

Hiring IPS Employment Specialists

Background and Experience

Many supervisors report that they attempt to hire people who have marketing or sales experience. Others hire people who have been employers in the past, and still others hire people who have a background in providing mental health services. Obviously, all of these types of experiences would be helpful to an employment specialist, though it is usually quite difficult to find someone who has such a varied background.

Another approach is to think about the personality type of a successful employment specialist. For example:

A recovery-oriented candidate is someone who:

- is hopeful about every person's ability to succeed in employment
- is open minded about helping people move into competitive jobs, regardless of active substance use disorders
- believes that work can help people manage mental illness
- believes that people learn and grow from their experiences.

A creative problem-solver is someone who:

- asks questions to learn more about a problem
- changes her perspective about a problem by learning new information
- can think of more than one possible solution to a problem.

A candidate who is genuinely interested in the job:

- would attempt to learn about IPS supported employment (interviewers can provide the link to Dartmouth PRC employment webpage: <http://www.ipsworks.org>)
- would ask questions about the job and their potential job duties.

A candidate who would be a good job developer:

- would present him or herself in a professional manner
- may have a gregarious, "sales" personality or may be quiet, but persistent
- would be a good listener—interested in learning about other people.

One strategy for finding people who understand recovery from mental illness is to hire employment specialists who have lived experience of mental illness. Some supervisors add the following statement to job advertisements, "People with a lived experience of mental illness are encouraged to apply." If a candidate identifies as having a mental illness, the interviewers ask if he would be willing to share how he overcame barriers to employment with some of the people on his caseload. They

view the lived experience as an extra qualification for the job.

Supervisors also consider the cultures of the people served by the IPS team when they hire employment specialists so that at least some team members will reflect those cultures. To recruit candidates from other cultures they might advertise at community centers such as centers for people from a particular ethnicity or at a lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender center. Job advertisements might specify that fluency in a particular language is advantageous or the advertisement might be placed in a newspaper that targets a specific cultural group.

Sample Interview Questions

Below each question are suggestions regarding what the interviewer should listen for in the candidate's response.

Did you have a chance to read about IPS supported employment? Based on that, what do you think a typical day would be like? (While setting up the interview, share the following website with the candidate: <http://www.ipsworks.org>.)

- Was the candidate interested enough to read about IPS? Does the person have a good understanding of the job?

What would you enjoy about this job? What would you not enjoy about this job?

- Does the person have a good understanding of the job? Is the candidate able to provide a thoughtful, honest response about parts of the job she would not enjoy?

How do you go about finding jobs for yourself?

- What type of job search skills does the person use? Is networking one of the strategies he uses to find jobs?

What would you do if one of your clients began missing appointments?

- Does the response seem to blame the client or is the candidate using more of a problem-solving approach?

What do you think about helping people with active substance use problems find employment?

- Does the person have an opinion about waiting for people to become sober? If so, how does the candidate respond to information from the interviewer about zero exclusion?

What would be your expectations for the people you would serve?

- Beware of answers similar to the following: "People have to be working as hard as I am with the job search"? "People have to show up dressed like they would if they were interviewing for a job." If people miss appointments then they must not want to work."

How would you learn about employers and their job opportunities within this community?

- Does the person have creative ideas? Does the candidate think of ways to get out of the office to meet employers or does the candidate suggest using websites only?

How would you build credibility and strengthen relationships with employers?
- Does the person have ideas such as in-person meetings, following through with what she says she will do, listening to what is important to the employer...?

Role-play: Candidate is approaching a restaurant manager for the very first time. Candidate has a client in mind—a person who is interested in food prep.
- This exercise may be difficult for someone who has never done job development, but see if the candidate listens carefully to the employer, talks about her client's strengths, asks questions....

Role-play: Candidate is going back to the restaurant after the person has been working for one week. Manager reports that the worker is too slow on the job.
*- Does the candidate try to ask questions to learn more about the cause of the problem?
Does the candidate listen carefully to the employer to learn what is important to him?
What type of solutions does the candidate propose – more than one?*

What languages do you know? Are you fluent in those languages?
- Does the candidate have special language skills similar to those people served at your agency?

Why do you think it would be important to stay in close contact with the mental health team? With Vocational Rehabilitation counselors?
- Does the candidate know how to work as a team member? Does the candidate value the contributions of others?

What do you hope to be doing in five years?
- Does this job fit the person's work interests?

For candidates who do not have mental health experience but who are final candidates for the job: Offer to let them shadow an employment specialist for a few hours. Ensure that the employment specialist will be working in the community, contacting employers, visiting people at their homes, etc. (Be sure to have completed releases in advance of going out with the candidate.)
- Does the candidate think that this is work s/he will enjoy? Does it feel okay to go into people's homes? To spend his/her days in the community, out of the office? Does the candidate think that s/he would enjoy job development and be able to develop good skills over time? Does s/he understand that developing relationships with employers would be part of his/her weekly responsibilities?

Employment specialist competencies

Develops relationships with employers by learning about their businesses, hiring practices, hiring preferences etc., over multiple visits.

Investigates the local business community in order to learn about different employers and types of jobs available.

Utilizes good client interviewing skills in order to learn about individual preferences, past experiences, hopes and concerns regarding employment.

Effectively collaborates with mental health practitioners, VR counselors, family members and other members of the vocational unit.

Utilizes a strengths-based approach when serving clients by recognizing each person's skills, experiences, and values that support employment.

Employs a recovery-based orientation including the belief that people learn from their experiences, develop new skills, and achieve life goals over time.

Applies new work methods, skills and technologies to complete work.

Assists with finding and accessing resources such as work incentives planning, local schools, available transportation, etc.

Uses a problem-solving approach when faced with challenging or difficult situations.

Conducts work in community settings (at least 65% of scheduled work hours).

Assists individuals to analyze each work experience for lessons learned, using input from employers, the worker, mental health practitioners, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, family members or others. Also, analyzes what he might have done different to provide better supports or more effective job matching.

Writes person-specific plans that are congruent with each person's goals and includes specific steps that will be taken to meet those goals.

Provides timely documentation that meets requirements of various funding sources including Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, and others.