



Employer Engagement Strategies

Hitting the Mark

In marketing, when the rubber really hits the road you must use specific techniques to address employer trepidations, build trust and convince them of the value of your services

Job development for people with criminal histories ~~can be~~ is challenging. With the right focus, however, you can overcome employer resistance and create opportunities for your job seekers.

The solution comes down to a fundamental question: *Why do employers hire?* For most, the answer is simple – to make money or provide a service. Employers look at three factors to determine who can help them make money: 1) Productivity; 2) Employee Retention; and 3) Legal and fiscal liability. Successful job developers tailor their marketing toward how their organization can improve the first two factors, reduce the third and ultimately help employers maximize success.

First, Market thy Services

When making their initial pitches to employers, many job developers make the mistake of trying to sell specific Job Seekers or their Organizational Mission. Remember, most employers are only interested in what *you* can do for *them*. Why should they hire from you rather than placing an ad in the paper or contacting the local Workforce1 Career Center? Focus on the potential services you offer such as pre-employment workshops, pre-screening of applicants, the ability to offer a variety of candidates and replace someone who leaves a job, post-placement follow-up, and help in identifying tax credits or other incentives. Even services like drug testing can be enticing to an employer if your organization does that.

Why not market specific Job Seekers? When you sell specific individuals, you are guaranteeing their reliability. Despite our best efforts at job readiness, however, job seekers (especially youth) can be unpredictable. They can change their minds. They can say no. They can act in ways you never anticipated. You cannot control them, but you can control what services you offer. By building a relationship based on services, when a placement does go bad you're better able to move forward rather than having to repair the damage done.

While employers may admire the purpose of your organization, their first concern is the bottom line. The fact that they're helping a good cause may influence some employers, but for most the quality of your candidates and services are going to be the most important factors in whether they work with you.

The bottom line is that when you save the employer time, effort, and money, you get the placements you need.

Focus on Retention, not Placement!

The goal is to build long-term relationships with employers. Start with what matters most: How you can partner to keep candidates on the job. Quick placements might boost your numbers in the short run, but what matters most is whether that employer will come back to you over time based on successful, longer term placements you have made and supported. And of course, use your placed employees to market your organization on your behalf with prospective employers and members of your current job bank!

From Prospecting, to a Foot in the Door, to Building the Relationship—Every Interaction Must Have a Goal

Pitching to an employer – especially an initial prospect pitch – should be kept simple and with the purpose of an in-person meeting or teleconference. Start with what the employer needs, and actively listen to what they say if they give you the in. **Your first goal is to get a meeting.**

Remember:

- Do not listen purely for the purpose of a response; listen for what is “between the lines.”
- Be ok with rejection. It is typically not personal. A sales mantra of yore has always been: “Every no is one no closer to yes.”

Sound Byte, Sound Byte, Sound Byte: Hone your pitch.

Practice it. Make it compact. The 30-second sell is critical for employers on the move. Time is money for everyone – non-profits and for-profits alike.

Make adjustments to your pitch based on your potential audience. The more you can know about an employer before you pick up the phone or drop by to schedule a meeting, the better. There is a foot-in-the-door pitch, and then there is a “I am now in the door” pitch. They are not the same! The first gets a meeting. The second conveys the value of services you can provide to an employer. With that second pitch or sound byte, do not assume that your first (or even second) meeting should result in you getting job orders. Some employers are turned off by the hard sell.

Know the Inside-Track Language:

Employers are more likely to be responsive to you if you have researched a bit about them and their industry before you make your pitch. Being able to use language in terms that the employer understands (avoiding non-profit or social service jargon which can be foreign to employers) is crucial.

Leverage Other Employers as References:

Make a list of references of the employers with whom you have successfully worked to place persons with criminal records. Use that list as a marketing tool or as part of a brochure! Ask current employers to act as a reference and speak on your behalf to other employers who may be interested in accepting your job seekers as referrals. Remember the value-added process: You can also sell your current employer a business-to-business connection by connecting them with other employers!

Many successful job developers use the reputation and reference of another business to get a foot in the door with new employers. Build a business advisory board in your organization so that your employers are encouraged to network, and can be thanked for their contribution to your organization.

Connect with Employers at Their Area of Interest:

Tune in to trades publications, trades associations, HR literature, and other issue-areas for employers. There is amazing value-added when you happen to “offhandedly” refer an employer to a website or organization that can help them to improve their HR services, or if you send them an “article of interest” that helps them to further develop employment retention tools.

Package and Market Incentives:

There are many incentives for employers to hire job seekers with special circumstances such as disabilities, recovery from substance abuse, persons with criminal records, homelessness or former homelessness, and persons living below the poverty line.

Examples concerning job seekers with criminal records, for example, can include:

- **Bonding** can provide an employer with an insurance policy of up to \$10,000 for the first six months of employment, and may be a free service through the New York State Department of Labor. The Bond covers damages that can result from the dishonest acts an employee on or off the employer’s premises, such as theft, fraud, larceny and embezzlement. It does not cover damage to property due to poor workmanship. If no claim is made during the first six months, the employee will be bondable for life through the McLaughlin Company, an agent of Travelers, and the employer can renew the bond at the going rate. Higher bond amounts may be attained at this point. Since 1966, the programs inception, less than 1% of persons bonded nationwide ended in default. It is a safe and worthy investment for an employer.
- **The Work Opportunity Tax Credit program** can earn an employer a savings of up to \$9900 for the first five years of employment for an eligible person. There are approximately nine target populations that are eligible. This benefit is easy to apply for, and guaranteed through the Federal government. In addition to federal benefits, there are state-based tax credits as well, which can be utilized to hire a person who is currently in receipt of public welfare, or for persons in recovery from substance abuse.
- **Subsidized employment** may be available through VESID (NYS Vocational and Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities). In order to be eligible for VESID, one must have a disability that interferes with their capacity to perform in their given occupation. Individuals with substance abuse histories may qualify for those services. Many ex-offenders have a history of substance abuse, and can therefore benefit from this as well. Persons with any kind of disability that makes them VESID-eligible can apply for these subsidies. The degree of benefit (or savings to an employer) during a subsidized period can vary dramatically. Get and market the facts for employers.

And Lastly, Know Your Limits:

When all else fails, remember that some employers are not appropriate for us to work with! Would you really want to send your job seeker to an employer who is discriminatory, unwilling to listen, or believes that it is ok to break the law? Probably not. And do not take it personally. You can just thank them for their time and move on. There are plenty of other fish to fry out there!