CONNECTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE RIGHT EMPLOYERS

7 Strategies for Effective Job Development

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F inding jobs for young New Yorkers is challenging in the best of times. In New York City's hyper-competitive environment—with experienced adults vying for entry-level positions, and a lack of "big box" retailers and supermarkets that typically provide teens with their first jobs elsewhere—employers often have their pick of applicants. The task of securing employment can feel downright impossible when the labor market is slow to hire and when young people face additional barriers like incomplete education, sparse work history, criminal records, or dozens of other situations that affect their lives.

Given these challenges, how can job developers maximize their efforts to engage employers in order to create opportunities for young people? Here are seven key strategies to consider.

STRATEGY # 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE(S)

Job developers wear many hats in their work connecting young people to employment. They must be able to switch seamlessly between four of these roles:

1. SALESPERSON. Job development is first and foremost a sales position, and quite possibly the most difficult sales position that exists. Unlike those who sell appliances, for example, job developers can make few guarantees about the skills and reliability of young people they represent. Good job developers sell only what they control directly: the services that they or their organization can provide.

2. TRAINER. Few young people arrive at workforce programs knowing how to find a job. Job developers play a critical role in helping them understand what employers need and look for when hiring new workers. If a young person cannot convincingly answer the question "Why should I hire you?" he or she is not yet ready to be referred out.

3. GUIDE. Many young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have little understanding of the world of opportunities available to them. While entry-level positions provide valuable experience, young people should begin to develop a sense of the types of occupations that can eventually get them to a point where they can support themselves independently in a high-cost city like New York.

A Useful Resource for Career Planning In New York City

One easy place for a young person to start thinking about the types of jobs they might like to do is the In-Demand Occupations list updated periodically by the New York City Labor Market Information Service. This list identifies occupations projected to grow over the next decade that have limited education and training requirements and above-average pay. These occupations are the only ones for which anyone over the age of 18 can apply for an Individual Training Grant (ITG) from a local Workforce1 Career Center to underwrite the cost of required trainings.
www.nyc.gov/wib
www.nyc.gov/workforce1

4. MOTIVATOR. Employment may not feel like a realistic goal to many young people. They quickly grow discouraged when employers respond to their applications with either "no thanks" or, more commonly, not at all. In truth, people of all ages often submit dozens of applications before finding the right opening. A job developer must be able to keep young people moving forward as the rejections pile up.

STRATEGY #2: UNDERSTAND THE CULTURAL DIVIDE BETWEEN FOR-PROFIT EMPLOYERS AND NON-PROFIT JOB DEVELOPERS[1]

Whether true or not, employer stereotypes of the nonprofit world often make them leery of working with job developers. To overcome these negative perceptions, engage them in ways that defy those expectations:

1. FORGET THE "BIG PICTURE" AND GET TO THE POINT. Most business people look for the "sales pitch" when meeting with a job developer, while nonprofits see raising awareness of their issue as central to their mission. Rather than spending twenty minutes explaining the history and nature of your organization and expounding on the difficulties that young people face, focus on how you can benefit the employer and quickly ask for the hire.

2. KEEP IT SHORT. The business world generally places a premium on time and efficiency, whereas nonprofits are often looser with schedules, deadlines, and lengths of meetings. Respect the employer's time. Develop an "elevator pitch" that can grab an employer's attention within 60 seconds, and keep your entire sales presentation under ten minutes.

3. FOCUS ON THE BENEFIT TO EMPLOYERS. Business people often approach negotiations with an eye to maximizing their own interests, whereas nonprofits are generally more focused on making sure everyone is treated equitably. Emphasize how the employer will benefit from working with you rather than how the employer can help your organization.

4. AVOID SOCIAL SERVICE JARGON. Businesses and nonprofits ascribe different meanings to certain words and phrases, so something that might sound innocuous or even positive to a nonprofit person may be extremely negative to someone from the business world. The terms "client" or "disconnected youth" instead of "job seeker," for example, may lead an employer to see the people you represent as less competent and reliable. Even the term "job developer" has bad connotations for some employers. Try "Account Manager" or "Account Executive" instead.

STRATEGY #3: DEMONSTRATE YOUR VALUE

Employers of all stripes hire people for one simple reason: to make money. (Even nonprofits need the right staff to run successful programs in order to attract future funding.) It's not enough just to tout your free services, however. Workforce organizations must be able to articulate their positive impact on three distinct areas of an employer's operations: hiring, training, and retaining staff.

Hiring new staff is extremely expensive and tedious for most employers. Although costs vary significantly across industries, one survey found that employers spend an average of $5,500 to fill just one entry-level position.[2] Hiring workers involves many costs, including advertising, sorting through applications, conducting interviews, running background checks and drug tests, training new hires, and sacrificing productivity as newly-hired employees ramp up on their jobs. By utilizing a workforce organization, employers can reduce some or all of these costs.

The best sales pitch sounds like this:

"I represent a staffing agency that specializes in placing qualified applicants with companies like yours. Last year we saved our employer partners an average of $3,500 per employee in their hiring and training costs. Our workers stay on the job 65% longer than workers hired off the street. I'd like to talk with you about how we might be able to help you save money too."

Training new and existing employees is also an expensive proposition for employers. Given the premium that employers place upon traits like work ethic, time management and critical thinking, the basic soft-skills preparation that most workforce organizations provide is valuable. Many organizations help their participants obtain certifications like the National Professional Certification in Customer Service (www.nrffoundation.com) that appeal to a wide range of employers. A few workforce organizations even partner with larger companies to shift the employer's customized training into their own classrooms, creating a pipeline of new workers ready to start.

Finally, many employers struggle to keep good workers on the payroll. Workforce organizations provide a number of retention services that enable their alumni to stay on the job and move up the career ladder. These include transportation subsidies when a participant first starts working, connecting low-income workers to public benefits like the Earned Income Tax Credit to supplement their earnings, and securing additional education and training for participants who want to enhance their skills. Being able to say that your job seekers' average retention rate is higher than that of the employer's current workforce will put you far ahead of most job developers!

TRY THIS
Brainstorm all of the services that you and your organization can provide to employers. Create a worksheet like the one below to think through the value of those services.

What services can I offer the employer?	How does this benefit the employer?	What is the actual value (in $$ or time saved) for the employer?
Example: prescreening candidates	Saves time not having to look at unqualified candidates.	3 hours of screening time. If the employer's time is worth $25 per hour, that's $75 saved.
Example: hosting on-site job fairs	Allows employers to see many applicants at once without the cost of paying to attend a larger job fair.	$150 that would normally be required to reserve a table at a job fair.

A completed table like this can serve as an excellent script for your conversations with employers and help you become more adept at using the bottom-line language that they want to hear: how your services will save time and money.[3]

STRATEGY #4: THINK LIKE AN ACCOUNT MANAGER, NOT A JOB DEVELOPER

Job development has traditionally been characterized by quick, low-wage placements with small to medium employers found through personal contacts or by canvassing a limited geographical area. While this approach works, it is not well suited to breaking into larger companies that offer higher wages and growth opportunities for young people. The account management approach, by contrast, emphasizes long-term relationships with medium to large employers, with a focus on jobs that have advancement potential. As with the sales industry, larger accounts are managed by teams of salespeople—not individual job developers—who are all equally adept at serving a business's needs. Account managers use strategic planning to identify and cultivate these higher quality employers. While the account management approach takes longer to implement, it can result in more job seekers securing higher-wage, career-level positions that can lead to self-sufficiency.

SUPERVISOR'S NOTE: Finding the Right Job Developer—The Proverbial Needle in a Haystack?

As a sales position, job development relies heavily on relationship building. When hiring a job developer, look for attitude in addition to (or even above) experience. Natural-born "schmoozers" who enjoy the challenge of getting to "yes" generally do better than those for whom striking up conversations with strangers feels like a chore, and who hear "no" as the end of the conversation.

The time and effort required to cultivate and sustain connections with employers is often substantial, and difficult to squeeze in between a host of other duties.

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TRY THIS

See where you fall on the "Am I a Job Developer or Account Manager?" table.

"Old school" job development	Account management
For me, immediate placement is the primary focus.	My focus is on long-term job retention and career growth for my participants.
Most of my employer contacts are based on personal relationships. I have "the exclusive" with most of my employers.	While I am the lead contact for most of my employers, anyone on our job development team can answer employers' questions or assist them with a fulfillment concern.
I tend to locate employers through word-of-mouth, mutual relationships, or the geographical area where I work.	I tend to identify high-potential companies in high-growth sectors using labor market data and industry publications.
I generally target many small and medium employers in a wide variety of fields.	I tend to target fewer but larger employers in a few specific sectors with growth potential.
I typically make a small number of placements with each employer per year. I meet my numbers by working with a high volume of employers.	I tend to make multiple placements with each employer, and have fewer employer accounts overall.
I keep my contacts to myself. My contacts follow me wherever I go.	I use a team-based approach in which many of us work with an employer so that the relationship continues after any individual job developer leaves. My organization understands that it is the source of the relationship, not me as an individual.
I tend to discuss my organization's mission as a key selling point to an employer when I make a sales pitch.	I tend to focus on the value that my organization can provide to the employer through the services we offer, especially in terms of time and money.

There is no right or wrong here. Answering mostly on the left-hand column does not mean that you should necessarily stop doing what you are doing—but you might think about which account management strategies you can integrate into your practices to attract bigger employers.

SUPERVISOR'S NOTE: Finding the Right Job Developer—The Proverbial Needle in a Haystack?

Supervisors can best support their job developers by carving out the room they need to focus on employers. Place your job developers where they are least likely to be disturbed by participants and remove as many of their non-employer-related duties as possible. Their true value lies in connecting with employers, not filling out paperwork or teaching workshops that can be handled by others. Remember, they are the rainmakers in a performance-based environment.

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STRATEGY #5: MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME

All job developers work under time constraints. In performance-based environments that reward job placement and retention, job developers are the bottom line for workforce development organizations. Given the intense pressure to meet placement numbers amidst other responsibilities (intake, administrative work, classroom training, writing resumes, etc.), efficiency is essential. Interruptions abound, and few job developers have the luxury of focusing entirely on employers. So how do you carve out enough time to actually find jobs for people?

1. CALENDAR ALL APPOINTMENTS WITH JOB SEEKERS. Participants can wreak havoc on your schedule by demanding your attention at all times of the day. To reduce interruptions, require them to make an appointment with you. At the very least, setting "office hours" (i.e., seeing unscheduled people only during certain hours) can cut down on disruptions.

2. SCHEDULE EMPLOYER OUTREACH TIME ON YOUR CALENDAR. In many ways, job development is a numbers game—the more employers you talk to, the more likely you are to find the ones that will hire. Blocking off chunks of time on your calendar—and treating that time as inviolable—will enable you to concentrate on the labor intensive process of employer outreach.

3. AVOID EMAIL IN THE MORNING. Email is a wonderful tool. It can also be a great time killer since it makes us feel like we're being productive even when most email is of low importance. The average office worker checks email over 50 times per day, breaking up sustained concentration. Devote the first hour or two of your day to substantive work—like employer outreach—before looking at messages that might divert your attention. At the very least, turn off the email notification that pops up every time a new message arrives in your inbox.

4. TRACK YOUR TIME CONSISTENTLY. Although the development and maintenance of good employer relationships lies at the heart of successful job placement, one study found that job developers in Chicago spent less than a third of their average workweek actually researching or talking with employers.[4] (Classroom instruction, resume writing, paperwork, and other non-core job development duties consumed the rest of the time.) Unless you understand where your time is being used each week, it's hard to figure out what you can change.

STRATEGY #6: TRACK AND TRIAGE YOUR CONTACTS

Successful employer relationships are built over time. But how do you stay on top of your interactions with all of the employers with whom you talk? And how do you know which employers are most likely to pay off in placements? Focus your outreach efforts wisely.

1. STREAMLINE AND CATEGORIZE EMPLOYER CONTACTS BASED ON POTENTIAL FOR PLACEMENTS. Job developers should understand which are their "bread-and-butter" employers and deploy their resources accordingly. Divide all contacts into four groups: "hot" employers that consistently hire from your organization; "warm" employers that hire occasionally but have the potential for more placements; "cool" employers that hire infrequently; and "cold" employers that have not hired in over a year. Create an outreach schedule so that you are in contact with "hot" employers at least once per month (and maybe more frequently), "warm" employers at least once a quarter, "cool" employers at least once every six months, and "cold" employers once per year. Employers that present little opportunity for placement should be dropped altogether. By focusing their efforts on employers most likely to hire, job developers will maximize their placements.

Did You Know?

The average office worker checks email over 50 times per day and loses over 2 hours of productivity every day to interruptions and distractions, according to the Basex IT research and consulting firm. Devote the first hour or two of your day to substantive work—like employer outreach—before looking at messages that might divert your attention.

2. NOTE EVERY INTERACTION IN A PERMANENT DATABASE. Many job developers start out with basic Excel spreadsheets, Outlook contacts, or traditional Rolodexes to collect information on employers, but quickly run up against their limitations. A better option is a full-fledged customer relationship management (CRM) database system, such as Act! by Sage (www.act.com), Resume Video (www.resumevideo.com), Efforts to Outcomes (www.socialsolutions.com), or SalesForce (www.salesforce.com). Developed initially for corporate sales activities, SalesForce is the most comprehensive CRM and provides a free option for small nonprofits.

STRATEGY #7: LEVERAGE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There simply are not enough hours in the day to do everything required of a job developer. What other tools or resources can make the job development process easier?

1. CREATE A FORMAL PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR LOCAL ONE STOP CENTER (WORKFORCE1 CAREER CENTER). These government-funded centers place thousands of individuals into jobs each year in New York City. Every center has a community outreach person who focuses on developing relationships with local nonprofits. By developing a close relationship with that person, your organization may be able to expedite the hiring process for your job seekers. For a complete listing of New York City's Workforce1 Career Centers, see www.nyc.gov/workforce1.

2. GET TO KNOW EMPLOYER INTERMEDIARIES. Entities that represent employers can be great ways to find new contacts quickly. Talk to the people who run the local chambers of commerce, Business Improvement Districts (www.nyc.gov/sbs), Industrial Business Zones (www.nyc.gov/imb), industry trade groups, and even local zoning boards. These folks are often willing to introduce job developers to appropriate employers.

3. REQUIRE JOB SEEKERS TO CONDUCT THEIR OWN JOB SEARCH EVERY DAY. Job seekers who wait for interviews to be handed to them and do not actively look for jobs on their own quickly become discouraged. All job seekers should be required to submit a minimum of four applications each day—20 a week—that they track and review with the job developer each week. These efforts help keep them engaged throughout the lengthy job search process, reduce the burden on the job developer, and demonstrate which participants are most eager to work and likely to succeed once employed. (Looking for work on their own also brings home just how much effort goes into finding a job, hopefully giving them pause before they decide to quit for trivial reasons once employed.) The job developer can then give highest priority to those participants who are most active, boosting placement and retention numbers.

IN SUM

It's not enough simply to know that your services are compelling—you must be able to market these services effectively. To create the competitive advantage that your organization needs to secure the best opportunities for young people, think like a business, focus on the value of your services, make the transition from "old school job development" to "account management," and create efficiencies through practical, time-saving techniques.

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[1] For more on the cultural divide between the for-profit and nonprofit worlds, see Laufer Green Isaac, Hidden Agendas: Stereotypes and Cultural Barriers to Corporate-Community Partnerships, 2004, www.lgicommunications.com.
[2] SASHA Corporation, Compilation of Employee Turnover Studies, 2007, www.sashacorp.com/turnframe.html.
[3] For an excellent resource on how to quantify the value of services, see the Aspen Institute's BVA Toolkit at www.aspenwsi.org/WSIwork-BVA.asp.
[4] Chicago Jobs Council, Capacity Building for Chicago Job Development: An Assessment of Chicago Job Developers' Needs and Emerging Solutions for Today's Tight Labor Market, 2004, www.cjc.net/publications/.