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Job Development: The Employer as a Customer

BY DENNIS W. NEILSEN

U.S. Probation Officer, St. Louis, Missouri

ON MARCH 16, 1977, the Probation Division and the Bureau of Prisons signed an Inter-agency Agreement which states the "Federal Probation System shall assume administrative and operational responsibility for developing employment resources and making job referrals for persons paroled or mandatorily released from Federal institutions."¹

Notwithstanding the fact that the primary responsibility for securing employment must remain with each individual client, there is no question that the probation officer's role has been vastly extended. Whereas this area was once rightly seen as a part of the job performed by all diligent officers, the task of job development now rests officially and heavily on each probation officer.

Who Wants a Job

Unfortunately, but realistically, not all ex-offenders are *job ready*. For some reason or another, although they may verbalize intentions to work, they are usually unemployed most of the time and very often it is the direct result of their actions or inactions. Putting aside the psychological, sociological or whatever logical (or illogical) reasons for this situation, we are still faced with a number of people who are not job ready.

The client who consistently answers the door in his pajamas, at noon, yawning, I maintain, simply doesn't want a job. The client that can ordinarily be found on the corner, who doesn't keep appointments—either with his probation officer or with prospective employers—doesn't want a job. This individual might best be referred to the State Employment Service, not to drop our problem in their lap, but to see if he even keeps the appointment. Perhaps some other local or governmental programs for the "hard core unemployed" are available and these could represent another source of referral for the unmotivated client. Local labor pools are another good testing ground as they usually require the applicant to be available on their premises at an early morning

hour. If your client keeps his appointment at 6:30 a.m. at the labor pool, it's a safe bet he wants to work! Additionally, labor pools often attract individuals who do not maintain a steady job, usually due to alcoholic tendencies or migratory traits, and this serves to make our referral that much more attractive.

Business Is Business

While companies appear to have become more and more receptive to the hiring of ex-offenders, it seems that the recent years of high unemployment have more than offset any net gains that might have been anticipated from more favorable business attitudes. We must recognize that business is business and companies exist for *profit*.

We, and our clients, have to accept the cold hard fact that until the product goes off the loading dock, is delivered and paid for, no money comes in the front door to pay the salaries! Therefore, however civic minded and humanitarian they might wish their corporate image to be, companies exist, or cease to exist, on profits.

When speaking to the prospective employer, don't attempt to appeal to his community responsibility or philanthropic nature. He is in business to make money and certainly does not run a charitable organization! He provides a service or goods for profit and the most effective way to get his attention is to show how he can increase or maintain profits.

What Do You Have To Offer and What Do They Want?

Most definitely do not offer the employer the opportunity to help someone out of a life of crime by giving him a job. He has 10 other people in the reception room who have never been convicted of a thing. When you ask for something, you have put the employer in the very powerful position of granting or denying your request. Instead, sell what you have to offer for him and what he can expect from you if he buys your program. If you

¹ Policy Statement 7550.27 of 3/16/77.

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simply turn the negative into the positive, you have much to offer.

Every probation officer knows his clients intimately. He knows their weaknesses and attributes. Point this out to the employer. If the officer has a recovered alcoholic that can meet the needs of the employer, the employer is aware of his basic fault and that the individual is doing something about it. The unknown 10 in the reception room may have several with active alcoholic problems, as well as others who have been involved in illegal activity, but have yet to be caught. With the client's permission, the prospective employer is aware of all the faults of the ex-offender before he even meets him. If these are overcome, what else is left but the positive?

Ask the employer what types of skills he can utilize at his place of business. You can't ask him to hire someone until you know what he needs. It could range from an electrical engineer to a punch press operator. Don't forget to inquire about custodial positions, as many firms pay their janitors quite well. When developing jobs, let the company know that you have no particular individual in mind and are merely canvassing to learn what types of skills or qualities they seek in an applicant.

Usually the most frequent response goes something like, "I want someone who will be here every day, on time, and will work while he is here." This is a good time to let the employer know that our clients will be monitored and have the extra responsibility of satisfying their probation or parole conditions.

Make It Easy for Him To Say Yes

Point out that you can be of service to the employer by screening your clients to provide him the most qualified applicant that meets his needs thus saving the company time and money. Let the employer know that should an opening occur and he were to call for a referral, if you didn't have someone you honestly felt had the skills or was job ready, you would sooner tell him so than to send an unqualified applicant. He will respect you more and the chances are you will be placing qualified individuals with this firm for many years to come.

Don't ask the employer to give your referral any special consideration, but request that he give him the same consideration as any other qualified applicant who is not an ex-offender. At the end of the interview, thank the employer for his time and

say, "If I should come across someone who I honestly think will fit your needs, may I call you to arrange an interview?" This is a *reasonable request* for you are offering him a service, and for him to say no would make him appear unreasonable. You will get very few negative responses for you have made it easy for him to say yes.

If You Make the Sale

The employer has just told you he has an opening and you have a qualified applicant. What do you need to know?

Immediately learn as much about the position as possible in order to be able to tell your client. Find out the starting salary, fringe benefits, when is payday, what are the working hours and a job description. Ask if the employer wants routine contact from the probation officer or would he prefer to contact the officer only if there are problems. Remember, the man is running a business and he wants no outside interference unless absolutely essential to his business. Be sure to inquire if any special equipment, such as safety shoes or tools is required. Is transportation necessary or is public transportation available?

You Gotta Know the Territory

Every probation officer should be attuned to the community and its changes. Local newspapers and community journals are not only valuable for their help wanted sections, but their business sections have news of companies expanding and what new businesses are coming into the area. Did a firm recently receive an award for sponsoring some community program or for hiring disadvantaged workers? If so, they may be receptive to your program. Was a company recently awarded a new government contract? If so, they may be hiring. Did a company that refused to hire the ex-offender last month have a change of management? If so, perhaps new management will be receptive.

Look around your territory and you'll be amazed to learn how many businesses there are that weren't only one year ago. If one firm has moved, find out which firm moved in. Learn where the other business relocated to and why. Did they expand? When a firm relocates usually not all employees will move with them for one reason or another. This means available jobs. Look for "Grand Opening," "Open Under New Management," or "Opening Soon" signs.

If you observe new construction on your territory, talk to the job foreman and find out what is being built and whom to contact. Don't wait until the doors open for business because you'll be too late. Companies hire their staff *before* opening their doors.

The local Chamber of Commerce often has information on businesses in the area, giving the names of the officers, the number of employees and the firm's location.

Don't forget the library. The reference section should have copies of the various Moody's industrial manuals which list major corporations, their history, the names of the officers and locations of plants. Moody's manuals are supplemented twice weekly. Also available is the *Standard & Poors Directory of Corporations*, which contains the company address, the officers, and the company assets. The *Standard & Poors Daily Stock Reports* contain information on any expansion or increased production of a firm and their *Corporation Records* is similar to the Moody's manuals. Other library sources of information include the Dow Jones Index, city directories, and State directories of industry.

Develop a personal liaison with individuals in your State employment office and with other governmental and local agencies such as the Urban League, C.E.T.A., W.I.N., C.D.A., H.D.C. and Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as the NAACP and neighborhood and minority organizations.

If you live in a cold climate you don't sell a popsicle company your program in December. Direct your efforts to the customers *before* their busy season. Don't wait until they are busy as they have already filled any openings they may have had. Usually, this means contacting swimming pool companies, ice and ice cream related firms, rental service firms, moving companies, baseball and zoological parks, soda and beer distributors, carnival suppliers, contractors, apartment complexes, sod companies and landscapers, hotels and motels, gas stations, window cleaners, car washes, wrecking companies, fence erectors and river barge lines in the early spring. At chain-type operations, such as fast food restaurants or service stations, find out if each individual manager does the hiring or the central office.

Summertime is appropriate to develop contacts with school bus lines for driver positions and early fall would not be too soon to call at various department stores and firms such as parcel delivery ser-

vices, which hire additional staff for the Christmas rush. Winter would be a good time to call on auto service clubs, auto towing firms and snow removal companies. Don't forget Christmas tree lots!

Some Final Tips

Very often the receptionist is a screen for her boss and you may be put off with "I'm sorry, but we aren't hiring at this time." As you introduce yourself, displaying your identification, simply tell her you are a United States probation officer and you would like to "speak to someone in relation to the company's hiring *policies* in regard to the ex-offender." Very few receptionists want the responsibility of discussing company policies and you will usually find yourself speaking to someone in authority in a very short time. Try to obtain the receptionist's name in case of a call back or should you later need to telephone, she can be addressed by name.

While in the reception room, be sure to notice any awards or letters of appreciation from social service organizations the company may have on display. If possible, during the interview, work in a word of praise for the company's efforts.

Take notice of what publications the firm receives and scan them while waiting to learn just what sort of product or service the firm is involved in. Magazines are also good sources for names of officers and their titles.

When you meet the person in charge, make a conscious effort to remember his name and use it during the interview. If a name isn't given, don't be afraid to ask. If you feel too embarrassed, look for a name on the door or the desk, and use it. Your professional observance usually won't go unnoticed.

Pay close attention to the employer's remarks and cue in on them. If he appears to be especially sympathetic to first offenders, discuss the Pretrial Diversion Program. If he appears to be a "hard-liner," stress your role in supervision and the client's accountability. While this may appear a bit devious, it can be done with honesty.

If the company is not hiring, always ask when they might be hiring or when would be a good time for you to call back. At the end of the interview, any good salesman is sure to inquire, "Do you know of anyone else that might be hiring at this time?" Occasionally it pays off and you are referred to another firm in the neighborhood and, with his permission, can often use the first em-

ployer's name as an introduction. It only takes a few seconds to ask.

Get business cards and leave them at *every* call. It's cheap advertisement.

Be sure to keep a file, (3x5 index cards work well) on each contact, noting the date, the employer's name, when to call back and any other information you think necessary.

Plan your calls. Don't stop at one firm and then drive 15 minutes to another. Park your car in an industrial complex or business section and knock on every door. One day you may find yourself speaking to an employer who has just discharged an employee out the back door. You can only make the sale while seated across from the customer. All other time is dead time! As you increase your percentage of time presenting your product, sales go up!

Are you nervous? Do you have butterflies? If so, go with another officer. This often reduces the

* Permission to use the above quote has not been requested.
** *Fiddlers*, By William Miller as told to Frances Spatz Leighton, Copyright 1977, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, p. 20.

tension and usually any slack in the conversation or points missed will be picked up by the other officer. Besides, two on one puts you at a definite psychological advantage.

Finally, be sure to familiarize yourself with the ex-offender bonding program as well as any other subsidized programs that may entice the employer.

Conclusion

Remember, you are a qualified professional officer who has a service to perform both for the employer and your client. You are not asking the employer for favors, but providing a service that any company can use. At the same time, the employer has a right to expect honesty and a business-like sense of responsibility from the probation officer.

"I learned early that when you apply for a job, you'd better talk only of what the other guy needs and not what *you* need." * * *

A Model for Increasing the Use of Community Supportive Services in Probation and Parole

BY R.J. POLISKY

*Assistant Director, Division of Probation and Parole Services,
Virginia Department of Corrections, Richmond*

AS PROBATION and parole caseloads increase, one wonders how probation and parole officers can adequately prepare presentence investigations, reports for the parole boards, administrative paperwork, etc., and still have sufficient time to devote to the individual needs of the offenders under their supervision. Not the least of these is the myriad of common human needs which, in order to be met, necessitate referrals to local service-delivery agencies, both public and private. These needs include, but are not limited to, housing, clothing, employment, and financial assistance.

In January 1965, the Northern Virginia Probation and Parole District (District No. 10) of the Virginia Department of Corrections, Division

of Probation and Parole Services, made up of the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William, and the Cities of Fairfax and Alexandria, had 344 cases under active supervision; in January 1971, the number of cases had dramatically risen to 1,145. District No. 10 is the most metropolitan of Virginia's districts, since it lies immediately on the border of the District of Columbia and handles the highest investigative and supervisory caseload in Virginia. In January 1976, 1,660 cases were under the active supervision of the 29 officers there, and each day the caseload continues to rise.

This increase in recent years is neither unique to District No. 10, nor to the Commonwealth of Virginia; it is occurring throughout the country

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