

Work Interventions Network

An International Collaboration of Practitioners and Researchers
on Unemployment and Underemployment

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Agenda

- Overview of the WIN initiative
 - Rationale
 - Objectives
- Summary of modules and workshop options
 - Planning, Exploring, and Engaging in the Job Search
 - Deepening and Sustaining Relationships
 - Fostering Social Awareness and Reducing Self-Blame
 - Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Care

Why This Initiative Now?

- Multifaceted nature of work, which is infused with inequality, is more evident currently:
 - Large numbers of unemployed
 - Growing precariousness in the labor market—short-term contracts; gig work; part-time work
 - Essential workers in the storm of the virus
 - Working from home (often with blurred boundaries)

Building on the Shoulders of Existing Practices

- Effective practices are being used throughout the world to support career transitions and job searches.
- We have constructed this effort using best practices that have been developed on the front lines of workforce agencies.
- Our team has been immersed in the world of workforce development, career counseling, and work-based research for many years.
- We have developed workshops that we would like to disseminate widely to One-Stop career centers, career agencies, practitioners, and other providers.

Why These Workshops and Why Now?

- The crisis is different:
 - Intersecting losses:
 - Work/jobs
 - Financial security and survival
 - Social connections
 - Fears of illness
 - Planning for the future



Why These Workshops and Why Now?

- Unemployment/Mental Health connection
 - Mobilizing job searches is difficult when clients feel stressed, depressed, and hopeless.
 - New research and practice innovations have revealed the following:
 - Unemployment causes mental health problems for some people (especially for men, blue collar workers, and those unemployed more than 6 months).
 - Preventive interventions (including even one workshop) can help to provide some protection for people in managing the stress of their lives.

Creating a Sustainable Support Network

- We have developed four workshops that can be delivered by career practitioners as an entire series or as standalone sessions.
- The goals of this initiative are as follows:
 - Mobilize job searches that can lead to meaningful and sustainable work
 - Enrich relationships and support: a critical factor in managing stress and loss
 - Enhance a broader awareness of the causes of sub-optimal work: helpful in reducing self-blame
 - Support self-care and emotional resilience

Planning, Exploring, and Engaging in the Job Search

Losing work is a crisis, but also offers opportunities to develop a pathway to a sustainable, and optimally, meaningful work life.

Participants will engage in two workshops that can be offered together or as standalone workshops—one workshop is devoted to career planning and the second workshop focuses on developing and implementing action plans in searching for new work options and opportunities. Included in the two workshops are exercises to enhance self-awareness, explore new career paths, and reinvigorate the job search process using state-of-the-art evidence-based practices.

Planning, Exploring, and Engaging in the Job Search

Goals

- Facilitate career planning, which ideally will motivate participants in their job search while also providing hope and a pathway to a sustainable, and optimally, a meaningful life
- Frame the job search around broader career planning perspectives
- Increase self-awareness and instill hope
- Reconnect to hopes and dreams about work and career
- Learn about career development process
- Support participants using perspectives and plans to sustain job search
- Develop contextual awareness and connect awareness to generation of options and recognition of imminent challenges

Planning, Exploring, and Engaging in the Job Search

- Not a duplication of job search services already available to career changers and job seekers online, or accessible at community-based organizations or colleges and universities.
- Building on what already exists and integrating other aspects of the career planning process often overlooked but known to be critical in successfully finding meaningful and wage-sustaining work.
- Will include activities to reconnect with self, acknowledge external factors affecting the process, and provide state-of-the art job search practices

Deepening and Sustaining Relationships

Being unemployed or underemployed and searching for a job are often very lonely challenges.

In this workshop, participants will have an opportunity to deepen their relationships, which is an essential source of support and resilience. Using the strengths of working in a group of peers, the workshop will foster a renewed sense of purpose for participants to connect with their friends and family, and develop connections within the group that can be sustained for the long haul.

Deepening and Sustaining Relationships

Goals

- **Overarching goal:** To deepen relationships, which are critical in providing a source of support and resilience for people managing work-based challenges.
- Define what community means to participants
- Communicate the benefits of community connection to job searching and well-being
- Help participants identify existing communities of support
- Discuss strategies for building community
- Provide opportunities for support network with other participants

Deepening and Sustaining Relationships

- Based on what we know about the importance of relationships and community as a buffer for stress
- Focus will not be on relationships as a networking tool, but rather a mechanism for coping, renewal, and joy amidst the stress of the job search process
- Will include exercises to help participants identify sources of relational and community support and strategies for building connections
- Will include opportunities for participants to sustain connections that are developed in the group (e.g., ongoing peer meet-ups)

Fostering Social Awareness and Reducing Self-Blame

Navigating work disruptions often leads individuals to experience shame and stigma along with self-blame.

This workshop focuses on helping participants enhance their critical consciousness (CC), which refers to the capacity to read the world and to enact change in one's life and context. Developing CC offers a powerful reframe about the causes of unemployment, which can reduce self-blame. CC also furnishes a protective factor that enhances resilience and promotes active engagement in one's life. Activities include group-based discussions of participants' experiences, which provide the content for a discussion of the larger factors that constrain the labor market.

Fostering Social Awareness and Reducing Self-Blame

Goals

- Develop a critical perspective about the participants' current challenges that is both accurate and fosters less self-blame
- Gain a better understanding of the macro-level factors that influence the labor market and job search
- Enhance participants' resilience via the use of more adaptive reframes and the development of a more critical perspective of social and economic forces

Fostering Social Awareness and Reducing Self-Blame

- Via theme-centered group discussions, participants will:
 - Explore the nature of the unemployment crisis
 - Understand the ways in which broader factors influence the job search
 - Explore participants' subjective experience and stigma
 - Discuss ways to use critical consciousness to protect against the psychological distress of the work-related challenge and to move forward with their job search.

Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Care

Managing unemployment and underemployment is hard and stressful.

These two workshops focus on self-care and stress reduction that can help to prevent mental health problems, which research indicates are far more prevalent and challenging during periods of job disruption. Participants will have an opportunity to build emotional resilience and enhance their self-care strategies, which are essential for managing work-related stresses.

Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Care

Goals

Overarching Goal: To provide participants with specific skills, resources, and support that will enhance their capacity to cope with the stress of job loss and other work-based disruptions.

Session 1:

- Provide safe and supportive spaces that allow participants to identify and express feelings; identify areas of lives that they have control over and build mastery in those areas; and increase awareness of the common psychological reactions to unemployment/job loss
- Validate participants' sense of loss as well as other emotions during unemployment and job search process

Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Care

Goals

Session 2:

- Increase participant understanding of how self-care helps one cope and be more resilient during stressful times
- Encourage ongoing engagement in self-care activities
- Increase motivation to take care of one's physical and mental health

Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Care

- Integration of evidence-based mental health interventions such as stress management and cognitive and behavioral techniques
- Will start with brief check in and centering exercises to help participants ground themselves
- Will include psychoeducation (e.g., informational handouts) to increase participants' awareness of the psychological effects of unemployment and the importance of self-care in managing stress; challenge misconceptions around self-care; and give examples of self-care activities
- Will engage participants into small and large group discussions to validate self and others and to learn healthy and affordable coping skills
- Will provide a list of free online resources to encourage participants to practice self-care

Provider Skills & Training

The workshops are designed to be used by career coaches/counselors who have experience in working with groups and in providing supportive work-based interventions. More specialized training in mental health is not needed to deliver these workshops.

Next Steps

- Current status of project:
 - Looking for partners to adopt some or all of the WIN project workshops.
 - Provide us with feedback and partnership
- Long-term goals:
 - Develop evidence-based interventions for this period and beyond the pandemic.
 - Conduct research to evaluate impact of interventions
 - Disseminate the interventions widely and globally
 - Publish articles in academic journals, practice outlets, and in policy-based contexts.