

## **OCL Study Session, May 8, 2014 at ProLiteracy**

Attendees: Kimberly Armani, Zach Becker, Laurie Black, Pat Bliss, Ginny Carmody, Jessica Cohen, Jeff Craig, Betsy Dunlap, Chris Godleski, David Goodness, Carol Hill, Mike Irwin, Phil Jakes-Johnson, Ava Kerznowski, Peter Knoblock, Jenn Locke, Don MacLaughlin, Melissa Menon, Sarah Merrick, Laura Miller, Frank Ridzi, Tim Riehlman, Mike Sattler, Olive Sephuma, Honora Spillane, Mary Thompson

OCL: Co-chairs Barbara Carranti and Ben Lockwood; Sandra Barrett

(Please note that study writer has compiled these notes from notes taken by Pat Bliss and recording by Heidi Holtz. Please alert Sandra Barrett of errors.)

Heidi Holtz (Gifford Foundation), Laura Miller (DARCO Manufacturing) and Mel Menon (On Point for College) facilitated a panel featuring unemployed and underemployed individuals

### **Panelists:**

**Garang Ajak:** SUNY Geneseo graduate 2012. He is struggling to find a job. Has customer service; manufacturing work while looking for work in his field.

**Cholawan Majok:** PSC College graduate 2008. Worked for city of Syracuse; now unemployed.

**Annette Monasterio:** Came to United States in 2000. OCC graduate in applied science. Unemployed.

**Jakia Durham:** 2013 SU graduate in sociology; associate's degree in criminology. Working at Sutherland global services; looking for better paying job.

**Jamie Plumley:** University of Maine graduate in mechanical engineering technology. Worked in Maine for 10 months, was unemployed, and just started working for DARCO.

**Isaac Rothwell:** SUNY Oswego 2009 in music and studio production. Entrepreneur working part time while he tries to start a business

**Lise Brown:** LeMoyne 2011 graduate in English. Temped, worked on political campaigns and now working in retail. Thinking about a master's degree

**Sharon Kehinde:** Has high school diploma; worked in Nigeria 35 years; she is 70. Medical issues and financial issues necessitate return to work later in life.

**Brian Ireland:** Has high school diploma- fork lift operator

**Bakaria Athumani:** From the Congo; has high school diploma, but no college in his country. Looking for work now.

Panelists were asked to list three to six assets they bring to the workforce. Responses:

### **Soft skills:**

Interpersonal  
Results-driven  
Hard-working  
Commitment  
Flexibility

Culturally diverse/global capital  
Team player  
Honesty  
Reliable/dependable  
Diverse experience  
Driven  
People-person  
Learn new skills quickly  
Persistent  
Problem-solver  
Out-of-the-box thinker  
Good work ethic  
Creativity

**Hard skills:**

Bilingual/multilingual (3)  
Computer literacy  
Forklift operator  
STEM skills  
Verbal/written skills (2)  
Social media skills  
College degree  
Plumbing  
Heavy equipment  
Carpentry  
Masonry  
Electrical training  
Welding

Employers identified many more soft skills than hard skills in the last meeting. (Check out the minutes from last meeting.)

Note that many new Americans bring broad global currency/experience.

**Question to panelists: Have you had the opportunity to really pitch your assets through the hiring process?**

**Durham:** Difficult to present the profile to every potential employer. The opportunity does not present itself in most interviews. It's not a real interview experience.

Panelist: When one is applying for a job they seem only interested in job history. The application and the resume paint the picture. Employer looking for job experience; not interested in background.

**Brown:** Not much of an opportunity to get at soft skills and previous experiences.

**Question:** Are most applications online? Yes!

When one calls they are referred to the website. The personal connection is gone. Will not take applications when one calls or walks in.

Profiles, logins, time invested and then info cannot be submitted, often creating frustration with the process. Many companies have their own

Other companies have online assets tests; applicants take the test and then disqualify.

**Panelist:** Felony conviction 10 years ago weeds out application on the front end, so he cannot promote skills.

**Panelist:** Substance abuse history from years ago creates barriers because of gaps in work history. Do not get a chance to discuss and sell myself. That's on me, but it's difficult.

ESL participants face specific barriers: language, age. Have to first pass through agencies, who do not even respond. The application process is intimidating to the job applicant. Maintaining the skills is tough.

**Question: Have you used a temp agency for screening or find work?**

Responses: Working with them, it's even tougher because it's a third-party to the employer. Their initial judgment at language skills often underestimate education and skills.

--There is a need for help navigating the online applications.

--Brown: Temp agencies are basically college graduate "farms." We worked for five months and then got laid off. It was a temp-to-hire job for copywriters, but I don't know anyone who got hired full time. Thirty people laid off at once, then company hired another group.

--Panelist: I have airline background. Temp agency called looking for travel agent. During interview, told position had been filled.

**Sarah Merrick:** Onondaga County government employs people, but test is required. There are many positions open. Must take civil service tests to get these jobs. Tests are not being given for entry level positions. Commissioner of social services can request that certain test are administered in certain time frames. Tests are not the solution to immediate employment but do yield results. Onondaga County will have many positions open with impending retirements and is not prepared to fill them.

**Question to panelists about networking: How do you create those possibilities? Who do you work with to make these types of connections?**

**Majok:** Some graduates do not have the professional connections to develop networks. It does not happen through the higher education process. No family connections. Courage is required to get out there and do internships. Said he had to become aggressive to land a 15-hour a week internship. Networking sounds great, but difficult for people with disadvantaged people.

**Plumley:** Build group experiences specific to networking. Many do not have the family contacts to rely upon. Many do not have connections with the outside world. Networking is more a white middle class advantage. Helps to overcome barriers to employment. Employers are missing out on wonderful job applicants.

**Panelist:** I'm the poster child for the Say Yes program, networked and had internships, but it's hard to network because "they'll just see you as another girl from the ghetto."

**Ajak:** Refugees do not have connections that can help them.

Most panelists said they are looking for jobs in Syracuse.

**Panelist:** Student loans to be paid back. Hard to figure out how to function outside of Syracuse. Need for resources for relocation.

**Panelist:** Networking is a white, middle-class tactic.

Employers should be reminded not to rule out applicants because of name, age, appearance, prior conviction. The interviewing and hiring process needs to offer access to people who need an opportunity to improve situation.

Ways to gain networking skills: job shadows, internships, field trips to employers, opportunities need to be designed in high schools. Creates opportunities for connections.

**Panelist:** Internship with Rep. Dan Maffei during college helped her determine that she did not want to be in politics. Said college was not helpful

**Question to panelists: Do alumni networks help?** They are mixed, panelists said.

Some tools to improve networking opportunities:

- Informational interviews? Understanding the process relative to job seeking.
- Workshops with CNY Works. Relationships built with caseworker there. Finding workshops helpful.
- Placement offices in university environments.

**(Possible report recommendation: Suggest beefed up program at colleges and agencies to build networks and practice skills.)**

Skill sets for the interview process: Most employers make the assessment in the first few minutes of the interview. Practice with videotaping. Work for OnPoint for College. Career services at Geneseo worked one-on-one with people.

**Is transportation a problem?** Arrange for volunteers to transport people to job interviews.

Volunteer opportunities create networking possibilities.

Importance of mentors in job searching: opportunity to expand thinking about future goals and interests. Situation has yielded positive results in thinking. Mentors should be go-to-resources. Stress importance in lifting one another up.

Refugees and poor people lack the social capital and access to networking and job-shadow programs that may be common among wealthier students.

**Betsy Dunlop (Visions for Change):** Mentoring is provided by volunteers. Data tracking is part of the mission of the organization.

All mentors are volunteers. If every unemployed person had a working mentor for support, we could put many back to work. Mentoring is even more important for immigrants coming into this country.

**(Possible report recommendation: Create a visible, responsive volunteer match program to serve as mentors for people negotiating job search and trying to build networks.)**

**(Possible report recommendation: Create volunteer group to provide transportation to interview and job training).**

Visions for Change: working on workforce development and eliminating barriers for transition to workforce: <http://vfcinc.org/site/>

**Upcoming meetings:**

**May 20 Study Committee meeting, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at ProLiteracy: Service and training providers.**

**June 12 Study Committee meeting, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at ProLiteracy: Topic: “How to find a job”; assessment of study thus far.**

**June 24: tba**

Submitted by Renée K. Gadoua, study writer