

Overview describing the innovative best practice

Dakota-Scott Workforce Services began presenting a quarterly seminar for job seekers entitled *Career Success Essentials (CSE)* in West St. Paul and Shakopee. CSE was designed to meet the needs of job seekers in need of assistance with the basics of the job search – the resume, networking and interviewing. The seminar was pilot tested for three initial quarters in program year 2007 and found that demand was so high, and feedback from evaluations were so positive, that the project was repeated again in program year 2008. In fact, due to high demand, an additional date was added.

CSE was redesigned for the current program year to meet the changing needs of jobseekers. Due to high demand, the program was expanded to offer six seminars and an additional location site was added, the Burnsville Workforce Center. The additional site was added to assist jobseekers by limiting the amount of travel required to attend a seminar. The format was also revised to reflect the ever-changing needs of today's jobseekers. Classes were added based on comments received from attendees of various workforce center workshops.

Resume Rescue - CSE begins with a resume workshop. Attendees learn the basic dos and don'ts of resume writing and how to show the value they will bring to a potential employer. They also learn what type of resume would be best for their individual work and education histories. Employment Counselors are on hand to review attendees' resumes. Counselors review the resumes and make comments while the participants attend other workshops, and pass them back during breaks.

Networking Redefined - Next, SagePresence provides a workshop on networking. SagePresence has a unique approach to networking that allows participants to view the effort in a new, less stressful, light. SagePresence is a collaborative of three speakers, including a communications expert, screenplay writer and movie director. Their skills are combined to present information in an informative yet enjoyable manner. Participants learn how to approach networking as a means of appreciating and helping others. By changing one's purpose, from being all about the job seeker to meeting the needs of possible network members, the job seeker's anxiety is dissolved. In addition, the job seeker and potential network member make a stronger, more memorable connection, and the risk of failure is also removed.

Hiring Panel - During lunch, which is provided by Dakota-Scott Workforce Services, participants interact with a panel of hiring professionals from the local area. In other words, if CSE is held in Scott County, the majority of the panelists are from Scott County businesses. Strong attempts are made to get panelists from companies currently hiring. A diverse group is sought as well, allowing perspectives from private, public and non-profit businesses, as well as large and small employers. Panelists give a brief description of their role and company, and then the floor is opened up to questions from participants. Questions often focus on what employers want to see in resumes and cover letters, what are the biggest reasons people are not given interviews, what stands out to them in a good or bad way, what makes an interview successful and much more. Participants learn the differences between public hiring processes and those of smaller for profit agencies. Participants learn how the decisions made are not personal, and what they can do to give themselves an edge.

Cover Letters and Thank You Notes - This workshop was added to address the overwhelming amount of questions and concerns expressed by jobseekers regarding this topic. During the workshop, attendees learn how to show their personality in their cover letter, how to get the employers attention, the difference between an emailed letter verses a mailed or hand delivered one, the common dos and don'ts and why each one is an important part of the job search process.

Are You LinkedIn? - The final workshop of the day addresses social networking through LinkedIn. Human resource professionals from local companies collaborated with Dakota County Workforce Services to design a workshop that explained how to design a profile that gets their attention or by 'standing out'. The presenters, also the human resource professionals mentioned above, use a live LinkedIn account to walk participants through building a strong profile. During this time the attendees are encouraged to ask questions and actively participate.

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

Job seekers gain advanced skills and motivation to propel their job search. Feedback from evaluations of CSE has indicated that they not only enjoy attending CSE all day, but find it very valuable, meaningful, and improves confidence for their job search. They are learning new approaches and techniques that can be immediately implemented. The new techniques are designed to be engaging and positive, to help remove the anger and depression many job seekers are going through that can hinder the job seeking process. The new skills do not supplant traditional job seeking approaches, but can be added to enhance what they were already doing. This makes it non-threatening, while the excitement of trying something new and different motivates the client to move forward. Many employment counselors refer their clients who have been job searching for long periods of time to attend CSE for the purpose of remotivating them with new approaches to the tediousness of job seeking. Finally, the interaction between hiring professionals and participants often opens up the job seekers' perspective on transferable skills. Many people leave realizing they had skills that transferred to other industries and were previously unaware of this, further motivating them to try new approaches.

Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

The direct interaction between hiring professionals and job seekers has proven to have some strong community development impacts. Hiring professionals come face to face with hundreds of job seekers and cannot help but realize the impact their job has on so many individuals. It has been our experience that companies are eager to assist in workforce development but do not know how to begin. CSE provides an opening for hiring professionals to volunteer an hour or so of time, become comfortable working with WSA staff, and further relationships are developed. Many continue on to apply for Incumbent Worker grants, sit on advisory committees, volunteer for Business of the Day or other events and even attend WIB meetings. Many of the employers have taken the time to contact staff after the event to say how moved they were or how eye-opening the experience was for them.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

Dakota-Scott Workforce Services is a collection of partners that make up our WSA. Staff members from the Burnsville, West St. Paul and Shakopee workforce centers collaborate to present CSE. Employment Counselors from DEED Job Service, Dakota County Workforce Services, HIRED and Scott County Employment and Training volunteer to review resumes and field questions during the hiring panel. In addition, local businesses send staff members to volunteer their time to sit on the hiring panel. While the majority of attendees appear to be universal customers and enrolled dislocated worker clients, the event has also gleaned referrals from MFIP and DWP employment counselors, Rehabilitation Services, Veterans' Services, Youth programs, Social Services and Child Support.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

Space from county departments has been donated, including the law enforcement center of Scott County and Dakota County conference rooms to defray costs. Participants receive packets of information that often includes upcoming event and resource information from area nonprofits. Services such as foreclosure assistance, financial resources, grief and loss events and more are included as many participants are universal customers not receiving ongoing resources and referrals from an employment counselor.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

CSE is easy to replicate once a format that fits the WSA is developed. It is important to get evaluations from as many participants as possible and review them immediately after each event so the presenters and program designers can continue quality improvement efforts with each event date. Listening to the attendees and taking their advice has been the basis of CSE's success.