



Employment Readiness Center

Building Workforce Capacity

ERS Intervention Strategies

Introduction: A major contributor to workplace success is an individual's belief system or state of mind. Increasing numbers of experts believe that people become successful in school and work, not because they are the smartest or best qualified, but because **they believe they will be successful**. They have a "success identity."

Each of the ERS Interventions is designed to help people acquire a success identity. They reflect the belief that individuals operate at three levels: the head, the heart and the "soul." While information and advice (head activities) can provide the **content** necessary to acquire a success identity, they do not always touch the "heart" (**feelings, emotions**), and "soul" (**values and meaning**), which play such an important role in workplace success. Historically, employment counseling has been viewed as a head activity, by both customers and workforce development professionals. The ERS Interventions require heart and soul participation.

Each of the ERS Interventions is presented as if the factor being addressed is a concern for a specific customer. E.g., "If you have a customer whose ERS profile indicates difficulty with this factor, the following interventions apply."

Although the interventions are designed for specific factors, they are connected and related. Strengthening one area can have a positive impact on others. For example, individuals who learn and "really understand" how the workplace operates are likely to have increased confidence in their ability to perform and will probably expect more positive outcomes. Because they are related, strategies suggested for one factor can easily be applied to others.

The twelve ERS factors are addressed in the following order:

1. Self-efficacy
2. Outcome expectancy
3. Social supports
4. Work history
5. Career decision-making
6. Skills enhancement
7. Job search
8. Job maintenance
9. Ongoing career management
10. Personal challenges
11. Environmental challenges
12. Systemic challenges

1. Self-Efficacy: Reflects an individual's sense of competence; a belief in one's ability to perform. It is an aspect of self-esteem.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals believe that they can perform and can "make things happen."

Low self-efficacy generates self-talk such as, "*I don't believe I can do it. I don't have what it takes. I will never be able to compete.*" There is not an assumption of success. A goal of intervention is to get people to say and believe, "*I can do this. I am as capable as the next person. If I can't do it now, I certainly can learn to do it.*"

2. Outcome Expectancy: Reflects a belief that one's efforts will result in a successful outcome; that good things will happen as a result of one's hard work.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals believe that a successful outcome is possible and that their efforts will produce it.

Some individuals have a difficult time visualizing their own success. They believe that in spite of their strengths and talents, "something" will prevent them from getting what they want. This "something" takes many forms: illness, the economy, discrimination, a felony conviction, favoritism, a misunderstanding, a disaster, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, etc. There can be a number of reasons for this low level of outcome expectancy.

- Past experiences, when things didn't work out, become generalized to the belief that "nothing will ever work out."
- A belief that one is somehow "unworthy," or "less than" and doesn't deserve to have things work out.
- Protecting one's self-esteem. ("*If I don't expect much, I won't be disappointed and can pretend I don't care.*")

3. Social Supports: Refers to one's network of supportive people and the ability to get assistance.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals develop a support system.

Many of us grew up in families/communities where support was automatic. Parents and other adults attended our school/club/athletic functions, asked us how things were going, and made it clear that they cared about us. We learned that there were people we could count on for support.

Not everyone had these kinds of experiences. For a variety of reasons, the adults in their lives were either unable or unwilling to provide the necessary support. These individuals

may have been abused, criticized, ignored or “marginalized” in some other way. They may not know how to seek support, or hesitate to do so because of negative consequences in the past. (Many people have been called dumb, stupid, or made to feel inadequate in other ways, merely for seeking help. There also may be cultural taboos about needing or requesting support.)

4. Work History: Refers to how well one has performed on jobs.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals convert their knowledge, skills and experiences into an appealing “work history.”

For many employers, a work history provides an indication that the applicant knows what it means to be a worker and will not cause a problem. It also may be an indication of stability, and of a person’s ability to apply knowledge and skills in a work setting. There is a difference between “having jobs” and having a work history. People who have not had many jobs can still create a work history presenting themselves as attractive job candidates. The task here is to make sure that a prospective employer views a job applicant as a desirable employee.

5. Career Decision Making: Refers to knowing the kind of work one wants to do, and having a goal and action plan for making it happen.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals identify the kind of work that will make them successful and happy, and develop an action plan for acquiring it.

Think of career decision making as “arranging and rearranging information into a choice of action.” There are two parts to this definition: The first requires one to acquire good information, and internalize and be comfortable with it, so it can be arranged in a variety of ways. The second requires the ability to arrange the information so a useful decision can be made.

In career decision making, the information to be arranged and rearranged is about self and about the workplace. The more a person knows about his/her strengths, skills, talents, interests and values, and about the organization and demands of the workplace, the better her/his chances for making a good career decision.

Many writers and observers differentiate between being **undecided** (a state, which is temporary) and being **indecisive** (a trait, which is deeper and more difficult to change). “Undecidedness” disappears when a person acquires sufficient information and has time to process it. The individual has a decision-making strategy, but just needs time to “sort things out and think them through” before deciding.

Indecisive people, on the other hand, have trouble making decisions regardless of the amount of information they get, or the length of time they work on it. There may be several reasons for this, each calling for a different response. When working with an

indecisive customer, a first goal is to help the person acquire a “decision-making identity.” This means continually using terms such as “decision” and “decide.”

6. Skills Enhancement: Refers to one’s possession of the knowledge and skills required to perform the work desired.

Purpose of Intervention: To help an individual acquire, identify and articulate the knowledge and skills required to perform in one’s chosen work.

“What do you know and what can you do?” When asked this question, many customers will talk about their years of experience or education without once mentioning knowledge or skills. Their inability to describe what they know and can do can prevent them from gaining satisfactory employment.

Some customers view “finding a job” as the end, rather than as a vehicle for additional learning and skill development. ERS Intervention Strategies help customers become knowledge- and skill-oriented.

7. Job Search: Reflects the degree to which an individual has the knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources needed to find employment.

Purpose of Intervention: To ensure that an individual has the personal attributes and information necessary to find employment.

Many people are unaware of the complexity of finding a job. They believe it is just a matter of filling out applications or sending out resumes, and waiting to be contacted. They have a difficult time viewing their job search from an employer’s perspective. ERS Intervention Strategies teach individuals to think like employers.

8. Job Maintenance: Refers to one’s ability to keep a job after finding it.

Purpose of Intervention: To ensure that individuals have the knowledge and skills to keep a job.

Many people are surprised when they are fired or laid off. They assumed things were going well because they didn’t hear complaints about their work. They knew how to find and work at a job, and thought maintaining it would be automatic once they were in the system. They didn’t understand the difference between getting a job and keeping it. The former is based on first impressions and the latter on the amount and quality of one’s work, and the ability to “fit” into the organization. Job maintenance depends on one’s **perceived** contribution or value to the organization.

Employers often ask, *“How much value does this individual add to our organization? Are we any better off at the end of the day because of this person’s work? Were we able to serve more people, produce more objects, generate more income, or attract more customers because of her/him?”* Workers who want to keep their jobs make sure the answers to these questions are always positive. They want to be viewed as an essential link in the value chain.

Seniority is closely related to job maintenance. People who don’t hold a job for long usually lack seniority, which means they are likely to be one of the first to be laid off, and the cycle is repeated.

9. Ongoing Career Management: Reflects the ability to learn, plan ahead and manage career change, even when encountering unexpected events.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals scan the environment, develop a sense of the future, anticipate unexpected events, and “bundle” their skills in creative ways, so they will never be caught off guard or stuck when the unexpected occurs.

Career management is a lifelong process. It requires accurate and current information, curiosity, higher level thinking skills, and the ability to see relationships.

10. Personal Challenges: Reflects events or stresses under the individual’s control, which can be changed or removed with the appropriate assistance and support.

Purpose of Intervention: To help customers uncover and tap into their natural resiliency.

We are all born resilient, but specific environmental factors must be in place if we are to maintain and use our natural resiliency.

11. Environmental Challenges: Refers to stresses from other people or things that may affect one’s ability to get to work (transportation), to be focused at work (noise, temperature), or to succeed at work (others not doing their part).

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals identify and utilize tactics and resources to help them overcome environmental challenges.

When faced with environmental challenges, many individuals become passive, believing, “There is nothing I can do about it.”

12. Systemic Challenges: Refers to stresses from physical and attitudinal barriers in one's community.

Purpose of Intervention: To help individuals overcome or work through systemic challenges that are preventing them from becoming employed.

Successful individuals find ways to “work around,” move through and flourish in “unfriendly” systems.

ERS Intervention strategies include specific questioning and communication skills to keep the ball in the customer's court and help individuals assume more responsibility for taking charge of their lives.

ERS Interventions are strengths-based activities designed to increase self-efficacy and resiliency. The focus is always on customers' past successes, on what they have going for them now, and on specific steps they can take to be successful in the future.

ERS Interventions:

- Draw from Appreciative Inquiry and Dependable Strengths.
- Emphasize the internal world (heart and soul) of the customer.
- Are sensitive to customer's vocabulary and use of words.
- Help customers visualize positive futures.
- Help customers feel competent, confident and connected.
- Focus on having reflective, meaningful conversations with customers.
- Help customers develop a futures orientation.
- Help customers learn to operate from a position of strength and power.
- Are designed to help customers develop worker, learner and success identities.

The three days of ERS Intervention Strategies training are divided evenly among the twelve factors measured by the ERS, with four factors being covered each day. All three days focus on helping case managers communicate differently with customers. The second and third days feature a considerable amount of practice and role playing, using the skills acquired the first day.