

Quality, Quantity, and Compassion BY Paul Clayton

One of the most difficult things that are going on in our industry is many states are cutting back on staff and because of the slow economy more people are coming into our offices and One Stops. Anyone can increase productivity and decrease quality and compassion but balancing them is a real hard job.

I believe that we are not going to put too much of a dent in a person's life if we just spend one hour a month working with them. However, you can have one trainer work in a group up to 30 people in a week working 30 hours that week. That is equal to 900 hours of one on one. Here would be my ideal setting for working in groups.

1. Work on getting 20-30 people into the One Stop for a class. This would take a lot of work though phone calls and lots of good selling techniques. Have the class start on a Tuesday at about 10:00 AM. Have refreshments etc. Provide day care.
2. Have someone dynamic start off with introductions and purpose. "We are here to help you get what you need and want."
3. Have a few former successful clients come back and speak about the human side of being out of work. Have one of every problem represented (dislocated worker, welfare etc.) either on video tape or in person. Have them relate to the customers by talking about their fears and how they got through them with your help and that today they are getting back on their feet. It would look like a version of a twelve step program.
4. Then I would have a group application if one was not already done. Paper work should be kept away from customers as much is possible.
5. Then I would get into the traditional job club but with the emphasis on overcoming fear and depression with some simple psychology.
6. After the week was over I would have them meet one on one with a staff member.

All of this may sound impossible but I believe it can be done with team work.

Responses to Quality Quantity and Compassion

In response, and other Project director's w/SCSEP may kill me due to the fact that many of our sites are maxed out on enrollment, and needing also to transition enrollees into the private sector for "EMPLOYMENT". So this is a suggestion for overworked Workforce Staff, utilize the Title V work training programs in your area. While they may not be able to help with the actual hands on training, they can and do provide support staff to answer phones, file; work w/customers in resource areas; copy, prepare, stuff and complete mass mailings; general clerical, which will free up staff to help in the training efforts. We work closely w/ the Workforce Centers (One Stops) here in Tarrant County, TX and our enrollees benefit from this arrangement, because they have access to the

resources there for job readiness and search, also benefit from the training, and hopefully will transition off the program into permanent employment, and that individual would be replaced ASAP with another enrollee who needs training or to just get back in the swing of going to work, upgrading skills, etc. So, remember there are 10 national sponsors of the Title V work training programs around the US as well as state sponsored programs that have Title V programs. Ellen TX

What you described is pretty much what happens here already, except for a few points. In order to serve the maximum clients with quality, we conduct regular workshops. We partner with the local DOL and do a 3 day workshop with those people who are registered with the DOL because of layoffs, etc. The general public is also allowed to sign up for these. The cutoff for size is determined by our available space and our experience with the shrink factor between those who sign up and those who actually show. Generally we cut off at 50 in order to get 25-30 people. We cover all aspects of job hunting, i.e. networking, organizing your job search, applications, resumes, cover letters, including the grief process and how that pertains to job loss.

We do a separate workshop for DSS clients, which runs to 5 days, because we have found that this group has different issues and needs more information such as how DSS operates, and the consequences of different choices within that system. We cover the same skills as in the DOL workshop, but also do a separate piece on job retention, since this is more of an issue with DSS clients. DSS workshops are also smaller--they range from 5-20 people to ensure quality is present and to give a little more one on one information.

From DSS workshop they are assigned to Job Club which meets weekly until they are employed. The other reason I believe this workshop is smaller is that no one comes on a volunteer basis and many rebel against being assigned to it. By doing the workshops, we are in a much better position to see more people and to identify those people that need further help. DSS clients are worked into a one on one rotation during Monday job club as we generally try to have 2 facilitators. DOL and general public clients can make appointments after the workshop is done to address further needs such as resume help, or to explore interest in training funds.

In order for all these things to happen, you need a staff that is willing to work together and trust one another that each need will get covered. We have a 10 person office including two account clerk typists and one counselor who is permanently based at DSS in another town. If our relatively small office can make this work as well as it does, a larger office should have a little more latitude. My co facilitator and I would be happy to answer any and all questions and would welcome a site visit to anyone who has further interest. shoag@co.livingston.ny.us for more information. Sheryl Hoag

Yes, our agency has been overwhelmed by applications. Unfortunately, we are under a hiring freeze, & our caseloads are over 650. We can only do so much. Our food stamp

error rate is going to cause us to be fined heavily by the Feds. It is also causing a lot of physical & mental stress on we, the workers. Any suggestions on how to handle this? My only hope is that the early retirement proposed by our governor is approved by our legislature. If it isn't, many, many workers will be pushed past their limit. MI

Things are going well here but your question is timely. We are facing the same hurdles other agencies are facing - more referrals and less support staff. One of the ways we are dealing with this problem is running group intakes and group (job club) sessions for all those appropriate for a group setting. Each Employment Specialist then meets with the individuals on their case loads to discuss JOB CLUB and employment barriers. So far this approach appears to be meeting with a lot of success. As you know, I've been facilitating Job Clubs for approximately 12 years now and I'm a big advocate for group activities and the synergy that flows from mutual support. With encouragement and support, it is amazing the obstacles that individual's are able to surmount.

For those of you who are not familiar with the "Job Club" model, let me tell you how we operate ours. The group meets daily (Monday - Friday) from 8:30am - 12:30pm for a total of 6 weeks. During that time, we not only cover the traditional issues like resume development, cover letters, interview techniques etc., but we have numerous guest speaker addressing the issues that our population traditionally have. By doing this, individuals not only get to tie into their respective Employment Specialist's experience but a whole plethora of people with differing areas of expertise. We are also a part of our areas Workforce Development System that provides people with additional supports and training programs as appropriate. Ben NY

Our office has not been hiring people for some time. We are 13 people short in our office and our state is talking lay-offs in order to balance the budget that the governor squandered. Our office is not doing anything about it because there is nothing to do about it. I already have over 500 cases and I can't imagine having to cover other people's caseload if they are laid off. Stressed out in Illinois

In the One Stop where I work, we are still covered pretty well with staff. However on days that we are not, group sessions are used and continue to be even on days staff is here. However, I liked the ideas you sent and our groups are not like that. I passed this on to several counselors to see what they thought and to use these ideas if appropriate. Thanks very much. June NY

My agency has been in a hiring freeze for the past five years. As a result, we are faced with seeing more customers with reduce staff. So how is this done? By teaching customers how to fish rather than doing the fishing for them. Prior to the freeze, each customer that came in search of a service, was assigned to an interviewer. Now that same customer is assigned to a PC. For the customers who need intense help, they are counselors who will work with the individual providing he/she really need help. Workshops are also provided for resume writing, interviewing, etc. As a result of a slow economy and the 9/11 incident, there have been an increase in job seekers. However, due

to staff shortage only customers referred to counseling are receiving individual attention. Quantity has definitely increase. Quality has decrease in terms of individual contact. Customers seen in counseling still receives quality service with compassion Earle NY

Yes, we are having an influx of people, our caseloads are growing and there is a hiring freeze. We are pretty stressed out about it, but we have help. We are so lucky to have a supervisor and a community resource specialist, who help us a great deal. I know some people in their positions would think it "beneath" them to actually go back and do "casework", but not ours. We also have a newly trained worker who has come on strong and assisted in numerous ways. They are great and it is really helping to lessen the anxiety the case managers feel. Not only are they willing to help us, they do it with the attitude of "I am here to help". So far they assist in our TANF Orientations and they even saw all of our Medicaid and food stamp reviews for us for the month of February, just so we can get more "caught up" and so we will feel less anxious about the overwhelming amount of work to do. I truly do thank God for them. Susan GA