# *Making It Work: How Relationship Skills Support Economic Self-Sufficiency*

## Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)

May 13, 2014, 2:00 pm ET

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**Question:** What is the average case load at the Keeping It Together program and at PB&J Family Services?

**Answer:** *Avis Files, Director, Keeping It Together, Toledo Area Ministries:*

Our case managers have a case load of up to 33 participants so that's at any given time they could have 33 participants on the case load. My case managers also facilitate curriculum. They purchase food. They do home visits so shout out to them. I don't know if anyone's listening but shout out to my staff who works very hard and I only have five case managers so you can imagine how much we're running around and working.

*Dean Ma'ayan, Director of Development & Strategic Initiatives, PB&J Family Services, Inc.:*

Similarly we're working in the prison and then we're working with home visits and we're working with the entire family. So they've [case managers] have to be available for on the job issues when they're having issues there as well and we need to call them in.

Case loads will be in different stages. It's about 15 to 17 people but some of those people are also - some are varying in need - high need. We work with about 157 [cases] annually, which is a real pilot project. It's not a very large number for this scope of work that's being that's provided to them so the idea is to get it then scaled.

*Avis Files, Director, Keeping It Together, Toledo Area Ministries:*

For our cases - again like Dean said – the participants are at various levels. So I may have a case manager working with someone who's just completed an intake until someone who's in the middle of classes to someone who's working and just started working and someone who's on their last part of their 90 day term there. The case managers have a wide variety of participants they're working at either at start, middle or at the end.

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**Question:** What is the best way to reach out to Human Resource Department heads to promote parenting and family education?

**Answer:** *Avis Files, Director, Keeping It Together, Toledo Area Ministries:*

I don't know if there's a certain answer for that question. I have two employment specialists. They do things from cold calls to going out in the community and just dropping off packets to using our board members who may give a referral or staff member who may give a referral in our region and we're in Toledo, Ohio - just a small city about 45 minutes from Detroit, Michigan. But we ran into several issues and concerns with getting employers because our Department of Child and Family Services runs what they call a WEP program - a work experience program.

We couldn't tap into employers because they had already had those participants going out and it's similar to when people work for their food stamps. So we were having some difficulties with that but our staff - just the two staff that have just kind of stayed on it and stayed on it and they just kind of do a combination of anything. And often time's employers will call us because we'll ask them to give us a referral of someone that they know.

It's been a wide variety of guesses and mistakes and lessons learned. We never lose but we do learn. That's for sure.

*Dean Ma'ayan, Director of Development & Strategic Initiatives, PB&J Family Services, Inc.:*

I heard in the question about parenthood so I'm just going to make an assumption since I don't have the person in front of me is that it sounds like it's an agency that also might be an expert. They might be providing education to the clients on healthy parenting.

One of the things that I actually might do is go to a human resources association - you can Google it in your town. They do open trainings. Maybe to go to one of those and because you just need sort of one in but it sounds like you'd be offering something, be able to say, "Here we are experts in parenting. We actually provide parenting education to a very vulnerable population."

Let us bring that expertise to you and use John's 22% statistic [*approximately 22% of employees said their biggest distraction at work - the number one thing that got in the way of them doing what they were supposed to be doing at work was relationship issues - personal relationship issues. See full webinar transcript*]. I mean what a great one. If you take the 22% statistic and you also take domestic violence and even if you're not a domestic violence expert - bring that in also - I think HR - an HR association would love to have that. How do you respond to employee issues around intimate relationships and domestic violence on the job so it doesn't cost the employer so much money. Right? And that's your angle of expertise even if you don't have all of that on your own that you're partnering with someone else - absolutely.

Then you're getting in front of them as an expert and then they're getting to know your mission and who are the clients you serve secondary and that could actually lead to other great outcomes later.

*John Wilcox, co-author Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees: A Guide for Workforce Professionals Toolkit, formerly of Corporate Voices for Working Families*

I'd be happy to talk a little bit from the employer perspective. If I were to give you the short version of what years of experience trying to connect nonprofits and for profit entities, it would be there's really three things to think about going in. The first is to make your case clearly. The second is to speak their language, and the third is to follow-up to do what you said.

When you go into an HR director and whether you're asking for them to hire your clients or to establish a partnership or to give you a donation - it doesn't matter what the ask is really - what you need to do is put yourself in their shoes and immediately make the case for why it makes business sense for them to help you and I do mean business sense.

Your client case load could be the most heart wrenching that you can imagine. There could be all of the great personal reasons in the world for them to help you. They could be old friends from preschool. None of that really matters too much. What really matters is that you give them a clear business case. If you can tell them "I know your need - you're having trouble hiring people. I can guarantee you good employees. I can guarantee that you will save X number of dollars for every dollar you invest in this program." Those are the kinds of arguments that will really resonate because no matter who the person is you're talking to, they'll have someone higher up them down the chain and auditors that follow along after and they have to make the case to each of those people that the decision that they make on your behalf is a good one for the company, not just a good one, you know, because it's innately good or because it makes them feel good or because it's the right thing to do but because it's right for the company and so that's the core of what you've got to come to them with.

If you have a clear vision of what you want out of the conversation that really helps because what you're doing when you're talking to that HR director is convincing them that you're going to be a good partner. So if you're organized, you can see things from their perspective. You can clearly present what you want and what's in it for them. All of that sends the message that hey, these folks are worth working with. This relationship won't backfire on us. This will work out for everybody.

If you can, understand the business culture. If you're going to talk to a production shop, a line manufacturing unit, understand they've got shifts for example and they're looking for shift workers. If you're talking to a retail employer, understand that they have some contingent workers and they have some full time workers and some part time so understand the setup.

Avoid the jargon that they might not understand is the flip side of this point. If you are a TANF outfit and are used to dealing in TANF terms, recognize that whoever you're talking to in the business world may vaguely know what TANF is but will probably have no idea about half the things that you're, you know, up to your hips in every day.

And finally the third key point is once you've established your bonifieds, once you've laid out the plan, once you've demonstrated to them why they ought to do what you want them to do then you've got to follow up. Then you have to actually produce what you promised and you have to remind them that you produced what you promised because from a business perspective the question isn't just well is this a good decision now. It's three months from now is this still a good decision? The next quarter, is this still a good decision?

If you want this to be a sustaining relationship - if you want them to keep hiring your clients or keep partnering with you or keep funding you, you've got to keep reminding them of all the business reasons why this makes sense for them.

*Dorian Friedman, co-author Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees: A Guide for Workforce Professionals Toolkit, formerly of Corporate Voices for Working Families*

I completely agree with John's key points. I would add one thing which is in our experience. Obviously the first point of contact is the HR department in any local business or large employer in your community. But very often the people who will be most receptive to your message - to your pitch - I think will be the people in the corporate social responsibility or community outreach sort of section of the corporate food chain so to speak.

I think it's a good idea to do some research and understand where the corporate social responsibility priorities are - the CSR priorities are - for each of the employers you want to approach. You may find for example that they're very interested in disconnected young adults and they may be willing to - they may be eager to partner with your organization and your clients around specific populations like disconnected young adults or TANF recipients or people with disabilities or reentering individuals in your community so do your research. Reiterating the point John made about understand their business needs and go in with a specific pitch.

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**Question:** Is the Online Work Readiness component free?

**Answer:** The Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. The Web-based OWRA Tool offers social service agency caseworkers and staff services for clients through four modules, including a detailed, comprehensive assessment of client's strengths, barriers, and work readiness. OWRA offers an innovative approach to creating a plan for clients that summarizes their strengths and barriers, and makes recommendations on placement into work activities and work supports.

There are currently two versions of OWRA available for download. OWRA 1.0 is the original version of OWRA; OWRA 2.0 is a more gender-neutral version of OWRA that is effective at helping case managers work with a wide variety of clients to identify and address barriers to increasing self-sufficiency, accessing social services, and obtaining and retaining employment.

The OWRA tool and more information is available online: https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/tanftc

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**Question:** Where can I find the slides from this webinar?

**Answer:** Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/events-archive to download a copy of the slides, recording, transcript, and a Q&A document from this webinar.

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**Question:** Who should I contact if I have more questions about this webinar?

**Answer:** Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org or email us at info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org.