

Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success

Second Edition

Instructor's Guide

By

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St. Paul

Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success, Second Edition Instructor's Guide

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Note to Instructors

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Contents

About This Guide	4	Part 4	
Part 1		Objectives	29
Objectives	6	Summary	29
Summary	6	Understanding the Job Market	30
Personal Barriers	6	Resumes, Cover Letters, and Job Applications	31
Financial Barriers	10	Conducting a Successful Job Interview	33
Discussion Questions	12	Discussion Questions	35
Homework	12	Homework	35
Part 2		Part 5	
Objectives	14	Objectives	36
Summary	14	Summary	36
Emotional Barriers	14	The Value of Additional Education	36
Physical Barriers	19	Choosing the Best Educational Program	37
Discussion Questions	20	Overcoming Barriers to Education and Training	37
Homework	21	The Importance of Lifelong Learning	40
Part 3		Make an Educational Plan	41
Objectives	22	Discussion Questions	41
Summary	22	Homework	41
I Don't Know What I Want	22		
I Don't Know What's Out There	24		
I Don't Know How to Get There	26		
Discussion Questions	28		
Homework	28		

About This Guide

Achieving employment success can be challenging for anyone, regardless of what they are up against. There are many different types of barriers that may be keeping your students from reaching their goals. Your job is to help them identify their most potent barriers and then help them devise and implement a plan for overcoming those barriers.

The most prominent barriers to employment success can be placed into the following five categories, which also correspond to the five sections of the workbook:

- **Personal and Financial Barriers:** Needing the basic resources that enable individuals to survive while looking for employment and to stay employed once they are hired, as well as being effective in financial planning and money management.
- **Emotional and Physical Barriers:** Potentially debilitating emotions related to and perpetuating unemployment or physical health problems, addictions, and disabilities that may prevent an individual from looking for work.
- **Career Decision-Making and Planning Barriers:** Needing effective skills and knowledge for making good career decisions, identifying occupations of interest, and then developing a career plan for achieving success in the world of work.
- **Job Seeking Knowledge Barriers:** Lacking knowledge about how to effectively look for employment in today's marketplace, how to demonstrate one's knowledge and skills with resumes and other documents, and how to effectively interview for jobs.
- **Education and Training Barriers:** Needing to understand the importance of lifelong learning and getting additional training and education to keep pace with the changes in the workplace.

Whether the barriers to your students' success arise from changes in the workplace or changes at home, from the outside world or from within themselves, from short-term difficulties or long-term conditions, you must help your students to take charge of their lives and their careers and make a plan for their own success. The most critical intervention that you can use to help your students to be more successful is to help them identify their specific barriers and set goals to overcome them.

This instructor's guide is designed to help you conduct a class or group workshop on how to overcome barriers to employment success. Each section contains valuable information related to each barrier, teaching tips to help make instruction easier, journaling exercises that will ensure that students understand the material presented, group classroom activities, and optional homework assignments.

Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success is designed to be used as either a supplement to the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI)* or as a stand-alone workbook. If you are planning to administer the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory*, you should do so prior to having students start the workbook. Once you have administered the *BESI*, students can proceed through the workbook activities based on their most pressing barriers. If you are planning to use the workbook by itself (without administering the *BESI* assessment), you should have the students proceed through the barriers sections as a group, starting with the first chapter. Have students read each section thoroughly and complete any assignments. You can

then spend class time reviewing the material and the work they've completed and reinforcing it with class activities suggested in this guide or ones of your own design.

Bear in mind that the hints and activities contained in this guide may not apply to all students or to all class or workshop situations. I encourage you to adapt anything you find to fit the needs of your students and the specific barriers they are facing. With your help, I'm certain they will overcome the obstacles preventing them from a successful life and career.

Part 1: Personal and Financial Barriers

Objectives

- **Help readers identify their most pressing personal and financial barriers.**
- **Help readers meet their basic needs for transportation, childcare, housing, and food.**
- **Help readers understand and research the outside resources available to them.**
- **Help readers learn more-effective ways to manage their money and overcome financial barriers.**
- **Help readers understand the value of financial planning.**

Summary

Personal and financial barriers are among the most difficult to overcome because they often prevent individuals from making choices or taking positive action. For example, it may be difficult for an individual to return to school if he or she cannot find childcare; or it may be difficult to search for jobs if that person has no reliable transportation. Therefore, it is often most important for people to overcome these personal and financial barriers before they can move on to identifying and eliminating other barriers.

Research has confirmed that people have to overcome their most basic barriers in order to be successful in life and in their career. Abraham Maslow was one of the first researchers to identify a hierarchy of needs that also can act as a hierarchy of barriers. At the lowest, most deficient level are many survival needs that correspond to the personal and financial barriers that this section of the workbook addresses. In order to reach higher levels of success, happiness, and self-actualization, those basic survival needs must first be met. Thus, it is critical that you provide your students with as much information and guidance as possible in order to help them overcome their personal and financial barriers.

Personal Barriers

This section explores readers' most basic barriers. Some of these barriers include the need for food, clothing, childcare services, transportation, medical and dental care, and assisting family members with special needs or health concerns. Of course many of these barriers or concerns can be quite extensive and may require a great deal of time and resources to overcome. The key for your students is to address each individual's most pressing barriers as it relates to their job search and job success. For most unemployed people, finding work is their top priority. Once they find work, it often (though not always) becomes easier to overcome other recurring life barriers.

This section of the book is very direct and solution-focused to help people overcome their most basic barriers. Because all people will bring different types of barriers to their search for employment, some of the topics in this section may be more applicable than others. In this

section, you should help students to identify their unique situation and develop a plan that is effective for them in their specific situation.

After completing the assessments and exercises in this section, students should have a plan for overcoming their personal barriers and should be prepared to implement their plan.

Teacher Tip: Remember that personal barriers may be difficult or even embarrassing to talk about in a class or group setting. Therefore, you should be cognizant of some people's unwillingness to talk about some of these topics. Encourage people to participate openly, but don't make people participate if they choose not to.

Class Activity: Cause and Effect

Consider doing this activity as a journaling exercise. Ask students to choose which of the following best describes their situation:

I can't seem to get a job.

I can't seem to keep a job.

Now have them write down all of the possible reasons or causes for the problem they chose. Encourage them to list both external forces (no jobs available, poor economy, corporate downsizing, kids to take care of at home) and internal forces (no motivation, no confidence, don't have any skills).

Once they have their lists, tell students that these reasons actually constitute barriers that need to be overcome. Then have students rank these barriers from most critical (those barriers that need to be overcome now) to least critical (those barriers that aren't much of a hindrance).

When you are finished, consider having students discuss which of their barriers are the most critical and why. Have students share any strategies they've learned for overcoming these most critical barriers.

Food and Clothing

It can be easy to overlook whether your students have food to survive or the right clothing to conduct an effective job search. However, you should keep in mind that your students may be unemployed for an extended period of time or may be receiving public assistance. More importantly, they may not be aware of the impact that good eating habits and professional attire can have on a job search and on job success. For that reason, you should spend time talking about the importance of good nutrition and professional clothing in class.

Teacher Tip: As far as clothing is concerned, it is important to discuss the need for appropriate, professional attire for job interviews. For that reason, you may want to discuss what constitutes good dress and grooming for interviews now rather than waiting until Part 4 of the workbook.

Class Activity: Whatever Shall I Wear?

Have your students identify three or four potential jobs that they would be interested in doing. Examples might include welder, computer operator, or nurse. Ask the students to describe what

people working in each of these occupations might wear on a daily basis. Then ask them to describe how they might dress in going on an interview for each of these jobs. Have them compare and contrast their answers, and discuss the need to dress appropriately for the industry in which they are interviewing.

Housing

Odds are quite good that your students are living *somewhere*. The immediate question is whether or not their living situation is safe, clean, and adequate. Still another important concern has to do with the job search and employment itself. Are students located conveniently near places of possible employment? Do they need access to public transportation, and if so, are their stations nearby? Do they have phone service or Internet service? Are they close to a public library? While such questions are not the most important, they do factor into housing considerations. For example, an individual may choose to pay an extra \$50.00 a month in rent for an apartment that is located next to a bus station if it means not having to own a car.

Class Activity: Housing Options

Have students research possible housing options for which they may be eligible. These options could include buying a house, living with friends, Habitat for Humanity, Low-Income Housing Tax Credit programs, Section-8 housing, the Salvation Army, and shelters in the community. After they have developed an extensive list, ask students to rank (from most realistic to unrealistic option) the options that are best for each of them.

Transportation

Jobs are only useful if you have a way to get to them. For your students, a lack of transportation may be keeping them from enrolling in school or being able to get to job interviews. Your students should take time to explore the transportation resources available in your community. These will vary, of course. Someone living in New York City will have more options than someone in a rural town in the Midwest. Spend some time in class comparing transportation options in terms of cost, ease, and viability so that students can come up with a transportation plan that suits them best.

Teacher Tip: The workbook primarily lists national organizations or those that can be found in the majority of states. Of course, each state, city, and community has its own resources. Be sure to provide your students with the names, numbers, and addresses of any organizations that could help them in your specific community.

Family Concerns

Taking care of their family is probably foremost in the minds of your students. You need to help them to understand that there are many resources available that they can take advantage of so that they can effectively look for a job and work at a job. Of course, you also should emphasize that one of the best ways to provide for one's family is to find stable employment as soon as possible. That may mean making short-term sacrifices in order to speed the job-search process along.

Class Activity: Family Barrier Brainstorm

Have students brainstorm family issues that can affect a person's search for employment. Write these ideas on the board. Have students break into smaller groups and assign each group a family barrier. Then assign them the task of identifying as many solutions to that barrier as possible. Come back together as a whole class to discuss.

Criminal Record

A criminal record can be a difficult barrier to overcome, but not an impossible one. Your students need to be prepared to discuss their incarceration and show how that experience has had a positive impact on their lifestyle, work ethic, and career goals.

Teacher Tip: Except in programs designed to help ex-offenders, many of your students will not face the barriers specific to individuals with a criminal record. And some students who do have a criminal record will be reluctant to discuss such barriers in class. Feel free to skip this section of the workbook, but extend an open invitation that any student with a past conviction is welcome to discuss this barrier with you outside of class.

One of the best ways to have students with a criminal record think about its effect on their job search and job success is to have them brainstorm answers to interview questions that specifically address their incarceration and rehabilitation. Feel free to use the following questions as part of a discussion, journaling exercise, role-play, or one-on-one conference:

- What have you learned about yourself from your time spent in prison?
- Are you rehabilitated? How do you know?
- Why should I hire you, given your personal history?
- How is your life different now than it was when you committed the crime?
- What did you do to better yourself or your situation while in prison?

Make a Plan

Students need to have a concrete plan for overcoming their personal barriers. Have students complete the exercise contained in the workbook. This will allow them to specify concrete barriers they are facing, develop ideas to overcome them, and identify resources in their community to help them succeed.

You may want to put a sample plan on the board for students to see the importance of this process. An example is provided at the end of this chapter. You may also want people to share some of their most pressing barriers with others in class. This will allow your students to see that they are not alone in their efforts to overcome their barriers.

Financial Barriers

Financial barriers constitute a kind of “catch 22” for most job seekers. The perception is that financial barriers can only be overcome once you've found a job. However, financial barriers can actually *keep* you from finding a job, preventing you from ever overcoming those barriers. While this is true to some extent, it is also true that there are strategies and resources your students can use to manage their finances. Doing so will allow them to better allocate their resources so that they can find a job quickly and escape the circle.

Your students need to find ways to save and invest their money. Money management is a basic life skill that most people are not taught growing up. The purpose of this section of the workbook is to introduce some basic concepts and to get students thinking about the role money management plays in their job search and employment success.

Managing Your Money

Managing money is hard to do. One look at the average credit debt for American families is enough to convince anyone of the difficulty of money management. The purpose of this section is to help students explore their own spending and savings habits and then encourage them to rethink those habits. Keep in mind that some students may have financial burdens (such as medical bills or massive debt) that are beyond the scope of basic money management. Consider referring students with severe money management issues to other outside resources.

Class Activity: What Kind of Manager Are You?

Write the following words and definitions on the board:

Squirrels: They stash money in no or very low income-producing investments (such as cookie jars or savings accounts) so that they always have it available.

Overspenders: They spend all of their money before they can save or invest it.

Risk-Takers: They put their money in potentially high-income-producing investments that are riskier (such as stocks).

Calculators: They work hard for their money and they plan their financial future by making careful and balanced investments.

Ostriches: They stick their head in the sand and let others handle their money for them.

Squeakers: They only make enough to cover their basic expenses, just squeaking by from paycheck to paycheck.

Ask your students to further define these money management types and list the advantages and disadvantages of each. Then have them pick the one that describes them the most. Is that the

one they want to be? If not, what kind of manager do they aspire to be? And what can they do to get there?

Needs Versus Wants

Needs are those things you must have in order to survive; wants are things you desire but that are not essential. It is important for your students to understand the difference between these two. Consider putting several examples on the board or overhead, either yourself or as a class exercise.

Class Exercise: A Penny Saved

Have students brainstorm as many different ways to save money (by cutting down on expenses) as possible. Some ideas might include joining a food co-op, carpooling, and waiting 24 hours before making any purchase to avoid impulse buying. Have a contest to see which student can come up with most ways to save. When the class is finished, have each student identify three or four strategies they would like to implement.

Financial Barriers and the Job Search

Financial barriers are at the heart of any job search. It is difficult for your students to think about employment when their family is hungry, when their pants have holes in them, or when they are living in their car. Therefore, you need to address the fact that finding ways to survive while looking for a job is critical.

Ask students to think of as many ways as possible that a lack of money can affect their search for employment. Consider putting this list on the board or overhead.

Teacher Tip: The purpose of this workbook is to help individuals overcome their most pressing barriers so that they can get and be successful at a job. For that reason, it is crucial to tie everything—including money-management—back to its impact on the job search process. Stress to your students that managing their money better now may free up time and resources they can use to expand and energize their job search.

Planning Your Financial Future

If your students are unemployed or struggling to stay employed, then they may not be concerned about their long-term financial future. But that doesn't mean that they *shouldn't* be. Financial goals should be at the heart of the career research and job search. It should factor into all of their career planning and job acceptance decisions. Though it may not seem like a pressing need, having a long-term financial plan can positively impact your students' job search success.

Long-term financial success does not happen automatically. Your students need to make it happen for them. It is important for them to have a dream and work toward that dream.

Class Exercise: My Dream Life

Provide students in class with large sheets of paper and different color markers. Ask students to think about living their ultimate dream. Ask them to take a minute, close their eyes, and visualize what their dream life is like. What are they doing, where are they, and how are they living? Then ask students to draw a picture that represents them living their dream life. Though they may be personal, consider asking students to share their pictures with the class. When you have finished, ask each student to come up with five things they can do to bring them closer to the life they've envisioned.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided for you to use as group discussion questions. Keep in mind that many, if not most, of the barriers discussed in this section of the workbook are personal in nature, and that students may be reluctant to discuss these issues with others. You can also ask students to answer these questions as part of a journal. Journaling is an extremely powerful tool for enhancing self-discovery, transcending problems, and breaking ineffective life and career habits.

1. What role does your family play in your job search? What contributions do they make, both positive and negative?
2. How can finances help or hinder your search for a job?
3. What are the best ways to overcome childcare barriers?
4. What is your long-term dream and what steps can you take to achieve this dream?
5. What transportation options are available in your community?
6. What types of survival jobs could you take to make money while you search for your dream job?
7. What are the best ways to manage money?
8. Why are budgets so difficult to stick to, and what can be done to make it easier to stick to a budget?
9. How can a criminal record be turned into a positive experience in an employment interview?
10. What are the most important barriers for you to overcome? What are the least important? Why?

Homework Assignment

For homework, have students think about a person in history who was able to overcome personal barriers to find success. Examples might include George Washington Carver or Helen Keller. Ask them to do some research on how this person was able to overcome his or her barriers. In their research, encourage students to write about the type of barriers the person experienced, how he or she overcame the barriers, and how it affected the person and his or her family.

Basic Needs Sample Plan

My Basic Needs Barrier	Strategies for Overcoming This Barrier	Agencies and Resources That Can Help
Transportation	Identify a way to get to the community college on the other side of town.	I will go to the bus station and see what routes the bus takes...I think it goes right past the college. I will also try and make friends with other people in my area who are students there.
Food	Find ways to supplement my food resources or cut down on my grocery costs.	I will enroll in the public assistance program for SNAP benefits. I will also contact churches in my area to see if they can help me.
Clothing	Find cheap but professional-looking clothes to wear on interviews.	I will go to the clothing bank in my town. If I get desperate, I will borrow clothes from my aunt to wear to interviews (though they may be a little large).

Part 2: Emotional and Physical Barriers

Objectives

- Help readers identify their most pressing emotional and physical barriers.
- Help readers understand the importance of self-confidence and self-esteem in a job search.
- Help readers deal effectively with the emotions that accompany unemployment and a job search.
- Help readers think about and begin using a system of support.
- Help readers discover ways to overcome disabilities in searching for and maintaining employment.

Summary

Emotional and physical barriers can be difficult to overcome because they affect a person's motivation to search for employment. They have a direct impact on self-confidence and self-esteem, and can contribute to feelings of stress, anger, depression, and helplessness. Some examples of common emotional and physical barriers include the following:

- Lacking the energy and motivation to look for a job.
- Feelings of anger and frustration that come from unemployment.
- Physical health problems that prevent one from looking for a job.
- Physical disabilities that can alter an individual's perception of their employability.

Most emotional and physical barriers keep job seekers from staying positive about looking for a job, often leading to a longer period of unemployment. This, in turn, leads to more negative feelings in a self-perpetuating cycle. Therefore, these barriers must be addressed if people are going to stay motivated and upbeat in their quest for employment success.

Emotional Barriers

In this section of the book, students should learn more about how their emotions affect their job search and job success. Emotions are more intense during times of stress, and researchers have found that unemployment is one of the most stressful situations a person can live through. Therefore, you should spend considerable time helping students explore their emotions in a constructive manner.

Remember, however, that many individuals may be reluctant to discuss their emotions openly with others. Stay focused on how their emotions directly impact their job search or their ability to keep and succeed on a job. Your class is not a therapy session (most likely); so feel free to recommend professional resources to individuals who ask.

Class Activity: Cause and Effect

Have each student complete the following statements on a separate sheet of paper. This may give them some insight into the causes of their emotional barriers.

"I get angry when..."

"I am sad when..."

"I hate my work because..."

"I have no energy because..."

"I get frustrated when..."

"I feel stressed when..."

Because of the personal nature of this exercise, it is probably best if it is not shared in a group. However, encourage students to stay aware of the causes of their emotions as they work through this section of the workbook.

Need for Support

All people need a strong support system if they are going to achieve employment success. Their support system can provide them with valuable information, job search assistance, job leads, and suggestions for self-improvement. People who are successful in their careers are able to identify others who were positive role models and mentors. More than likely there are people—both personal and professional—willing to help each of your students succeed.

You should also remind students that there may be people in their community and even their own families who do *not* want to see them succeed. You should stress to your students that these negative influences can have a detrimental effect on their employment success.

Class Exercise: Who Has Your Back?

Put two columns on the board labeled "Positive Characteristics" and "Negative Characteristics." Then ask students to list the characteristics of people who would provide or have provided positive support to them. Also have students list the characteristics of people who were not supportive. This exercise can be useful as they go on to develop their support network later in this section.

Teacher Tip: One branch of the support system might be called the "Professional Branch." These are people who are paid to help others cope with their barriers and find jobs. Odds are you, as their instructor, belong in this category. As their instructor, you are also probably best equipped to provide them with names and contact information of other professional resources in the community that can help them.

Taking Responsibility

In a landmark study conducted by Andy Helwig in the 1980s, he found that personal motivation and effective job search attitudes are as important or *more* important than job search skills and techniques. He concluded that taking personal responsibility in finding a job is probably the most important factor in finding employment.

People who take responsibility for their job search do not rely on luck, fate, or others to find them a job. Instead, they are active, involved, and motivated to find work or go to work. They are self-determined, in control of their own destiny, and believe that they have the right to live their own lives—lives not controlled by circumstances outside of them. Naturally, these are the people who tend to find jobs more quickly.

You need to provide support for your students, help them identify solutions to the barriers to employment success, and push them to take the calculated risks necessary to be successful. Make sure that they understand that by knowing what they want, setting goals to get there, and taking action they can achieve their career dreams. It is in this stage that you must be more of a cheerleader to your students than a coach. Help them to see risks as opportunities and have them trust the outcomes they will receive.

Class Activity: The Blame Game

Have students develop a list of all of the people or organizations they blame for what has happened in their lives. Encourage them to be specific about the circumstances. Then ask your students what responsibility they (the students) had in each circumstance. What might they have done differently? What have they done to make up for it since?

Low Self-Esteem

Your students' overall evaluation of themselves and appraisal of their worth is their self-esteem. Self-esteem is a combination of beliefs (such as, "I am good at what I do"), emotions (such as feeling proud or sad), and behaviors (such as being assertive or acting confident). Low self-esteem keeps people from enjoying life. It also keeps people from projecting a strong, confident sense of self to employers.

Of course it can be difficult for your students to feel good about themselves in the face of unemployment and a difficult job search. Low self-esteem is not something that can be overcome overnight. Often it becomes hard-wired into an individual's consciousness. However, it is important to begin gaining some measure of self-worth if one is to muster the energy and confidence to succeed on the job search. It may sound cliché, but you should encourage your students to "accentuate the positives," both within themselves and when they interact with others.

Class Exercise: Why I Matter

As a journaling exercise, have students develop a list of reasons why they are unique and matter to those around them. Examples might include "my family counts on me," "I am a good neighbor," or "I take an active part in my community." Suggest that students list everything they can think of rather than eliminating items prematurely.

Now have students develop a similar list of reasons why they might matter to prospective employers. These reasons could include such things as "I am dependable" or "I write well." Then have students rank their list based on what they believe to be the most important characteristics that prospective employers desire.

Teacher Tip: All people fail from time to time, but successful people learn from their failures. Your students are apt to focus on their failures and assume that just because they failed in the past, they can never succeed. Encourage them not to get trapped in the past, but simply to learn from it and move on.

Managing Stress

A little bit of stress can be stimulating and can help your students to meet challenges. However, too much stress can hurt their emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral wellness. Stress is unavoidable, especially during a job search; thus, stress management is a critical life skill.

Some people are able to stay relatively stress-free during periods of personal change. This ability is referred to as *resiliency*. Resiliency is a pattern of qualities that determine who will be most successful in dealing with change. Resiliency includes such characteristics as creativity, flexibility, and tolerance for ambiguity. All of these characteristics combine to determine how well your students will cope with the stress of unemployment and a job search. To help your students explore their current coping skills, ask them to complete the stress management exercise that follows.

Class Exercise: Coping with Stress

Break students into smaller groups. Have students discuss the various ways stress can affect them personally and in their job search. Have students in each of the groups describe the positive things they do when they feel stressed, as well as the negative things they do. Then ask the groups to get back together and create an overall list of positive and negative ways of coping with stress. Feel free to start with the list outlined in the workbook.

Dealing with Depression

Your students need to understand that when they are depressed, both happiness *and* jobs will elude them. Depression often comes with irrational and unrealistic thinking, which can negatively impact the job search.

An event such as loss of a job can start the cycle of depression. However, preoccupation with anxiety, unrealistic expectations, feelings of failure, perfectionism, and lack of assertiveness can keep depression alive long after the loss of employment.

Of course, clinical depression is not the same thing as "having the blues." Everyone gets the blues, especially in times of personal hardship or stress. In such cases the key is to try and stay positive and to focus on small improvements and successes that can be built on. Remind students that if they think they are depressed to the point where it is severely affecting their lives, they should consult a physician for treatment.

Teacher Tip: Emotional barriers can be deep-seated and complex. Be sure to offer as many resources as possible for students to learn more about overcoming their barriers. For students battling depression, one place to start might be www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_tips.htm.

Managing Anger

It is normal for your students to lose their composure and get angry from time to time. Anger is a normal, often healthy human emotion. However, it all too frequently turns into verbal and physical aggression or is suppressed. Anger can interfere with an individual's role as a parent, a partner, a worker, and a friend. Therefore, it is very important for individuals to learn how to manage their anger if it is a problem—especially if it is interfering or has interfered with their employability.

Some of your students may not know *how* to control their anger. Anger management is much more than learning a few tools and techniques that they can use when they get mad. It involves getting to know oneself: learning what triggers an angry response, evaluating the ways anger is expressed, and understanding the consequences of those responses.

Anger management is important in all aspects of life, but it can have a direct and profound impact on both the job search and job success. Interviews are naturally stressful situations, and prospective employers are looking for people who can stay calm and collected under pressure. Likewise, situations at work are apt to cause an angry response. Learning to manage that response may be a key to ongoing job success.

Class Exercise: Let Your Body Do the Talking

You should explain to your students that they can learn to monitor the changes in their emotions by simply becoming more aware of physical changes that accompany various emotions.

Break students into smaller groups. Have them describe various emotions such as *happy, mad, depressed, scared, and anxious*. After they describe these emotions, have them take turns role playing people exhibiting these emotions. Tell them to pay attention to the body language associated with each of the emotions. Have them come back to the large group and describe what they've seen. What can they do when they start to see these physical responses in others? What can they do when they start to notice these responses in themselves?

Teacher Tip: Anger management experts believe that anger and aggression are primarily learned from people and events in one's environment. Since people learn to feel angry, they can also learn other ways to feel instead of angry.

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers are those barriers that result from physical problems or limitations. These problems or limitations may be beyond the control of students in your group. These barriers might include learning disabilities, physical impairments, mental illnesses, sensory impairments, and some types of chronic disease. While there is little you can do to remove these barriers, you can encourage your students to find ways to cope with them and to not let them interfere with finding employment success.

You need to stress to your students that they need to move beyond blaming others and feeling sorry for themselves and begin thinking about how they can overcome their physical barriers and achieve success despite being disabled.

Teacher Tip: If you have students in class with physical disabilities, it is important that they do not feel like they are being discriminated against or stereotyped. Do not force anyone to participate in a discussion or activity they don't feel comfortable with.

Dealing with a Physical Disability

Some of your students may have physical disabilities that could be a barrier to searching for employment. It's important for those students to accept the fact that a disability exists, but also to believe that the disability can be overcome. You need to talk to your students about various types of assistive technology that is available both in finding and succeeding on a job, and help them to become aware of their rights in searching for employment.

Class Exercise: Starting a Discussion About Disabilities

Use the following True-False quiz to promote discussions among your students:

1. If a person has not documented his or her disability, it does not exist. (F)
2. A disability can affect a person's ability to perform some work tasks. (T)
3. ADA stands for the American Documentation Act. (F)
4. Mental illnesses are considered disabilities. (T)
5. People with disabilities cannot be promoted on the job. (F)
6. Employers can ask applicants if they are disabled. (F)
7. Employers need to provide reasonable accommodations for disabled employees. (T)
8. Disabled job applicants must tell employers they are disabled on their resumes. (F)

Dealing with Addictions

Addictions begin with voluntary activity, but they become compulsions. It is important for students who struggle with addictions of any kind to learn more about what they are addicted to and develop a plan for overcoming their addiction.

It is important to understand the impact that addictions can have on one's work life. Substance abuse can negatively affect your students' search for a job and then their performance on the job. People who abuse substances often lack the necessary energy and focus to conduct an effective job search campaign. They may have trouble interviewing and maintaining a positive attitude while they search. The stress of a job search can also increase their dependence and abuse.

On the job, it has been found that substance abusers tend to be absent from work a lot, have trouble getting to work on time and completing projects, and have episodes of anger and rage. They often have difficulty thinking and performing their required job tasks. It is critical that you

stress to your students the negative effects that the abuse of substances can have in a job search and in finding employment success.

Class Exercise: The Root of Many Problems

As a journaling exercise, have your students think and write about how substance abuse has caused them problems. Write the words "With My Family," "With My Friends," "In My Social Life," "At Work," and "At School" on the board. Then have the students describe how the abuse of substances has caused problems for them in each of the areas described.

When they've finished, have them pick one of these categories. Then have them write a paragraph about how this aspect of their life can improve if they are willing and able to end their addiction.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided for you to use as group discussion questions. Keep in mind that many, if not most, of the barriers discussed in this section of the workbook are personal in nature and that students may be reluctant to discuss them with others. You can also ask students to answer them as part of a journal.

1. How can emotional barriers hinder your job search efforts?
2. How can a good support system help your job search efforts?
3. Who should be part of your support system and why?
4. How often do you blame others for problems or challenges in your life? What does blaming others do for you?
5. What is your self-image and how does it affect your self-esteem?
6. What can you do to manage stress while searching for employment?
7. When has anger caused problems on a job or while looking for one?
8. How can a physical disability affect your job search?
9. What are some ways to overcome a physical disability as a barrier to employment success?
10. How can an addiction negatively affect your search for employment?

Homework Assignment

For homework, have students identify an inspiring book from the library (a starter list is provided below). Ask them to read a chapter and describe some of the tools and techniques that are recommended by the author. Then ask students to bring their lists of recommendations in and develop one large list of tools and techniques for enhancing self-esteem and maintaining a positive outlook while searching for employment.

Chicken Soup for the Soul
Repacking Your Bags
Way of the Peaceful Warrior

What Color is Your Parachute?
Career Quizzes
Life's a Bitch and Then You Change Careers
Dare to Dream: 25 Extraordinary Lives
Finding Your Perfect Work
The Tao of Pooh
The Road Less Traveled

Part 3: Career Decision Making and Planning Barriers

Objectives

- Help readers identify their career goals.
- Help readers explore their interests and skills as they apply to occupations.
- Help readers research and explore occupations of interest to them.
- Help readers make and implement career decisions.

Summary

We all make career decisions—and more often than we are even aware of. If they are reading this workbook, your students are facing a career decision or maybe several. You need to stress to your students that the quality of their lives is determined by the decisions they make. Many people miss great career opportunities because they lack effective decision-making skills or don't know when to make these career decisions.

Teacher Tip: While they are of an individual nature, career goals and plans are often less personal than the barriers discussed in the previous sections of the workbook. As such, this is often a good opportunity to emphasize and encourage group activities and discussion. Just keep in mind that each person's career goals are unique, and their barriers to career planning may require more individual assistance than one course or workbook can provide.

Class Activity: Be Inspired

As a journaling activity, put some of the following inspirational quotes on the board. Have each student pick one and write about what that quote means to them.

"The indispensable first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: Decide what you want!" –Ben Stein

"Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go in." –Napoleon Bonaparte

"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one." –Elbert Hubbard

I Don't Know What I Want

Your students must know what they want before they can achieve it. They must be willing (and able) to articulate their dream career. You must help them to explore all of the various facets of this dream. Where are they? What are they doing? Who are they working with? How much are they making? Have students brainstorm both their "perfect" job and what they would consider a "good" job to be.

Bear in mind that some students may consider the processes of setting goals, developing a dream career, or engaging in career exploration a waste of time. They simply want a job—*any* job—as soon as possible. Be sure to stress that taking just any job probably will not lead to long-term happiness or success. The only way to achieve *that* is to make a plan and to follow it. That includes finding out what they really want to do with their life.

Class Activity: The Collage

Collage making makes use of visual images to help your students identify their dream career. Provide students or groups of students with scissors, glue, cardboard, and a variety of magazines. Ask students to look through the magazines and cut out pictures that depict or describe their career dreams. Have your students then paste the pictures to the cardboard. Finally, ask the students to use their collages as a visual aid to describe their dream career to the larger group.

Identifying Your Interests

For your students, identifying their interests can be daunting. Often students have a general idea of *what* they are interested in but have little idea *how* those interests can apply to the world of work. They may labor under the illusion that work is something they do to make a living and that interests are activities they pursue on the weekends. One goal of this section is to convince students that their interests can and should play a valuable role in their career decision-making.

Sometimes students will be able to identify their interests from work experiences they have had. Other times they will need to look to hobbies and leisure-time activities to find their true interests. Once your students have identified their interests, they can translate those interests into occupations.

Teacher Tip: Overcoming provides a very brief checklist that students can use to quickly identify career interests. There are, however, more valuable and more accurate measurements of career interests available, such as the Career Exploration Inventory and the Self-Directed Search. Consider giving your students one of these assessments to help them make effective career decisions.

Class Activity: Turn Play Into Work

Ask your students to generate a list of their favorite leisure-time activities. This might include such things as collecting stamps, biking, cooking, or singing in a choir. Then have your students identify work activities, characteristics, or skills that stem from or parallel these leisure activities. For example, collecting stamps might entail an interest in keeping things orderly and attending to details. Finally, have your students identify occupations that match these characteristics. For example, occupations such as stock clerk, accountant, and medical record technician might take advantage of a stamp collector's skills and interests. Consider doing this activity in small groups.

Identify Your Skills

Skills can be defined as specific attributes, talents, and personal qualities that people bring to various occupations. Every job requires a different set of skills, and each of your students has a different skill set they bring to the workplace. When your students do *well* at certain tasks, they will generally *enjoy* doing those tasks. Therefore, skills and interests are intertwined. Knowing their skills, then, can help them to plan their career.

You need to stress to your students not to be bashful when describing their skills. Employers look for employees who know what their skills are and who can talk about them confidently.

Class Activity: Take Pride in Your Accomplishments

Traditionally, one of the best ways for your students to identify their skills is to ask them to identify their top five accomplishments.

Ask each student to write a few sentences about what happened during each of their five accomplishments and the impact those accomplishments had on their lives and careers. Then ask students to identify the specific skills associated with each accomplishment. Lastly, have students identify the skills that are present among the majority of their accomplishments. These often represent their best skills.

Teacher Tip: Overcoming provides a checklist of transferable skills. However, there are many transferable skills not listed there. In addition, there are thousands of job-specific skills not listed. Consider having students make an exhaustive list of their skills now. They can use this information again in Part 4 when they write their resume and practice for interviews.

I Don't Know What's Out There

You need to remind your students that there are more than 20,000 different jobs available in the workplace with new opportunities becoming available all of the time. Students should not limit themselves to the traditional occupations that they have known. It is very important for them to understand how their personal characteristics match the various occupations available in the world of work.

There is a process that your students can use to research all of their available career options:

- Identify some occupations that they would like to explore.
- Conduct broad research on the industries for these occupations.
- Learn about trends affecting these occupations.
- Gather information using print resources, informational interviews, and the Internet.
- Identify key employers in their area to contact.

The workplace is changing at breakneck speed. Your students need to understand how the world of work has changed and the effect it will have on their own search for employment. Have your students brainstorm different ways that they believe the workplace has changed and how it will affect them and their search for a job.

Class Activity: I Want *Their* Job

On a piece of paper, have your students write the names of five people who they believe have an interesting or rewarding career. Next to each person's name, ask your students to write a sentence or two about why they think this job is interesting. Then ask the students to prioritize these occupations from most to least interesting. Have your students identify trends among the occupations, or make note of the different industries that these occupations represent.

Exploring Careers

It is important for your students to explore further the match between their interests and skills and occupations in the world of work. Your students are much more likely to like their work if they find it interesting and it makes use of their best skills.

In order for your students to explore occupations, it is best to begin by researching a small number of job titles. You should probably explain to them that they should not prematurely throw out potential occupations before they find out about them. Many times people have stereotypes or biases about certain occupations and will not pursue them. Encourage them to gather as much information about various occupations as possible before making any career decisions.

Class Activity: Research from All Angles

Break your students up into smaller groups and assign each group the task of taking a different resource and searching for information about two or three occupations. Consider the following media to do their research:

*O*NET Dictionary of Occupational Titles* or the O*NET database

Occupational Outlook Handbook

The Internet (Google search)

Career sites such as www.careerpath.com

Trade magazines that cover those occupations

People who work in those occupations

Have groups report back and share what they've found with the larger group. You might also consider giving this activity as homework.

I Don't Know How to Get There

In order for your students to get to where they want to go, they need to know how to get there. The sections that follow deal with setting goals, comparing alternative pathways to meet those goals, and making decisions based on that analysis. Be sure to remind your students that no decision they make will be set in stone, but that any decision they make they will need to commit to. After all, without a full commitment, they will never know if it was the right decision.

Career Decision Making

Effective career decisions take into account all of the important aspects of who your students are, including their interests and skills, but also their time, resources, and energy; their work history; and their future goals. Your students probably lack a system for decision making and implementation. They may have made poor career decisions in the past for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- A lack of information about self
- A lack of information about the world of work
- A failure to accept responsibility for making a decision
- A tendency to make decisions impulsively

Many of your students may be afraid they will make the wrong choices; therefore, they probably often make no decision at all. They may procrastinate, ask someone else to decide, or decide based on a hunch. It is important for your students to realize that *not* making a decision is, in effect, making one.

Class Activity: My Decision-Making Style

Have your students brainstorm all of the different ways that they make decisions. Ask them to think about how they made various decisions in the past. Some of these decision-making methods might include the following:

Taking the easy way out

Letting others decide for me

Doing nothing

Doing what other expected me to do

Doing the first thing that popped into my head

Carefully weighing my options

When they have finished, ask your students to identify their predominant decision-making style. Is that style working for them? What should they try differently?

Setting Goals

Now that your students know what they want in their career, have learned more about themselves, and have made some career decisions, they are ready to set career goals. By setting goals, your students will be able to take back their careers and their lives. Many of your students are probably prone to sitting back and waiting for things to happen *to* them. Goals can help to provide direction and propel them to action. Research has proven that people who set goals (and write these goals down) tend to be much more successful than people who do not.

Your students will find that as they begin to set and work toward goals, they will have more confidence, which will breed even more success.

Teacher Tip: Be willing to share your own goals with your students—those you've reached and those you haven't yet. Personal anecdotes can encourage class discussion and show your students that everyone faces decisions in their careers.

Class Activity: The "I Want" Game

Break your students into smaller groups. Have each person in the smaller groups take turns answering the question "In my career I want..." Ask students to go around the group answering that question until they are sure what they want. Then have the students identify five things that they need to do (goals) to achieve what they want.

When they have finished, ask each student to prioritize his or her goals from most critical (1) to least critical (5). Have students return to the larger group and share their findings.

Teacher Tip: Remind students that they first need to set long-term goals and then break these into smaller, more manageable and achievable goals. These smaller goals will keep them motivated through the process.

Take Action

Goals are useless unless your students take action to achieve them. You must now stress that notion to your students. Also remind students that if their goals are to get a particular job or to go get more education and training, the last two sections of the workbook will help show them how.

Class Activity: Goal Statements

Write the following sentence on the board and have students complete it: "My long-term career goal is...."

After students have identified their long-term career goal, ask them to answer the following questions about their goals:

Did I choose this goal myself? If not, who chose it?

Am I ready to commit to this goal?

What is my timeline for accomplishing this goal?

Is this goal within my control?

Is the goal based on my interests and skills?

Can I visualize the outcome (what will it look like when I attain this goal)?

How am I taking responsibility for achieving this goal?

After your students have answered each of these questions about their long-term career goal, have them share their answers with others in the group.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided for you to use as group discussion questions. You can also ask students to answer them as part of a journal.

1. What do you want most out of your career?
2. What would your dream career look like?
3. What interests do you have that you are not using?
4. What skills do you have that you are not using?
5. What would be the best way to explore some of the occupations that you are interested in?
6. What career decision do you most need to make?
7. How have your career decisions brought you closer to your career dreams or taken you further from them?
8. What career goals do you need to set?
9. What actions will you take to get you closer to your career dreams?
10. What changes have occurred in the workplace?

Homework Assignment

For homework, have your students visit the state employment office or look on the Internet to gather information about occupations available in their area. Have them use some of the resources discussed in the workbook to research those occupations. Take some time next class to discuss their findings.

PART 4: Job Search Knowledge Barriers

Objectives

- **Help readers better understand how the job market works.**
- **Teach readers the best techniques for finding a job.**
- **Help readers better understand networking, social networking, and direct contact to employers.**
- **Help readers learn how to present themselves on paper by writing effective resumes and cover letters.**
- **Help prepare students for the interview process.**

Summary

Finding a job isn't easy. Finding the right job is even harder. This section of the workbook is designed to help students identify those knowledge barriers that have prevented them from conducting a successful job search. In other words, it helps students who don't know *how* to find a job learn the best methods for doing just that. As such it is the most practical section of the workbook and may be the one that requires the most attention and class activity.

Before you get started, you should remind your students that there is more competition for jobs now than ever before. Let them know that a job search is made up of a series of steps and that they will need to be prepared for all of those steps. Also let them know that finding a job is a skill that can be learned and one that will probably be used again and again.

Class Activity: The Trouble with Tradition

Put the following "traditional" job search methods up on the board and ask your students to discuss why these methods are not effective.

Filling out applications

Answering classifieds

Blindly sending out resumes

Explain to them that one purpose of the workbook is to help people deal with and overcome these problems with the traditional job search. If possible, try to drive home the point that these methods are passive and most often require the job seeker to wait until a position is posted, rather than proactively seeking employers who might need someone with their skills.

Understanding the Job Market

It is important to remind your students that most job openings will *not* be advertised, and that in order for them to find a job, students must often look beyond traditional methods such as searching the want ads of newspapers or sending out unsolicited resumes. The overall purpose of this section is to provide your students with the skills they need to find a job so they do not have to rely on these “traditional” job search methods.

Class Activity: What Has Worked for You?

Break the class into groups of three or four. Ask your students to interview one another in their smaller groups and find out how they found their last job. They should get as many details as possible about the process. Then have members of the group decide whether the method used in each instance was a hidden market or visible market technique and whether or not it was the quickest, most effective way to find a job. When the smaller groups have finished, have the whole group come back together to discuss the results of the survey.

The Visible Job Market

Although this is not the way most people find a job, your students still need to know how to look for a job in the visible job market. Remind them that the most effective job search is one that uses *all* of the job search strategies at a person's disposal. After all, if employers never hired workers from the want ads, that section of the newspaper wouldn't exist.

The visible job market includes looking at newspaper want ads, going to employment agencies or state employment service offices, going to human resource departments and filling out applications, mass mailing resumes, and posting resumes on the Internet.

Teacher Tip: Some of your students may not be familiar with the Internet's influence on the job search. If not, a brief crash course in all the ways you can find jobs on the Internet may be in order.

The Hidden Job Market

The most effective ways for your students to find a job include contacting employers directly and networking to find job leads. These two methods have been proven to be more effective than all of the other methods they will use in the visible job market approach. However many of your students may not be aware of how effective these methods are—or how to use them. Be sure to work through this section of the workbook carefully, assessing just how much your students know about making cold contacts and networking.

Teacher Tip: The purpose of this workbook is to help students overcome their barriers. That means giving job seekers the basic knowledge they need to get started. There are plenty of more in-depth resources that students can use to find a job, however. Resources such as Getting the Job You Really Want, by Mike Farr, can give your students even more helpful advice—as, of course, can you.

Class Activity: Making Warm Contacts

Ask your students to generate a list of all of the potential types of people that could be included in a warm contacts list. This list might include school friends, relatives, people at church, etc. After your students have created an extensive list of these groups, they should try to identify people they know in each group.

See who can create the longest list of contacts. Encourage them to share names of people with other students based on career interests and job history.

Resumes, Cover Letters, and Job Applications

Resumes and cover letters are useful if used properly. They are tools designed to land interviews. The key is to not only present oneself well, but to also stand out from the crowd so that one gets noticed. Job applications serve one primary function: to screen out applicants. With all of these job search tools, it is important to be professional and be viewed as such.

Writing Your Resume

Although sending out mass numbers of resumes rarely nets a person a job, it is still important for your students to have a resume that they can tailor to specific jobs. The same holds true for resumes and the Internet; although applying for jobs on the Internet does require your students to have a resume to post online, this method will rarely produce the results they desire. Because competition is so stiff, the key is to create a resume that captures an employer's interest and doesn't screen the applicant out of a job.

Class Activity: Resume Writer's Workshop

Have each of your students bring in their resume and conduct a writer's workshop. Have students split into groups of three or four and critique each other's resumes based on what they've learned so far. Act as a resource, going around the room and answering questions. Make a running list on the board of good resume-writing strategies that students notice as they critique each other's resumes.

Class Activity: Resume True and False

Have your students take the following quiz about resumes and then discuss their answers in the group (note: all statements are false).

A resume should never be more than one page.

A resume can't get you screened out of a job.

A resume is always in paper form.

A resume is a summary of your life.

You should mass mail resumes to every organization you can find.

It does not matter how your resume looks, it's the content that counts.

You should be humble on a resume.

It's okay to lie on your resume.

When students have finished the quiz, come back together as a whole class and discuss the answers.

Teacher Tip: Your students may be tempted to give the same resume to every employer, or, worse still, simply copy a sample resume they find in a book. Encourage your students to not only write their own resumes, but to customize that resume for each job they apply for. Of course, if they need help, it is perfectly acceptable to have others proofread and critique their resumes.

Writing Your Cover Letter

Many of your students will be under the impression that all they need is a resume. You need to stress the importance of effective cover letters. Impress upon your students that the cover letter actually encourages prospective employers to read the person's resume, thus it is extremely critical in the job search process.

Students need to understand the parts of a cover letter and how the cover letter complements, rather than copies, the resume. Stress that cover letters provide an opportunity to expand on key skills and experience that apply directly to the job being applied for. They are also—for better or for worse—a chance to show off a person's writing skills.

Class Activity: Cover Letter Writer's Workshop

Have each of your students bring in their cover letter and conduct a writer's workshop. Have students split into groups of three or four and critique each other's cover letters based on what they've learned so far. This can be done in conjunction with the "Cover Letter Draft Form" exercise on page 66 of the workbook.

Teacher Tip: Some of your students may be more than willing to create a resume but reluctant to write a cover letter. This is because cover letters are closer to what they consider more traditional "writing." There is more room for creativity and, in their eyes, more chance for messing it up. Thus it wouldn't hurt to spend some time looking over several sample cover letters as you teach this section.

Filling Out Applications

You should stress to your students that employment applications are designed to help employers screen out potential employees. Your students need to be aware that if they complete employment applications too quickly and sloppily, they won't make a good impression and will likely not land an interview.

Students need to be aware of the “rules” for completing employment applications that are outlined in the workbook. Make sure that students have had some practice in completing practice applications before they attempt to complete one for a job.

Class Activity: Application Practice

Have students practice completing employment applications. For this practice, you can get employment applications for an organization in your community or an online practice employment application. You can also use Internet sites such as the following:

<http://www.stratford.lib.ct.us/job/practiceapplication.html>

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/jobappsamples/a/sampleapp.htm>

Ask your students to complete one of these applications. Then have them get into pairs and critique each other's practice applications.

Conducting a Successful Job Interview

The employment interview is probably the most important step in the job search. It is also probably the step that people have the most trouble with. Although there is substantial research that indicates that employment interviews are not the most effective way to choose employees, they remain a staple of the hiring process for most organizations.

You should stress to your students that employment interviews are complex interactions; they need to be prepared for all aspects of an interview. Stress to your students that they should not fear rejection and that much of their success in interviewing will stem from the attitude they have going in. Encourage them to be confident, professional, and enthusiastic. But also encourage them to prepare well in advance.

Class Activity: Interview Horror Stories

A bad example can be just as useful as a good one. Encourage students to share personal examples of interviews that went poorly. If it's not too personal, ask students what they feel went wrong, what they tried to do to correct it, and what effect it had on their job search. Of course, you should try to bring in some stories of your own, personal or otherwise. From these stories, try to get a sense of what not to do in interviews. Then you can proceed with what to do.

Before the Interview

Your students need to understand that the employment interview process begins long before they walk into the employer's office. Stress that all of the preparation they do the days before an employment interview is just as important as the actual interview. Such preparation includes determining what they will wear to the interview, gathering as much information about the prospective employer as possible, practicing answering interview questions, and determining some interview questions that they would like to ask the interviewer.

Class Activity: Pre-Interview Preparation

Have your students create their own checklist of everything they need to do the night before an interview. This checklist might include things such as “learn more about the employer through an Internet search” and “iron my clothes.” Have students share their lists. As a class, create a master list.

Teaching Tip: Gathering information about organizations they are interested in can help students in a variety of ways: The information can help students write some questions they would like to have answered in the interview, help students identify hiring officials to whom they can address their cover letters, and help to make important career decisions if they are given a job offer.

During the Interview

The interview is the most important sixty minutes of the job search. Students need to be aware of the types of behaviors that can cause them to be ruled out during an interview. For example, showing up late will cause your students to look unreliable and undependable. Chewing gum, slouching in their seat, or wearing unsuitable attire are just some of the small behaviors that can cost students job offers.

Students also need to spend a significant amount of time learning how to answer interview questions. You should provide them with samples of some of the types of questions they may be asked and help them to prepare answers to the questions. Ensure they provide examples and descriptions they can use when answering similar interview questions and provide a platform for them to practice their answers in a “mock” interview situation.

Class Activity: Interview Role Play

Break your students into smaller groups. Have each of the members of these smaller groups take turns being the interviewer and job seeker. While not in one of these roles, the other members of the group can act as evaluators of the job seeker's performance. Feedback should be given at the end of each of the role-plays.

Teacher Tip: There is no substitute for practice. Encourage your students to practice answering interview questions outside of class with friends, family members—whomever they can find. Give them a list of questions (in addition to those found in the workbook) that they can practice with.

After the Interview

Many of your students will think they are done when they walk out of the interview. However, employers like to be thanked for taking the time to talk with them. A follow-up letter to the prospective employers after an interview is critical in securing the job. Help students to understand how follow-up letters and thank-you notes can also add details that they forgot to mention in an interview and stress to the employer again how much interest they have in working for the organization.

Class Activity: Thank-You Notes

Students need practice in writing follow-up letters. Ask your students to think back to an interview they recently went to or ask them to think about an employer with whom they would like to interview. Have them write a thank-you note to the employer. Have them break into groups and share their letters with others. Then return to the large group and discuss the importance of effective follow-up.

Assessing Job Offers

Remind students that it is important to assess any offer they receive from a prospective employer. Students should answer the questions listed in the workbook when assessing job offers from employers.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided for you to use as group discussion questions. You can also ask students to answer them as part of a journal.

1. How do you look for jobs that have not been formally posted?
2. How have you traditionally looked for jobs in the past?
3. How can your friends and family help you find job leads?
4. What is a network, and how do you go about creating one?
5. What are the differences between the visible and hidden job markets?
6. What should your resume include?
7. How should you use a resume in your job search?
8. What is the hardest part about interviewing?
9. How would you follow up after an employment interview?
10. If you were interviewing applicants for a job, what questions would you ask them? What kinds of answers would you be looking for?

Homework Assignment

For homework, have students do research and gather tips for writing an effective resume from sources such as books and the Internet. Then have the students bring their work to class and create a list of tips for writing an effective resume. They can use that list to help critique and improve their own resumes.

Part 5: Education and Training Barriers

Objectives

- Help readers explore the advantages of being a lifelong learner.
- Help readers choose the best educational program to fit their needs, interests, and long-range career goals.
- Help readers connect education to occupations.
- Help readers overcome negative beliefs, false expectations, and myths about returning to school.
- Help readers identify ways to overcome financial and academic barriers to returning to school.

Summary

More education leads to better career opportunities and increased employment success. In today's changing workplace, lifelong learning has become the rule rather than the exception. Most of today's highest-paying and fastest-growing jobs require some form of postsecondary education.

Your students' levels of education directly impact their employability, job prospects, income, and overall life and career satisfaction. Of course, there are numerous barriers that may be preventing your students from furthering their education. This section of the workbook is designed to help them overcome those barriers.

The Value of Additional Education

At one time, having a high school education was sufficient for employment success. However, as the workplace has become more sophisticated, it is increasingly more important to continue to get as much education as possible. Research indicates that jobs with good wages and greater levels of opportunity require educational training not possessed by most people in society. In short—there are good jobs out there and not enough qualified people to fill them.

Stress to your students that education has traditionally been a way for people to break out of the cycle of poverty and achieve employment success. Explain to them that with educational attainment comes more opportunities for them to get and retain jobs with good pay and benefits.

Teacher Tip: In many cases, your students will easily be persuaded of the value of more education. But that doesn't mean they believe they can get one. Many will feel that college is simply not an option—financially, academically, or otherwise—no matter how much they might want it. Your goal is to help combat these assumptions.

Class Activity: Looking at the Facts

Read the following statistics out loud or put them on the board. Then engage your students in a discussion of what this research means to them specifically. What can they do to be on the positive side of these statistics?

Roughly 60% of new jobs created between 1998 and 2008 required an associate degree or higher.

People living in poverty who acquire any form of postsecondary education have a 41% better chance of becoming financially independent.

By just staying in school and graduating, workers earn an average of \$8,000 per year more, or \$320,000 more in their lifetimes.

Choosing the Best Educational Program

It is important for your students to choose the educational program that best suits their needs and long-term goals. Help them explore the nature of their career goals and then make a direct correlation between those goals and their educational options.

Your students may not even be aware of all of the educational options available to them. Many of them might think of postsecondary education as “going to college” and may ignore apprenticeships, training programs, trade schools, distance learning programs, CLEP exams, and other options offered at the community college level. Once they have explored all of their options, you should help them use the decision-making process outlined earlier in the workbook to choose the one that is best for them.

Teacher Tip: Have the students complete the Learning Style assessment included in the chapter to help them explore the types of classes that fit their most effective way of learning.

Class Activity: Working Backwards

Have your students close their eyes and think ten years into the future. Ask them to think about the type of job they are working at. Ask them to be very specific about what they are doing and how they are doing it.

Now have them work backwards to identify the skills and training they would need to get now in order to be at that job in ten years. Ask them to think about the educational requirements of that job. Then have them identify the steps needed to enroll in such a program.

Overcoming Barriers to Education and Training

Because of its long-term benefits, one of the most important things you need to do is help your students explore their barriers to education and training and find ways to overcome these barriers.

Keep in mind that many of the barriers to education and training parallel other barriers to employment success. For example, someone who can't afford groceries, a car, or a place to live

will likely struggle to afford tuition and books. Stress that students will also need to overcome their personal, financial, emotional, and physical barriers in order to successfully overcome their education barriers as well.

Some of the barriers that prevent people from obtaining vocational training or college degrees include the following:

- **Attitudinal barriers:** When others diminish the role of education, diminish the self-esteem of people attempting to go back to school, or fail to act as role models for completing educational opportunities.
- **Personal/situational barriers:** When people are unable to return to school because of family commitments, lack of partner support, financial difficulties, living in rural or isolated areas, or transportation issues.
- **Institutional barriers:** When people are unable to return to school because they are unable to meet the requirements for admission or because they must miss too many classes.
- **Health problems:** When people suffer from mental and physical health-related disorders including depression, drug or alcohol dependence, or disabilities.
- **Socioeconomic problems:** When people are unable to return to school because of transportation costs, childcare costs, the need to work full time or overtime, or other costs related to attaining additional education.
- **Lack of preparation:** When people do not complete high school or do not meet adequate academic standards for admission.
- **Cultural factors:** Some cultural factors include limited English proficiency, primary work and family responsibilities, different definitions of success, and low educational expectations.

Class Activity: What's Holding You Back?

As a whole class, have your students brainstorm a comprehensive list of all of the reasons that have kept them from returning to school. This list might include answers such as "I cannot afford it," "I don't see the point," and "I am too old." Write all of these reasons on the board. Then have them think of ways to overcome each of these barriers.

Negative Beliefs and False Expectations

Misconceptions about returning to school are commonplace. These misconceptions are usually based in fears and false expectations. You will need to have your students identify their own misconceptions about returning to school and take time to debunk these myths.

Class Activity: Fact or Fiction?

Break the class into smaller groups. Assign each group one of the following common misconceptions:

"I can't go because I don't know how to study."

"College is only for very intelligent people."

"I can't afford to go back to school."

"I did not do well in high school, so I can't get into college."

"More education will not help my career."

Then have students in each of the smaller groups discuss why the statement is a misconception and describe ways people can overcome the misconception and return to school.

Teacher Tip: The workbook tells the story of Nola Ochs who earned her college degree at the age of 95. Such personal anecdotes can be great sources of motivation for people. If possible, bring in a guest speaker who has overcome barriers to his or her education, or share your own personal stories. In many cases, students simply need to be convinced that furthering their education is possible.

Funding the Cost of Education

Finding money to go back to school (and still support themselves or their families) is a concern that your students will have. In many cases, it will be their primary concern. You will need to impress upon them the long-term benefits that more education will bring. Your students should think of additional education as an investment that will pay off in the long-term in terms of more pay, more security, more opportunities, and greater work satisfaction.

You should also help your students to identify funding sources for them to return to school. They can start their research with the following Web sites and print resources:

- www.ed.gov/finaid/
- www.iefaf.org/
- www.financialaidforcollege.com/
- www.college-scholarships.com/
- *College Financial Aid for Dummies* by Herm Davis
- *The Financial Aid Handbook* by Carol Stack and Ruth Vedvik
- *Paying for College Without Going Broke* by The Princeton Review
- www.fastweb.com
- www.scholarships.com
- www.fafsa-application.com/

Class Activity: Finding Buried Treasure

Assign this activity as homework. Have students to do some research on available sources of funding for people returning to school. More specifically, have them identify three scholarship and/or grant opportunities that they might be eligible for. Have them share their findings with

other students in the class. They can use the Web sites listed above or those listed in the workbook as starting points for their research.

Barriers to Learning

Some students may feel that they lack the knowledge, study skills, learning strategies, and student behaviors required to go back to school. For many this is simply a misconception. Like riding a bicycle, returning students often find they have what it takes to succeed academically. In fact, many feel that their additional life experiences make them even better students with deeper perspectives on the material being taught.

That isn't true for everyone, however. Some of your students may have barriers to learning that *would* prevent them from succeeding in an educational environment. For those students, it's important to stress the need for a learning support network. Help these students identify programs, people, and other resources they can use to improve their ability to learn. This might include getting help for a learning disability, finding tutors for especially difficult subjects, or simply improving one's test-taking skills.

Teacher Tip: You can use the students' own strengths and weaknesses in your own class as the basis for a discussion of what they can do to succeed in another educational program.

Class Activity: Overcoming Specific Learning Barriers

Break your students into four or five groups. Assign each group one of the following key learning skills: study skills, test-taking skills, reading skills, writing skills, math skills, and computer skills.

Ask each group to brainstorm and/or research five or six ways to improve these skills. Then ask students to reconvene as a class to review each group's suggestions for becoming a better student and learner.

The Importance of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is no longer a buzzword. It has become a reality in a workplace where employers expect employees to keep up with their skills, knowledge, and ever-changing technology.

Being flexible is an important aspect of lifelong learning. By continually learning new things, employers will feel like your students have the skills to do a variety of tasks in the workplace. This will often lead to more responsibility, which can lead to promotions and more success.

Teacher Tip: You might want to tell your students that lifelong learning doesn't always mean getting a degree and choosing a different career. It may simply mean taking an art class at a local community college. If that ultimately leads to a graphic design program and a change in career, so be it. But even if it just leads to bad pottery or a deeper appreciation of Moby Dick, it will still be a worthwhile experience.

Class Activity: Lifelong Interests

Lifelong learning requires people to think about the interests that they have maintained over their lives and careers. Have students brainstorm the interests and hobbies that they have always wanted to apply to their careers. Ask the students to list the skills that are required in the interest or hobby.

Ask them to create a list of their top five interests and corresponding skills. Then ask them to identify vocational programs, college programs, and online educational programs where they could apply these interests and skills.

Make an Educational Plan

After your students have researched their educational options, assessed their barriers, revised their expectations, and made a decision, they must develop an action plan for their education and training. While the road will be long, having a plan in place will help your students stay on track.

Encourage your students to fill out the Educational Action Plan included in the workbook. But also encourage them to share that plan with others in their support network. The more encouragement they have, the greater their chance of following through, getting more education, and advancing their career.

Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided for you to use as group discussion questions. You can also ask students to answer them as part of a journal.

1. What is the relationship between education and career?
2. Why do some people believe they can't or shouldn't go back to school?
3. How has the workplace changed in the last twenty years? How can more education and training help you take advantage of these changes?
4. What are the best ways to fund additional education and training?
5. What can you do to become a better student?
6. How can additional education and training help you and your career?
7. Why is lifelong learning important?
8. If you could learn how to do anything, what would it be?

Homework Assignment

For homework, have your students log onto www.finaid.org/calculators/ and use the College Cost Projector to identify how much a college education would cost at various local colleges and community colleges. Ask them to bring their results and share with the group.

Part 6: Conclusion

This workbook is designed to help your students overcome their barriers to employment success. The activities are designed to both initiate reflection about past decisions they have made, their current situation, and ways to overcome employment barriers for greater career and life success. You may want to consider administer the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI)* to gather comprehensive information about your students' barriers to employment Success. In addition, BESI provides specific interventions and helps your students develop a specific goal-setting plan for overcoming barriers to employment success.

The following Class Activity can be useful in helping students brainstorm ideas for overcoming their barriers:

Class Activity: Working Backwards

Break your students into four or five groups based on the similarity of their barriers. Ask each group to brainstorm and/or research ways to overcome their barriers. Then ask students to reconvene as a class to share each group's suggestions for overcoming various barriers to employment success. On the board, write down some of the common ways students thought of for overcome their barriers.