FROM HARD TO EMPLOY TO I GOT THE JOB!
HOW TO DO A STRENGTH BASED ASSESSMENT

By Larry Robbin

The traditional perspective about the goal of assessment is to find barriers to employment. This barriers first mentality is filled with problems. In my focus groups of people that went to workforce programs once and did not come back, one of the most common reasons for not returning was that assessment focused on their problems and not their positive attributes. Another problem with the barrier hunt mentality is that it reinforces the unemployability of the job seeker in their mind and in ours. If we don't believe in their employability, it will make it difficult for them to believe in it. You can see this at work when someone who has a lot of barriers to employment comes in and says to us, "I got a job!" Often the first thing that will go through our mind when we hear this is, how did that happen? It happened because where we saw barriers, the employer saw assets.

In my strength based assessment model, the first goal after establishing a positive rapport with someone is to uncover their hidden assets to employment and envision them working. We ask questions and listen for the clues that will make it possible for us to imagine a picture frame around this person with a picture of them at work in the frame. You start to build the picture quickly using what they say, what their personality is like, the impression they make on you, their history, their interests and their strengths. Many people from historically marginalized populations find it difficult to imagine themselves working. This is a fundamental barrier to employment that comes from their disenfranchisement from the labor market. We want to help them change their self-image from being someone who is unemployed to someone who is working successfully doing something they like.

Let's say a young man or woman who has left school before graduating and has other barriers to employment, comes into our offices. It is not uncommon for workforce staff to open the conversation by asking what the last grade of school was that they completed and why they dropped out. This does not make people feel positive about themselves. It does not reinforce their ability to work. This is a barriers first conversation.

We need that information, but it should follow a conversation where we build on that individual's strengths. Imagine the different reaction a staff person would get if they said, "In order to help you with employment, I need to know some things about you. Do you mind if I ask you if you can give me an example of something that you can do better than a lot of the people that you know?" This is a strength based assessment question and the information that follows will often be eye opening and change how we see that young person and how they see themselves.

For example, in response to that question I have had a young person show me an amazing video on their phone of their eight incredibly well trained dogs. I have had people show me pictures of the beautiful clothing they have made. I have had people tell me about their skills as a chef, their ability to rebuild a car engine and how they learned on YouTube to reupholster a couch! They told me these things while they were smiling proudly about their assets to employment. You could feel the positive energy that was coming from them feeling inspired by their accomplishments. These conversations led us down the pathway of employment conversations where the picture of them working became their picture.

I have developed a handout you can use to help with strength based assessment. Go to https://larryrobbin.com/v2/raise-self-esteem-and-assess-transferable-life-skills-in-all-populations-my-life-skills-are-work-skills/ to access the handout and the instructions for using it.

The next time you do an assessment, evaluate how much emphasis is on the positive strengths and how much is on the negative barriers. It is not easy to learn to do a strength based assessment, but once you have the tools and mastered it, you will see a whole new level of employment motivation! Don't miss the next article in this series on new ways to overcome employment barriers!

Larry Robbin has done over 70 trainings, webinars and keynotes for NAWDP. He specializes in strength based webinars for workforce programs. He offers over 100 webinar topics including Digging for Gold! How to Find Hidden Assets to Employment in the Hard-to-Employ! For a description of that webinar and to get his helpful resource lists, email him at larry@larryrobbin.com His free newsletter is packed with best practice

information. You can see over 500 articles from past issues and subscribe to the newsletter at http://www.LarryRobbin.com.