Overview of EmployAble Project

EmployAble is a model Virtual Employment Orientation and Support Center funded by the Kessler Foundation and developed by the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawai‘i in partnership with Virtual Ability and Abilicorp.

EmployAble is guided by a belief that a practical and sustainable employment tool can be created through a combination of technological innovation and collaboration with employers, representatives of the disability community, and people with disabilities. Using interactive online tools including the virtual environment Second Life as a platform, EmployAble facilitates employment skills training, networking, mentoring, and employment resources for persons with disabilities.

In the Summer and Fall of 2013, a pilot study was conducted to assess the use of the EmployAble model by 51 adults with disabilities from across the United States. Results indicate that the Employable model holds promise for improving the employment status of people with disabilities.
Mentoring

The purpose of this Brief is to highlight EmployAble mentoring, an essential component of the EmployAble Virtual Employment Center. From the onset, EmployAble has been committed to ensuring that every EmployAble participant interested in learning more about employment and the workplace received needed supports and services. This included interacting with a mentor to understand how to find jobs, meet job expectations and expand their careers. EmployAble mentors were integral to participant success.

How EmployAble Mentoring Worked

Recruiting: Mentors were recruited by EmployAble staff; EmployAble partner Abilicorp; EmployAble Advisory Board members; through disability focused listservs, social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook; and via the EmployAble website. All recruited EmployAble mentors were volunteers. Mentors were people with disabilities with significant work experience and/or professionals in the rehabilitation field.

The Intake Process: Individuals who expressed interest in becoming mentors were asked to fill out a Mentor Application Form that requested information about mentor experience, preferences and expectations.

Orientation: Mentors participated in an online orientation via Skype that outlined project goals, procedures and mentor/mentee relationship expectations.

Implementing EmployAble Mentoring: Mentors worked both with groups and individuals with a goal of communicating with participants at least twice a month. Groups were formed based on time zones to facilitate meeting planning. Depending on what worked best for the match, communication occurred via Skype, Second Life, Facebook, LinkedIn, email, phone calls, texts, or in one group situation, with face-to-face meetings.

Reporting: Mentors filled out an online Mentor Contact Documentation Form describing how they met with participants; what happened during meetings; how the meetings fit with EmployAble goals; outcomes; next steps; and if any resources were needed from project staff.
Outcomes

Mentors focused on employment activities, such as: (1) Assisting with resume development or refinement; (2) Practicing mock interviews on Second Life, Skype, or in-person; (3) Preparing job applications; and (4) Preparing for real life interviews. In a post-survey of participant outcomes, participants indicated that mentors were an important component of their experience with the EmployAble Project. Concrete outcomes for participants included (1) Finding out about the availability of job coaching services from a local Vocational Rehabilitation agency; (2) Signing up with a state Brain Injury Program, for people with Traumatic Brain Injuries; (3) Obtaining a job interview; and (4) creating and disseminating a resume.

Below are concluding observations about Mentoring from two pilot study participants:

“My mentor was always available to answer any questions and to offer encouragement.”

“My telephone conversations with my mentor helped me overcome fear of speaking on the telephone. My mentor was supportive and encouraging.”

Implications for Practice

EmployAble mentors were even more integral to participant success than was first envisioned by the project. Mentor meetings provided a safe place for participants to discuss dreams and aspirations; concerns and fears; to receive feedback on resumes or job application letters; and to practice interviewing skills and discuss how changes in disability might impact a need for job adaptations. The successful use of mentors in the EmployAble Project demonstrates the importance of integrating mentoring into the fabric of similar projects that focus on the use of technology to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Further Resources and Contact Information

Email: employ@hawaii.edu

EmployAble Website: www.cds.hawaii.edu/employable

Employable Interview Module: https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/interview-module/


Please feel free to distribute with the following acknowledgement:
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