

OCL Study Session, June 12, 2014, at ProLiteracy

Attendees: Kim Armani, Laurie Black, Ginny Carmody, Chris Godleski, David Goodness, Bruce Hamm, Carol Hill, Heidi Holtz, Phil James-Johnson, Peter Knoblock, Don MacLaughlin, Melissa Menon, Laura Miller, Rhonda O'Connor, Tim Riehlman, Mike Sattler, Mari Ukley

OCL: Barbara Carranti, Sandra Barrett, Renée K. Gadoua

Topic: How do employers find employees; how do employees find jobs, and where are the gaps?

Panelists:

Allison Smith, president of ISSI job placement <http://www.issitechpros.com/>

Chris Kennedy, on-the-job coordinator for CNY Works <http://www.cnyworks.com/>

Marie Christopher, senior employment counselor NYS DOL

<http://labor.ny.gov/formsdocs/factsheets/pdfs/p13-central-new-york.pdf>

Anne Messenger, owner of Messenger Associates <http://www.careermanagementpros.com/>

Sandra Barrett led a discussion of what services each panelist provides and how they view the skills gap.

Messenger has spent 17 years running her company, specializing in career management and human resources consulting, outplacement services and executive coaching.

Christopher critiques resumes and presents job search and interview skills workshops for DOL

Kennedy connects eligible job seekers with employers through OJT programs via CNY Works.

Smith owns a technology job placement company, working with IT specialists, engineering and aviation experts.

Question: what kind of job seekers do you work with?

Smith notes significant changes in technology and ways of networking. Her company's tagline: "Good people know good people."

--Companies pay ISSI to find workers; her service is free to candidates.

--She networks with ITT Tech and Bryant & Stranton. Jobs available for people with two-year degree.

--ISSI maintains database of candidates: 15,000 records.

--Starting salary is about \$30,000 a year for workers she places.

Christopher works with people both on unemployment insurance and those not getting UI. Huge range of clients: blue to white collar and all in between; full spectrum of education, experience, age, pay levels.

Kennedy works with job seekers who lack skills for specific jobs. Can offer OJT grants, which reimburse 50% of salary to employers during training. Notes the grants exist to help employees, not employers. Clients with least skills and longest unemployment tenure are priorities.

Messenger's company works with individuals who want to upgrade skills and resume; outplacement services for companies laying off workers; blue and pink collar workers she refers to CNY Works and DOL. She co-chaired the 1990 OCL study.

Question: What has changed since 1990 OCL study on workforce issues? (Download 1990 study at <http://bit.ly/11ApwaH>)

Messenger praised consolidation of CNY Works and DOL (a 1990 recommendation). Syracuse and Onondaga County previously had separate office staffs, separate procedures, separate OJT contracts, offices several blocks away. Both were supported by state and federal regulations.

“From the client perspective and a company perspective it was bewildering. It’s still bewildering, but it’s better.”

Technology has also changed dramatically, she said: “If you’re not doing technology, you’re not paying attention.”

Question from **Laura Miller** to Kennedy: How do you verify OJT money is used appropriately?

Kennedy: payroll records verification, site visits. Rigorous process to qualify. Offers OJT workshop for job seekers. They can market OJT program on their own behalf in interviews. Some businesses will call him about openings and give baseline qualifications.

Smith: "There is never enough good talent." She uses word of mouth, networking, database of candidates; referrals from ITT Tech and Bryant & Stranton. She notes there are specific agencies for every kind of job. She also acknowledged need to partner more with DOL and CNY Works.

Temp to hire is popular; she considers it a necessary evil. Cited increased aviation jobs; government likes temp-to-work arrangements.

Question from Carol Eaton: Do you serve DSS clients?

Kennedy: If they can demonstrate a skills gap

Question: Panelists in previous sessions have cited problems with technology in accessing applications: site problems, digital divide, how to use key words, never getting past initial computer screening. What do panelists see?

Messenger noted reality of virtual world: “It’s good news and bad news,” she said.

--Job seekers need to be critical thinkers about what they find online.

--People also need human relationship in networking and job searching, she said. Have a LinkedIn profile, but also meet and greet.

Jobs are found through networking, and personal and professional overlap: "Everything is a job interview."

Phil Jakes-Johnson shared story of relationship with man who ran local fish fry. Later learned he had skills relevant to Jakes-Johnson's business.

Smith: Despite more automation, job seekers and recruiters still need personal connections. The pile of resumes still has to be sorted.

In response to a question about using keywords in resumes and LI profiles, she recommends listing job title and key skills, which in technology industry might include Citrix, Cisco, software engineer. Interview offers opportunity to showcase strengths and behavior.

Messenger: Keywords should include job title. Research industry and competitors to see what keywords they use.

Bruce Hamm of MACNY: Staffing agencies do well at identifying needs of companies and what clients possess and see the gap. Asks why there are not training programs that amalgamate needs. Some exist, but they need to be scaled up and there's too much red tape.

“We knew years ago machinists were in great demand, but we still can't get enough. Same with welders.”

Kennedy: DOL/OJT does offer tuition assistance if certificate or degree will significantly increase chances of getting a job in certain industry.

Messenger: Past efforts at such training have failed. “It's a major source of frustration for many of us.” Reasons for failure: loss of momentum, politics, turnover.

Goodness: Training program gives you a certificate, but does not make you a welder. You need to be seasoned to be a welder.

Messenger: In a perfect world, there would be a continuum of training from pre-K to unions to college and beyond.

Smith: Need a big pool to make such programs work. Specialized programs are difficult for training programs.

Miller: To expect a perfect pipeline is unrealistic given the reality of how businesses work.

Possible recommendation: Encourage more programs in this model, larger programs such as Green Train and Health Train. Perhaps align more directly with CenterState's recommendations and DOL projections.

Question: How much do these unfilled positions pay? Is it a living wage? What is the living wage?

Christopher recommended Onetonline.org as a resource to research job titles, job descriptions, skills, pay scale.

Possible recommendation: Include this and other useful resources on accessible, one-stop resource for job seekers.

Laurie Black asked about resources for the underemployed who lack networking skills.

Rhonda O'Connor of Housing Visions said the agency teaches people to work in a society that's based on middle class norms and teach employers to work with people who grew up in a different environment.

“We assume they know the hidden rules,” she said. “We're setting them up for failure.”

Christopher described her view of the skills gap: The DOL is about training people to get job search skills to get a job and keep it. The gaps she sees: Poor networking skills; people who offer too much and irrelevant personal information; people who don't have or don't use phone; don't have appropriate message on phone; lack a professional email address; inappropriate interview attire; unprepared for interviews; poor spelling and writing skills.

--“Preparation and confidence are key to a successful interview,” she said.

--She tells people, “I believe you're freed up for the next best thing.”

--DOL offers computer training, but many don't take advantage of it.

Heidi Holtz later shared this June 13, 2014, article, “The Job Training Program That Really Works.” <http://bit.ly/1y2xtL8>

Possible recommendation: Urge appropriate agency to address with employers “hidden rules” as part of their responsibility in training and retaining workers.

Messenger: People need both strong job search skills and technical skills.

Hamm: The community gets confused by not distinguishing between technical and behavioral skills.

Miller: There are a lot of layers to this systemic problem: race, class, union vs. non-union, pay.

Messenger: Employers must acknowledge how young people communicate. Coaches, decision-makers need to be aware of the dynamics of technology and social media.

Recommended resources:

<https://www.uschamber.com/blog/governors-discuss-attacking-skills-gap-0>

<http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/2014/06/5-states-facing-skills-gap-and-what-they%E2%80%99re-doing-beat-it>

World Economic Forum report on Human Capital: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/human-capital-report>

--Submitted by Renée K. Gadoua, study writer