THE REHABILITATION COUNSELOR IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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Introduction:

Some years ago the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) funded a grant to the Virginia Department of Rehabilitation for the creation of a model program for the recruitment, training, and professional development of rehabilitation counselors. The results of the research were presented in a national conference in Chicago, Illinois in April 1980, under the sponsorship of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Region V, and the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program, Region V. The research was published in book form as *Shaping the Future: A Systems Approach to Human Resources Development in Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (1981).* I was the Director of the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP) for Region III at the time and lead author of the publication.

The model program was the “brain child” of Corbett Reedy, former Acting Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration to whom *Shaping the Future* is dedicated. Corbett Reedy long felt that there were significant gaps between the pre-employment education of rehabilitation providers in colleges and universities and the professional practice in state agencies. As a result, following employment, the state agencies, in his words, had to “grow their own”. Corbett Reedy envisioned the creation of a model program where higher education and state agencies would share information and create educational experiences more closely related to the actual professional practice. The results, he believed, would provide better educated and trained professionals for service to persons with disabilities.

*Shaping the Future* provided the structure for the administration of a human resources program within a rehabilitation agency, including the recruitment, training, and career development of rehabilitation counselors. What is known is that the research was used by several agencies in the restructuring of their human resources programs. *Shaping the Future* was, however, just a beginning, a blueprint, so to speak; what was also needed, it was felt, was practical research into current practices in the field, such as job placement, and teaching content in vocational areas specifically related to work and disability. *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* directly addresses the concern for education and training in work-related issues in a text; and, hopefully, provides a partial answer for narrowing the distance between academe and the pre-employment needs of the practicing professional. - Gerald K. Wells, Ph.D., CRC
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Case Management

The unifying theme for *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* comes from the definition of rehabilitation set forth by Paul Ellwood in an article written for the Journal of Rehabilitation in 1968. This definition is set forth in the Preface and excerpts from the definition are carried throughout the book.

Paul Ellwood defines rehabilitation as a profession of professions. From the very start, he says “rehabilitation has attempted to organize itself to circumvent professionalized categories and to create a unified and synthesized program of management designed to integrate the skills of many professions. The essential quality that differentiates the rehabilitation profession lies in the dynamics of its multi-disciplinary, total concept approach to client service. Indeed, this represents a dominant aspect of rehabilitation’s distinctive body of knowledge”

Case Management as used in this text is not to be confused with worker’s compensation case management where case managers, mainly rehabilitation nurses, serve the interests of insurance companies for injured workers during medical treatment in preparation to return to work. The main focus of *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* is what follows maximum medical improvement as the case moves from physical and/or mental restoration toward competitive work, providing, as Paul Ellwood says “a unified and synthesized program of management” (1) to assess the effects of disability upon a person’s ability to work, the diagnostics of rehabilitation, (2) to define work alternatives that lie within their residual functioning capacity (RFC) and (3) to guide clients toward work alternatives and in job placement.

In keeping with the familiar practice in rehabilitation of borrowing research findings from other occupations and professions, this text draws vocational issues of importance from the fields of applied counseling, personnel management, sociology, industrial psychology, business and economics, American economic history, labor research and labor statistics from the United States government, in particular the Department of Labor, and the popular field of job-search literature.
Motivation and Empowerment

When Wells & Associates was preparing a seminar called “Finding Jobs on Main Street” for counselors and supervisors for the state agency in Minnesota some years ago, our firm was asked to address the subjects of motivation and empowerment as part of the training. I had made presentations on this subject when I was Director of the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP) with the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services. These seminars were general and basically overviewed available research at the time. However, more recent research from the field of industrial psychology has provided new insight into the ways managers and their teams can work together toward achieving higher levels of performance. In Chapter 4: “Motivation and Empowerment” the authors describe how these discoveries translate directly into the field of rehabilitation.

With the 1982 publication of In Search of Excellence, Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. codified many of the more moderate ideas prevalent at the time and demonstrated in their research a balanced approach to managing workers. The original design of the McKinsey “Studies in Excellence” was an attempt to look at management practices in large corporations and determine the qualities which made them stand out in their industries, keeping them “alive, well, and innovative”. For The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice the authors have chosen six (6) key assumptions from this study and argue that these assumptions from the field of industrial psychology apply equally well to the counselor-client relationship in job placement. They are:

- Counselor Attitude toward Clients
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Building Commitment through Positive Reinforcement
- Action vs. Contemplation
- Self-Determination: Gaining Control over one’s destiny
- Risk vs. Self-Determination

The closing sections of Chapter 4 bring our research in motivation and empowerment up-to-date with recent findings from other studies, such as Daniel Goldman’s Emotional Intelligence which, for the most part, support the body of research found in earlier studies.
The People of Rehabilitation

Most Americans share certain values, such as those spelled out in our Constitution: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But there are vast differences in the way individuals and groups think about their place in society; and, in particular, their work and preparation for work.

Rehabilitation counselors are a primary link between employers – the people with the jobs – and our clientele – injured and disabled workers in need of help to return to work or to find a work alternative. The employers we meet are primarily entrepreneurs and managers who run private or public businesses. Most of the entrepreneurs and managers come from advantaged homes where education is a prerequisite within the family complex and upward mobility in a business or an occupation is a hoped for and expected goal. Career development usually means seminars, workshops, and college degrees to learn new knowledge that will lead to higher levels of achievement. They value ownership and wealth accumulation. These people make the everyday decisions which lead to success or failure in their chosen business or occupation.

On the other hand, our clientele in rehabilitation come mostly from the working classes where work skills are more important than formal education, where learning work skills and lateral movement within occupations are more likely than upward mobility, where training and vocational education leads to higher levels of work skills within an occupation, and where physical and often heavy work is usually the norm. They work for someone else and normally have little or no authority over business decisions related to their jobs.

Most of us who provide rehabilitation service to injured or disabled workers come from middle-class America. While we may share a common background and some of the values of both groups, generally, we have not been employers nor do we know the jobs, first-hand, done by our clientele. But to be effective in job placement we must learn how to relate to employers and acquire the knowledge about the jobs performed by our clientele. Most important, we must understand the people doing the jobs, and be able to relate effectively to both the workers and their employers. Chapters 2 & 3 provide a basic understanding of group behavior, particularly as it relates to the workplace, of the persons we serve. Research studies used in the presentation come from observers of our society in America over the past 100 years.
Client Function: The Diagnostics of Rehabilitation

Each rehabilitation counselor has to know how to determine a client’s vocational potential and be able to express their findings in recognized terminology. This determination of vocational potential represents a combination of a person’s residual functional capacity (RFC), the level at which a person can perform work activity given their physical, mental, and vocational limitations and abilities, and their employability: can the person perform work activity, and if so, what kinds of work can this person do given his/her residual functional capacity. Residual functional capacity and employability are the main diagnostic questions under consideration in job placement.

Whether or not the rehabilitation counselor is with a private company or a public agency, the primary professional activity undertaken is much the same: (1) determining a person’s residual functional capacity and (2) making an assessment of their employability. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 explore the subject of client function. Chapter 5 uses an actual case study, the case of Mary Gilmore, which sets forth the questions a counselor, serving as a vocational expert, normally need to address, and provides guidance for acquiring and understanding medical, psychological, and vocational information required to determine a client’s functional abilities and limitations.

Chapter 6 is about counselors serving as vocational experts in disability cases for the Social Security Administration. The chapter is written from the viewpoint of the rehabilitation counselor. But the Chapter serves also as an application of the principles of client function presented in Chapter 5 and extends the discussion of client function to the workplace. The role of the vocational rehabilitation counselor in disability hearings is to help an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) determine if a claimant seeking benefits can perform jobs they have done in the past or other, alternative jobs. The knowledge counselors need to serve as a vocational expert requires an understanding of client function, which takes us back to Chapter 5, and looks forward to the last four chapters of the book on the job placement which provide an understand of the American economy (Chapter 7), how jobs are found in the American economy (Chapter 8) and strategies counselors and their clients use to find work in the national and local economy (Chapters 9 & 10).
Job Placement

For the most part, job placement in rehabilitation has always been an individual activity and most of us have devised our own methods of placing persons in jobs with very little guidance and training. True! There are superstars in our business, but their ways of doing things have gone unrecorded for the most part. Moreover, there has been a scant amount of training in job placement, little uniformity in the practice and procedures for job placement, and virtually no writings to guide rehabilitation counselors on the techniques of placing persons with disabilities in appropriate jobs.

The final four chapters of *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* deal exclusively with the process involved in finding jobs for persons with disabilities. Chapter 7 presents a broad picture of the American job market as we look back over the last 40 or so years of gut-wrenching changes that have taken place in the American economy, changes that have moved this nation from a goods producing economy to a services economy. Chapter 7 also looks at the supply and demand projections for select jobs suited to the typical vocational profile for our clientele.

Chapter 8 through Chapter 10 looks at specific ideas and techniques for finding employment for our clients. Chapter 8 “The Job Search” is divided into three sections: an overview of the methods job-seekers use to conduct a job search in the United States, suggestions for developing community resources to uncover job leads in a community, and guidance from experts in the job-search field on how to design and use specific tools for the job search - the resume, the cover letter, and complementary correspondence.

Chapter 9 “The Selective Approach to Job Placement” and Chapter 10 “Networking for Jobs in the Hidden Job Market: A Client-Centered Approach” explore two well-documented methods used in rehabilitation to find jobs for persons with disabilities. Chapter 9 provides guidance for a counselor-centered job search and ways to present their client’s vocational assets and engage employers in conversations about jobs. Moreover, Chapter 9 explores ways counselors can expand the job search and identify jobs through the use of the Internet. The Chapter takes the reader through internet job searches identifying and analyzing web sites for both a large city and a small town. Chapter 10 introduces counselors to the “Job Search Organizer” and demonstrates ways for networking in the community highlighted by the use of social contacts in job placement.
The Job Search Organizer

The Job Search Organizer is a separate, companion booklet. Chapter 10 of *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* takes the rehabilitation counselor step-by-step through an interactive program and shows them ways to: (1) involve their clients in the activities of the job search, and (2) help clients develop a vocational profile, identify transferable work and other skills, approach employers in the job market, use networking to uncover job leads, as well as create and use tools of the job search - - the resume, the cover letter, and complementary correspondence.

What makes the ‘The Job Search Organizer” original and different from any other job-search material is that it is uniquely shaped to the needs of the field of rehabilitation. Before and during the job search, the Organizer becomes a management strategy and discussion document to help counselors identify important information, recognize and reinforce motivators and success behaviors, surface traits and client achievements important to employers, teach job-seeking skills, and manage the overall job-search process. The Job Search Organizer:

- Reinforces the role of the counselor as manager;
- Focuses a counselor’s time upon those who want to work and who are most likely to benefit most from rehabilitation services.
- Requires that clients become involved in their own job search
- Focuses the content of the counseling sessions to help counselors manage their time.
- Provides a networking plan for clients that surfaces job contacts and job leads

Most important, “The Job-Search Organizer” addresses the need for uniformity in job placement. Too often in the field of rehabilitation we throw away the accumulated experience from our past and begin the next day with a clean slate. While there are unique features to every job search, there is much common ground and known knowledge in how to look for and secure jobs for our clients. No rehabilitation counselor should have to begin a job search without the benefit of experience from those who have gone before. And no new rehabilitation counselor should have to become involved in a job search without professional guidance.
Additional Training Available

Wells & Associates offers training & consultation in the areas of its research & expertise. Our primary program of training “The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice” includes, topical areas, such as:

- Orientation and training in the effective use of the Job Search Organizer
- the diagnostics of rehabilitation,
- case management during the job search,
- the use of the internet for a job search,
- motivation and empowerment,
- job search techniques specifically suited for job placement for persons with disabilities
- networking strategies designed specifically for a job search for persons with disabilities.

This program is presented by one or more of the authors. Each participant receives a personal copy of *The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice* and the “Job Search Organizer”. The program may be presented on location for groups of 25 or more.

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Job Search Organizer
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An Interactive System for Job Placement of People with Disabilities

From the authors of
The Rehabilitation Counselor in Professional Practice