

Building Business-Friendly Community Rehabilitation Partnerships - Transcript

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Power Point Presentation: www.ed.uiuc.edu/illinoisrcep/activities/teleconf.htm

Lynda Leach, Facilitator: It is my pleasure to introduce Rich Luecking who is the author of a new book, *Working Relationships: Creating Career Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities through Employer Partnerships* with Ellen Fabian and George Tilson. Rich is with TransCen, in Rockville, MD. Also presenting with Rich will be Keith Clark who comes from Chesterfield Employment Services, Richmond, VA. Today we are very happy to have both of them on to talk about working with employers to create good relationships. With that I am going to let you get started Rich.

Rich Luecking: Thanks Lynda. Hello everybody. It is my pleasure to be with you. I have mid-western roots even though my organization is based in Rockville, MD. I spent a considerable amount of my youth in Illinois and a considerable amount of my adulthood in Wisconsin so I am happy to join folks from Region V. Lynda didn't have to twist my arm too hard to do this session. Thanks for inviting me, Lynda. Also I want to thank Keith Clark for joining me in this presentation today. He will be providing perspectives of a CRP that has worked with us in this business partnership process. Once I go through my initial presentation I will have Keith give some of his perspectives.

Let me give you a little bit of background of my organization so you know how we decided to pursue this kind of activity. My organization, TransCen, is based in Maryland, but we also have an operation in California. In both states we are a certified community rehabilitation program by the state vocational rehabilitation agency. So we have vendor contracts with vocational rehabilitation in both states, and we have vendor contracts with developmental disability funders as well. These contracts stipulate that we are to help people become employed. We have taken that seriously enough that since 1989 over 6500 individuals served by my organization have become employed.

We operate our organization with two central beliefs which you will hear me repeat at various times throughout today's presentation. The first belief is one of the most important ones for all of us in this field to embrace: regardless of disability, regardless of economic circumstances, regardless of an individual's education level, etc., we believe that there is a job for everybody who wants one. In other words,

regardless of the degree of accommodations a person might require, the disability label they might have, or anything else in their lives, there is a job for everyone who wants it. That is the starting place.

The second belief we have, and the topic of today's presentation, is that we can only do this if we also regard employers as important customers of CRPs. Today's presentation will reflect my organization's experience and that of CRPs like Keith's that we have helped around the country to improve their relationships with employers.

A little bit about me. I told you that I have some Illinois roots. In fact, my very first job out of college as an undergraduate was with Illinois Vocational Rehabilitation. I like to tell this story because it is kind of important to where we are today. I started in this field quite a long time ago and just to give you an idea of how long ago that was I was a vocational rehabilitation counselor before the Americans with Disabilities Act which was passed in 1990. I was a rehabilitation counselor before the Education for all Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975 and I actually was a rehabilitation counselor before the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was passed. Does that date me or what? Anyway, I was in the field when literally it was legal for employers to discriminate against people with disabilities and say, "We won't hire you because you have a disability."

It was also legal for school systems to say to students who had disabilities, "We don't have to educate you because you are too disabled." Fortunately, as all of you know things have changed considerably since then. The interesting thing is I was working in rural southern Illinois. For people who are familiar with that part of Illinois the economy is primarily coal mining and farming. When I was there during the early 1970's there was a huge recession in the area and the unemployment rate was 17%.

The economy was bad and so finding jobs for people who were represented by vocational rehabilitation wasn't the easiest thing. In fact, more ironic than that is, is that the vocational rehabilitation office where I started working assigned me to be a job developer to help the folks on the various case loads to get jobs. The reason they gave it to me is because I was the newest person there and nobody liked job development. They apparently thought that they might as well give this responsibility to somebody who was green and didn't know the difference.

In retrospect, looking back at it 30 plus years later, it is interesting that I would have been considered to be assigned to a job that was very low on the level of importance on people's minds. Actually I have come to believe now that job development and talking to employers is probably the most important part of our job. In fact, if our job is to help people get jobs, then we should be talking to those people who provide the jobs – the employers.

Things have changed a lot, but I have to tell you this quick story. I wasn't so wise when I started. They asked me to do job development and here I was working in a community with a high unemployment rate. It was before a lot of these legislative protections against discrimination and we didn't have services like supported employment and assistive technology and so on and so forth. So you might be wondering how did I do my job under those circumstances? If you are looking at the first slide you will see my technique was "beg, place and pray." I kind of joke about that, but in the old days we would beg employers, "Would you please consider hiring people with disabilities?" Actually, in those days we used different language. We called the people we represented the "handicapped." Fortunately, those

terminologies have changed. If the employer was benevolent enough to consider hiring the person we represented we then would place them and then pray that the placement would last up to 90 days so we could get a rehabilitation closure out of it. Now it is 60 days - things have improved.

Anyway, I wasn't very successful at that technique. I think one of the things that was clear with that kind of approach - and what is still often clear today in a lot of approaches I see in the field of people trying to relate to employers - is that we still tend to beg employers. We try hard to convince employers to hire people with disabilities. We have found however that this is really not the best approach. In fact, there is no employer in business, or very few employers in business anyway, whose job it is to hire people with disabilities.

It behooves us who are in this work to figure out better ways to connect with employers. The next slide I have illustrates how we should be thinking about this. It's an old marketing maxim that says "it is more effective to find out what customers need and want and match it to what you have to offer than it is to get them to buy what you are selling." In other words, by applying that maxim to our work, it is more effective to go out to employers and find out what it is they do and how they do it and what kinds of human resource needs they have than it is to go out there and try to convince them to hire people with disabilities. That is not what they want.

We are going to take that idea and we are going to look at things through the eyes of employers this afternoon and talk about things that organizations, as operational entities, can do to make themselves more appealing to employers so that employers will want to partner with them.

I have four purposes for today's presentation. The first is I want you to gauge your level of business friendliness. How to do that is with the other document that Lynda referred to at the beginning called *How Business Friendly are You?* You don't have to fill that out now. You don't have to fill it out at all if you don't want to. But I strongly encourage you, if you haven't already, to go through that checklist and find out how your organization stacks up as a business-friendly entity and you as a professional in this field stack up as a business-friendly professional. My belief is that if there is any item on that list that you can't check then you can use some re-tooling on how to better approach employers and businesses. That is the first purpose of this session. It is something that you can pursue separate from this phone call because we only have a short period of time today.

The second purpose is to review important employer perspectives. My organization and my colleagues and I have done a lot of research and focus groups through contact with employers. I think we have a pretty good handle on how they see us and how they see things. I am going to share that with you and show how that relates to presenting ourselves to employers.

The third purpose is to examine how organizations pursue their work. In other words, in the context of CRPs, how CRPs can be organized in ways that might make them more attractive to business. I will be more specific when I get to that part of the presentation.

And finally, and this is kind of the crux of the presentation, I am going to review a process that we have used at my organization and we have used with organizations like Keith Clark's in Richmond, VA. In your Region, if any of you are familiar with Sheboygan Rehabilitation Center in Sheboygan they have

been through this process. Those of you who know Craig McFadden there you might ask him about his organization's experience with this process. Anyway, I am going to review a process that these organizations have used to restructure how they approach employers and how they organize themselves to be more effective in helping people get jobs. If that is what you are here to listen to and that matches what you are interested in today, then you have tuned in to the right presentation and again I am happy to be here. I again thank Lynda and the University of Illinois for inviting me. Let's jump into this whole thing.

I think there is a lot of good news since I started in the field 30 plus years ago and most of that good news is associated with the fact that we have an expanding array of strategies and workplace supports to help people get jobs. In fact people who I would have closed on my caseload 30 years ago are now thriving and doing good work because we have realized that disabilities should not be an impediment for employment if we approach it the right way. The bad news, however, and the reason why we have gotten into this work is that employment rates remain unacceptably low.

It bothers me that after all these years every person who is referred to vocational rehabilitation, and referred from vocational rehabilitation agencies to one of their vendors, is not getting a job. There is no reason why that can't happen if we were better at this. I asked myself and you might ask yourself, "Is the reason for this low unemployment because people with disabilities are unprepared for workplaces?" I think many people would argue that people with disabilities need to develop their work-seeking skills, need to have technical skills that might be marketable to an employer. That might be a reason in some cases, but I think many of us have experiences that tell us that the experience and skill levels aren't necessarily an impediment to work.

Or, are the reasons for low unemployment because workplaces aren't ready for people with disabilities? In other words, is it because employers don't have a very positive attitude about hiring people with disabilities, or they don't understand how to accommodate people with disabilities, or workplaces just aren't accessible to certain people with disabilities? That may be true in many cases and it probably is in more cases than we would like. But I still think that that is not necessarily the primary reason why people with disabilities aren't getting the jobs.

So you might ask yourself, "Is the reason for low unemployment because rehabilitation processes and protocols are unfriendly to employers in the workplace?" We might ask ourselves, "Is what we do, how we approach employers, how we relate to them, is how we operate our work in rehabilitation so foreign to employers that it may really impede our ability to establish good relationships with employers?" I would postulate, and my experience bears this out, that we are not sophisticated yet as a whole field in partnering with employers, in spite of the fact that there are pockets of excellence all around the country, including in places like Keith's.

We have designed ways of interacting with employers that are very friendly to them, where employers want to work with us, and employers actually come to us and say, "Do you have people to fill the jobs that we have?" As opposed to our going to employers and saying, "Would you please consider hiring a person with a disability?" To be effective partners with business is not sufficient for community rehabilitation programs to "do good," that is, help people with disabilities find jobs because it is a noble thing to do. To really make the work that we do successful, CRPs and their staff must "be good." They

must be professional. They must provide quality service and in the eyes of employer customers. They have to be seen as professional and competent and able to provide quality service.

Otherwise, it is nothing more than a charity kind of relationship. If that is what we want we can go back to the “hire the handicap” campaign of 30 years ago and that is as far as we are going to get. We really have to move ourselves in the direction that in the employer’s mind we have operational procedures, we have staff, we have ways of interacting with business that cause employers to see us as helping and benefiting their enterprises.

Here are the three basic things that we see that employers want. 1. They might have a particular work force need of the company. In other words, they might have a position or a task in their organization that needs to be filled and competently performed. 2. They might want to address a need that is industry wide. In other words, they might want to work with organizations that will help them prepare people to be able to do work in a particular industry, such as retail, health care, etc. Or, 3. they might want to work with programs that they perceive are meeting a community- wide need and that makes the community a good place to do business. There are still a few employers who are motivated by hiring people with disabilities because they see it as a community need because they don’t want to see people unemployed and they want to see people in their communities productive. If they do it for that reason, there is nothing wrong with that. They still see themselves as getting something out of it.

Here’s what employers say they want:

- Quality service from workforce programs or CRPs. Right now they get various degrees of quality from CRPs around the country. Some of you may be familiar with organizations in your area that have more and less quality in the service they provide. But employers want consistent quality service.
- They need convenient access. They don’t want it to be hard for them to do business with rehabilitation organizations. They don’t want to be burdened with all kinds of processes and rules and regulations and jargons that are unfamiliar to them or that are inconvenient.
- They also need products and services that support employees in the workplace. In other words, organizations that can help them identify ways to make their employees productive. In our case, for the employees they hire who we represent, how to help them be productive by virtue of accommodations an support.

The problem is that what employers often get is programs that are defined by a job seeker category coming to talk to them. In other words, it might be an organization that represents a certain segment of the disability population, for example, people with developmental disabilities, or mental illness, or mobility impairments, or sensory impairments. Employers are often approached by organizations who define themselves by the disability of the people they serve. This might make sense from our end, but it doesn’t make sense from a business end. Employers often don’t know what these disabilities are and what they mean. It doesn’t make sense to them.

They also get programs that are defined by geography that only serve a certain geographic area and that could be a problem for employers who operate on a regional basis. They also often on the one hand get programs that will follow through and provide excellent services, and on the other hand, and some who will simply dump a job seeker in their laps and hope it works out. In the end many employers who we

have talked to and deal with have been very confused and frustrated by our field. That is not such a good thing if our work is to develop partnerships with them.

Much of our work over the recent years has been to help job developers, employment specialists, and rehabilitation counselors become better at working with employers. This is what our book is all about. How can we help CRP organizations become organized in a better fashion so that employers see the organizations and the professionals who are employed by those organizations as credible business partners? What I am going to do walk you through a process that we have used with organizations like Keith's to help these organizations move from being a human-service organization that does charitable things to organizations that become viewed by businesses as organizations that can help business get their work done.

We modeled our retooling process from "organizational development" field. The definition of organizational development is provided in the slides. I am not going to spend a lot of time talking about that definition but in order to help organizations retool themselves they have to go through a series of planned activities by which organizations look at how they manage the individuals who work there, how these individuals are deployed in their work, and how their work can be strengthened and reinforced in such a way that the whole organization becomes better at what it does.

We have applied this concept, which is very prominent in the business world, to the operation of community rehabilitation programs. You can see on the slide that the end result should be output of quality services. That is, the quality that employers are looking for, and outcomes for which the CRPs should be looking to achieve. So, the first question that you might ask is: If your organizations are being paid by vocational rehabilitation or by developmental disability services to help people find jobs, are you getting them jobs or not?

Then what you might ask is how these outcomes are influenced by what we call internal quality areas of the organization. Does the organization have clear job descriptions for the people who work there? In other words, for employment specialists, job developers, vocational rehabilitation counselors etc., are their jobs designed in such a way that they actually meet the needs of both job seekers and businesses in their community? Are staff selected and supervised in such a way that they can go about their business working with employers and do it well? These are all internal quality areas that an organization has to look at before it can really restructure itself and meet the needs of employers. Are there staff role clarifications that make sense and work for employers?

This is born out in organizations in lots of different ways. Some CRPs have people who are designated as job developers and that is the only thing they do. They go out and talk to employers and then come back to their other colleagues and share what they have learned through contacts with employers and hopefully make some kind of match. Some organizations have employees who do job development and job support and job counseling or a mix of all of those. The important question to answer is: Is it clear to people what their roles are so that everyone knows exactly what they have to do in order to address employer's needs and therefore help people with disabilities find jobs?

Finally, are there ways supervisory people within the organization can communicate and manage and reinforce the activities of the staff so that they are pursuing customer service activities with employers?

Look again at the slide for what we call the “Links in the Service Outcome Chain.” The outcomes that an organization achieves are directly based on the chain of events that start with the internal service quality of an organization. If all of these internal service quality activities are addressed well in an organization then employees are going to be happy with their jobs and they are going to stay in their jobs a lot longer.

Now I don’t think it is any news to any of you folks that one of the things that plague CRPs around the country is staff turnover. One of the things we have found is that if all of these internal quality aspects are addressed employees are much happier and they stick around a lot longer. The result is that the customers who they are serving, and in our case we are seeing employers as customers, are getting the results that they want. In other words, they are hiring people who are going to help their enterprise. This leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty. It leads to employers who are going to want to continue to do business with the organization, who are going to provide testimony to other employers about how good your organization is. Most importantly, it is going to lead to more and more jobs, that is, better outcomes for the people you serve. In many cases, I have seen organizations become so much better at getting outcomes for their job seekers and employer customers by addressing internal organization quality. They are getting more and more referrals from vocational rehabilitation and there is a growth in their funding base as a result. Those are the optimal outcomes.

Factors that affect internal quality and need to be addressed include not only staff turnover, but also regulation compliance. Some of you are probably CARF accredited or have some sort of accreditation or certification process that you have to go through in order to get funding from vocational rehabilitation. You have various reporting requirements and you have service hours that might not match employer’s needs. Staff training is often an issue within organizations because they don’t have the capability or the time or the resources to thoroughly and properly train employees who are going to go out and interact with employers.

We have developed a six-step process to retool how CRPs go about improving relationships with employers. I will go through it quickly and then I will ask Keith to expand. I want to reserve about 15 minutes for questions and answers. Hopefully, you are all with me so far. I can’t see any of you so I am assuming that you are all nodding your heads. If you have questions please hang on to them because I will be happy to address them when we finish getting through this. I want to make sure that in this short period we have a chance to cover all the information.

The six steps are described in our book in considerable detail. The first step is basically finding out how well you are doing. It is performance analysis. How are we doing? Are we getting people jobs is the basic question. Do we have lots of employers who want to work with us? Do employers in our community know who we are? If the answers to any of those are “no” then you have some work to do. If the answers to those are “a few,” you still have some work to do. Unless you are able to say every employer in our community knows who you are, and unless job seekers who are referred to our organization always get jobs that they want or appreciate, then there is always room for improvement. First, you say, “How we are doing and what are we doing?” I am hoping that some of you are thinking, “Gee, let’s see, over the last month, how many people did we help get jobs? Are we struggling with that or not?” If you are saying “yes,” and I suspect most of you are to some degree or another, then you are taking the first step in doing the performance analysis.

The next step is to ask why is this happening, why are we getting people jobs, or why aren't we, why are employers wanting to work with us or not? Maybe there is some way of identifying where we need to do some work. For example, in one organization one of the first things they pointed out was the reason why they weren't getting people jobs was because nobody in the organization had ever been trained in quality job development techniques. People had just been hired to do it. Another problem that organizations often have identified is staff turnover. They don't get trained fast enough to be able to be effective with the people they are assigned. There are all kinds of other reasons. This step is to decide why is it that we are not getting the outcomes we want.

The third step then is to develop an intervention. What can we do about it? This is where an action plan is developed. Organizations like Keith's and others have actually developed specific strategies that guide them to improve their outcomes. We have a very specific process for identifying goals for the organization, specific activities that they are going to undertake to pursue those goals, individuals who are assigned to take the lead in those particular activities, and deadlines by which they those activities are to be completed. This is essentially a roadmap of what organizations are going to do to be better at interacting with employers. In our book there are a couple of sample action plans that organizations have developed in this process that you can refer to. Without some sort of roadmap you are not going to achieve the intended outcomes.

The fourth step is to actually implement the action plan - to begin performing the activities that the organization prescribed for itself. Again taking the specific steps to get to where you want to go. Keith will tell you some of those specific activities that his organization has pursued as a result of their action plan.

Once the action plan is rolling then you need to continually review it and see where support is needed to complete these activities. Many times when an organization undergoes a change in the way they do things there is a lot of support that is needed to make it happen. For example, organizations may not have a very good staff training process or have access to good staff training. They need to identify where to go to get that support to help in staff training. Another support might be to identify marketing resources that look professional and that make sense to employers.

The sixth step is evaluating and measuring how you have done. What changed and what do our customers think? One of the things we encourage organizations to do regardless of whether they go through this process or not is ask their employer customers what it is they like about the services you are delivering to them and what it is that could be improved. It is a very simple concept. Businesses do it all the time. Every Marriott Hotel, for example, asks their customers for feedback on their services. This is a way to evaluate and then tweak the ways in which services are provided to make the customer happy. This evaluation can be a basis for change in the action plan and improving services.

Before I get into the final guiding questions that I want to conclude with I'd like to include Keith Clark in this discussion. Keith is the Services Supervisor for Chesterfield Employment Services, Richmond, VA. Keith if you would please give a little background of how your organization got involved in this change process.

Keith Clark: We initially got involved with Business Partnerships Institute actually before we even called you Rich. We had actually began a cultural change within our organization about a year prior where we were really trying to wrestle with this problem of getting relationships built with the businesses that we currently had and then developing new business partners. That was where it started. We recognized that we didn't do so well with that. We knew that we needed to make some changes, but we weren't exactly sure where. One of the reasons why I was hired for my position was because we felt as an organization that we needed people with business backgrounds. I had a background working as a plant manager for ten years. That being said we got involved with the Business Partnerships Institute about three years ago. What we asked from them was, "What can we do to improve our business relationships?" That is how we really got started.

Rich Luecking: As a result of being involved in this process what was the focus? What were some of the main elements of your action plan?

Keith Clark: We didn't get too far into it before we realized that to accomplish our goals it meant that we had to look our organization's operation from top to bottom. We really took the microscope and looked internally at our organization to determine our problems. We looked at a number of different issues. How are we allocating our staff resources? What are our staff doing with their time? Is it the best thing for consumers? Is it really too focused on trying to train people? Do we have enough resources and marketing? What about roles and responsibilities? What is it that they are doing? We had a marketing position, but what was that person supposed to do? We looked at things like that. We looked at trends as they related to new referrals to our program. We looked at our budget to see where we were spending money. Was that an appropriate way to spend our money? We looked at a whole host of things internally. We spent some time looking at the policies that surround our organization? What I mean by that is we are a government organization. We are part of a local government so we have some special rules that we have to follow that non-profits may not. You mentioned that programs defined by job seeker category and programs defined by geography are sometimes an issue. As a government organization we are mandated to be that exact way so that is an obvious limitation. We also wanted to see how could we get around these limitations. What are our options? How can we be more business friendly based on some of those limitations? We noticed that once we started looking into this we had a lot of flexibility. Whether you are a government agency or whether you are private or non-profit, the reality is that there are a lot of things that you can do internally to position your organization to build these partnerships. These are just some of the things that were the focus of our plan.

Rich Luecking: Actually, Keith if I might add to that, your organization came up with a fairly detailed action plan. Here you are three years out and it seems to me that you are still referring to it from time to time.

Keith Clark: Well, we change it. In fact, we initially called it our Business Partnership Institute Plan. We changed it two years ago to our "strategic plan" because that is in effect what it was. We update it every August. That update is based on an ongoing reanalysis of our organization. Every July I put together a program analysis that looks at our entire program data in order to inform the strategic plan. Have things changed? Based upon this analysis the plan changes. In the past three years it has changed twice. There have been instances where it has changed in mid-year based on different conditions. I think

that one of the points that you made is that while there are six steps you tend to go back to the first one again. You tend to do that a lot.

Rich Luecking: That is a great point Keith. I can't reiterate this enough. Change is constant. No matter how good you think things are getting or how much things are improving there is always reason to readjust how you are approaching these things based on changing conditions in the community and within the organization. Keith, what kinds of specific things did you do that you weren't doing before and what kind of results did that yield?

Keith Clark: Well, it was interesting. I mentioned earlier we had a marketing coordinator. We kind of joked when we initially created the plan because we ended up loading some of the responsibilities on this marketing coordinator position that was vacant at the time. We did end up hiring for that position. What is important here is not that we had the position, but really the focus we took in hiring for the position. The person who we hired had absolutely no experience in vocational rehabilitation, but sales management. We revised that entire job description and that entire role into someone who is not so interested in actually closing a specific sale per se, but rather in coordinating the marketing efforts of an entire organization. We redistributed some of the primary sales functions to all of our frontline staff. All of our frontline staff are job developers. What this did for us is we ended up getting people jobs much faster. We went from an average of about ten months to find a job to as little as three to four weeks on an individual placement basis. That change in and of itself was phenomenal. Just from looking at our staff time and realizing that if we spent it a little differently we would be fulfilling our mission of finding jobs. We also looked at some other things. We got a business advisory counsel formed. That just started here this past spring. We wanted to try to get that done sooner but we had to delay it to get better membership. That has been formed and is very active. Actually they are a little bit more active than we were expecting them to be. We also tightened our business management. What I mean by that is as I mentioned earlier we do a program review every year now. We did that before but it didn't tell us why things happened. It didn't give us any recommendations as to what we should do. It didn't even look at all the different data that may have been important. The key objective to our original plan was to come up with a way to track cost of services continuously. After a year we figured out a way to track our cost of services continuously. That was a very obvious change. Shifting the organization's entire mindset away from the job seeker as the only person we serve to our business partners as important customers was significant. We really refocused on how we looked at businesses in general. I think that was one of the biggest things that came out of it. The organization is vastly different from four years ago.

Rich Luecking: My jaw is still dropping, Keith, over the ten-month to three-week placement change. That sounds to me like a very, very significant outcome as a result of the changes that you put in place.

Keith Clark: That was a very interesting thing. We had also done a lot of staff training on job development as well. We really changed our focus on that too. We had separation rates of about two or three a month and now it is one about every two to three months. People stay in jobs a lot longer. We don't have as many people falling out of employment. Our average rate of length of time in any employment is about six or seven years.

Rich Luecking: Keith I appreciate your perspectives. We really can't go about the work that we are charged to do without including a very strong focus on employers. We can't put that focus on employers

as much as it needs to be if we continue to do things the same way we have always done them. Hence, the organization change process that we developed. We have had a little time to give you a brief overview of how this happens and why it should happen. Keith gave an excellent overview of how his organization went about changing its relationships with businesses. We still have about 15 minutes. I would like to open it up now for some questions before I make some concluding comments.

Caller: Could they give us some specific things that they did? Specific things that they did in their action plan or is that covered in the book?

Rich Luecking: It is in the book. I will say a couple of things and then I will have Keith elaborate. Specific things that I know of that Keith did right off the bat was to reorganize how their staff was trained. They had more training for their staff about job development. They started a business advisory counsel that is comprised of business people who advise the organization on how businesses see things. As Keith mentioned, they revised marketing materials to make them more professional. They have also created a circumstance where all of the front-line staff do job development and are trained on how to do that. More people have contact with more employers and therefore the universe of perspective employers to hire people represented by Keith's organization has expanded considerably.

Keith Clark: Just to add to that we had had one position that did that. I think now we have approximately 30 people who are involved with that in some way, shape or form on an ongoing and day-to-day basis with a substantial amount of their time devoted to marketing.

Rich Luecking: One of the things I didn't mention before which may answer your question. To start the process of developing the action plan we asked the organization to convene several key people to be part of a planning group. That included the agency's director, the person who is in charge of the employment program, any marketing people that might be on their staff, front-line staff who have a particularly important perspective, a consumer of the organization's services and if possible an employer. We also asked them to have representatives from vocational rehabilitation and any other funding organizations so that they too are part of the planning process. This group worked together to help them develop the action plan that we helped them facilitate.

Lynda Leach, Facilitator: Are there any other questions for Rich or Keith? We have some time left Rich.

Rich Luecking: If anybody has any questions just jump right in. You also have the ability to get more information from either the Web sites at the University of Illinois which Lynda gave you or from our book. The last two slides have contact information both for the publisher and for myself if any of you want to e-mail me with more questions. You are welcome to do so. For those of you who don't have that e-mail address it is rluecking@transcen.org.

Let me end with a couple things. Some of the things that you might ask yourself about your organization are these:

- Does the organization's mission and value statement reflect commitment to external customers? Is there really an obvious mission to serve external customers outside the organization?

- Does the organization's procedures help or hinder employee relationships? I will give you a horror story on that really quickly. One employer called me up one time and said, "Can you help me? We have an individual who is not performing. He was placed by a disability employment organization." I said, "Well, if that person was placed by another organization, why aren't you calling them?" The person said, "Well, they are in the middle of a CARF accreditation process and they said they couldn't get here for three more weeks." That's an example of organization's procedures that hinder employee relationships.
- Another question is: are staff rewarded for service to external customers? At our organization we have what we call a "Wall of Fame" where letters of satisfaction that are written by employers to our organization are actually framed and posted on the wall as one way of rewarding staff and making it a clear agency priority that customer service is something that we value.
- Do the job descriptions reflect attention to external customers? As Keith mentioned in their organization they actually changed some of the job descriptions of the individuals so they would be more focused on their external employer customers.
- Do job development activities feature external customer service strategies? One of the things that we have done and sounds like Keith has done is actually have staff go through customer service training that is not all that different than what Nordstrom's or Marriott might have their employees go through so that they understand how to better serve their customers. It is really amazing at what difference that makes in employer relationships when they are treated in a high-quality customer service fashion.

If you can answer "yes" to any of these questions then you are really getting the job done. If the answer is "no" then maybe you might want to consider retooling how you go about your work. Do employers come back for more? In other words, are they repeat customers? Do they hire more than one individual from your organization? Do they go to other organizations and brag about your organization's service? That's the kind of outcome you would like to see.

Is your organization receiving more referrals because vocational rehabilitation or whoever else is making referrals to your organization really likes the outcomes you are getting for your money? And finally, and most importantly, are job seekers getting jobs they want? And if they are, then the primary objective of our work is being achieved.

With that I would encourage you to again visit the University of Illinois's Web site that has the *Business Friendly Checklist* and the PowerPoint presentations from today. If you are so inclined please check out the Brookes Publishing Web site. There is a table of contents and summary of the book. By the way, what we talked about today constitutes only one of 16 chapters in the book. More information about employer customer service and job development strategies are included that might be of use to you. I encourage you to check that out. That's it from my end. Any final comments?

Lynda Leach, Facilitator: Are there any other questions for Rich or Keith? I have a question Rich. I don't know if this is naive or not but can people who are on the line and other people around the

country access the Business Partnerships Institute services?

Rich Luecking: We do this through the RSA Region III RCEP that serves the mid-Atlantic states. We have done it in the mid-west under the auspices of the National Supported Employment Consortium, but we would consider helping organizations with it on a kind of contractual basis if they are interested. They can contact me if they want to get more information.

Lynda Leach, Facilitator: Rich and Keith we really appreciate your time today. It was an excellent presentation and lots of information.

Caller: Could we get a repeat of the name of the book and the Web site please?

Rich Luecking: Yes, the book is called *Working Relationships: Creating Career Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities Through Employer Partnerships*. The Web site is www.brookespublishing.com. My e-mail address is: rluecking@transcen.org.

Lynda Leach, Facilitator: Thanks Keith and Rich and thanks everyone for participating.