**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Podcast**

**WIOA-Customer Centered Design**

**Part 2**

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VIRGINIA HAMILTON: In our next segment we're going to hear from Maria Morgan and Toni Caruso, two job coaches at the Sacramento Works! Hillsdale job center, with a combined experience of over 23 years in workforce development. These are people who've been around the system for a long time and have really benefitted from using this new kind of approach in designing services for their customers.

Maria creates and facilitates computer literacy workshops with an ESL job readiness component, and Tony provides workshops for career guidance, basic job search skills, computer literacy, and various assessments.

As two passionate workforce development specialists, Maria and Toni are going to give us a firsthand account of how they use the principals of customer-centered design in the development of their workshops, and how it can have a positive impact for One-Stop center customers.

MARIA MORGAN: This is Maria Morgan. Actually the reason I got involved is curiosity was the first thing. Also I think as a coach we always – and I can speak for all the coaches here at our center, if not everybody – is that we always look forward to new ways or new ideas to help our customers because that is our main goal.

But again, first was curiosity. I wanted to see what this customer-centered design was all about. I'm really into now I guess you can say what we practice here. So yes, just different ways to look at, different ways to really engage and get to the roots of what the customer needs are. That's what's important for us.

TONI CARUSO: And I'm Toni Caruso. I'm at the Hillsdale career center, and I too was curious about being involved in the customer-centered design program; and also about change. I like change and I'm ready to embrace change and I'm hoping to help others do the same.

So like Maria pointed out, we're all about the customer and how we can help them better, and we thought going through this program would help understand so we could help others understand as well.

MS. HAMILTON: What are some things about the process – the brainstorming, the prototyping, the failing quickly – what are some things that you learn through that process? And how do you think it's improved the way you think as an employee that's providing customer service each day?

MS. CARUSO: I think one of the top things is there are no bad ideas. Throw out everything you can and then you pick and choose and put it together as a puzzle to come up with what we're going to be doing.

Again, we'll brainstorm about the idea, see what's good, what doesn't work, and all things don't work. Some things we have to revamp and try again. And when we try again, it's again with the customer in mind and how is it going to work for them. So not only are our co-workers all involved in this, but we involve the customers to see how we can improve our processes and what we're working with them on and teaching them.

MS. HAMILTON: How do you engage customers in that process?

MS. CARUSO: Through our workshops. Initially when they come into our career center we greet them at the door with friendly faces and invite them into the center, and we do an orientation right away to get them engaged in our services here, let them know all of the things that we have available for them; and then invite them back into the individual workshops.

So rather than having them come and say, well, come back next week to a workshop, we get them engaged right away and get them excited to come in here and be a part of our customer service design flow that we have here going on at the career center.

MS. HAMILTON: One interesting thing I think that listeners would really want to hear a little bit more about is the idea of speed dating was brought and as I understand it, was sort of implemented into the system and the overall customer flow. But you guys also improved upon some workshop designs where you have customers supporting each other in that process. Can you talk a little bit about how those workshops are set up and what the benefits are?

MS. CARUSO: We certainly can.

I want to address speed dating right off the bat. We tried that and it didn't work. We had our customers interviewing each other, and because they didn't have a bond – they hadn't really known each other for very long or if at all – they did not feel comfortable going through that process. So that's part of what Robin was saying, that we were afraid to take back to her that it didn't work.

But from there we've created some workshops, one in particular called "Who Do You Know." We get together every Thursday morning and our customers get to practice their 30-second me's – their marketing speech, their elevator speech, whatever it is that they would like to call it. They're able to identify what type of work they're looking for, their skills and abilities, and get some information about that.; anything that they would be doing in networking with others, also when they go to the employer.

So that's something where they're getting to know each other, and this is starting to build the bonding process. So as they're getting to know each other, also how they can help each other look for work.

Another workshop that we have is called "Plugged In." We get together three times a month in "Plugged In," and this is kind of like a support group. So not only do we share our 30-second me's; they also share what's going good in their job search, what's not going good, if they have personal things in their life that they want to tell other people. We talk about successes. That's one of the highlights of the week, when people get to come to "Plugged In" and share with their other job seekers.

MS. HAMILTON: How have you found that other customers react to this experience? Has it taken them a little while to warm up or do you think that they really enjoyed the opportunity to get to know others who are in the similar circumstance?

MS. MORGAN: I think it's different for everybody. One thing, it was mentioned earlier, is the fact that customers, when they come to the center they can be in different stages mentally. Some people it will take longer to go through the process because of personal situations, or like we call it, they're still going through the grieving of losing their job.

So yeah, there's some people that are going to be ready to connect with others but there's others that it's going to take them a little bit more time to connect, if we want to call it that way.

MS. CARUSO: We're finding the people that are attending the workshops, not just "Who Do You Know" and "Plugged In" but all of our regular workshops – résumé, interview, assessments – are starting that bonding process. So those that go through the workshops are getting to know each other. They're creating friendships with each other versus those that are only using core services.

And there are some people that feel that they don't need to attend the workshops at this time. So as they go through the workshops, the ones that do go through the workshops we're finding them to be more successful in going through the grieving process and doing better in their job search overall by being connected with others.

MS. HAMILTON: Thank you, Toni and Maria. You guys have been through the certification process of customer-centered design. I'm wondering about what's your interaction like with the employees who haven't been through the process; they're not certified, they don't fully understand the concept, but there's constantly changes being made based around the customer-centered design. So how do you get buy-in or is there resistance from other staff, or have they sort of fallen in line with this as well?

MS. CARUSO: Our staff here has pretty much fallen in line with what we've learned through the certification of the customer-centered design. They're all open to change and ideas. When we get together – we have meeting fairly frequently throughout the month, usually three of four times a month, and we brainstorm and come up with new ideas how we can help our customers through their process and job search and going to work.

MS. MORGAN: Yeah. Another thing that Toni said as far as when we have meetings, sometimes we run into situations, and that is another good way to brainstorm as to how can we better help the customer, whether it's mine or Toni's or any of the coaches. We always bring that name or that customer to the table and figure it out – which way is the best way to serve him or her.

MS. CARUSO: And we find with us here at our career center we exchange information about our customers so we're each aware of what's going on with them. It's kind of like a big family of customers and coaches working together. So if one coach were to be out and a customer had some needs, the other coaches would be able to fill in with those needs.

MS. HAMILTON: Are there any other areas that you guys have looked at making changes to outside of the workshops?

MS. CARUSO: We're always revamping our orientations when people come in. We want to make sure that all staff, not just a set of staff, but we have other partners that work with us here; all of them are aware of the services that we have so they can inform our new customers.

It's mostly the workshops that we revamp and how we address customers' needs. How we decide to change these workshops up is based on the customers' needs, the customers' feedback. We do surveys and evaluations after the workshops and we take into consideration their comments and we make our changes based on our customers' needs. That's how a lot of our workshops came to be, is through customers' needs and customer feedback.

Another thing that we like to focus on is career guidance and career planning with our customers. We want to know where they want to go and then help them according to their plan. We don't come up with a plan for them. We let them guide us and then we will help them with that guide.

MS. HAMILTON: Thanks, guys. I think that's a great end to segment two. You guys did an excellent job and you gave a lot of very good information that I think will help your peers.

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