

## Make More Than One Employment Plan

Right after job loss we help dislocated workers make an employment plan, but they have too much to learn about today's labor market to make a realistic plan. Plans often include goals of a better job with higher wages and more benefits than the previous job. This plan inadvertently feeds their denial and prolongs their job search because the goals are unrealistic and as a result people become more depressed, confused, and lost.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that job search is taking twenty-eight weeks. Older workers, dislocated workers with disabilities, and other groups with

additional barriers to employment face a much longer job search. Most people will have to settle for jobs that are below the one they lost. If they recoup pay and insurance they won't get the same vacation or seniority based benefits. They will have to work their way back up the success ladder. If you bluntly hit dislocated workers with these facts you can really hurt their motivation and what little is left of their pride. You will also receive an angry, hostile, and defensive response.

Denial will keep them from hearing accurate information and acting on it. They hold on to false promises made by friends and relatives about helping them. They look for dream jobs that aren't there anymore. They apply for jobs way over their qualifications. They are trying to dodge labor market reality. This is the impact of denial. Some people may get to reality quickly, but unfortunately the vast majority will learn in the harsh school of job search to adjust their expectations. This is a terrible process, but it is even worse if they have never thought about it or made a plan to deal with it.

There is a better way to help dislocated workers. Instead of one employment plan, develop three or four plans that are implemented at various dates in the job search process. Finances and other factors influence when plans after the first one become active. Back up plans have different job goals, wage levels, benefits, and other features that are less desirable than the first plan, but must be considered. Keep saying in the planning process that you hope they achieve the goals in the first plan, but in your experience it is much better to have back up options as well. I repeatedly say we hope for the best and plan for something less just in

case they need it.

Point out if job search goes long enough without back up plans people become frantic job hunters and make many mistakes, give terrible interviews, and stay unemployed longer. Also the longer people stay unemployed the more employers think of them as unemployable. A good, well thought out, proactive, multi-stage employment plan reduces the chance of this happening. It's much better to get back in the labor market and continue job searching as a working person than to job hunt jobless in extreme desperation mode. Praise dislocated workers for their willingness to plan and not improvise with their futures. If they have a family, point out that this type of planning is taking care of their future as well. Consistently restate your hope that the first plan will work, but patiently encourage them to make all the plans.

With the multi-stage employment plan people have other strategies, although they will use them begrudgingly like any of us would if we were in their shoes. The very act of doing a multi-stage plan gets them thinking more realistically. An interesting side effect of the multi-level process is that people job hunt harder and smarter as they try to achieve the first plan. They will really

follow your job search advice. This can slightly increase the odds of them accomplishing the first set of goals.

Some dislocated workers will end up achieving their initial goals, but a much bigger percentage need the multi-stage employment plan as they go through their multi-level education about starting over. It is never easy to deliver an unfortunate message, but it is much worse for you to know the truth and not find a way to say it appropriately. In my volunteer work I see far too many dislocated workers coming into homeless shelters with their families because they had one very unrealistic, inflexible plan. You will find the multi-stage employment plan is the safety net for many dislocated workers and their families, and puts them on the path to a better future!

*Larry Robbin offers over 250 on-site and telephone staff training workshops and a wide variety of workforce management consulting services. For information on his services and dislocated worker training "From Pink Slip to Paycheck! Success With Dislocated Workers"! email him at [larryrobbin@aol.com](mailto:larryrobbin@aol.com). ♦*