



Learning to Work It Out

Workplace Soft Skills for Individuals with Significant Barriers

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PROGRAM INFORMATION

THE PROBLEM

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that over 2 million American families with children were receiving assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program at the end of 2003. More than half of these also struggle with other significant challenges, such as disabilities, substance abuse/addiction, mental illness, incarceration, functional illiteracy, domestic violence, and periods of homelessness.

To survive these challenges, many individuals in long term poverty have adopted a live-for-the-moment mindset. These attitudes and behaviors temporarily ease the anxiety of poverty, but paradoxically keep individuals from escaping the poverty itself. As a result, they often find themselves trapped in a multigenerational, self-defeating cycle of poor educational achievement and underemployment.

THE SOLUTION

Traditional interventions for this population have included esteem-building, feel-good programs on one end, and practical-minded, job-seeking training on the other. The "Learning to Work It Out" (LWIO) curriculum bridges the gap by first challenging self-defeating thinking that keeps these struggling individuals from fully engaging in the job search process, then deliberately teaching the interpersonal skills needed to manage difficult work-related social situations. Specifically, LWIO uses cognitive behavioral techniques to help hard-to-serve customers develop:

- (1) Insight into self-defeating personal beliefs which drive unproductive behaviors;
- (2) Awareness of employers' unspoken expectations,
- (3) Skills for managing strong emotions;
- (4) Skills for dealing with difficult social interactions; and
- (5) Skills for logically solving problems without relying on assumptions.

THE DETAILS

"Learning to Work It Out" is a 10-lesson cognitive-behavioral program which targets individuals with multiple barriers to employment, especially those struggling with low self-esteem.

Through structured group activities, supportive role playing, and stories with realistic characters, Learning to Work It Out participants come to develop the insights and skills necessary to successfully adjust to the interpersonal demands and social expectations of the workplace. The LWIO program works best when delivered to groups of 8-16 participants by 1-2 trained instructors over the course of 2-4 weeks. It is designed to complement, not replace other programs which more specifically address other issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Learning to Work It Out” consists of ten 90-minute lessons. The curriculum is divided into three parts, each focused on a different set of insights and skills needed to transition from poverty into the workplace.

Part 1: Learning Self- Awareness

Lesson 1 Challenges and Resources

Lesson 2 Personal Beliefs

Lesson 3 Unspoken Rules of Work

Part 1 focuses on self-awareness. It helps participants become aware of self-defeating beliefs, attitudes and perceptions which may keep them from successfully finding and keeping good jobs. It first helps them set work and life goals, then identify resources to overcome the challenges that keep them from reaching those goals. It goes on to help them understand how the beliefs and behaviors that seem appropriate in their personal lives can backfire in the world of work. Skills and insights are applied to work-related situations.

Part 2: Learning Communication Skills

Lesson 4 Stop & Think

Lesson 5 Expressing Your Feelings

Lesson 6 Dealing with Complaints

Part 2 focuses on interpersonal skills. It teaches participants step-by-step strategies for keeping strong emotions in check, expressing professional complaints, and dealing with criticism from coworkers or supervisor. Skills and insights are dramatically role-played in specific work-related situations.

Part 3: Learning Problem Solving Skills

Lesson 7 Identifying Problem & Goal

Lesson 8 Gaining Information & Insight

Lesson 9 Considering Choices & Consequences

Lesson 10 Closing

Part 3 focuses on rational problem solving. It first helps participants simplify overwhelming situations by identifying useful, objective problem and goal statements. It then teaches them to avoid making false assumptions, and to analyze all possible choices before making an impulsive decision. Skills and insights are applied to specific work-related situations.

More information about this program, including samples of the workbook and trainer’s manual, may be downloaded from www.WorkinItOut.com.