

YouthBuild Webinar Series

Post-Program Placement and Retention: Creating a Culture of Career Readiness

Live Webinar – August 5, 2014

Welcome to the YouthBuild Webinar Series Webcast: Creating a Culture of Career Readiness.

My name is Charles Modiano, I am a facilitator, coach, and consultant for YouthBuild USA. And I’m really excited that everyone is able to join us today.

Before we start discussing career readiness and the context for career readiness, I want to start with this Einstein quote. It is “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” And this quote has great value, because before you have the context for career readiness, YouthBuild has to have a staff value system. Which it does, and this quote really speaks to the value system that YouthBuild has. That’s a value system that deeply respects youth intelligence and culture. It’s a value system that is asset based, and does not focus on deficiencies. Because we know the assets that young people come into our program with are transferable. It includes staff practices, that include both high support and high expectations. That are non-judgmental and know that youth culture is transferrable to career culture. And that it promotes peer leadership. One of the things that we often do at YouthBuild is to facilitate groups to be self-governing.

As we discuss building a career readiness culture and career readiness strategy, it is important to have appreciation for what young people face. And some of those barriers, which often include, poverty, poor schooling, disrespect, discrimination, sometimes a prior conviction on their record. And what does that mean moving forward? We also have to take a look at the economy within this context. So first of all, we have a knowledge based economy. We know, every other week, a study comes out that says the value of post-secondary education is no longer really an option but, it is a requirement. It is a very different economy than thirty years ago or even fifteen years ago. We know two-thirds of all new jobs will require post-secondary education and credentials. Just to be clear about what we are saying, when we say post-secondary education we’re talking not just only college but we’re talking about vocational skills and vocational trade as well. So it’s a very much a broad definition. However, it is no longer a case where it is an option for young people. Secondarily, we also have moved into a service based economy. And what that means is more than ever before with the decline of manufacturing, people skills are required in ways that have been almost unprecedented. So if you were to go into the healthcare field or the business/professional field or the teaching field or some of the growing industries, you have to be able to deal with people, 90 – 96% of all new jobs will be from the service industry. So you have to have post-secondary education, and you have to be able to deal with people. And this context forms our program. Well what’s so important about people skills? People skills are both transferable skills and advancement skills. We know young people take transferrable people skills from one job to the next, from one career to the next, and we also know that managers are individuals who can deal with other people. So it inherits the people skills from the advancement skills. What’s important to recognize is that people skills often serve as the life preserver as young people obtain their education credentials and work experience. Understanding that young people come into YouthBuild at all different reading levels, not everyone is going to go into post-secondary education, or even get their high school degree within the time frame that they are in YouthBuild. Although it will be in their individual career plan. And what that means is that soft skills and people skills are something that can be acquired a right away within the frame work of our YouthBuild program while they’re there and give them an advantage. So in many ways we are looking at a great opportunity.

And when we look at this opportunity we also have to look at the rising costs of not going to college. As you can see we have a chart here. And if you were to go back into 1965 you would see there’s a seven thousand dollar gap between not having a college degree and having one. And today that gap is like seventeen thousand dollars and it’s far more pronounced when you adjust for inflation. And then there’s the added layer and this doesn’t even talk about all the young people who won’t even get a job and will be unemployed. So to match the economy we have to create a PSE culture. And ask yourself questions, like does your program culture promote post-secondary education calls? Is that message coming from all staff members? Not just some staff members? So from our purposes at YouthBuild that if staff don’t believe it, young people won’t believe it, and by the time the young person is graduating YouthBuild. A key question we want to ask is - What is our post-secondary education aspiration rate amongst the young people who leave our YouthBuild program post-graduation? We want to make sure that aspiration rate is 100%. We cannot guarantee that everyone will be at the level at that moment where they will enter post-secondary education. Or even get their high school degree at that moment but, we can guarantee a 100% post-secondary education aspiration rates. Which means every young person has the belief and the plan to go into post-secondary education. And that is a plan that will survive the length at YouthBuild. And we will discuss more on the postsecondary education in the August 5th webinar. And for our purposes here we are going to make a shift to employers and take a look at what employers want.

It hasn’t changed, if you look at the following slide it reiterates some of the people skills and the soft skills we just discussed. The first four skill qualities employers want from college graduates are an ability to work in a team structure, an ability to make decisions and solve problems, an ability to plan and organize and prioritize work, an ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization. Again we haven’t discussed technical skills. That is the seventh on the list. So from young college graduates, employers have a premium on the soft skills and the people skills we just discussed. And we have to have our focus there because often employers say we will have time to learn the technical skills. And in YouthBuild we have technical skills components which include construction, which include healthcare, which include office technology and those are all very important but not important if they’re not complimented here. So what exactly are employer’s asking for?

Well we have to take a look at a number of studies and we generally come up with four areas, problem solving, attitude, communication skills, and teamwork, so this is your other PACT. We know many YouthBuild sites have either NCCER or PACT certification skills in construction. Well can’t you have that PACT without having this PACT, and this PACT speaks to those soft skills. So let me start with problem solving up top. At the forefront of YouthBuild is the leadership development model. And leadership development is really synonymous with problem solving. Employers today will say we just don’t want instruction followers we want individuals who can solve problems so when young people at YouthBuild do all types of leadership development activities to help think critically for themselves. We are teaching employment skills during that same process. If we are helping the community we are often doing so while promoting personal development skills. We see attitude and professionalism that has always been important. There’s nothing new here. To sum it up in three words what we want to know, “Are you likable?” Are you likable? - Likable people who get along with others in the workplace often are very successful and learn all the details along the way, particularly when you have to spend over forty hours with somebody. Then there are communication skills. That was very important in every single study that we ever looked at whether it’s verbal, whether it’s nonverbal, whether it’s written, and what we learned about communication skills it seems to advance with education. Meaning the more education you receive, the more communication skills are cited as needed by employers. It goes hand in hand. And finally teamwork and collaboration, in a flatter workplace today teamwork is extremely important. The ability to make not just yourself better but, teams better and influence others at work. So, all the studies really come up to these four areas. So the question is - how are we addressing these four areas? And are we doing it in a matter that address the culture and not just the curriculum.

And that’s an important point because career readiness is so much more than curricula. And when I work at sites, and when I work with staff. Almost one of the first questions I receive is - Do you have curricula? And the answer is yes, there’s plenty of curricula. There’s plenty of good curricula when you facilitate some of your career readiness workshops. We have three listed here starting with the Department of Labor ODEP: Skills to Pay the Bills, there’s another one here from Massachusetts their career readiness curriculum guide, and then I always throw in one, what are Ivy Leaguers doing? How are they job searching? So there are portions in there that are applicable. All three of the following curricula, as well many other curricula out there have wonderful workshops within their curricula. And I tell folks, you decide what works for you. You sample what works for you and your young people. You may find lesson plans that you like, you may find many that you don’t like. Why focus on these, well these are free! There are many other resources that aren’t free and I want to sort of move away from curricula. Because career readiness is not about a curricula. You can have a fantastic trainer, in a workshop, and a fantastic facilitator. But if that work is not being supported by the entire organization that falls apart. So when we create a career ready culture we have to do so much more than that.

And generally there are six areas that comprise a career ready culture. You want simulate it, you want to integrate it, and you want to measure it. Those are the first three we are going to focus on. If you simulate a work environment, you simulate the repetition of work habits in that environment. So, we understand that YouthBuild has a construction component that is simulating the construction environment. That should not stop there but continue in all facets of your YouthBuild program. You also want to integrate a career ready culture throughout all your components, whether that’s construction, whether it’s GED, leadership development, counseling. If communication skills are important then we have to use every platform that is provided to us to improve communication skills. So in your GED class you want instructors that are constantly providing young people with opportunities for communication skills, deliberately providing opportunities for teamwork, addressing punctuality and lateness. For instance, in your career development workshop, punctuality is addressed or in the morning it’s addressed. But someone is allowed to come late to the GED without any reference or consequence or discussion? Then we are undermining what has happened in some of the previous components. So that’s where we say integrate. If there’s a counseling component that stays on the subject of punctuality and you have an appointment and a young person comes five minutes late, you want to ask a young person - why did you come five minutes late? Let’s have a discussion on that and when all staff persons are doing that, it becomes a culture more than a curriculum. Thirdly we want to measure it, we often measure the most important aspect of what employers and educators want. So we measure literacy and numeracy rates. We measure credential gains from did you get your NCCER or PACT certification? To did you get your high school diploma? We have to make sure that we measure work readiness behavior and PSE progress in the same way. Having visited many YouthBuild sites we find that we don’t measure work readiness behavior in the same consistent manner that we measure literacy numeracy rate and some of the educational gains. So that is something we want to do as well.

Fourthly, we want to model the behavior. Now everybody knows we want to model the behavior and wherever you go you hear we have to model behavior. But do we actually ever measure the modeling of behavior? And what that means is whatever tool you use to measure work readiness behavior of young people, use the same tool to measure the work readiness behavior of staff. You can do that on a quarterly basis. For instance you may measure the work readiness behavior of young people on a monthly basis just to make sure that we as staff are on top of our game. We should do the same, minimal on a quarterly basis. And this might be different than your official evaluation but it is something we will measure just to know that we are upholding the values that we are preaching. And we will have tools at the August 5th webinar that goes deeper into this. Creating a culture also requires repetition. You want to repeat it, words like daily, weekly, monthly are great words. So for instance you can go to many YouthBuild sites and you can hear weekly examples, such as “Leadership Mondays”, “Working Wednesdays”, “College Thursdays”, they’re all but of a few that I have seen. When you name days in a weekly manner there is built in repetition and all the young people are aware of that repetition. All of the staff are aware of that repetition and these themed days create a culture by the end of the YouthBuild cycle. So this is really important. So one example, one site I know who does “Working Wednesdays” everybody is coming in that Wednesday dressed like they would attend an interview. So by time they get to a job interview it’s not something that’s new. Before we go do college tours, every week a site might have a “College Thursdays” for instance. And they are dressing in a college manner. And there’s a college atmosphere on site. This is just some of many examples. Finally, part of the foundation of YouthBuild is that its peer led it was founded on being peer led. Dorothy Stoneman asked young people, “What is that you want to do in the community?” and the answer was “Rebuild abandoned homes”. We have to continue that spirit as we look at career development. Have young people informed, teamwork, design, expectations, and have us inform young people via employers and educators. So a good way to do that is while we include young people in all these decision making processes. We also have young people visit with many employers, do informational interviews with many employers. Find out what expectations are, go to colleges, and come back and then help decide on what expectations we have in our program modeled off of the real world. So while it is youth led it is employer and educator informed. And these are some of the strategies that all lead to a culture.

You have to have some questions around program design. Generally we find a career readiness culture includes staff members that have names such as post-secondary, career, placement, transition, retention, college, graduate, and so forth in their titles. While we know many individuals have a case manager in their titles. We find some of these other titles are more deliberate towards progress. It begins in orientation and mental toughness. Are career readiness principles integrated into the structure and design of orientation and mental toughness from the beginning? It includes holding group workshops on career readiness form the outset of the program. Sometimes this is integrated within the leadership development component, within the 10% top. And sometimes these skills are integrated within GED and construction. But the key is group workshops and hat way they include the peer to peer learning. That is so much more valuable than the instructor to peer learning. And then there’s content - does it heavily reflect on people skills of college and employers demand most? Do youth and educators and employers have a joint control in the design? - As I just previously mentioned. So when I think content I’m talking again those people skills, the PACT, the problem solving, attitude and professional skills, the communication skills, and the teamwork. And then finally delivery, we look at studies of why young people often drop out of school. There are many reasons but one of those reasons is it wasn’t engaging enough. “I was bored”, we see that over and over. Is the delivery of the material, dynamic, engaging, youth culturally confident, experiential, and peer led? And if it is all those things you will find that the career readiness culture will be gained more by osmosis, than it will be gained by any particular workshop. So to give on example of that osmosis. I just came from a site that recently implemented a strategy that all young people are greeted in the morning by all staff with a smile. When they walk in the door they literally have a greeter at the door. And every staff member greets them in a positive smiling manner, in a very deliberate way, one at the door and everyone else beyond the door. And we believe that this is a far more effective message of creating a culture of a positive attitude, than having a lecture on having a positive attitude.

Well this is a primer today and we want everybody to make sure that they come back on August 5th for the Career Ready webinar. And we are going to have more, career ready strategies promoting problem solving, attitude professionalism, communication skills, and teamwork. We are going to have more promoting of post-secondary education culture. We will have more examples from YouthBuild sites, so please come back on August 5th and we look forward to having you!

So we look forward to continuing our discussion on creating a career ready culture. We look forward to continuing the discussion on career ready strategies such as a problem solving, attitude, communication skills, and teamwork, more on promoting of post-secondary education culture. And come back on August 5th and we’ll discuss those strategies and cite examples. And I want to thank everybody for joining this pre-recording. Thank you so much!