

JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT REPORT

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33 years
of service

for professionals who support employment for people with disabilities

Choosing a Quality Community Rehabilitation Provider

By Cary Griffin
& Dave Hammis

In many cities, adults with significant disabilities, as well as special education students and their families, have more choices than ever for various community employment services. The flip side is that deciding which providers to select can be both confusing and time consuming.

However, making a good choice is worth the time and effort because success as an adult (having a career you enjoy, etc.) is directly tied to the efficiency, innovation, and leadership of the organization selected.

In our work at Griffin-Hammis Associates, approximately 90% of our customers are Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) with dedicated professionals working hard to improve their communities. However, while CRPs comprise the bulk of our clients, in the bigger picture they represent only a small percentage of the nearly 5,000 adult service agencies nationwide. Consequently, while CRP selection is crucial, their services are also not as widely known as other providers.

To help offset this gap, what are the quality indicators that people should look for when choosing a

“Does the CRP support Social Security work incentives, such as Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS)? This is a significant consideration.”

CRP? The following are some questions to consider when interviewing potential providers, and some thoughts on what progressive agencies are doing.

1. Does the CRP have proper financial management and transparency? Considerations:

The CRP should have a record of solid fiscal management, and board meetings should be open to the public, with consumers and their families made to feel welcome. Furthermore, the CRP should have an ongoing financial plan and overall strategy.

Also, examine the organization's commitment to helping staff, consumers, and families through their financial prowess — assisting with benefits analysis, creating small business loans or grants in collaboration with local financial institutions, and leveraging dollars for homeownership opportunities for consumers. Bottom line: Is the

CRP's money going to support inclusion, or does it go to support segregation?

2. **Is there majority governance?** Considerations: Following the example from the Independent Living movement, people with disabilities should comprise a slight majority (51%) of CRP boards.

This ensures that people from all walks of life, including service recipients, are included on a board of directors. An organization that serves people with disabilities should be guided by them.

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Furthermore, “job descriptions” should guide board positions, and membership should be relatively difficult to obtain.

3. Does the organization have a rigorous continuing education program? *Considerations:* An organization that is not continually investing in training will fall behind. Implementing innovations (in employment, transportation, etc.) takes serious commitment. Look for alliances with colleges and universities, individualized staff development plans, enrollment in certification programs, etc.

4. Is the CRP actively divesting in its “parallel systems?” *Considerations:* For years CRPs were faced with providing their own residences in lieu of community housing, sheltered workshops in lieu of typical employers, and specialized transit in lieu of accessible public transportation. Today, the trend is to address these issues as community-wide considerations, and not limit them to those with disabilities. A CRP needs to enhance, not replicate, existing systems.

For example, in many cities where it’s reported there’s a lack of transportation, there are countless traffic jams! This indicates that there is actually *too much* transportation, but *too little* collaboration of services. When true partnerships exist, the CRP knows who the people are in the cars, and it understands how to leverage rides for people who don’t own one.

5. Does the CRP have a commitment to the accumulation of social capital? *Considerations:* Social capital refers to the concept of building not only individual

jobs, but also participating in community building that improves the local *economy*, among other benefits. The CRP should be working with civic groups, neighborhoods, employers, financial sectors, government, and others to create capacity for inclusion throughout the community.

6. Does the CRP have a plan for the future? *Considerations:* Ask for a copy of the CRP’s strategic plan. Does it offer innovations such as customized employment and self-employment? For example, at VIA of the Lehigh Valley (in Pennsylvania), as many as eight funding sources have been used to assist a single person in starting a business. Is the CRP committed to providing individualized services? Is homeownership a major emphasis of its residential program?

Does the CRP support Social Security work incentives, such as Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS)? This is a significant consideration. PASS and other work incentives can liberate job seekers (and their families) by providing money to go to college, get a good-paying job, or to start a business.

Conversely, CRPs that DON’T offer such services, especially when these benefits have been available under the Social Security Act for more than 25 years, is unethical.

7. Does the CRP develop leadership at all levels? *Considerations:* As mentioned earlier, a well-trained and intelligent workforce is vital to assisting someone in getting a job and a home. This means that the staff you choose (or who are assigned to you) should have the authority to take discretionary action on your behalf.

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In other words, CRP personnel can speak for the agency, make decisions in sync with your plan, and work on your behalf with a sense of urgency. If the organization wallows in constant meetings, continually seeks permission to act from upper management, and treads water while consumers remain unemployed, it’s time to look to another CRP for assistance.

8. Does the organization support living wages? *Considerations:* Certainly, making ends meet in a CRP is tough. Here again, at issue is the effort leader-

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ship makes to address problems head on, even tough ones; reduce staff turnover; and develop other positive initiatives.

For instance, Easter Seals of Southern California is adept at coming up with new funding sources for staff development and consumer support. Ask about the turnover rate for staff and whether the agency sees the issue as “just normal for our industry” or as a serious problem they are taking steps to address. Are there both monetary and non-monetary reward programs in place to enhance staff retention?

Does the organization still use piece rates or sub-minimum wages in sheltered workshops? Does the CRP solicit jobs at sub-minimum wages in the community? Do you really want to settle for jobs that pay that little? Progressive agencies are doing away with these wage practices.

9. Does the organization demonstrate cultural competence? *Considerations:* Does the organization hire staff that reflects the cultural heritage of the clients it serves? Can consumers and families access staff that speaks a different language, such as Spanish?

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Editor's Notebook

The last issue of the current publishing year is a good time to thank those of you who took the time to write articles for this newsletter in 2009. They include: Dennis Born, Shannon Munn, Molly Sullivan, Allen Anderson, Tony Langton, Mary Lou Wyandt, Cary Griffin, and Dave Hammis.

And this *doesn't* include the numerous people who took the time to email information and photos. Space prohibits us from naming those folks, but thank you, too!

JTPR has been around for more than 30 years, and that wouldn't be the case without your help and support!

Speaking of support, we greatly appreciate the terrific response to this year's reader survey, which we went back to providing in print. And the surveys were received well *in advance* of the survey reminder that appeared in this space in the November newsletter. That was great!

We plan to provide a few of the key results in the January issue of *JTPR*.

Until next year. Happy holidays. ■

Mike Jacquart, Editor
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Is there an active recruitment plan in place that demonstrates to the community that the organization believes people with disabilities can perform all types of jobs as well as people without disabilities?

10. Does the organization embrace inventiveness?

Considerations: It's been said that in tough economic times, quality indicators like the ones described in this article, must be put on hold until money loosens up. Nothing could be further from the truth. Today is actually the *perfect* time to get started! During lean times, it's more crucial than ever to make the best use of limited financial resources by funding practices that work.

More than 50 years of data clearly indicate that sheltered workshops and day programs do not lead to real employment, any-more than living in a group home

prepares someone for home ownership. It makes no sense to keep spending money on processes that don't work.

Summary

Should consumers and their families seek a CRP that's achieving perfection in each of these 10 quality indicators? Certainly not! Rather, the key is to recognize an organization that is making a concerted effort to address these areas. Find a provider that's changing with the times, and go with them. ■

Cary and Dave are senior partners at Griffin-Hammis Associates (www.griffinhammis.com), a consulting and training firm specializing in community rehabilitation improvement, leadership development, and self-employment. They are also the authors, with Tammara Geary, of "The Job Developer's Handbook: Practical Tactics for Customized Employment."

Editor's note: The APSE Executive Board is calling for a complete phase-out of the sub-minimum wage by the end of 2014. For more information, visit www.apse.org.

Didn't You Get the Memo?

Managers say they are communicating better and more often with their employees today, as opposed to one year ago, a new survey shows.

Unfortunately, their teams may not be getting the memo. An estimated 69% of executives said that messages to employees have become more frequent, and 56% believed communication is of higher quality. Conversely, only 37% of workers polled agreed there's been a boost in the rate of corporate updates, and only 38% felt information has improved.

"During times of change, companies must be able to share information quickly and often," said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam. "The good news, in light of this difficult economy, is that most employers have increased staff outreach. What is less encouraging is that this communication may not be as effective as it could be."

Hosking noted that clear and timely communication will be especially valuable as businesses prepare for the upturn. "Managers who provide regular updates and encourage open discussions help employees better understand the company's overall goals and their own role in helping to achieve these objectives," Hosking said. "Frequent communication also can aid retention efforts, which will become a greater focus for employers as the job market improves." ■

Source: OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com).

What is the Key to Success?

Soul-searching is seldom easy, but "looking within" can make the difference between settling for any old job, and being truly happy and fulfilled in one's work. While a job developer, career counselor, or other professional can help a job seeker expound upon these points, the following are a few ideas to get started:

- What is your ideal work environment?
- In what jobs have you been happiest?
- What work-related areas can you compromise? Which areas are not "negotiable"?

- What are the three things you need most from working?
- Ponder the question, if you could do anything at all for a career (let your heart and mind take you there), what would it be?
- Identify one barrier that holds you back and work toward overcoming it.
- Write out a mission statement for yourself and use it as a guide.
- Spend more time with people who appreciate the true you. ■

Source: "Career Choice, Change & Challenge," by Deb Koen and Tony Lee, JIST Publishing.

Make Rejection Work

By Joe Turner

You just reached the end of your job interview, and the news is not what you wanted to hear. It's the end of the road, right? Well, not so fast.

Nobody likes rejection, but job seekers *can* make rejection work in their favor, and even get some new momentum in the job search.

Here is the situation: You just had a conversation with someone who:

- A) Has a lot of information about the industry;
- B) Already knows a little about your background and the fact that you showed incentive by inquiring about a specific opportunity; and
- C) Would like to end the conversation on a positive note.

Job seekers should never slink off the phone or out of their office without taking full advantage of this opportunity — I'm referring specifically to point C. Even if you didn't get a particular job, you still can obtain further information for your job search.

Ask parting questions such as: "Are there other divisions in your company, or any related industries that could use people with my skills?" or, "Who do you know in the business community that I might introduce myself to about a job?"

Job seekers should make a list of questions like these ahead of time. Put them in your own words, and pick the one or two that you feel most comfortable with. Write them down so they're handy if you're on the phone.

Bonus tip: Before leaving after a job interview, be sure the interviewer has your phone number so he or she can call you should another job lead arise in the future.

You'll be amazed at the amount of support you'll get when you just ask. Thank the interviewer and always ask if you may use them for a referral for another position. ■

As a recruiter, Joe Turner spent 15 years finding and placing top candidates in some of the best jobs in their careers. The author of "Job Search Secrets Unlocked" and "Paycheck 911", you'll find free tips and advice on landing a job in this tough economy at Joe's website, www.jobchangesecrets.com.

What Would an Ex-Boss Say About You?

Job seekers need solid cover letters and résumés in seeking employment. But what about references? Having favorable references is crucial, and yet many job seekers take little time or effort to verify that their references are providing the kind of recommendation they need and expect to land a job.

A job candidate's "need to know" has never been greater. In today's current economic climate, employers have seldom had more qualified candidates vying for a limited number of jobs. As such, prospective employers are being more cautious than ever in checking references and in eliminating candidates whose reference(s) provides an either negative or lukewarm recommendation.

Why do job seekers overlook the importance of good references? In large part, due to a misconception that former employers cannot (and will not) divulge reference-related information beyond a former employee's dates of hire and job title. The harsh reality is that many former employers – supervisors and HR representatives alike – will offer more information than is required to prospective employers.

Corporate spokespersons advise that over half of the thousands of reference checks they have conducted, come back as slightly or significantly negative. It only takes one key reference to torpedo your chances of new employment, and to add insult to injury...it's possible, even likely, that a negative reference will continue to impair one's chances of getting an employment opportunity as each new prospective employer is contacted.

In some cases, legal recourse — often with the help of a professional

reference checking and employment verification firm — may be necessary.

However, the job seeker can also help prevent negative referrals by seeking out references that the individual is confident will provide positive recommendations on his/her behalf. The following are several tips:

❖ **Maintain active and positive relationships with references.**

Persons chosen as references should be kept up to date about a job search, and job seekers need to make sure they have the most up-to-date job information about *them*. It doesn't paint the job seeker in a positive light if the reference, let's call him "John," is listed as working at "A-B-C" only to have the prospective employer call and find out that John is no longer working there.

❖ **Advise references about important opportunities.** To avoid burning out references, they should not be called about *every* job opportunity. However, if a particular position is important or appealing, references *should* be contacted and provided with details about the company, and what skills they may be looking for. Job seekers must also keep references up to date about any new skills they may have acquired.

❖ **Understand a former employer's reference policy.** Although federal law restricts certain reference information, some states allow more extensive disclosure. Know which regulations and policies govern the company. ■

Source: www.allisonataylor.com, a reference-checking firm for job candidates.

—Resources—

📖 *Getting Back to Work: Everything You Need to Bounce Back and Get a Job After a Layoff*, by Linda Rolie, \$15.95, McGraw-Hill, www.mcgraw-hill.com. Maybe you can't control whether you lose your job, but you *can* control the reactions and decisions you make afterward. The author, a career development expert, shows how.

📖 *Dive In: Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity, and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce*, by Nadine O. Vogel, as told to Cindy Brown, \$32, Paramount Market Publishing, www.paramountbooks.com. In this new book, the author presents the business case for hiring and supporting this untapped and underutilized workforce. She also presents concrete how-to information and best practices from "in-the-know" corporations.

📖 *Make Job Loss Work for You*, by Richard and Terri Deems, \$12.95, JIST Publishing, www.jist.com. The authors outline what individuals should do after a layoff to move past their emotions and score a new job — possibly one that's a better fit than the one they left.

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Sharing Tips: *Talking to Others about a Child's Disability*

By Marcia Kelly

Experience is the best teacher, as the saying goes—and one of its big lessons is how to communicate about your child's disability. For Kathy Graves, the learning began when her son, Sam, then 1, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy (CP).

Sam is now 16. Over the years, experience has taught Kathy some important lessons about communicating with others about her son's disability. As a result, she has developed a philosophy about whom, what, and how much to tell, as well as how much energy to expend on it. Here's what she learned:

Lesson 1: Find People You Trust

"My husband and I started slowly by calling people we could really trust and talk to without having to make them feel good," she says. "My sister-in-law and brother-in-law both work in special education, and they felt like the right people to talk to.

"We also learned early on that you need people outside the family. Find three or four people who are always there for you, without judgment; people you want to go through this with," she says. "Stage one for us was having someone listen and not try to fix it or say 'everything will be fine,'" she says.

As time went on, they also found friends who have children with disabilities. "There's nothing better than that. You can call them on days when you're really down. They understand."

Lesson 2: Learn and Share, but Set Limits

"Stage two was educating ourselves about the disability," Kathy says. That paved the way for communicating with professionals. "You get further with teachers and doctors," she says, if you're knowledgeable about the disability. "Help those closest to you understand, too," she adds, but let them know you're still learning.

"When people ask questions, it can feel like pressure. Tell them, 'Hang in there with us. We'll tell you what we know as time goes along.' Plus, it's not what we wanted to talk about first all the time. It wasn't helpful for us."

What was useful was a question someone asked early on: Well, what's the future likely to look like? "It was so helpful because it had hope in it," Kathy says. "Ask me questions about what you think our future will be like. Have it be forward looking, with hope, not grief."

Lesson 3: Be Prepared for Questions and Stares

"In the beginning you think you have to explain the disability to everyone," Kathy says. "You get exhausted telling your story that much. It helps to have short, medium, and long answers, depending on who you're talking to," Kathy says.

"If kids ask, they're OK with a two-sentence reply," she says. "Adults will ask 'how did it happen?' It's like a defense mechanism; they want to know how to stop it from happening to them. They're not trying to hurt you; they may just be fearful. I try to remember that when I respond to



them, but the honest answer, which I believe is best, is that sometimes things just happen. It's as simple as that."

Then there are people who stare and ask inappropriate questions. "One doctor told us if people stare, just stare back until they quit looking," Kathy says. "If an adult asks, 'what's wrong with him?' I feel it's my job to say 'nothing is wrong. He has CP.' Their insensitivity is wrong. You don't have to tell them anything. "You constantly have to help people understand," she adds.

When someone talks down to Sam or treats him like he's a little child, Kathy finds that gentle reminders about Sam's teen activities and interests help to change the interaction.

Lesson 4: Talk about Strengths

"In one of my very first [Individualized Education Program] IEP meetings, there was a physical education teacher who said, 'Let's talk about what Sam can do.' That was the best advice. A lot of this world focuses on what he can't do. We just started to focus immediately on Sam's assets and what he could do. It's an amazingly powerful way to

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refocus yourself and your child's future," Kathy says.

"It is tempting for people to pin everything on your child's disability," she adds. But sometimes the challenge is unrelated. "Not everything is about the disability." He's a person with strengths who also has CP, Kathy says.

The disability doesn't define him, and that's a message she always communicates.

Experience — both good and bad — has shaped Kathy's philosophy about communicating with others about Sam's disability. Time, too, has played a role. "In the early days, I spent a lot of energy on it. I tried to learn everything about CP and interpret it to the world. I do that less now. Most days, I think about getting lunches packed, getting the kids off to school, getting to lessons and games — just regular, plain old life. The effort is less as time goes by, at least for us," she says.

For others, she offers this simple advice. "You have to carve out your own philosophy. Every child is different, and you need to honor who that child is. Focus on their strengths, and let people know that to you they're no different than any other child. A diagnosis of a disability is the start of something, not the end of something."

"And remember," Kathy adds, "you don't have to figure out everything at once. One day at a time is a beautiful thing." ■

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Getting Back on Track after a Pink Slip

By Kathleen King

Laid-off employees shouldn't wait to be hired back. An old job may not exist when the economy turns around. The secret to landing a new job in the current economic climate is to take risks, and step into the unknown.

That may not be easy, but it's a sobering reality with today's unemployment rate. Fortunately, there are some tips that can help:

➤ **Do something different.** Think "new career." Check out growth projections for various industries so you don't waste valuable re-training time. New jobs in demand include MRI medical technicians, health information technology, and scores of others you probably never knew existed. **(Editor's note:** See "College Majors to Consider" article on page 8 in this month's newsletter.)

➤ **Use your knowledge and talent to start your own business.** For

instance, if you were in marketing in a previous job, you might consider starting a marketing consultant business.

➤ **Talk to others about your options.** Successful people talk with other people and surround themselves with a solid support team such as a job and/or career coach, etc. No one likes admitting they are currently unemployed, but you'll never know who's in a position to help if you don't ask.

➤ **Just do it! If nothing changes, nothing changes.** Ever hear the saying, "you can't keep doing things the same way and expect different results"? It's true. Conversely, unexpected opportunities often open up new chapters and directions you may have missed in your prior career. Keep your eyes and ears open, and don't be afraid to go in a completely different job direction.

Kathleen King, Ed. D., M.Ed., is professor of education at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education in New York City.

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College Majors to Consider

Laid off? Going back to school? Recent economic woes have led many people to do just that, but what majors will help students get jobs and not land them right back where they were before — out of work?

One way college students can minimize their obstacles in the job market is to choose an academic major that is connected to stable jobs. These types of jobs remain necessary despite fluctuations in the economic climate, according to Laurence Shatkin, Ph.D., author of the recently released book, *50 Best College Majors for a Secure Future*.

“Though a few of the majors lead to jobs with a moderate level of pay, most lead to jobs that pay quite well and can provide good long-term career opportunities or the ability to move up to more responsible roles,” says Shatkin.

The following are 10 of these majors:

1. *Nursing* (R.N. Training)
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 233,499
2. *Graduate Study for College Teaching*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 129,040
3. *Secondary Education*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 127,178
4. *Business Education*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 93,166
5. *Early Childhood Education*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 88,989
6. *Physical Education*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 73,179



7. *Family and Consumer Sciences*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 59,961

8. *Public Relations*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 51,216

9. *Medicine*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 38,027

10. *Religion/Religious Studies*
Avg. Annual Openings of Related Jobs: 35,092

Additional information about high-security majors and jobs can be found in *50 Best College Majors for a Secure Future*, available at Amazon.com, major bookstores and from the publisher (www.jist.com or 1.800.648.JIST). ■

Source: JIST Publishing.

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People Skills are Still Important

Having a winning personality has always helped in making friends or getting a date, but a recent survey confirms it also opens doors in the job search.

When presented with job candidates who possess similar qualifications, 31% of chief financial officers (CFOs) interviewed said applicants' people skills would tip the balance over such attributes as software proficiency and advanced certifications. This is up significantly from five years ago when interpersonal skills were cited by only 1% of respondents.

Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps, which conducted the survey, pointed out that job seekers should use the employment interview as an opportunity to establish a rapport with hiring managers.

“The conversation should be natural, and applicants should try to find common ground with the employer,” he said. Messner added that it's also valuable for job seekers to describe business situations where they were recognized for their teamwork or for inspiring others to perform at a high level.

“Interpersonal skills take center stage in a collaborative workplace,” Messmer concluded. ■

Source: Accountemps
(www.accountemps.com)