional child care and Medicaid, Food Stamps, and federal and state Earned Income Credits. Many families, however, do not receive these supports, either because they do not know about them or because of complicated application procedures.

 **Provide services in ways and at times convenient for working people.**

Make sure that services are accessible to workers by offering evening and weekend hours, providing services at multiple times, meeting employees outside your office, and providing child care during meetings and activities.⁵

 **Aggressively market the services you provide.**

Make sure that new workers know about the program’s services by actively marketing them both before and after people get jobs. Employers and community agencies can also provide information about your services to workers.

 **Build in reemployment assistance.**

No matter what you do, a certain amount of job loss will occur and is part of the process of achieving steady work. Use the channels of communication that you have developed to find out when someone loses a job, and help the person get another job quickly. Identify the specific issue that contributed most to loss of the job, and take steps to address that issue.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR *NEW EMPLOYEES*

- ➡ What time did you get to work today? How did you get there?
- ➡ Is it hard to get out of the house on time? If so, why? What can you do about that?
- ➡ What kinds of tasks do you do at work? Do you have too little, too much, or enough time to finish your work?
- ➡ Whom do you ask if you have a question about the work? Are you comfortable asking? If not, why?
- ➡ What is your supervisor like? Does your supervisor clearly explain what is expected of you?
- ➡ Has your supervisor corrected anything that you have done? How did that go?
- ➡ What do you do at lunchtime? What do others do?
- ➡ What time do you leave work? When do others leave?
- ➡ Do you get along with your coworkers? What kinds of things do you talk about with them?
- ➡ Have you had any conflicts or uncomfortable situations with your supervisor, coworkers, or customers? If so, what can you do about that?
- ➡ Are you satisfied with the child care you have? Have you had any problems with it?
- ➡ Does your family support your employment? How do you know that?
- ➡ Do your children act differently now that you are working? In what ways?
- ➡ Have you changed your routines at home in any way? How is that working out?

As much as possible, tailor questions to the person's job, and follow up on any problem that was mentioned in a previous contact.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR *EMPLOYERS / SUPERVISORS*

In contrast to your in-depth questions for new employees, try not to burden employers or supervisors with a lengthy interview. Instead, ask them how the employee is generally doing in these areas:

- ➡ Attendance and punctuality
- ➡ Ability to follow directions
- ➡ Quality and quantity of work
- ➡ Cooperation with supervisors and coworkers

NOTES

1. Hershey and Pavetti, 1997; Rangarajan, Schochet, and Chu, 1998.
2. Rangarajan, 1998; Rangarajan and Novak, 1999.
3. For best practices on preemployment services, see Brown, 1997.
4. In the NEWWS Evaluation, the program most effective at helping people stay employed (Portland, Oregon's Steps to Success) was structured to help people get the best job they could. See Scrivener et al., 1998.
5. One program that has adjusted services to meet the needs of working people is Portland, Oregon's Steps to Success.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Programs and Organizations

Chrysalis Labor Connection: 516 South Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90013-1422; (213) 895-7777

National Governors' Association, Center for Best Practices: 444 North Capital Street, Suite 267, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 624-5300; www.nga.org

Project Match: Erikson Institute, 420 N. Wabash Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611; (312) 755-2250 ext. 4001; www.pmatch.org

Public/Private Ventures: One Commerce Place, 2005 Market Street, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103; (215) 557-4400; www.ppv.org

Steps to Success: Mount Hood Community College, 14030 NE Sacramento Street, Portland, OR 97230;

contact Kim Freeman at (503) 256-0432 or freemank@mhcc.cc.us. Portland Community College, 5600 NE 42nd Avenue, Portland, OR 97211; contact Pamela Murray at (503) 788-6287 or pmurray@pcc.edu.

Vocational Foundation Inc.: 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010; (212) 777-0700

Welfare Information Network: 1341 G Street, NW, Suite 820, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 628-5790; www.welfareinfo.org

Welfare to Work Partnership: 1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 955-3005; www.welfaretowork.org

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QUESTIONS from the Field

"Questions from the Field" is a new series for practitioners in welfare-to-work and employment programs.

The series is edited by Dina Berin and is a publication of ReWORKing Welfare, MDRC's technical assistance project. ReWORKing Welfare seeks to distill, synthesize, and share lessons from our research and experience in the field to help states and localities make informed decisions in this new environment.

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