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## BREAKING THE FEAR OF PLACEMENT FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

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**B. ROBERT GONZALES**

In spite of outstanding rehabilitation services in existence today, it seems a pity that there are still so many unemployed and/or underemployed hearing impaired people in our nation. A small percentage of these are college and high school graduates. The larger share of the unemployed, and underemployed, hearing-impaired are the multiply disabled deaf. This population has an even lesser opportunity for job placement and advancement. Self placement, as opposed to placement by vocational rehabilitation counselors and other professionals, is a virtual impossibility for this population and realistically should not be considered feasible under present circumstances. This has been clearly exemplified in programs such as the St. Louis Jewish Employment and Vocational Service (Hurwitz and DeFrancesca, 1968) where, after three years, employment for 66 per cent of their clients has been obtained. This could not have been possible without the professional assistance of a placement specialist.

Any sincere placement specialist or counselor will admit that regardless of maturity or display of independence, it takes a great deal of courage for an individual to secure employment without some form of assistance. The existence of thousands of employment agencies, public and private, is proof of this fact. The fact of the matter is that there is an ubiquitous element of fear in employment solicitation that everyone experiences, including the expert in the field. This fear is comparable to the apprehension encountered by all

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salesmen preceeding the initial contact with new buyers. The expert salesmen or placement counselor has mastered this apprehension so that it does not interfere with his capability, but nevertheless it is present. It takes years of experience to become so thoroughly competent. Many individuals never reach this level of competence either because of inherent inabilities or lack of drive toward obtaining this objective.

Troop (1966) points out that there continues to be a reluctance on the part of the general counselor to provide placement assistance to the clients he serves. Many reasons are given in defense such as, "this reluctance can be traced to a fear of the unknown, an unwillingness to attempt that with which one is not familiar, about which he has very little knowledge and for which he has little or no particular skill.. The placement of the disabled person is almost totally left out of the curriculum in graduate training in rehabilitation counseling" (Troop, 1966, p. 90).

In reference to training, the novice salesman is definitely at an advantage in that his employer has most likely required him to take courses in salesmanship with emphasis on learning his product and developing introductory "pitches" for dealing with various kinds of situations when contacting a prospective buyer. For the novice placement counselor, preparation is not this simple. He is not dealing with a concrete piece of merchandise that can be placed in a display window for observation. His merchandise is hearing-impaired clients who are never identical at any given time. Selling these "products" to an employer takes a supersalesman who has to rely on years of experience for his course work in the school of hard knocks.

If an experienced counselor were available for advising the novice counselor on placement, the primary concern in advising the novice would undoubtedly revolve around effective communication. Without thorough competency in communication skills which would include utilization of sign language, fingerspelling, and comprehension of the limitations of speechreading, little could be learned about the psycho-social problems of the hearing impaired. Apathy toward the psycho-social problems of these people would disallow complete de-

velopment of communication skills necessary for establishing rapport with the hearing impaired and empathy with his problem in our society (Adler, 1963).

Let us consider some other pertinent facts and advice the experienced counselor, or supersalesman could use to enlighten the novice counselor seeking employment opportunities and placement for his clients. Communication, rapport, and empathy must also be developed with the prospective employer and his needs which makes the prearranged introductory statements the most vital aspect in occupational solicitation. Two most effective introductory statements used upon meeting a personnel director for the first time may be: "I'm a placement counselor for the deaf and hard of hearing and in need of some professional advice. I'm attempting to become more familiar with your line of work. Would you assist me?" Or as a good opening in large factories. "I'm a placement counselor etc., and interested in the machinery a deaf person could handle that perhaps a hearing individual cannot tolerate due to noise." Follow-up statements should be involved with his opinions, not the counselor's, on the realism of the hearing impaired handling positions or openings in the plan of employment. This allots more time to appraise the employer's attitude. The counselor's opportunity will present itself when the employer turns about and asks for the counselor's opinion.

A business card left at every establishment called on is as essential as the visit itself. This card may very well be the personnel director's sole source of contacting the counselor at a later date.

Another approach which many times has been underestimated in employment solicitation is the use of the newspaper. Its fruitfulness depends mostly on the persistence and approach utilized. The lengthy Sunday Want Ad listings make Monday the logical day for itemizing various openings according to the solicitor's needs. After identification with a selected personnel director via telephone or in person, an inquiry is made if a person with impaired hearing could realistically be considered for the available position. If not, whether there are any other areas where the deaf could fit in. If the

employer would consider a deaf person for the advertised position but the position has been filled, the counselor should place him on files as a potential employer. On the following Thursday or Friday, a call is made to check if the person hired was retained. A daily check on the Want Ads will not only assist with immediate openings and the making of new contacts, but will present a clear picture on the trends of the local employment situation. Such an approach has proven its effectiveness through personal experience by the author.

Some positive points in favor of deaf employees are clearly presented in an article written by Freed on why his company maintains a policy of employment for qualified deaf workers. These positive points are stated as:

1. Their job performance is as good or better than the normal employee.
  2. They are less likely to quit; reduced turnover saves money.
  3. Their attendance record is superior.
  4. They are more likely to be conscientious and put forth maximum effort.
  5. They have fewer accidents.
  6. They have fewer health problems.
  7. They are punctual, waste less time, and are motivated to do their best.
  8. They have desirable personal and social traits.
- (Freed, 1962, p. 35)

When discussing particular clients with personnel directors and foremen, the suppression of most objective test results may, as a matter of practicality, be necessary. The reliability of most such tests when used with deaf people has always been open to question and are highly susceptible to misinterpretation by the person who is not conversant with the handicapping aspects of deafness, especially in the verbal sphere. Projective personality, verbal intelligence scale scores, etc., are examples of test results which should not be communicated, but results of such tests as general aptitude, dexterity, mechanical skills, clerical skill, etc., are examples of test results which can be and should be used to foster employment. However, a general classification such as dull, average, or

bright may be essential in establishing and maintaining good relations. The counselor should also make it clear that his services are always available, especially when difficulties in interpersonal relationships might arise and jeopardize the client's chances of retaining employment.

Recognizing that future placements are foreseeable, it is best to begin with an individual most likely to succeed. When proper rapport has been established with a successful client, then the counselor may attempt placement of a person about whom he is less certain.

Full advantage should be taken of vocational schools suitable for training of clients. Their placement staffs, which should be more than willing to assist in finding openings for the graduate, generally have exceptionally close contacts with employers.

Availability of employment should be reasonably certain before training individuals. Even better, every attempt should be made to train people specifically for prearranged vacancies pledged by contacted employers.

The accompaniment of most multiply-handicapped hearing impaired clients on job applications and interviews is very essential. Undeveloped language and reading skills do not grant these educationally and culturally deprived persons the abilities necessary to cope with facing employers and filling out application blanks. Their difficulty in retaining information for which they have no immediate use often makes the effort of application and job interview orientation a fruitless one. If the counselor is fortunate in having access to a competent rehabilitation center or sheltered workshop with qualified staff where pre-vocational evaluation is offered, its services should be used. The heavy caseload carried by counselors today makes it impossible to properly assist the multiply-disabled deaf without some inter-agency assistance.

Over-placement, especially of a multiply handicapped client, can be disastrous. The loss of a job is nothing compared to the possible damage of an individual's self-respect. Under-placement is acceptable where there is a monetary need, but with a mutual agreement that the counselor will continue searching for a more appropriate position.

The problem of over- or under-placement can be avoided to a degree if sufficient old and new employer contacts are continually made and maintained. This cannot be accomplished with an attitude that job solicitation is necessary only when a client is ready for placement.

In contacting new employers, there is no approach more effective and interesting than door-to-door selling or, as many salesmen put it, "beating the bushes." This entails the location of a business or industrial district where a person can go from personnel director to personnel director within a matter of minutes. The two introductory statements presented previously can possibly be used with this technique.

Follow-up is an essential part of the placement process. Several objectives are achieved by follow-up; rapport is strengthened with the client as well as with the employer; the counselor has an opportunity to check on his client's progress; the counselor makes himself available to the employer for possible advice; the counselor has an opportunity to learn more about positions in a particular plant or factory; and there is a possibility the employer may refer the counselor to another employer in need of people.

The follow-up service is nothing more than finding out how the client is adjusting to his new position, employer and fellow workers, and how they are adjusting to him. The purpose is to find and correct the adjustment problems at an early stage, if at all possible. *A secondary purpose of the follow-up is to find these problems and pass the information back to the schools and training centers.* These schools or centers might take steps to prevent these same problems from occurring with other students (Shinpaugh, 1956, p. 299).

In summary, if a counselor expects to be successful in placement, he must first be successful in employment solicitation. The element of fear can be lessened through experience in knowing how to approach employers as well as what to say to them. It is essential that the counselor develop the necessary communication skills not only to thoroughly comprehend the

psycho-social problems of the hearing impaired but to have the ability to counsel with each individual client. Some clients will have to be led by the hand through the entire process of solicitation and placement before employment is secured. An abundance of employer contacts and possible placements must be available to meet the needs of the people served by the counselor. This is possible only through an almost obstinate dedication to the cause of successful placement.

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