

Instructor Resources

Breaking Barriers

A Modern Guide for Job Seekers
with Disabilities

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Instructor Resources

Breaking Barriers: A Modern Guide for Job Seekers with Disabilities

These Instructor Resources have been curated for the four-part ***Breaking Barriers: A Modern Guide for Job Seekers with Disabilities*** video series. Find ready-to-use discussion topics, activities, homework, and worksheets to enhance your program and ensure comprehension.

Discussion Topics

Encourage job seekers to truly reflect on their attitudes and beliefs associated with these discussion questions. Ask them to write down their thoughts, being honest. Reassure them that they can keep these reflections private, but explain that being honest with oneself is a helpful first step in moving forward. You may be your own hardest judge, but that is the only person who is judging you.

Personal & Financial Barriers

- What does the term “barrier” mean to you?
- What are examples of some barriers that you have faced? What are some techniques that you or others have used to overcome those barriers?
 - Lack of reliable transportation
 - Energy limits; Realistic work hours
 - Childcare issues
- What experiences or relationships have shaped your attitude about employment?
- How can you use these experiences and anecdotes to support your answers during an interview? Why are such examples so effective at highlighting your skills and experience?

Emotional & Physical Barriers

Some barriers that affect our overall well-being and job search are internal. Things like a positive attitude and outlook, controlling one’s emotions, and managing stress are equally important in becoming successful.

- How can your attitude help you or hurt you in a job search or in a job?
- Imagine you are an employer. What attitudes, actions, or behaviors would be just cause for instant dismissal? Why?
- What are some things you can do to improve or maintain a positive outlook?
- What are my energy limits? Will I need to take a break in the middle of the day?
- Do I require any additional support due to my disability? What should I be ready to ask for?

Career Decision Making & Planning Barriers

Career success is influenced by an employee's ability to provide value to an employer. Helping job seekers understand they can make it easier for themselves to find a job that is a good fit will help them succeed in the jobs they choose to pursue.

The following questions can begin conversations about the type of work a job seeker would enjoy.

- Think about your interests, hobbies, and skills. What do you do that makes you a good fit in certain industries? What does this tell you about your skills, knowledge, and talents?
- What would be the perfect job for you? Imagine you are in that role. What are you doing? Why would you like it so much?

Job Search Knowledge Barriers

Knowing and understanding the job market is almost as crucial as being able to perform the job itself. In a competitive market, a job seeker needs to learn how to position themselves to gain an interview first, and secondly, how to share with a hiring manager the skills and value they can add to an organization.

- Imagine you are sitting in a hiring manager's office. They ask this question, "What made you decide to pursue a career in this industry?"
 - What are some possible responses? Why would an employer ask this question?
- Think back to an interview you have had. What difficulties did you face? What made the interview a failure or success?

Education & Training Barriers

Developing one's skills and learning new methods is critical in today's workplace. This can be done through a variety of resources, ranging from further education to certifications to online workshops. Employees who make themselves more valuable to their employer will have more success remaining employed and gaining advancement and promotion.

- What skills do you want to learn?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- What is keeping you from exploring those new ideas or skills?
- Why is lifelong learning important?

Finding the Right Job for You

Your decision of whether or not to take a job should not depend solely on salary. There are many factors that go into deciding whether a position is right for you. Think about the things that you value most in your work.

- Which is more important: flexible hours or autonomy? The potential for advancement or the possibility for extra training and education?
- What would you consider to be your three most important requirements for a new job?

Navigating Difficult Questions

Everyone has at least one question that they don't want to answer. Think about what that question is for you and discuss different ways you could answer it.

- What would you do if an interviewer asked you a question that made you uncomfortable? How would you answer questions about your personal life or home life, for example? Why should that matter to an employer?
- Do you know what employers can and cannot ask you about your disability?
- What can you do if an employer asks something completely inappropriate or illegal?

Soft Skills

Employers stress the need for responsibility, honesty, adaptability, dependability, and a strong work ethic.

- Why are these skills so important?
- Which are more valuable: job-specific skills (like the ability to repair an engine) or good worker traits (honesty, responsibility, etc.)? Why?
- Are there some occupations where job-specific skills are more important?
- What hobbies, leisure activities, or personal responsibilities do you have?
- What skills do you have gained from those activities and responsibilities? How could you translate those skills to the world of work?

Activities

Making the Connection

Format: Individual/Pairs

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Resume, sample job openings, pen and paper

1. Print out a wide variety of job descriptions for open positions and put them in a hat. (You can easily find them online at sites like Indeed.) Have each participant draw a job at random or draw two and then pick one to work with.
2. Participants should then use their resume as well as their own understanding of their skill set to think of three reasons why they would be good at doing the job they chose. These reasons should be directly tied to their best skills.

Story Time

Format: Group/Pairs

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: None

1. As a group, make a list of all the possible ways an interviewer may finish this request: Tell me about a time when....
2. Break participants into teams of two and have each person take a turn being the interviewer and the job seeker. Role-play responding with anecdotes. Give everyone the chance to answer at least two different versions of “Tell me about a time when....”
3. When everyone has had a chance to practice, come back together as a whole group and discuss strategies for answering questions of this nature. What kinds of stories/examples work best? How do you incorporate your skills? How do you keep the story concise? How do you tie it back to the job you are applying for?

Dealing with Tough Personal Questions

Format: Small group

Time: 30–35 minutes

Materials: Timer, pen, paper

1. Organize the class into groups of three.
2. Give each group these statements on a piece of paper:
 - a. You were fired from your last job because you were often absent due to an ongoing family illness. You have since asked for help from a relative and should not have to spend as much time helping out at home.
 - b. You stayed at home to raise kids, resulting in an eight-year gap in your work history. Now that your kids are both in school, you are just now coming back to the workforce.
 - c. You have lived in seven cities in the last three years because your spouse’s job has required that you make frequent and unexpected moves

3. Ask students to take turns role-playing an employer and job candidate in an interview (5 minutes per role-play). Have each employer ask about the candidate's personal life with one of the three scenarios in mind. Candidates cannot lie and cannot refuse to answer a question.
4. The third member of the group should keep a list of techniques used to honestly address a personal situation in a positive way. Have students share with each other the most successful and least successful approach they observed.

Prove It!

Format: Individual, pairs

Time: 20–30 minutes

Materials: Index cards, pen

1. Write the following workplace situations on the board:
 - a. Dealing with an angry customer
 - b. Having to succeed within a tight budget or time constraints
 - c. Overcoming a particularly difficult obstacle to finish a task
 - d. Taking initiative to solve a problem at work
 - e. Taking a leadership role in a group project
 - f. Recovering from a costly mistake
 - g. Dealing with a coworker conflict
 - h. Creating something that leads to increased profit or productivity
2. Have each student pick two or three of these situations and think of examples of when they have succeeded in each. They should use the index cards to write down specific details and list the skills they used to succeed.
3. Break students into pairs and have them role-play an interview where the employer asks the candidate to prove he or she could be successful in one of the situations the candidate chose.
4. When everyone has finished, come back as a class and talk about all the ways students can “prove” that they have the skills and experience to succeed on the job.

Interview Checklist

Format: Small group to large group

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

1. Organize the class into small groups of three or four and have them generate a checklist of everything they need to remember to do when getting ready for an interview. This should include any item related to their personal appearance and preparation that can be handled the morning of or night before. Examples include: brush teeth, iron clothes, pack briefcase, and put on deodorant. Lists do not have to be gender or workplace specific.
2. Come back together as a whole class and discuss your lists. Create a master checklist on a board or overhead for everyone to copy down. Alternatively, you can collect the lists and create your own master list to print out and give to participants during the next meeting. Advise them to use this list before every job interview.

Best and Worst Impressions

Format: Small group role-play

Time: 20-30 minutes

Materials: List of defining personal characteristics

1. Write the following attributes/characteristics on index cards or scraps of paper: lazy, disinterested, nervous, disrespectful, over-enthusiastic, and shy. Break class into groups of 2-5. Give one characteristic to each participant, making sure that members of a group each get a different characteristic. Participants should keep their selection secret from the other members of their group.
2. Participants should take turns role-playing the first sixty seconds of a job interview (taking turns as job seeker and interviewer). The job seeker should try to give the impression exemplified by the characteristic written on their card. After sixty seconds, whoever acted as the role of the interviewer should try to guess what characteristic the job seeker was expressing.
3. When everyone has had a chance to play the role of job seeker, come back together as a large group and discuss what participants noticed. What behaviors or mannerisms stood out as giving a negative first impression? Make a list of such behaviors to avoid.
4. Finally, ask for two volunteers who would like to come up and role-play a positive first impression with the characteristics confident and professional. Alternatively you can ask a participant to be the interviewer and play the role of the job seeker yourself. Discuss the differences between the positive and negative impressions.

From Weak to Strong

Format: Individual

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: Pen, paper

1. Ask each person to write down two or three skills that he or she could improve in order to be more successful at work. Give examples such as interpersonal skills, writing, math, computer skills, or time management.
2. Ask students to write down five actions they could take to improve in each skill area (for example, take classes, role-play with friends, read a book, volunteer, attend a workshop, ask a coworker for assistance, practice on their own, etc.).
3. Ask a few volunteers to read their action list and share ideas with each other.

Soft Skills Inventory

Format: Individual

Time: 15–20 minutes

Materials: Paper, pen

1. Explain what a soft skill is (skills that are not job specific). List the following soft skills on the board or overhead:
 - a. gets along with others
 - b. dependable
 - c. team player
 - d. willing to learn
 - e. reliable
 - f. problem solver
 - g. good communicator
 - h. creative
 - i. computer savvy
2. As a group, expand this list so that there are at least 15 soft skills that everyone agrees are important for most workers to have.
3. Have students write these skills on a sheet of paper and then rank them from 1 to 15 based on how important they are to employers.
4. Now ask students to go through each skill and rank themselves, on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest), at how good they are at each. Encourage students to be honest.
5. When all students have finished, ask them to compare their rankings of important skills to their own skill levels. Do they excel at the skills that they deem most valuable? If not, what steps can they take to improve those skills? Feel free to discuss these results as a whole class.

Homework

Wants vs. Needs

Managing one's money and keeping expenses in line with an income is an important responsibility. Having "financial wealth" does not mean having a lot of money. It means that someone is living within their means; they have enough money to pay for living and day-to-day expenses.

Use the following introduction to frame this Wants-vs-Needs activity to help learners reflect on how they might make better choices regarding how they spend their money. After job seekers respond to the prompts below, you may invite a discussion about designations they have made, and how they might rethink those choices.

Wants vs. Needs

It's easy to spend money. What's not as easy is spending money-wisely. One way to help you spend wisely is to separate your needs from your wants, and spend money primarily on your needs.

- **Wants** are nice to have but are not essential: eating out, going to concerts, or getting the newest cell phone and ring tones.
- **Needs** are the essentials, the basics of life that you must have to survive: food, housing, and clothing. Some expenses that relate to your job also are needs, such as transportation to and from work, and healthcare coverage to keep you well enough to go to work.

Think about what you have spent money on in the last month. On a piece of paper, try to categorize each spent item as a want or a need, and indicate the amount spent on that item.

Now, think about how you are planning to spend money in the near future. Try to categorize each item as either a want or a need.

Follow-up

After the lists are completed, ask them to review the items that were marked as needs and wants. Are there some items marked as needs that really are wants? Ask the job seekers to consider if spend can be reduced by reclassifying a need as a want? When money is tight, how might the spend be prioritized?

Creating Focus

On a piece of paper, write down what barriers exist between you and a successful work life. Look at your list. Circle three barriers that feel the most overwhelming.

Follow-up

Consider these questions.

- What resources do you have available to remove these?
- What is the first step for overcoming these?
- Who would you put in your support system to help you achieve this?

Skill Discovery

Make a list of three categories—your skills (things you have background/experience or are good at), your hobbies/interests (things you enjoy in your free time), and preferred work environment (would you prefer being outside, in an office, or warehouse/factory? Would you enjoy working alongside others or by yourself?).

Once you have a list, circle your top two answers in each category.

Next, brainstorm occupations/industries that might need someone with those skills and interests. Don't limit yourself, but be honest.

Follow-up

Discuss what experience/training/education might you need to start toward that career path. Research community resources, including your local workforce office, to check for assistance opportunities.

Hello, My Name Is

Develop your 15-second introduction. What would you say if you had an opportunity to introduce yourself to a company's hiring manager? Ideally, your 15 second intro would include:

- Your name at the beginning
- The position/type of work you are seeking (“I’m interested in a position in your logistics/shipping and receiving area.”)
- Your background and skills
- Anything else that might interest them or set you apart
- Your name

Practice this. You don't want it to sound too rehearsed or scripted, but want to be able to market your skills and abilities.

Employer Research

Make a list of employers who match your skill set and interests.

Follow-up

Find out if job openings are available and research the company's website and social presence to understand their mission and culture better.

Build Your Resume

A resume is your personal business card for employers to view. It is an important tool, no matter the position. Create your own resume and include the following information:

- Your contact information
- Job objective or the type of position or work you are seeking
- Work experience (include volunteer experience or non-paid assignments)
- Education/specialized training you have completed or certifications you have received

What Employees Want

What do employees really want from their jobs? Ask participants to mark how important they think each motivational item is to them as an employee on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the most important. After compiling the participants' answers, compare them to the following statistics. How do their rankings compare to the source's employee rankings? How do the source's employer rankings relate to the source's employee rankings?

Motivational Item	Employers	Employees
Loyalty to workers	6	3
Job security	5	1
Promotional opportunities	3	2
Good wages	1	5
Help with personal problems	10	10
Feeling "in" on things	7	8
Tactful discipline	9	9
Interesting work	2	4
Good working conditions	4	6
Full appreciation for work done	8	7

Source: *HR News*, published by the Society of Human Resource Management, October 10, 2020. Data used to create this table was compiled from survey responses from 200 companies across the United States.

Goal Setting

Think about your employment and career goals. How would you further your own education or gain additional training for a desired job or position? Research what additional education/training you would need. Then write down the necessary steps. What community funding might be available to assist (Community/Junior College, workforce office, workshops, internships/apprenticeships)?

Worksheets

Barriers Worksheet

In the chart below, check any barriers that apply to you. Then use middle column to rank the barriers you checked from most to least critical (with 1 being most critical). Finally, use the last column to brainstorm one possible solution for overcoming each barrier.

Barrier	Rank	Suggestions for Overcoming
I don't have reliable transportation.		
I need a place to live.		
I don't have adequate childcare.		
I don't know government agencies that can help.		
I don't have enough money to live on.		
I don't know how to manage my money.		
I need assistance with health problems.		
I have problems controlling my anger.		
I feel depressed most of the time.		
I have low self-esteem.		
I lack the energy and drive to find a job.		
I have a substance abuse problem.		
I am too stressed to find a job.		
I lack a sense of purpose or direction.		
I don't have any goals.		
I don't know enough about the jobs available.		
I don't know how to apply my interests to jobs.		
I don't know how to make career decisions.		
I don't know how to find job leads.		
I don't know how to write a good resume.		
I don't know how to interview for a job.		
I don't see the point in getting more education.		
I can't afford to go back to school.		
I don't have a plan for my education or my future.		

Goal Setting Worksheet

In the spaces below, write down what you would like to accomplish in the time frame given. Be sure your goals are realistic but positive.

Today's Goals

Tomorrow's Goals

This Week's Goals

This Month's Goals

This Year's Goals

Five-Year Goals

Budget Worksheet

Use the following worksheet to identify how much money you spent last month. Then, use that month's information to help you plan next month's budget.

Month: _____

Year: _____

Income

Paychecks \$ _____

Other Income (tax refunds, child support, cash jobs) \$ _____

Total Monthly Income

Expenses \$ _____

Rent/Mortgage \$ _____

Utilities \$ _____

Internet, cable, phones \$ _____

Other housing expenses (insurance, taxes) \$ _____

Groceries and household supplies \$ _____

Dining out/entertainment \$ _____

Car payment \$ _____

Car insurance \$ _____

Car expenses (gas, oil changes, maintenance) \$ _____

Other transportation expenses (tolls, cabs/ride sharing/bus fees) \$ _____

Medicine \$ _____

Health Insurance \$ _____

Other health expenses (doctor's appointments, eyeglasses) \$ _____

Childcare/child support \$ _____

Clothing \$ _____

Credit card payment \$ _____

Bank fees/financial fees \$ _____

Prepaid cards/phone cards \$ _____

Educational expenses (school supplies, student loans) \$ _____

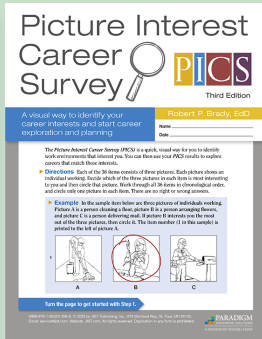
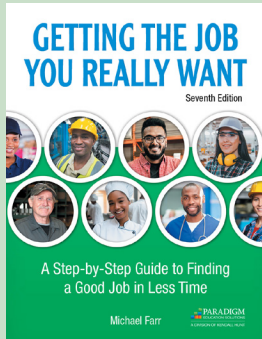
Other expenses this month \$ _____

Total Monthly Expenses

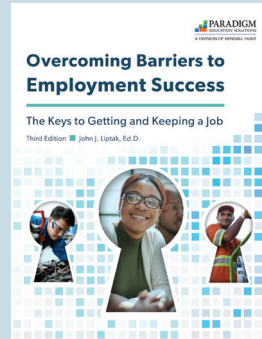
\$ _____ (Income) — \$ _____ (Expenses) = \$ _____

Maybe your income is more than your expenses. You have money left to save or spend. Maybe your expenses are more than your income. Look at your budget closely to find expenses that you may possibly be able to reduce or cut out.

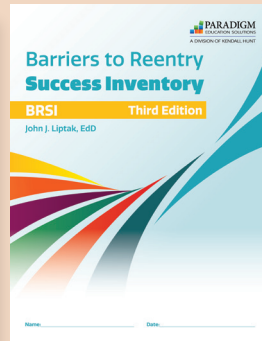
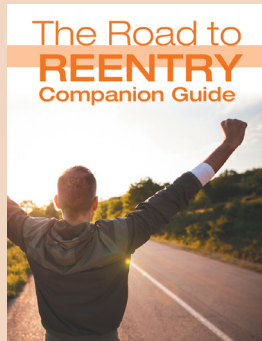
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