



Building Career Facilitation Skills

Module 6: Helping Offenders Secure Employment

Facilitator's Curriculum

Time Required: 1 hour and 45 minutes

Summary and Rationale

This module addresses several areas of the job-seeking and employability process. This includes identifying major resources for job listings and ways to network and conduct informational interviews. The content also offers a practical understanding of the major resources for interview preparation and strategies for interviewing including addressing incarceration. An overview of the concepts and issues related to accepting a job, participating in a job club, and job retention are included. A number of activities present opportunities to apply knowledge learned during this session.

Performance Objectives

At the end of this module, participants will be able to

1. describe the advantages and disadvantages of various job search strategies, including the use of classified ads, direct-mail campaigns, job placement centers, job fairs, and the Internet.
2. define and describe the benefits of networking.
3. explain the job interviewing process and coach offenders in effective interviewing techniques.
4. explain the role and responsibilities of the offender in accepting a job offer.

References/Resources

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- Weinstein, B. (2003). *Resumes don't get jobs: The realities and myths of job hunting*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (1991). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Equipment

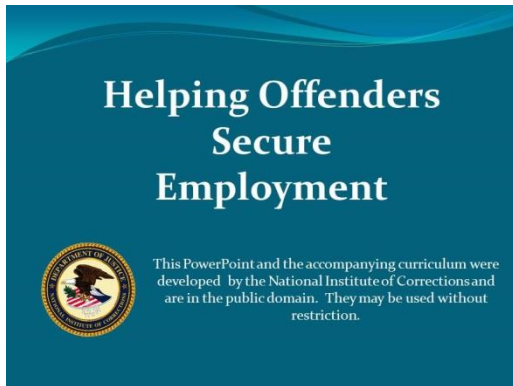
- Easel stand with flip chart
- Markers
- Computer and display device
- Screen

Materials

- PowerPoint presentation for this module
- Box, bowl, or hat with 20+ jobs written on separate slips of paper
- Activity Worksheet: Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews
- Observer Worksheet: Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews
- Offender Role Scenarios

CONTENT

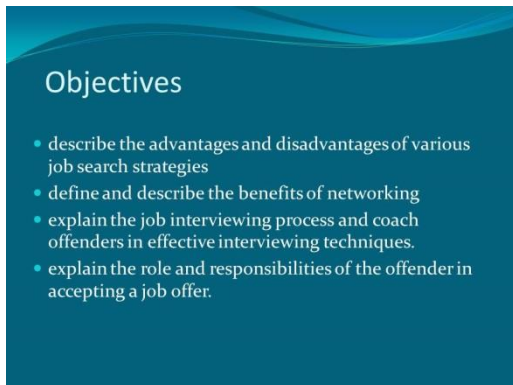
PowerPoint 1



The labor market continues to undergo numerous changes. The economic situation in geographical locations, the rise of the Internet, and greater mobility are examples of the many factors that have influenced job seeking.

Many of the offenders with whom you work may have never been employed legally. Others may not have been employed for many years. Their knowledge of the labor market, their understanding of how to get a job, and their ability to stay employed may be limited, at best.

PowerPoint 2



At the end of this module, participants will be able to

1. describe the advantages and disadvantages of various job search strategies, including the use of classified ads, direct-mail campaigns, job placement centers, job fairs, and the Internet.
2. define and describe the benefits of networking and describe the four major networking groups.

3. explain the job interviewing process and coach offenders in effective interviewing techniques.
4. explain the role and responsibilities of the offender in accepting a job offer.

PowerPoint 3



The instructor asks:

There are several strategies that people use when they are job searching. How many can you name?

Job search strategies typically used include the above. These methods have varying degrees of success. Only about 5% - 10% of job seekers find jobs using classified ads and/or Internet job listings. This fact doesn't mean that offenders should not use this job search method. It does mean that they should use others as well.

Using classified ads tends to be an attractive job search method for offenders because it is easy. It can be a useful first step as many lower-level positions are advertised in this way and because offenders can get a sense of the kind and variety of jobs available in a particular community.

Generally, however, responding to classified ads is the least effective method of job searching. Since so many people have access to classified ads, the competition is great. Since many of the jobs listed are low-level and/or hard-to-fill positions, the quality of jobs tends not to be great. Additionally, there is no personal contact with the potential employer making this approach a passive method of job searching (mailing resumes but not actively networking).

Direct mail campaigns, including sending resumes by e-mail, typically yield no more than a 5% success rate. This method should be used very little, if at all, by offenders.

Job fairs, job placement centers, and temporary employment agencies, however, are often reported to yield a success rate as high as 15%-20%. As most jobs presented at job fairs are entry-level positions, fairs can be excellent sources of employment opportunities for offenders. They may also be effective ways to conduct company research and gain knowledge about local labor markets.

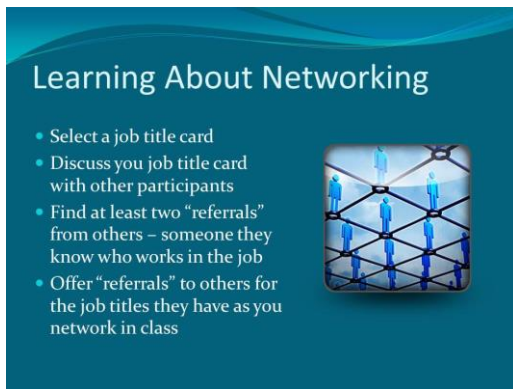
Instructor Notes

Possible Presentation:

If a participant has experience with a job fair held at a correctional facility or if a local job fair organizer (community college career centers can be a source for contacts) is available, the instructor may want to have someone discuss experiences with job fairs. If a local job fair is being held during the time of this training, the instructor may want to assign participants to attend and report on their findings.

Connecting directly with employers gives offenders a better chance to be seen, to answer any questions about their experience and background, and to ask questions of their own. Job fairs, placement centers, and temporary employment agencies give employers and offenders a chance to meet in a more open setting, allowing each party a chance to evaluate the other. Any form of mail, electronic or otherwise, is one-dimensional and allows for one-way communication only—at least initially. If the employer isn't interested, the offender rarely knows why.

PowerPoint 4



The heart and soul of successful job searching is networking. At the most basic level, *networking is meeting with people who are doing what the job seeker wants to do.*

Activity - Learning About Networking

1. Choose a job title from the box or bowl that your instructor is passing around.
2. Walk around your classroom and talk with other participants about the job title they have selected.

3. Find out whether anyone knows someone who works in the job you have selected, and try to get at least two names and phone numbers of people who work in this area.
4. Offer contact names and numbers to others if you know someone who works in the job area they have selected.

Instructor Notes

Activity - Learning About Networking

20 Minutes

Activity: Write a variety of job titles on pieces of paper, and place them in a small box or bowl. Examples might include plumber, secretary, data entry clerk, computer programmer, inventory stock clerk, photographer, etc. Instruct each participant to choose a job title. Now, have participants spend ten minutes mingling with each other and asking whether anyone knows someone whose job is the same as the one listed on their slip of paper or someone who knows someone who works in that job.

The instructor might include one or two unique jobs (like opera singer or football coach) to see how close participants might come to connecting each other to someone with whom they could network.

Instruct participants to write down at least two names and phone numbers of their contacts. After fifteen minutes, discuss participants' results and reactions to the activity.

For those who may have had difficulty, have the group brainstorm ways to help that person get a networking contact.

Networking is difficult for offenders prior to release, as the most effective networking is conducted face-to-face. Prior to release they will need people to come to them. You may be able to facilitate this process by having successfully employed ex-offenders attend a special networking session that you set up at your facility.

Whether or not such a special session can be planned, offenders will need to be coached on how to network. As with each step of the job search process, effective networking requires preparation.

PowerPoint 5



The job interview is one of the most difficult experiences of the job search process for most people. It is likely doubly so for the offender worried about discussing his/her incarceration and expecting NOT to be hired as a result. Careful preparation can help the offender gain confidence prior to going on job interviews and increase his/her chances of being successful.

There is no substitute for practice. Holding interviewing practice sessions with groups of offenders can help them prepare and gain the skills needed to perform well on job interviews.

There are different types of interviews, interviewer styles, interview preparation steps, and components of job interviews. While you may ask questions about any of these areas, we are going to focus on two topics: the purpose of a job interview and answering difficult questions, in particular, questions about the offender's incarceration.

Assisting offenders in understanding the purpose for a job interview will help them understand how to prepare. Interviews are conducted to help an employer answer three questions about a job applicant:

- Are you qualified?

The employer assumes the applicant is qualified based on the resume or job application. However, he/she will ask questions of the applicant designed to gain a better understanding of the applicant's skill level and abilities to perform the work required.

- Are you motivated?

The employer expects the applicant to be motivated. However, the employer is looking for clues that the applicant will actually do the work required without constant supervision.

- Are you suited to the team?

Perhaps the most important question of all (at least from the employer's perspective) is whether or not the applicant appears to be well suited to the work team.

An applicant (in this case the offender) needs to be able to get along well with others on the team and add, not take away from, the productivity of the group. Employers are looking for people who can come into a work environment and get along with the other employees. No matter how skilled or motivated an employee might be, if he/she can't get along with other workers, he/she will drag down the group.

Offenders need to be very conscious of this last point, particularly as they address the issue of their incarceration. Offenders may fear that employers won't want to hire them simply because they have been in prison. While true for some employers, more employers will be concerned about their abilities, motivation level, and their ability to make others comfortable around them and get along with others. A congenial attitude and a pleasant demeanor will increase the likelihood of being hired. Remind offenders that being able to discuss and show how they are team players who will be dependable employees is also very critical.

Many offenders may jokingly state that all interview questions are difficult ones. While they may feel this is true, they are likely dreading one particular question—the one which asks about their time in prison. While there is not one right answer to this question and no way to guarantee that an employer will hire an offender, preparation can ease the anxiety and increase interview performance.

Regardless of how it is asked, the offender may be asked something like, “Can you tell me about your time in prison?” or “Have you ever been in prison, and if so, why?”

Instructor Notes


The instructor may ask the participants “how would you advise offenders to answer questions about their time in a correctional facility?”

The instructor should take notes on a flipchart and facilitate discussion on the merits of each response.

PowerPoint 6

Tips for Answering Difficult Questions

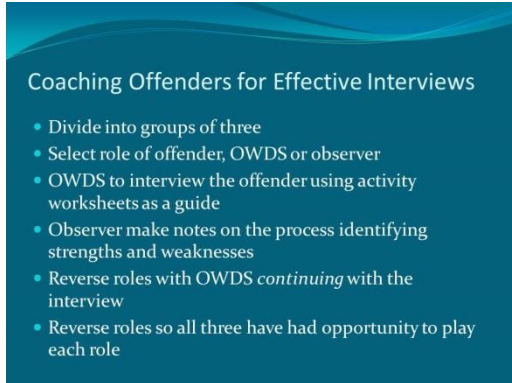
- Think before answering
- Ask interviewer to repeat question
- Be brief and respond in factual way
- Never lie, exaggerate, or overstate

An illustration showing a woman in a white lab coat sitting at a desk, looking towards a man whose back is to the viewer. The man is wearing a brown jacket. The scene is set against a light blue background.

Using these hints on how to answer difficult questions, the offender might respond any number of ways. Some examples follow:

- *Think before answering.* The offender might respond, “That’s a good question.” and then pause for a moment before responding. This allows the offender time to collect his/her thoughts before responding. Having practiced the answer many times beforehand, however, the offender may not need much time before responding.
- *Ask the interviewer to restate the question.* This is really unnecessary in this situation and might seem strange. For other difficult questions, however, an offender may want to ask the interviewer to restate the question to give more time to think about the answer and to help understand more about what the interviewer is asking.
- *Be brief and respond in a factual way.* This is perhaps one of the best ways to respond. An example might be, “I got mixed up with the wrong crowd in my youth and ended up being arrested. I used my time in prison to complete my education, gain some technical skills, and now I am ready to move forward.”
- *Focus on what is really being asked.* The offender might reflect the basic concern as a part of his or her answer. For example, an offender might say, “I can imagine that you might be concerned about having someone who’s been in prison working for you. Let me assure you that I have no desire to go back to my former way of life. I have straightened out and am ready to work hard for you.” A follow-up statement might focus on prison work experience, a letter of recommendation, or similar positive credential.
- *Never lie, exaggerate, or overstate.* This is a must for all interviewees but especially important for offenders. If an employer finds out that an employee lied about anything during a job interview, no matter how big or small, that can become grounds for immediate firing.

PowerPoint 7



Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews

- Divide into groups of three
- Select role of offender, OWDS or observer
- OWDS to interview the offender using activity worksheets as a guide
- Observer make notes on the process identifying strengths and weaknesses
- Reverse roles with OWDS *continuing* with the interview
- Reverse roles so all three have had opportunity to play each role

Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews Activity

1. Your instructor will divide your group into groups of three.
2. Within your group, each participant will be playing three roles in turn: offender, offender employment specialist, and observer. Decide the order in which you will play these roles.
3. Each participant in your group will have the opportunity to play the role of an offender employment specialist who is coaching an offender in preparation for a job interview. Each coaching session will take 15 minutes. You should use the activity worksheets at the end of this module as a guide.
4. During each 15-minute round of coaching, the observer in your group will note the strengths and challenges of the coaching approach, making notes on the observer worksheet provided. At the end of each round, the instructor will give the observers in each triad an opportunity to share their feedback with the offender employment specialists.
5. Your instructor will signal you to change roles at the end of each 15-minute time period. He or she will then lead you in discussing the activity when everyone is finished.

Instructor Notes

ACTIVITY

Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews

50 minutes

1. Place the participants in groups of three. Assign each person one of the three offender role scenarios.
2. Explain to them that each person within the group will play three roles in turn: offender, offender employment specialist, and observer. Ask them to decide the order in which they will play these roles.

3. Tell the participants that each person in their group will have the opportunity to play the role of a correctional staff person who is coaching an offender in preparation for a job interview. Each coaching session will last 10-12 minutes. Participants will use the activity worksheets at the end of this module as a guide.
4. During each 10-12 minute round of coaching, the observers in each group should note the strengths and challenges of the coaching approach, making notes on the observer worksheet provided.
5. As the instructor, you should keep time and signal the groups to change roles at the end of each 10-minute time period. You should give everyone a two-minute warning after 8-10 minutes of each 10-12 minute time period has passed. At this point, you should invite the observers in each triad to share their feedback with the person playing the role of offender employment specialist.
6. When all of the participants have had an opportunity to play all three roles, lead them in discussion by using the following questions:

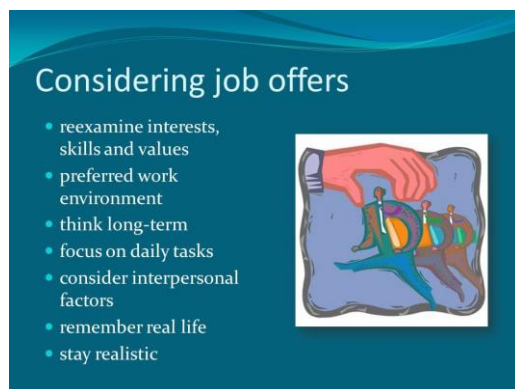
Which of the questions seemed most difficult for offenders to respond to?

What coaching approaches seemed most effective in helping offenders to improve their interviewing skills?

What coaching approaches seemed least helpful?

What did you learn from this activity that may prove helpful in working with offenders who are preparing for job interviews?

PowerPoint 8



Many offenders may vacillate between believing they must accept the first job they are offered and thinking that they won't accept a job they think is beneath them such as "flipping burgers". Considering a job offer is an important part of teaching offenders about the job search process. For one thing, it helps them to have a sense of control over the process. Even if a condition of their release is getting a job quickly, they need to see the part they play in accepting a job offer.

What are some of the factors offenders should consider when deciding about accepting a job offer?

At this stage, offenders need to review their interests, skills, values, and preferred work environments and other self-assessment themes that may have been examined earlier in the job search process. Understandably, many offenders will not be able to choose from an array of ideal jobs at first. However, keeping their preferences in mind may help offenders choose more wisely from the options they do have.

While all of these factors are important, thinking long-term may be one of the most critical. While it is not listed among the traits that assist in job retention, it is a crucial component there as well. Thinking long-term doesn't mean just looking at the stability of an occupation or job growth; it also means having a personal long-term goal in mind. This first job after release is not the last job offenders will ever have. They should look at this job, and subsequent ones, as stepping stones, realizing that the first job (or two or three) may not be their dream job.

Too often, adult job seekers who have had a difficult time becoming employed (including offenders) are easily frustrated if they have to start at low-level, low-paying jobs. It may help offenders to focus each day on what must be done, do that well, and look to the future to help them get past these feelings. Focusing on daily tasks helps offenders keep their minds on what is most important at that moment—doing well on this first job after incarceration.

The old adage "you never get a second chance to make a first impression" is vital to offenders' success on the job. Right or wrong, bosses and coworkers may be watching offenders more closely than they would any other new hire. Offenders can make their transition from prison to work smoother by considering interpersonal factors. Characteristics such as a positive outlook, a pleasant smile, and eagerness to help others, will put coworkers at ease and help offenders integrate into the workforce quicker.

Finally, offenders can be successful on the job if they remember that life is more than just a job. Real life is made up of many things and being realistic about what one expects from a job at this stage can help offenders see that these first few jobs are the means to achieving bigger goals.

SUMMARY

- In this module, we have reviewed several job search strategies and identified those that are the most promising. We have also explored methods that can be used to prepare offenders for a job interview and examined the factors they must consider when a job offer is made.

Activity Worksheet: Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews

Instructions

1. Your instructor will divide the large group into groups of three.
2. Within your group, each participant will be playing three roles in turn: offender, offender employment specialist, and observer. Decide the order in which you will play these roles. Your instructor will give each of you an offender role scenario to play during your turn in that role.
3. Each participant in your group will have the opportunity to play the role of an offender employment specialist who is coaching an offender in preparation for a job interview. Each coaching session will take 15 minutes. You should use this activity worksheet as a guide.
4. During each 15-minute round of coaching, the observer in your group will note the strengths and challenges of the coaching approach, making notes on the observer worksheet provided.
5. Your instructor will signal you to change roles at the end of each 15-minute time period. He or she will lead you in discussing the activity when everyone is finished.

Interview Questions for Coaching

During each 15-minute coaching period, the correctional staff person in each group will ask the offender as many of the following questions as time allows. The correctional staff person is role- playing an employer who is interviewing the offender for a job. The offender should respond as though the offender employment specialist were an employer. The offender employment specialist should make notes on the offender's responses as he or she is speaking and then offer coaching on ways to improve these responses.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

3. Why are you interested in this job?

4. What can you contribute in this job?

5. Have you ever been convicted of a felony?

6. Do you have any questions?

Observer Worksheet: Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews

What techniques (interpersonal approaches, facilitation skills) is the correctional staff person using to help the offender to improve his/her interview skills?

Which of these coaching approaches seems most effective?

Which of these coaching approaches seems least effective?

Offender Role Scenarios

Offender Role #1

Joe is being interviewed for a job as a truck driver on a construction site. Most of Joe's answers to the interviewer's questions are one word in length. He doesn't make eye contact and seems bored with the interview. At the end of the interview he asks, "Do I get the job?" and seems surprised and irritated when the answer is anything other than "Yes."

Offender Role #2

Susan is applying for a job as a receptionist in a large real estate office. Susan dominates the interview. She barely takes a breath between sentences, forcing the offender employment specialist to interrupt her in order to ask another question. Susan doesn't mention her record (or dismisses it if the correctional staff person mentions it). She asks, "When do I start?" at the end of the interview and starts to cry when the answer is anything other than "Right away."

Offender Role #3

Mike is applying for a job as an electrician's helper. He has good skills but focuses on his multiple robbery convictions, his time in a correctional facility, and uses examples from his experience as an offender for every answer. Mike is apologetic about his "bad record" and ends the interview by saying, "I wouldn't blame you if you didn't hire me."

Training Grid for Module 6: Helping Offenders Secure Employment

Min	Topic	Delivery	Slides	Worksheets
15	Intro/Job Search Strategies	Lecture/Discussion	1-3	
20	Networking	Lecture/Activity	4	Job Title Cards
10	Interviewing	Lecture/Discussion	5-6	
50	Interviewing	Activity	7	Coaching Offenders for Effective Interviews
10	Accepting Job Offers	Lecture/Discussion	8	
Total 105				