



Promising Practices Brief

Promising Practices Brief: Networking

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Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide

Based at:

University of Hawaii
at Manoa, Center on
Disability Studies

In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for
Independent Living
Hawaii Vocational
Rehabilitation and
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Purpose

The purpose of this brief is to describe networking as a promising practice for serving Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities. In a continuing effort to increase employment opportunities for the population we serve, the National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities distributed a survey to rehabilitation administrators across the United States. Of the 80 state agencies surveyed, 34 agencies (42.5%) responded. The survey identified networking as a promising practice that is being used to guide and enhance provision of rehabilitation services.

Networking

What is networking? One definition is in the website Quintessential Careers (n.d.): “Networking means establishing relationships so that you can enlist support and comfortably ask for ideas, advice, and referrals to those with hiring power.” The desired result of networking, in this case, is employment of some type.

However, significant barriers to networking can exist. Major barriers that are encountered include these: 1) The Fear Factor—simply being afraid of the process or feeling awkward; 2) Lack of Knowledge of the Job Search Process—not understanding the process or how to take control; and 3) Lack of Confidence Speaking to People—hesitancy to present yourself to potential employers. Other barriers could include family concerns, cultural issues, and simply not having anyone with which to network (Making Networking Easier, 2005). It is not difficult to see that having a disability would magnify those barriers and make them seem insurmountable.

Barriers can be reduced by actions such as breaking the process of seeking employment into more manageable steps, learning to see that selling yourself is not necessarily boasting, and finding ways to take more control of the situation. In addition, individuals with disabilities need to increase the number of supporters, friends and advocates they have, which, after all is said and done, may get them a job.

Disability Network

One organization that facilitates this process is the appropriately named “Disability Network,” which bills itself as an information highway for individuals with disabilities and their families—a place to find support from others as well as helpful and entertaining links for adults and children. The Disability Network believes that the word “DISABLED” stands for “Determined Individuals Striving And Beating Limitations Encountered Daily” (Disability network, 1999-2006). Facilitated by the Disability Network, the mere support of peers in similar circumstances or of those who have experienced success finding a job, may be all that is needed for some individuals with disabilities to overcome their obstacles. This is the Network’s sole reason for existing.

Dependable Strengths Articulation Process

Conceived slightly differently, Bob Pack, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the Coordinator of the WorkStrides Program in Washington, explains how he recommends networking. Bob is involved in implementing a training process for individuals with disabilities that focuses on strengths. The process is called the “Dependable Strengths Articulation Process” (DSAP). DSAP is a planned sequence of experiences in which participants identify their strengths and talents, uncover hidden potential, and become motivated to strive for success. Dependable Strengths is a unique research-based process proven to increase self-esteem, motivation, and interest in learning for people of all ages (Center for Dependable Strengths, n.d.).

The Dependable Strengths website says the DSAP was developed in 1945 by Dr. Bernard Haldane, the “grandfather” of career counseling in the U.S. Dr. Haldane spent 50 years refining and perfecting the model. In the DSAP, job seekers contact people they know, talk about their dependable strengths, ask for referrals, contact those referrals, and then ask for additional referrals. This process continues until they find someone who is interested in hiring them (Pack, 2006). Dr. Haldane was once quoted as saying, “Because you’re unique, there’s something you are better at than anybody else” (Center for Dependable Strengths, n.d.).

Allen Boivin-Brown, the President of the Center for Dependable Strengths, believes the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process not only incorporates a unique and effective form of networking for job-finding, but the process goes deeper and assists individuals to uncover their core strengths, thereby gaining self-esteem, motivation, and greater control over their lives.

The Dependable Strengths website, www.dependablestrengths.org, has many recommendations for individuals attempting to network and secure employment even though they have a disability. To network with the Disability Network or chat with others, you can also visit this website: <http://www.disabilitynetwork.com/>.

Recommendations from the Field

In our communications, Vocational Rehabilitation providers offered their own unique interpretations of what networking entails and why they think networking is such an important activity. For instance, Tuyet Nguyen (2006), a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Washington, says the most important thing in working with Asian or Pacific Islander communities is to make a connection with the individual’s community leaders. If you are able to develop a good relationship with them, community leaders can be a great help by receiving referrals, getting help with accommodations, interpreting, and just sitting down to brainstorm with you. Attending community events and volunteering in community projects are good ways to develop trust and friendships.

Another Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Spokane, Washington, wrote, “Networking is the art of making contacts, which leads to potential job leads and other sources of support in the community for assisting people with disabilities. Personally, I network everywhere

I go, hand out my business cards, and explain what I do.” She attends the Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meetings, networks while standing in line at the grocery store, with the person sitting next to her on the plane, virtually every chance she gets. She calls it “the six degrees of separation” theory: everyone knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone..., which will eventually lead to someone who might have a job opening or lead (Baconrind, 2006).

Julie Zander (2006), a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Renton, Washington, believes networking is easy. “It is a generic tool that involves ‘rubbing elbows’ with people who may have access to information or other people in positions that could potentially influence one getting hired. It involves meeting and greeting others on an informal or formal basis, getting their cards, and keeping up a relationship with them to ask them for information about their company or other people they may know. A networking contact can lead to other networking contacts. It involves taking risks, making ‘cold calls,’ and following up after you meet someone.”

Not What You Know, But Who You Know

Professionals in the field, like June C. Kuehn (2006), a District Administrator with the Department of Rehabilitation in the Orange San Gabriel District in California, believe, “Networking is vital in the work that we do due to the limited resources within the Asian and Pacific Islander community. Within our community, our Counselors must constantly network, attend community events, and go to churches and other public functions to get the word out not only about our services but to find out about resources within the community. As most of our clients are monolingual in the Asian languages, they cannot access many of the services for our mainstream clients. Therefore, this requires that our Counselors find services within the community that provide those resources for our disabled, monolingual consumers.”

Debbie Barker (2006) of the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is of the opinion that networking is just developing relationships and good marketing. It involves going to Chamber of Commerce meetings, taking target employers out to lunch or golf, or boating, or whatever is deemed to be cost-effective. Getting to know people is the #1 source of job placements for people with and without disabilities as well as minority and non-minority populations alike. She firmly believes that “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.”

In addition, Debbie believes an effective networker knows a lot of prospective employers. A good job-developer has many good working relationships with many employers with whom she or he has prior successful job placements. “Vocational Rehabilitation counselors who do job development also have tons of employer relationships; established through networking” (Barker, 2006).

Reaching Out to Diversity

Angela C. Price, a Transition Counselor for the Division for Blind Services in Houston, Texas, also believes networking is very important. She recommends “frequent outreach in heavily populated Asian Communities at Health, Career, and Church Fairs.” She also believes networking improves counselors’ cultural sensitivity. “Cultural sensitivity is an awareness that I keep at the forefront, and I also show an interest in their cultural practices; I have been known to approach individuals seen in the community, [or] in a grocery store... introducing myself and offering my card for services. I feel that diversity is an important tool and we all should remember to include the various ethnic groups.”

Considering the limited training and employment sometimes available to minority ethnic and language groups such as Asians, networking can save service-providers’ time and effort. The networking that may help a person with a disability is fairly easy to do.

Networking with Professionals

Networking is promoted by Hong (1995), who believes it is useful for rehabilitation counselors working with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to network with community agencies and other culturally sensitive providers in allied professions (e.g., psychologists and social workers).

Since the ultimate goal of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors is to help individuals with disabilities secure employment and become self-sufficient, logically, the two approaches to networking (with community leaders and with providers in allied professions) are closely related.

Summary

Networking is beneficial, whether by individuals with disabilities trying to find a job or by counselors trying to do their jobs better. By utilizing all available resources—contacts, friends, and advocates—individuals historically underserved by Vocational Rehabilitation, and often overlooked by employers, can receive services and find jobs. More importantly, clarifying and reiterating the dependable skills you possess can give a profound boost to your self-esteem and self-concept.

Author Note:

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