

Tips for Employer Relationship Building:  
A Job Development Guide for IPS Specialists



*Developed by: Sarah Swanson, Jerry Wood, Laura Flint*

*Updated by: Jackie Pogue, Chris Llorente*

## Introduction

This booklet is intended to augment job development training for IPS programs. The premise of this job development approach is that employment specialists should take time to learn about the needs and preferences of employers before asking employers to meet a job candidate. In this approach, the employer is viewed as a customer. So, although the employment specialist may go to an employer with a job candidate in mind, they might ultimately decide that the candidate is not a good fit for that particular employer.

Another important component of this type of job development is that the employment specialist makes multiple in-person visits to develop relationships with employers. Just as many people find jobs through networking, the employment specialist develops a network of employers that she can share with her clients. Further, the repeat visits demonstrate that the employment specialist is dependable and interested in a long-term relationship.

The first step is for the specialist to go in-person to introduce herself to an employer and ask for a short appointment to come back to learn about the business. When they return for the appointment, they will focus on learning about the business and the employer's view about the type of candidates that she would like to meet. The employment specialist will refrain from asking about job openings or conducting a presentation about their program. They will likely follow-up by sending or dropping off a thank-you note for the employer's time, and then would take time to reflect on the stage of the relationship. Is it time to begin discussing a candidate? Does the relationship need further work? Does it appear that they and the employer will be able to provide something useful for each other going forward? An employment specialist may decide to maintain the relationship even if the employer isn't hiring, or even if they don't have the right candidate for the job at that moment.

It's worth noting that this approach is easiest to use in service jobs where employment specialists can walk into the business and access the manager relatively quickly. However, it can successfully be used in other sectors, sometimes with additional legwork of phone calls, emails, LinkedIn connection, and other networking to get to a face-to-face contact with a hiring manager.





# Sample Questions to Learn about an Employer's Needs

## Questions about the business:

- ★ Why do you like working for \_\_\_\_\_ (name of business)?
- ★ What are your goals for (the business or department)?
- ★ What is your vision for your company over the next year?
- ★ What sets your company apart from others?
- ★ As the manager for \_\_\_\_\_, what are you most proud of?
- ★ Is there a time of year when your business is busiest?

## Questions about the right job candidates:

- ★ What type of person tends to be successful here?
- ★ What qualities do you look for when you are interviewing job candidates?
- ★ What are some of your hiring headaches?
- ★ Describe the qualities of a person who would love to work here.

## Questions about positions:

- ★ Please describe your workforce.
- ★ I see that you have \_\_\_\_\_ positions. What other positions do you have that I may not know about?
- ★ What is a typical day like for a \_\_\_\_\_ (name of position)?
- ★ What are some of the challenges that people have had in these positions?
- ★ Do some positions have more turnover than others?

## Questions about the hiring process:

- ★ What is your hiring process?
- ★ So, people should start with an online application. But you mentioned that you need people who are self-starters with outgoing personalities. If you had a friend who matched that description how would you advise your friend to go about applying for work here?
- ★ How have you found good job candidates in the past?
- ★ Do you have times of the year when you do more hiring than others? When?

## Ineffective questions:

- ★ Are you hiring?
- ★ Do you anticipate job openings in the future?
- ★ Do you hire people with criminal histories?
- ★ Do you hire people who have substance use disorders?
- ★ What do you do here? (Learn this about the company before the appointment.)

## Questions You Have Found Helpful

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

## How to Structure a Meeting to Learn about an Employer (Second Visit)

The focus is to listen and try to understand the workplace from the employer's point of view. Be curious. Ask open-ended questions, use reflections, etc. You will know that the interview is going well if the employer is doing most of the talking.



# Top 5 Mistakes to Avoid During Meetings to Learn About an Employer

## 1. Asking about job openings

*Learn about the employer's business needs and build a relationship before asking about job openings or talking about a job seeker.*

## 2. Interrupting the employer

*Whatever the employer is talking about is what he or she thinks is important. So, listen! Be curious.*

## 3. Asking if the employer is open to hiring people with criminal histories

*If you ask this, employers may assume that everyone you work with has a criminal history. And, even if you do work exclusively with people who have legal histories, this is not the first bit of information that you want employers to know about the people you represent.*

## 4. Speaking at length about your program

*The goal is for the employer to do most of the talking. Answer questions about your program, if asked, and then return to learning about the employer.*

## 5. Neglecting to prepare for the meeting

*Demonstrate that you are willing to work at this relationship. Know the basic goods or services produced by the company. Consider looking up the company's mission statement. Have some questions prepared. Bring your business card, program brochure, and appointment book. Wear business casual or better –no jeans, t-shirts with logos, or athletic shoes.*



## After Meeting with the Employer

### 1. Write a thank-you note.

After you meet with an employer to learn more about the business, your first order of business is to send (or hand deliver) a thank-you note. Handwrite a couple of lines on a plain note card to let the employer know that you appreciate her time and that you enjoyed learning about the business. Consider keeping thank-you cards in your car. At the very least, send an email.

One example: Dear Alison, Thank you for meeting with me yesterday. I enjoyed learning about Chili by the Lake and appreciate your offer to introduce me to the kitchen manager. I look forward to meeting Carl next week. Best Regards, Jackie

### 2. Reflect on the stage of the relationship.

Spend a few minutes thinking about your new relationship with the employer. Does she appear eager to work with you? Interested, but unsure about your program? Remember that you don't want to move faster than the employer. For example, you wouldn't want to return to talk about a job seeker if the employer is still unsure about working with you.

### 3. Plan your next step.

If the employer appears interested, but not committed to the idea of working with you, then you might think about how to deepen your relationship with the employer. For example, if there is more that you would like to know about the employer, you might return to ask if you can take a tour of the business or if you can ask a few more questions about the business. You might also ask for an introduction to another manager or the owner. Another strategy to learn more about the business would be to ask if you can return to observe workers during a busy period to learn more about their jobs.

If the employer seems like she might be interested, but it looks like she will not be hiring any time soon, she still may be able to help you by introducing you to other employers. For example, she might introduce you to some of her suppliers, or she may be willing to participate in a steering committee meeting to educate members about employer needs. Or she might be willing to help a client with a mock interview. These steps can help further your relationship.

If the employer appears interested in meeting people from your program now, or even at a later time when he expects to be hiring, return to talk about a person who might be a good fit for that business. "John, I've had time to consider your need to find people who are avid readers and would enjoy working with customers. I believe I do know someone similar to the person you described. Would you like to hear a little bit about her?" If you know the employer is not hiring, ask if he would be open to allowing the candidate to visit the workplace to learn more about that type of position—a 30-minute visit to observe workers and ask a few questions.



## Maintaining Employer Relationships over Time (Third Visit and More)

Stay in touch with the employer every four to six weeks. Each time the employer sees you again, it reinforces the notion that you are interested in a long-term relationship and that you are reliable—you keep showing up! Further, don't rely on busy employers to remember to call you when they have a job opening. Visit regularly so that you will hear about openings before employers advertise those jobs.

Keep a list of 15-20 employers with whom you are building long-term relationships. Next to each employer, jot down the date of your most recent visit so that you can remember when you should return.

### Ideas for Return Visits

- Drop off thank-you notes for anything the employer has done to help you, for example, spending time to educate you about the business, reviewing a person's resume, visiting a steering committee meeting, etc.
- Return to share printed materials about your program, such as a brochure designed especially for employers or a newsletter.
- Return to share good news about your program. For example, an article in the paper about your program or a record number of job starts in the last quarter.
- Return to congratulate the employer about an article that you read about his business.
- Stop by to say hello and to ask the employer how business is going.
- Drop off a holiday card.
- Ask for a tour of the business.
- Ask for a tour of the business for a small group of participants.
- Ask to come in for an hour to observe workers at their jobs. This will help you better understand the workflow and the challenges for people in those positions.
- Stop by to give the employer the name and phone number of another employer who has worked with you (a reference).
- Return to ask the employer if he would be interested in attending a steering committee meeting to help members understand the needs of local employers.
- Drop off information about the Work Opportunities Tax Credit or other hiring incentive.
- Ask the employer to introduce you to some of her suppliers.

- Ask to meet managers in different departments of the business.
- Inquire about changes in the business if you haven't been there in a while.
- Invite them to an employer or client recognition event that the program is hosting.
- **Candidate-specific activities**
  - Return to let the employer know that you are working with someone who is interested in their type of work. Ask if the employer would be open to allowing the person to visit in order to observe and ask questions about that type of position.
  - Return to let the employer know that a job seeker you know has submitted an application or drop off their resume.
  - Return after a job candidate interviews for a position to ask the employer for her impressions about the candidate.
  - Return to ask the employer if she would be willing to provide someone with feedback about his interviewing skills or feedback about a resume.
  - Return to let the employer know that you do know a candidate who would be a good fit for the business. "John, I know it's important to you to find employees who want to work here because they are interested in books, and also people who are friendly and outgoing. I do know someone who fits that description. Would you like to hear a little bit about her?"
  - Check back about their follow-through if things don't seem to be moving. "I know you mentioned that you would be doing interviews last week, but Kyle didn't hear anything, so I wanted to check back and see where you are at in the process."

### **Your Strategies to Sustain Employer Relationships:**

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

## Tips for Keeping Track of Important Employer Information

Think about this: each manager or business owner has her own preferences about who she wants to hire, right? A manager at one retail store might stress the need for someone who knows about the product being sold, while a manager at a similar store may prefer to hire someone who has good customer service skills and a flexible schedule. Some hiring managers may even be willing to share information about the questions they ask during interviews and how they expect a good candidate to respond.



If you are out in the community talking to six employers a week, it won't be long before it becomes impossible to remember all of this information. But you want to be able to tell your clients about those interview questions. Or, when you go back to talk about a job candidate, you want to be able to use the same words the employer used when describing a good candidate, "Jack, I've had time to think about your need to find candidates who are outgoing, reliable, and good team players. I think I do know someone who fits that description..."

### So, how can you keep track of all the information?

- Take a few notes while the employer is talking. Be careful not to lose focus on the conversation—just jot down a few important ideas or phrases that you want to remember. As soon as the meeting is over, go to your car and add to your notes. Some people have a small job development notebook. Others use notes or voice memo apps on their smartphone to save information in the moment.
- Use employer contact logs to track the information. If you use paper logs, always keep a few with you during your workday. You can even fill it out right after making job development contacts. If you keep electronic logs, save the form on your desktop or create a link on your smartphone and fill out the information on the contact within a day or two.
- Keep a list/ document/ folder of each long-term employer relationship and add to it as you learn more information.

A sample employer contact log follows. Versions of this can be made in Excel or Google Sheet.

## Job Developing for People with Criminal Records

People with criminal records usually face more challenges with securing employment, particularly if their criminal charges are recent or significant. In these situations, people will benefit from more advocacy from the employment specialist. Here are five tips!

1. **Build a good relationship with the employer** by learning about their business and workforce needs. You will need this foundation. In general, it's best to ask indirectly about their hiring practices with regard to criminal records. One helpful question is "Tell me about your hiring process." Often employers will say if they do a background check and you can ask if there are any disqualifying convictions.
2. **Be savvy about how you introduce your candidate to the employer.** Make a return visit and share with the employer that you have a candidate who has skills and strengths that meet their needs. If they are interested in meeting your candidate, bring the person in to meet the hiring manager. It's best to bring up the criminal history while the person is meeting face-to-face with an employer, because it gives the employer an opportunity to see that the person is sincere about improving their life.
3. If you have a good relationship with the employer, you might bring up the person and their criminal history without them present. Be sure to describe how the person meets the employer's needs and would be an asset to their company. For example, *"Rick has a conviction for possession of drugs with intent to sell. However, he has been in treatment for eight months and is very committed to changing his life. With regard to a job, Rick is someone who always shows up. He really wants to work and I know that you have expressed interest in meeting people who are very reliable. Can I bring Rick by to meet you?"*
4. **Keep track of each employer's policies** about hiring people with criminal histories. Remember to differentiate from hard policies and opinions. Rely on things you learn from talking directly to employers, rather than lists of friendly employers that you might find on the internet.
5. **Prepare your job seeker for the application and interview process**, including coaching on how to explain their record. The "Nobody Would Hire Me if They Knew" worksheet is a useful preparation tool. Practice together until they can explain it in a direct, matter of fact way. They can also provide the information in a letter to the employer and submit letters of recommendation as part of their application.

# “Nobody would hire me if they knew”

**A worksheet** for people who want to find good jobs in spite of a criminal history.

It can be difficult to look a prospective employer in the eye and talk about a criminal history. However, many employers are willing to hire people with felonies and misdemeanors if they are honest and upfront about their past. People who have found jobs in spite of felonies, agree with this perspective:

*“I found out that telling the truth about my criminal history made it easier for me to interview for a job because then I didn't have to make up other lies to avoid the truth.”*

### **The way that you talk about your legal record can make the difference.**

In order to hire, employers say that they need to believe that the person has changed his or her life for the better. There are four things that you should

remember when talking to employers about your record:

1. **Be honest and upfront.** Look the employer in the eye and tell them about your conviction(s). For example, a person might say: “In 2007, I was convicted of theft and drug possession.”
2. **Let the employer know that you are willing to take responsibility** for what you did, but keep it brief. For example, “I regret the things I did.”
3. **Explain how your life is different now.** For example, “I’m in counseling now so I have support”, “I’ve been sober for six months”, “I’m going to GED classes because I want to focus on getting ahead”, “I’ve been going to church because religion helps me stay focused on the right choices”, “I’ve been volunteering at the food pantry because I want to give back to my community.”

4. **Talk to the employer about the reasons that you would be a good employee.** “I have experience as an assembler and I am very reliable. At my last job, I only missed one day of work in 11 months.”

*“In my experience, it’s important to come clean, admit to your mistakes and then tell the employer what you have learned from the experience and why you will behave differently in the future.”*

Begin by thinking about the work experience and job skills that you have to offer an employer. For example, experience in food service, a welding certificate, or experience working with customers.

List your job skills and work experiences below. (If you had any training or work experience in prison, include that as well.)

---

---

---

---

Now think about your good qualities as a person—characteristics that an employer would like. For example, has anyone ever told you that you get along well with others? That you are reliable? That you stay calm in stressful situations? List your strengths below:

---

---

---

---

**Read the following examples to see how you might explain your history:**

*Example One:*

“I have a charge of possession of drugs on my record. I have made some bad choices in my life. I’ve successfully completed a drug rehabilitation program and I am currently working with an employment specialist to help me to find part-time employment. I would never use drugs that would affect my ability to do my job. I have experience working with the public and previous employers told me that I have great customer service skills.”

*Example Two:*

“I have a sexual assault charge on my record. I know that what I did was wrong. I used poor judgment and made a life-changing mistake. I understand now how to make better choices and not repeat the same mistakes. I am eager to start a new job and continue down a more positive path. My family is supportive, I am an active member of my church and I am engaged in mental health treatment. I would be a good employee because I am extremely reliable and I have experience driving a forklift.”

*Example Three:*

“When I was younger I was arrested for burglary. I am extremely remorseful and I understand that I made a poor choice. I am a changed person. I have grown and I have not committed any crimes since then. I am currently a volunteer at the local soup kitchen and I am very involved in my community. I am a hard worker. I’ve always been a person who wanted to work and I never complain on the job.”

**Finally, write the statement that you will use to talk to employers about your past.**

It will help if you practice saying your statement out loud until you can say it with confidence. You can also review your statement before going to meet with employers.

State your conviction(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Express regret/take responsibility for past choices. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Explain how your life is different now. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tell the employer why you will be a good employee. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Think about people who know you and can vouch for you.**

For example, your employment specialist, VR counselor, probation or parole officer, AA sponsor, clergy, GED instructor, volunteer supervisor or past employer. Consider asking those people to write a

letter explaining that they know you and believe that you are a person of good character—that you have changed your life for the better. Bring copies of these letters when you meet with employers.

**Finally, stay positive.**

It may not happen overnight, but people with all sorts of convictions and multiple convictions have been able to get back to work. You can, too.

stay positive

# Job Development Tip Sheet

## **1<sup>st</sup> Face to Face Interaction:**

- Introduction statement- 4 things: name, title, agency, what you do (help people re-integrate back into the workforce, help people find better jobs that fit them more appropriately, help employers find employees that fit their business needs and preferences), and purpose of visit. \*Make sure you are targeting employers based on job seeker's interests.
- Purpose: schedule a meeting to learn about their business and hiring preferences and eventually be able to match job seekers to positions they have the need to hire for (regardless if they have a current opening or not); assure them that you are not looking for a job for anyone today.
- Schedule next appointment for a specific time/date for 15-20 min meeting with employer.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Face to Face Interaction:**

- Research employer before meeting. Demonstrate you are reliable by showing up on time.
- Reiterate their mission if known, stay engaged with what they have to say, be interested, and focus on the positive.
- Ask 4-5 questions about the company and employees; the goal is to have the employer talk the majority of this meeting. Get a feel for the agency, type of person the employer would hire, types of positions, hiring process.
- Take good notes. Thank them for meeting with you.
- Avoid discussions about job openings or if they are hiring. Keep to your intention/purpose of the meeting to help build rapport. Also avoid questions about drug tests and if they hire people with criminal backgrounds.
- Purpose: To learn about the employer, what they look for when they hire, types of positions, and hiring process.
- Leave them knowing that they are a customer and you are a reliable resource who has their needs and preferences in mind.
- Summarize the meeting and ask if you can contact them if you find a person who would fit at their company/in a position they described/have a need for.
- Ask if they would consider meeting a job seeker who is interested in their company/field of work to partake in an informational interview (to help the person learn if that business is a good fit for them in the future), or even mock interview or job shadows.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Face to Face Interaction:**

- Advocate for job seeker based upon what you learned and how it matches the person's strengths, skills, etc..
- Return in a few days with job seeker and/or resume if you have someone in mind for a position there.
- If unsure about the relationship, continue to build rapport; avoid talking about a candidate or turning in a resume.
- Meet and ask follow up questions.
- Ask to talk to another manager in another department, or other employers they know.
- Ask if you can observe people working to get a real sense of the job duties.
- Send another follow up note if manager is not available to meet with you for a minute after observing workers.
- Follow up with potential job matches just as you would for 2<sup>nd</sup> Cup.
- If you believe the employer is very unlikely to hire from your program, ask them to introduce you to other employers they have connections with if appropriate.

## **Ongoing Face to Face Interactions:**

- Keep a list of about 12-15 employers you will visit on a regular basis, with good/updated notes; Visit every 4-6 weeks.
- Share lists with other employment specialists so you don't visit the same employers without introducing each other first.
- Invite employer to be a member of steering committees if good rapport is established.
- Talk about WOTC (bring brochure), bonds and other incentives.
- Mock and informational interviews, job shadows, business tours.
- Stop by and ask how business is going, share good news about your program, congratulate them on good news you hear about their business.
- Send holiday cards, etc.

## **Always:**

- Dress professional; be employer and job seeker sensitive.
- Leave them with a business card and brochure after every meeting.
- Send or hand-deliver a thank-you note to the employer after every scheduled meeting.

**Note:** Any job development meetings with employers can be done with or without a job seeker present based on disclosure.