**STRESSING THE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOME**

**A Manual** **Dedicated To The Concept That Blindness,**

**In And Of Its Own, Does Not Prevent Employment**

by

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May, 2014

**INTRODUCTION**

**Note From the Author**

I freely give this manual to whomever wishes to gain from it. I only ask that people know who the author is. That is me, Robert Leslie Newman.

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**Background**

I spent thirty-seven years working for the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, assisting consumers to become employed. After retiring in December of 2010, I was hired back as a consultant and mentor for new VR counselors. I did a lot of talking and modeling, and to cap it off, I decided to finish by providing a document that could be referred to now or later.

This is a in-your-hand, big-picture, how-to-do-it document to help a new or experienced counselor to get his or her mind wrapped around a case-long, overall employment strategy. Think of this: it takes three people who know what they are doing to reach the end goal of a successfully employed blind person -- an employable blind person, a willing employer, and a skilled vocational counselor to bring them together.

And so the employment professional with the right employment strategy mindset can develop and orchestrate a plan to bring the consumer to a state of readiness for employment, can school that consumer to be a smart job seeker, and can also reach out into the business community to educate and support a willing employer. To help the counselor to develop this mindset, this document shows the what and where to apply a verbal and/or action strategy to promote an employment outcome, and the why and how to do it.

**About the Manual**

This manuscript is divided into three major parts:

* Part I, Vocational Rehabilitation. The counselor is taken through the entire life of a typical VR case, from referral (status 00), up to a successful closure (status 26).
* Part II, The Job Seeking Process. The counselor is provided a comprehensive guide to providing vocational counseling and job seeking skills.
* Part III, Working With Employers. The counselor is given insight and guidance in job development, making employment contacts, job analyses, and follow-up.

**PART I**

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

Part I will take you through all statuses of a typical case, from 00, 02, 18, 20, 22, to 26. This section helps the reader to know what the expected employment strategy looks like, where to build in specific actions, why these actions are necessary/advisable, and how and why to present and implement the strategy.

**Statuses 00, 02: Referral and Applicant**

When you first meet a potential consumer, be they newly blinded or not, you can be assured his or her life has been negatively impacted by blindness. Be advised, your initial demeanor and comments reflecting philosophical and intended action will either positively or negatively set up your consumer for either an easier or not so easy path to success. Accordingly, if you give that consumer something akin to a promise -- that with proper training and attitude, the average blind person can do a job just as good as the average sighted person -- then you will get their full attention. So from the beginning, set the hook that there is life after blindness, that there is the expectation your services will lead to employment. Given that, then your consumer most likely will work with you to that goal.

For example, you are meeting with a newly blinded individual for the first time, and part of their story is blindness has caused them to lose their job. Your response could be something like:

“Yes, blindness can be bad. It initially can bring on many heartaches and limitations. It can rob us of much of our independence, our confidence, and our employment. But once a person learns how to think and function like a blind person needs to think, then independence and employment is back in the picture.

“This is what we have to offer: to educate you to the human potential to live and function with severe vision loss, regardless of how severe that loss is. One of the world’s best kept secrets is functioning when blind is not as hard as most people think. So if you want to go back to work, then shortly down the road, you will.”

**Status 18: Development and Execution of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)**

This is your first opportunity to build a complete picture of how the consumer’s program will take him or her, one step at a time, to a goal of independence and employment. In the following paragraphs, each stage of the IPE will be broken down with examples of suggested employment related activities, and those can then be interwoven into the services/activities that would fit along with what normally goes on within each given stage of a plan.

At this initial stage, the development of the IPE, it is presupposed the counselor has had previous meaningful conversations with the consumer in preparation to construct the employment plan. There again, as the consumer regains control over his or her life, the IPE can be amended at any time in the future.

Note for the purposes of this document, a typical IPE may follow the stages shown below. Note also some elements of these stages happen simultaneously and carry on throughout the program.

(1) Blindness counseling

(2) Vocational counseling

(3) Blindness skills

(4) Vocational training

(5) Ready for employment

(6) Employment

The below format first gives you the specific stage or service, then a short suggested piece of dialog you could use during the development/writing stage of the IPE. The purpose of the dialog, in a sense, is a modeling of how to introduce one or more of a series of services or activities of an employment nature. Then below the suggested dialog is a short section giving additional employment related activities which could be chosen. What you actually write into the IPE will be up to the unique situation relative to you and your consumer.

#1. Blindness Counseling

Suggested dialog:

“The greatest gift we will provide is to teach you how to think as a blind person needs to think. This will be accomplished through the things we will talk about, and the blindness skills you will learn. One additional key service I will arrange for you in terms of adjustment counseling is to provide you with opportunities to meet other blind people who have successfully adjusted to their blindness -- and are employed.”

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* provide information about and/or opportunities to attend a gathering of a consumer group of the blind who support employment (NFB, ACB, etc.).
* provide opportunities during the blindness skills training period to take part in group activities where there are guest speakers who are blind and employed.

#2. Vocational Counseling

Suggested dialog:

“In the beginning, I will provide you with opportunities to learn what other blind people are doing for employment. And as you learn your blindness skills, we will discuss and explore as to how what you are learning will transfer to those competencies needed for eventual employment.

“Then later, once you are feeling more comfortable and confident with your blindness, and at the point when you have a better idea of what you know you are capable of, we will have a serious look at the possibility of you returning to what you were doing before.

“Or alternately, we will conduct an evaluation of your interests and skills and will start matching these characteristics up with what employment is out there, then develop a strategy to get you there.”

During the actual execution of the IPE, you could also:

* provide opportunities to attend career development and/or placement workshops.
* set up informational interviews.
* take tours of a college campus.
* visit the local government Work Force Development Office, or any other reasonable placement service.
* work through the next major section of this manual, Part II The Job Seeking Process, to prepare your consumer to be a smart job seeker.

#3. Blindness Skills

Needless to say, the specific skills to be learned in this stage will vary from one consumer’s IPE to another. All skills learned for independent living are skills also needed for employment.

Note for the consumer with severe vision loss, if you can arrange for your consumer to attend a training center such as what Nebraska or the NFB offer, wherein the trainee is submerged in an demanding, up-lifting atmosphere of learning non-visual alternatives, then you will be providing the best option for learning needed blindness skills.

1. Travel

Suggested dialog:

“In travel, once you have mastered the basics and are comfortable in moving about, one type of travel lesson you will experience will consist of going to an informational interview with someone who works in a job that interests you.”

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* conduct searches for business locations. First, by looking addresses up on the computer, establishing if the address is reachable by public transportation, then traveling there where appropriate.
* attend a job fair and learn to handle that crowded and noisy environment.
1. Braille

Suggested dialog:

“In learning Braille, you’ll develop a writing system for tracking employment related information. That could be where you’ve been, who you’ve talked with, and the results. Once you get to the job interviewing stage, you’ll want to be able to use your Braille to take notes and/or read them."

During the actual execution of the IPE, you could also:

* get the consumer to figure out a labeling system for a task which might be found in a work setting (labeling home records/files, various containers, etc.).
* have the consumer Braille out what he or she thinks will be the top ten questions which might be asked during an interview.
* require answers to expected interview questions to be Brailled out.
* check out what advantage may be gained by using a Braille display for an intended job.
1. Independent Living

Suggested dialog:

“Personal grooming is important for employment. Depending upon your vocational goal, we will make sure you can manage all those skills for making yourself presentable. That will include not only personal hygiene, but also identification of clothing, checking for spots on clothing, washing and drying and ironing clothing, etc.”

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* work on the application of makeup, shaving, etc.
* consider any special health needs of the consumer. This would be a very important skill-set to address to ensure employability.
* look into other life issues such as childcare and finance concerns (what effects earnings will have on SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, etc.). This would be important to boost further development of blindness skills and readiness for employment.
1. Computer Literacy

Suggested dialog:

“Computer literacy at home, in school, and in many jobs today is a necessity. To help you sharpen your skills, some of our computer lessons will be developing a new resume, conducting a job search, and filling out applications online.

“Besides the computer, we will examine the benefits of using several other kinds of devices such as digital recorders, other computer like devices popular for note-taking, etc.”

During the execution of the IPE, being that communications skills are key, you could also add in the learning of low-tech options such as a writing guide, a slate and stylus, etc.

#4. Vocational Training

Suggested dialog:

“During your schooling and training, it’ll be important to get some work experience related to your employment goal, be it paid or volunteer. Employers value experience over education. This means we also have to cover job seeking skills, including how to market yourself as a blind person.”

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* require your consumer to work with you through the exercises found in the next section of this manual, Part II, The Job Seeking Process. This recognizes that being good at finding openings and getting hired into a job aren’t skills just needed at the end of the rehabilitation process.
* work on mock interviews.
* have the consumer attend an employment workshop (using all their blindness skills).

#5. Ready For Employment (Job Seeking)

Suggested dialog:

“At more than one point within your IPE, you may need to find a job. And to increase the success of your efforts, we’ll need to examine what you know about the process of finding employment, and where necessary, bring you up to speed. I will want to take you through a programmed text of job seeking skills we recently adopted.”

Note: What is being stressed above is the importance of job seeking skills, and the last point relates to the next major section of this manual. And what is super critical, no matter what the consumer might say, is you can’t assume he or she knows how to perform this critical interviewing skill well.

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* get your consumer to consent to having several mock interviews.
* after fully explaining the services of the Commission/counselor relative to a partnership with an employer, have the consumer memorize these services. Have the consumer be prepared to present them to an employer.
* have the consumer be prepared to talk about the support he/she can draw upon to make the new job start be a success. Examples of support are IT consulting, a resource for the purchase of adaptive technology, job-coaching, OJT funding, follow-up services, etc.
* make use of informational interviews.
* make use of job fairs.
* make use of networking beyond the consumers own circle, utilizing blindness consumer groups and/or other community organizations.

**Status 22 Employed**

Suggested dialog:

“Once you are in your new job position, we will continue to be a resource to you and the employer for ninety days, that with the purpose of ensuring your successful transition into employment. This could include being a resource to cover the costs of adaptive equipment, additional job coaching, and any other reasonable employment related request.

“Finally, at the end of this three month period, if you no longer rightfully need our active support, your case will be closed as being successfully employed. Even after your case is closed, however, if your continuing employment becomes threatened, we are still a resource to you and the employer under Post Employment Services. Your case would be reopened, and appropriate services would be figured out and provided.”

During the execution of the IPE, you could also:

* ask the newly employed consumer to be a mentor or guest speaker to other consumers still seeking employment.
* get the consumer’s consent for you to ask the employer for written positive comments concerning employment of blind workers.

**Status 26 Closed Employed**

Once your consumer is ready to have his or her case closed, make sure they are aware of Post Employment Services (PES). PES should have been explained during the earliest discussion of the IEP, as well as prior to closure. Retention of employment of a former consumer is a significant function of the vocational rehabilitation service.

**PART II**

**THE JOB SEEKING PROCESS**

After getting the consumer thinking and functioning as a confident, competent blind person, you will proceed to Part II. This is all about the second most important service: job seeking skills. That is, to assist the consumer to be the best job seeker that he or she has the potential to be. Part of achieving this is to establish a counselor-consumer relationship where the consumer takes ownership of the job search. The consumer should expend more time and energy than the counselor.

Additionally, when first working with any consumer, he or she may state: “I know how to look for a job.” And/or they may say: “I know how to interview.” Never, never take that at face value. Always have them explain and demonstrate. Run them through the below programmed text. Never assume that the consumer’s approach cannot be improved.

The below programmed text is a modified version of a two-day workshop. The author wrote and conducted this while working for the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). The exercises are what the NCBVI team felt are the basic job seeking skills necessary for a successful job search. Note that the counselor would need to use his or her judgment concerning the consumer’s unique circumstances to decide whether to apply these exercises verbatim or in a modified form.

**STEP 1: IS YOUR LIFE IN ORDER?**

**Exercise 1. The Elevator Speech**

During all stages of finding employment, there will come times when the consumer will need to speak about who you are and what you want. This works best if you are prepared, and the best way to be ready is to write out and practice what you should say. When you first meet an employer, it is your opportunity to take advantage of it and make a good first impression. This short speech, often referred to as The Elevator Speech, should last no longer than thirty to forty-five seconds (the length of an average elevator ride). Given below are several examples.

First Example, the wrong way

Employer:

“What can I do for you?”

Job seeker:

“Well, I’m looking for work. And you know, I do have a visual impairment. And it’s caused by a combination of glaucoma, which started first, but about a year ago I was trying to read the newspaper and noticed the line of words I was looking at was bending and was a little fuzzy. Dr. Anderson, my ophthalmologist, said it was the beginnings of macular degeneration. And I’m way too young to have that condition. Ordinarily, it shows up in people in their mid to late fifties. I heard my Uncle Ted might have had it, but before I had a chance to ask him, he died.”

Second Example, the right way

Employer:

“What can I do for you?”

Job seeker:

“My name is Robert. I am pleased to meet you. I am looking for a new position, a chance to advance my career. I have researched your company and like what I see. You have a job opening listed that fits my background, and I believe may be the next step in my career. I would like to ask you a few questions and tell you more about myself.”

**Exercise 2. Do You Have Your Blindness Skills In Order?**

First: In relation to your activities at home or on a job, write down the alternative techniques you use as accommodations for your unique blindness characteristics.

Examples could be:

* use of screen enlargement software to read a computer screen.
* use of a long white cane to travel.

Cover all aspects of functioning, including such major areas as:

* travel.
* reading.
* writing.
* self-care.

Second: Also in relation to your activities at home or on a job, write down the alternative techniques you need to improve upon, additional training you need, and how you will acquire them in order to be job ready.

Examples could be:

* need to increase speed and accuracy using JAWS, so get more instruction and practice.
* improve my travel skills, so get more experience.

**Exercise 3. Is Your Life In Order and Supports In Place?**

First: For a typical week (all seven days), chart out the times for each day you would be available to work.

Example:

* Sunday, unavailable
* Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
* Saturday, unavailable

Second: Write down your intended travel mode for getting to work. Plan on using only the most reliable mode. Unreliable means of travel may get you fired.

Examples of travel mode could be:

* city bus.
* car pool.
* walk.

Third: Give a list of your intended solutions for additional considerations you need to handle before starting work.

Examples could be:

* childcare.
* personal medical problems.
* work clothing.

Fourth: What are your financial considerations when going to work?

Questions could be:

* how does working affect your budget?
* do you plan to work part-time or fulltime, and why?
* how will your new income affect any benefits you are receiving due to your disability?

**Exercise 4. What Is Your Job Goal and Career Path?**

First: Write down your vocational goal, the qualifications to be accepted into this job, and what specific alternative techniques do you need to perform this job.

Example goal: customer service

Examples of qualifications:

* Keyboarding, with speed of thirty-five words or better.
* Minimum of six months previous customer service experience.

Examples of alternative techniques:

* Command of screen reader software.
* Have a method for taking notes (e.g., with a Braille Note).
* Have good travel skills using a long white cane.

Second: Write out the career path that will take you to your desired job goal.

If customer service is my goal, an example could be as follows.

* First, I must finish my course at the blindness training center.
* Second, I must test out on my keyboarding skills.
* Finally, I should take a call center job and get at least six months of experience before I apply for a permanent customer service position.

Third: Write down five types of businesses (with specific company names if possible) where your desired job can be found.

For example, customer service positions could be found at:

* hospitals (with Blue Cross health insurance).
* online (with Apple Store).
* food distributors (with Hilton Hotels).

Fourth: If your desired type of job is not available, give five other job titles that you are qualified for.

For example, if your desired job is in customer service, you may be qualified for:

* switchboard operator.
* greeter.
* receptionist.
* survey taker.
* out-bound caller.

**STEP 2: KNOW HOW TO FIND OPENINGS**

Finding job openings can be a real puzzler. The process of locating them will not only lead you to specific opportunities matching your initial desired goal, but the exposure to a range of other openings may expand what you feel is possible.

There are several methods to finding job openings. Some are complex, but most are simple and very commonsense. Read through the following scenarios and see if you can identify what type of job seeking method each represents.

First Example:

The following conversation happens every day behind closed doors.

Employer speaking to an employee:

“An applicant by the name of Robert Newman used you as a reference. Do you know him?”

Employee:

“Yes. I’ve known him for years. I was telling him about the opening we have. He’d be good, and he’d fit right in.”

Question: What type of job seeking method is that?

Answer: Networking.

Second Example:

A job seeker walks into a business.

Job seeker:

“Hi, my name is Myrna. I’ve stopped in to inquire if you are looking to hire.”

Employer:

“Yes, we are hiring. We don’t advertise. Did you bring a resume?”

Question: What type of job seeking method is that?

Answer: Cold Call.

**Exercise 1. Do You Know How To Tap Into the Job Market?**

List the top three job seeking methods you would use to get hired. Examples could be:

* networking.
* joining a job club.
* cold calls.

The top three can vary to fit your circumstances. To maximize your chances, use several of these in combination.

Question: What businesses (large, medium, or small) have the most jobs, and how do they generally advertise their openings?

Answer: Small businesses, and they generally do not advertise.

**Exercise 2. Do You Know Your Resources For Finding Openings?**

List as many specific resources as you can that are available to you in the job search. Examples could be:

* friends.
* phonebook.
* Creigslist.com.
* newspapers.

These are tools you can use in your job search, and the more of them you use the better.

**Exercise 3. What Is the Value of an Informational Interview?**

Write out a minimum of five questions you would ask in an informational interview. Examples are:

* what are the specific duties of your job?
* what are the qualifications needed for your job?
* how did you get your job?
* what does the future look like for this type of job?

Note: an extensive list of such questions can be found on the Internet.

**STEP 3: KNOW HOW TO MAKE THE INITIAL CONTACT**

An initial contact can take several forms. These could be:

* by phone.
* a face-to-face meeting.
* by a hardcopy letter.
* by an electronic message.

You must determine which is best, then do it well. Making a first contact happens only once.

The following scenario shows a job seeker getting three tries to talk an employer into an interview. Examine how he goes about presenting, or framing, his request. Notice how the words he chooses sets up the listener’s response.

“Sir,” the young blind man said, addressing the business owner, “I’m looking for a job. I heard you have several openings.” The young man held up his white cane for emphasis. “As you can see, I’m blind, and because of it I’m having a very tough time getting employment.

“Did you know that nearly 80% of the blind are unemployed? For centuries, blindness has been viewed as the worst handicap a human can have. But it’s all a mistruth, a great misunderstanding.” Raising his cane again, he added, “With the right tools, like this cane, or dog guide -- and using Braille or large print, and using other blindness skills -- we can do most jobs just as good as a sighted person. But we don’t usually get a chance to prove it.”

Lifting the cane for a third time, he said, “Usually, people can’t see past this, and we get pity, doubting thoughts, and seldom an equal chance. Would you give me a try in one of your job openings?”

“No, I won’t,” the business owner said, an earnest tone in his voice, his palms flat on the countertop as he leaned forward. “And I’m going to tell you why.

“I listened to you, heard every word, processed the difficulties you laid out concerning the non-acceptance and unemployment of the blind. But think about how you framed your story and what you set me up to think. You walked in, gave me the woes about being blind, hit me with five negatives to one positive, and you want me to think you’ve got what I’m looking for in an employee?”

Slapping a palm on the countertop for emphasis, the business owner said, “But this is what I’ll consider. I want you to go back outside, take a minute to think about how you need to better present yourself to me, then come back in and try your spiel again. Concentrate on telling what you can do for me.”

Surprised at the businessman’s response, the young blind man nodded, accepting the challenge. Turning about, using his best cane technique, he exited the building. Minutes later, he came back in.

“Sir,” he said to the business owner, “you are looking to hire a customer service representative. I believe I have the skills to fill the position.” Indicating the cane in his hand, the young man said, “As you can see, I am blind, though if you would hear me out I would like to explain how I can make this a success.”

Getting a go-ahead sound from the business owner, the young man continued. “Your job ad listed a requirement for competency with a PC. I use a PC every day. The way it works for me is that I use what is called a ‘screen reader.’ It has voice output. This software will usually work with most computer applications. And if we find that it doesn’t work right out of the box with your computer system, we could call my state rehab counselor and she can have her IT specialist come in to evaluate your system and tweak my software to work with yours.

“Secondly,” the young man went on, “you require customer service experience. Though I haven’t been paid to perform that duty, I’ve had a couple of volunteer positions in which customer service was part of my responsibilities.”

“The answer is still no,” the business owner said. "Better, but still not good enough. I now know that you have abilities, special tools, and some backup to aid you if you need technical assistance. Although I’m feeling there is employment potential, it appears to come with an equal weight of potential problems that I would have to overcome.

“So, no again, but I'll give you one more chance. Go back out, rethink, come back in, and convince me that you are the best person for the job.”

The young man was not totally surprised by that reply. Though somewhat dismayed, he felt encouraged. He nodded, turned and exited the building. Minutes later, he came back in.

“Sir,” he said, reaching out to shake the business owner’s hand, “my name is Robert. You have an opening for a customer service representative. That is one of my best skills. I want to talk to you about hiring me for the job.

“I’m a very competent PC user. I have references I will present that will vouch for my ability, and for my reliability to be at work every day on time, and that I always give 110% to the job. May I talk to you about your position?”

“Yes, let’s talk,” responded the business owner.

**Exercise 1. If a Phone Call Is Your First Contact, How Do You Make It Be Your Best?**

First: If you are calling into a business looking for an opening, write out a short, clear script of why you are calling.

Example:

“Good morning. I am calling to inquire if you are accepting applications for customer service representatives?”

Second: Assume you have been given the okay to come in and apply for a job, write out a script of how you would ask what the application process consists of. Additionally, if you know accommodations will be necessary for you to fulfill one or more parts of the process, based on what they have described, then you must ask for accommodations.

For example, If a keyboarding test is required, you might say:

“To make this a fair test for you and me, I need to tell you that I am blind. Also, I am an excellent typist and in previous employment, in school, and at home, I use adaptive software for the computer. If your testing facility does not have the software I would need, I can describe other options whereby we can make it work and be a fair test.”

For the applicant who needs accommodations, then he or she must disclose their blindness and negotiate for accommodations. Generally, it is not wise to surprise the employer and expect that they will have the knowledge and/or resources to accommodate a blind applicant. The employer should be given some awareness and lead-time. Additionally, and super important, the applicant should have some idea of accommodation options that could work for him or her.

**Exercise 2. What Do You Know About the Resume?**

First: A resume is made up of several distinct sections. Using section titles made up of two words, write out a list of the sections found in a typical resume and arrange them in their proper order.

Although there are several types of resumes, here is a suggested list for a typical resume:

* Personal Information
* Job Objective
* Special Skills
* Job Experience
* Educational Background
* Personal/Professional References

Second: Write out why and how do you make a resume fit the job requirements you are applying for.

* The “why” Makes the job seeker look to fit the requirements of the job.
* The “how” highlights your qualifications by using the wording from the job add to make what you have to offer standout.

Note that many interviewers use a grading tool consisting of a list of key words based upon their ad.

**Exercise 3. How Do You Fill Out a Job Application?**

Filling out an application is a necessary step in the hiring process. In many cases, the application is the first sorting point for the business, and filling one out is a very important strategic skill needed by the job seeker. Many applications are now online, and can be filled out from a remote site. The job seeker should work with all types of applications.

First: In the process of filling out an application, what is your method for minimizing the effort and assuring accuracy?

Example: I work from a prepared data sheet or resume, and make sure all questions are answered.

Second: If you must fill out a hardcopy application, write out what special accommodations you need to accomplish this task, and describe how you would use them.

Examples are:

* I use magnification, and I will take my hand-held magnifier with me.
* I cannot see to read print, and must use a reader.
* To minimize any negative speculation on my abilities, if allowed, I would like to fill out the application where the business staff cannot observe me.

Third: Write out why and how you make your job application fit the opening.

Example of “why”: For the best chance of success, I want my application as much as possible to fit the specific requirements of the opening.

Example of “how”: I highlight my qualifications by using the wording from the job add of the business. (Many interviewers use a grading tool, based upon their ad, consisting of a list of key words they are looking for.)

**STEP 4: KNOW HOW TO SELL YOURSELF**

The interview is the make-or-break moment in the job seeking process. It is up to you to convince the employer that you are the person the company is looking for. That you have the personality to fit into the team and the abilities that will allow you to perform the job duties. And with blindness as one of your characteristics, and with our knowledge of how blindness is generally viewed, no matter how unfair it may seem, you need to openly address your blindness and describe how you do things. This most likely is your one and only chance to educate the company on blindness, and you have to convince them you have the ability to fulfill their requirements.

As a warm-up, selling yourself as a blind person requires a well-timed and adequate disclosure of your blindness. Read through the following examples of disclosure during an interview, and think about potential consequences.

First Example, the wrong way:

This is a partially sighted job seeker. To read, he needs enlargement measures, but doesn’t use them. He has a hard time seeing in dim lighting. He is applying for a warehouse job where he must pick out items to fill orders.

Employer:

“Summing up, we expect the warehouse picker to gather up his clipboard of orders and cart, then quickly find the items to fill his orders. It’s a lot of walking in and out of the stacks, reaching up over your head, or stooping down to pick the products. Is there anything else you would like to know about the job, or that you’d like us to know about you?”

Interviewee:

“No.”

s a result of that interview, the applicant’s limitations are not known until he starts the job.

Second Example, only half right:

To read comfortably, a partially sighted applicant plans on using screen enlargement and additional lighting. He is interviewing for a customer service position.

Employer:

“We feel you are a candidate we’d like to ask to come back for a second interview. Is there anything else you would like to know about the job, or that you would like us to know about you?”

Interviewee:

“Well, I am legally blind, and I’ll need accommodations.”

In the interview, the applicant does not elaborate on the needed accommodations, or what he plans to do himself that will allow him to perform the required job duties.

Third Example, the right way:

This is a woman who is totally blind, uses non-visual alternatives, and is applying for a teaching position.

Employer:

“Tell us about yourself.”

Interviewee:

”First, thank you for choosing me for an interview. I believe my scholastic accomplishments, previous experience, and great references helped with that decision. And being up front with you, I want to draw your attention to the white cane that I used coming in. I feel that along with my skills as an educator, we also need to discuss my blindness, and how I do not allow it to be a factor holding me back from achieving my goals. In fact, I want to share with you as to how I make my blindness a positive in my teaching. Also, I want to describe how I perform such basic job requirements as handling paperwork, using the computer, monitoring student behavior, managing the classroom environment, and of course, answer any questions you may have.”

**Exercise 1. Disclosing Your Blindness**

If you do not disclose and talk openly about your blindness during a job interview, then you have not had a full or fair interview. As an exercise, write out where, why, and how you will disclose your blindness.

Example: I will not disclose my blindness until I arrive for the interview. Then, as I interview, I will bring it up as early as I can. I will make sure to explain how I will use alternatives to handle each part of the job duties. That will be my first and maybe only chance to educate and convince them that I can do the job, and that I am the one they want.

**Exercise 2. Are You Ready To Answer the Questions That Will Be Asked of You in the** Interview?

First: Write down the top five questions you feel will be asked of you in an interview. Note that an extensive list of such potential questions can be found on the Internet. Examples could be as follows.

* Tell us about yourself.
* What are your strengths?
* What would a manager or co-worker from a past job say about you?
* How would you handle dishonesty in the workplace if confronted by it?
* What was the most useful criticism you ever received?

Second: It is important to practice answering questions you suspect will be asked within an interview. For each of the five questions you thought you could get, now write out answers to them.

**Exercise 3. Why Thank the Interviewer?**

Why is it smart to send a thank you note to the person who interviewed you? An example answer could be: It is a nice gesture, and it will remind them of me.

**Exercise 4. Why Should a Person Keep Track of Contacts During Job Seeking?**

Write out your answer. Give examples of what you would keep records of and why, such as:

* to have the information to make timely follow-up contacts after an interview.
* to know when it is time to check again for openings.
* to have a record of whom you’ve talked to, and when.
* to record if a business has what you are looking for or not.

**Exercise 5. Arrange to Have Several Mock Interviews**

Record them and go back over them with your counselor. The interview is the point in the job seeking process that you and your counselor have worked hard to achieve. You must be at your best. More than likely, the interview will be the one and only time you will get to convince the employer that you have the skills to do the job, and your blindness should not be a factor as to whether they hire you or not.

**PART III**

**WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS**

Part III is all about working with the business community. This section will specifically look into job development, employer contacts, job analysis, and follow-up services.

**A. Job Development**

In job development, our mission is to make two parties very happy: the employer, and the blind consumer. We are a service provider, the go-between, striving to match up the business needing good workers and the blind consumer looking for a good job. This works best when we first establish a working relationship with these two parties individually.

Job development, in the main, is about the education of the employer. The first goal is to get the business to view you as a harbinger of information and assistance relative to employment of the blind -- and that you can prove it can be a positive/profitable action, not the normally viewed negative employment issue.

Job development usually starts out as an initiative by the VR counselor (or some type of placement specialist) as a result of an employer contact. The employer contact is a great way for the counselor to not only educate the company about blindness and where the blind are employed, but equally important is for the VR counselor to learn about the company and its needs. The outcome hopefully is the employer finds an ally willing to help find good workers, and the counselor gains career-related information to aid in counseling and finding possible employment for a consumer.

Our initial work with the employer is very much like what we have to do with a newly blinded individual. We need to educate both of them to the truth: that with proper training and attitude, the average blind person can do a job just as well as the average sighted person.

We will know we have done our best with the consumer when he or she knows what to do on a job search, has the motivation to do so, and does that with intelligence and confidence.

Then when necessary, we can become a resource to both the job seeker and/or the employer.

**B. The Employer Contact**

Contacts can come about by several different processes. Common are:

* cold calls. The VR staffer walks into a business unannounced and asks to speak with the owner, or whoever is responsible for hiring.
* networking. The VR staffer learns, through any means, of a company and is given contact info in order to make an appointment.
* joining civic organizations. By getting involved in such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, the Lyons Club, or the Rotary Club, the VR staffer can meet management of community businesses who deal with employment issues.

**Introducing Yourself**

The VR counselor should have a good opening speech lasting from thirty to forty-five seconds (The elevator speech). Here is an example:

“Hi, I am Robert, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the State Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Part of my job is to assist our consumers to go back to work, and when they are ready, I work with them to find employment. And one of the best ways for me to accomplish that is to familiarize myself with our community businesses, find out who is doing what, learn about their staffing needs, and establish a partnership based on meeting one another’s mutual needs.

“One service we have to offer is that we have a pool of qualified and motivated workers who we know quite well. We know their talents, and their likes and dislikes. And we also have specialized knowledge of how to accommodate for all levels of blindness. We know how to make most jobs accessible and doable for both the business and the blind worker.

“If we can have a few minutes of your time, we would appreciate learning about your business, your employment needs, the types of positions you have, and what you look for in a person when you do have openings. Also, we could elaborate on where and how the blind are working, and even assist you to know where within your company a person with any vision loss may fit in.”

**Services VR Has to Offer the Employer**

The services you can offer will depend upon your agencies unique circumstances. Though there is a general framework of how to conduct an employer contact, and a finite number of services that anyone may have to offer, each encounter is unique. What you end up doing for one employer may be totally different than for a neighboring business. Below are listed out a series of services typical for VR agencies which can be use to make a deal with an employer. With some thought and experience, you will learn how to read the employer’s reactions, and you will know when to present any of the below services or even to elaborate on them.

a. Placement Services

VR can:

* be seen as an employment service providing pre-screened applicants.
* provide On-The-Job funds for a specified short term training if there is a likelihood of employment at its successful completion.

b. Technical Support

VR can:

* provide expert job analysis on all positions to point out where and how a person with some usable sight and/or no sight would fit in.
* bring together the VR IT specialist with the company’s IT staff to evaluate and/or install adaptive software.
* be a final resource to cover part or all the cost of adaptive software/hardware needed to accommodate a blind worker.

c. Retention of an Existing Employee

VR can help a business avoid losing a valued employee experiencing on-coming blindness. All the VR’s resources would be brought into play to evaluate and train both the employee and the business to allow continued employment.

d. In-Service Training of Business Staff

VR can provide in-services to the staff of a company on such matters as:

* how to evaluate a blind applicant.
* sensitivity training to anyone involved with the hiring process.
* sensitivity training to staff who in some way serve the public and may encounter a blind person in the performance of their duties.
* sensitivity training to any segment of a company’s workforce.

e. Referral to Other Resources

VR can:

* sign off on the paperwork for the employer to receive a “Targeted Tax Credit” for the hiring of a VR client.
* refer the employer to other governmental/private service providers offering specialized assessment/training in adaptive hardware and software for the blind and/or people with other disabilities.

**C. The Job Analyses**

Listed in this short section are several key thoughts that must be considered during the question and answer time of the job analysis process. This list is not by any means all the questions that may need to be examined to make a job workable for a blind consumer. But they are to get you thinking along the lines necessary to help you and the employer figure out if it is worth pursuing.

#1. A Customer Service Position

This would apply to any similar type of position where a computer station and a phone line are needed, and the task is to serve a customer.

Question 1: What are the basic duties of this position, and what are the prerequisites/qualifications needed to enter this position?

Question 2: Is the computer station a PC on a network, or is it an iOS (Apple)?

Question 3: If the worker is required to use hardcopy materials such as reference manuals, faxes, invoices, receipts, or catalogs, will they be made accessible?

Question 4: Will the worker need to access graphics/images on the computer screen to fully fulfill the job duties?

#2. A Manufacturing Position

This applies to positions involving such tasks as assembly, packaging, order filling, etc. which do not require the use of a machine or any other type of equipment.

Question 1: What are the basic duties of this position, and what are the prerequisites/qualifications needed to enter this position?

Question 2: Is there color coding which needs to be strictly followed?

Question 3: Do references need to be made to hardcopy materials such as blue prints, instructional guidelines, order sheets, and so forth?

Question 4: Are the materials needed by the worker brought to or taken away from the work station by someone other than the worker?

Question 5: If the worker needs to perform inspection, is it to be done by vision, by means of another sense, or by a specialized tool?

#3. Production Position

This type of position requires operating machinery.

Question 1: What are the basic duties of this position, and what are the prerequisites/qualifications needed to enter this position?

Question 2: Are there dials or screens that need to be monitored?

Question 3: Do the duties of the position require the use of hardcopy materials such as blue prints, instructional guidelines, order sheets, and so forth?

Question 4: Are the materials needed by the worker brought to or taken away from the work station by someone other than the worker?

Question 5: If inspection of the finished product is to be performed, is it to be done by vision, by means of another sense, or by a specialized tool?

#4. Support Position

This could be a position such as a clerk of any type, a secretary, a switchboard operator, etc.

Question 1: What are the basic duties of this position, and what are the prerequisites/qualifications needed to enter this position?

Question 2: Do the duties of the position require the handling of hardcopy items such as reference materials, hardcopy reports, faxes, invoices, and so forth?

Question 3: Is travel, such as to attend meetings, to transport people or materials to other locations, required by this position?

#5. Management or Professional Position

This could be a position such as an office manager, an accountant, a computer programmer, etc.

Question 1: What are the basic duties of this position, and what are the prerequisites/qualifications needed to enter this position?

Question 2: Do the duties of the position require the handling of hardcopy items such as reference materials, receipts, faxes, invoices, and so forth?

Question 3: Is travel, such as to attend meetings, to transport people or materials to other locations, required by this position?

**D. Follow-up Services**

Consider in achieving new employment, you will have taken an active role in some cases, and you will have not in others. Some consumers are very independent and are capable of performing the job-seeking process on their own. Your program may serve only as a potential resource.

Once the consumer starts his or her new job, the IPE requirement is for the program to remain open for a minimum of ninety days. Most companies will ease the new employee into the set of job duties and give him or her a time period to get up to an acceptable level of production. Thus once your consumer is employed, there are two major concerns which must be closely attended to in order to ensure the ongoing success of the placement. These are a happy and satisfied employer, and a happy and satisfied employee.

Therefore, after placement, the on-going successful efforts of you and your consumer will now depend upon yet another very important employment strategy: the follow-up. The follow-up needs to happen in the new employment situation, no matter what your part was in the hiring process. This could occur on one of two fronts: either with the employer and the employee, or with the employee only.

#1. With the Employer and the Employee

This scenario presumes that the VR counselor has performed some job development activities with the employer. In this case, the follow-up services may consist of the following:

1. With the Employer

Once the consumer starts on the job, the counselor is not only communicating with the consumer, but is actively communicating with the employer. The counselor is getting up dates, and generally is making sure all is well. If needed, the counselor would bring in other VR staff if a situation requires something from a tech specialist, and/or a rehabilitation teacher, or whatever.

1. With the Consumer

The counselor is actively communicating with the consumer as he or she starts the new job. The concerns would be making sure the consumer is feeling comfortable with their blindness skills, their equipment, and the like.

However, the consumer may voice problems relating more to the job rather than his/her personal skills/ equipment. These concerns could be dealing with other employees, or something “any employee” should take to their supervisor. The VR counselor must then advise the consumer the he/she must deal with the employer. The VR counselor must not become the middleman.

There can be rare situations when the counselor can step into the middle of things and talk to the supervisor first. That is situational. But we want the goal of having the employer feeling comfortable communicating with the blind employee, and the employee communicating with their employer.

#2. With the Consumer

This scenario presumes the consumer has proven they are very capable, responsible, and basically did get the job on his or her own. The counselor follow-up would be much like what they have previously established with the consumer, such as timely contacts, receiving updates, being a resource to purchase needed equipment, etc. Involvement with the employer could happen if the consumer requested it, and/or if the employer finds there is a special problem they need assistance with, such as a technology issue.