

## Interventions that 'work' with the unemployed

A plethora of literature shows that unemployment has negative effects on an individual's psychosocial wellbeing, physical wellbeing and their chances of reemployment. Given this finding, multiple investigative studies have sought to find out what really works to help a person become reemployed, and not just reemployed, but in a job which they can flourish and sustain in the long-term.

Esher House strives to integrate the latest and most effective in job seeker behavioural science research to inform their interventions with the unemployed, with the aim of providing the job seeker the most successful chance of improving their overall wellbeing and becoming successfully reemployed as soon as possible.

Our research team have summarised the results of the recent job search interventions meta-analysis by Liu, Wang & Huang (2014). Below are the evidence-based behavioural science interventions that really do 'work' to facilitate employment:

### Goal – Setting

Liu, Wang and Huang (2014) found in their recent meta-analysis that interventions which assisted job seekers to set goals were more effective in helping people gain employment than those interventions which did not include goal setting. **The odds of obtaining a job were almost 5 times higher** for the job seekers who participated in interventions that included goal setting (Liu, Wang & Huang, 2014). So what makes goal setting have such an impact? Setting a clear goal helps to motivate and direct a person towards a desired outcome (Locke & Latham, 1990). With reference to job search interventions, Latham (2001) suggested that it is imperative to ensure job seekers' see the connection between what they are doing (e.g. networking with weak ties) and the expected outcome goal (employment). In other words, the goals are most effective when they are 'occupational goals'. Doing this helps boost the person's commitment and motivation to reach the goal. Research also shows that goal setting is most effective when the goals are personal, specific, challenging yet achievable and also when feedback is given on the progress (Locke & Latham, 1990).

### Self-efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations." When job seeking or even just trying to gain the motivation to do something positive about your current situation, holding this belief in your ability to succeed is vitally important. As a consequence of this research many job search interventions evaluated the effect of exercises that help to build a person's self-efficacy. The results revealed that **job search interventions that included improving a person's self-efficacy were more effective than those that did not include the element of improving self-efficacy**. The odds were 3.25 times higher. One of the most successful self - efficacy-boosting exercises involved teaching the job-seeker to turn negative self-statements into positive ones (For example, from "I'm too old, they probably would rather employ a

younger person” to “I have years of administration experience, and that’s exactly what the company are looking for” (Brown et al., 2010; Millman & Latham, 2001; Yanar et al., 2009). According to social cognitive theory this type of self-persuasion training is “very effective largely because it comes from someone that most people believe to be credible and trustworthy, namely themselves” (Bandura, 1997; Aronson, 1999). The exercise, through repeated affirmations transforms self-debilitating self-talk into self-enabling self-talk which is much more functional for the job search process and interviews, particularly when faced with stereotypical and discriminative beliefs (Latham & Budworth, 2006).

## Proactivity

Job seekers are often advised to be proactive with their job search, and encouraged to apply for a wider variety of positions that they may not be on paper qualified for, or have experience in. This type of problem solving intervention has proven to be effective, particularly as companies often provide on the job training and/or courses. Considering a wider range of jobs often opens new doors and shows personal initiative and drive to change current circumstances (Crant, 2000). Job seekers are also encouraged to be assertive and proactive by calling or emailing organisations to discuss possible employment opportunities even before a vacancy becomes available (Azrin et al., 1975). The effectiveness of encouraging proactivity was demonstrated in a study of job-handicapped persons. The results were remarkable -93% of the intervention group obtained employment (Azrin et al., 1975). Further, in the 2014 job intervention meta-analysis, interventions which included the component of encouraging proactivity were more effective in helping a job seeker find employment than interventions without that component of proactivity – **the odds of obtaining a job were almost 6 times higher** (Liu, Wang & Huang, 2014).

## Social Support

Past research has indicated that social support can improve a jobseeker’s effort towards job search and reemployment. In particular, the positive attitudes and expectancies of the value of finding employment from the jobseekers spouse can really make a difference (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987). Further, emotional support (encouragement/listening) and tangible support (transport/childcare help) from family and friends also improved the job seekers self-efficacy, job search effort and intensity (Reynolds et al., 2010). In the 2014 meta-analysis **Job search interventions that helped people enlist social support were more effective in helping people gain employment** than interventions that did not help enlist social support - the odds of obtaining employment were 4.26 times higher (Liu, Wang & Huang, 2014). Braddy & Gray (1987) undertook one particularly successful study with mature age job seekers, which had a large effect size. The intervention involved employment advisors facilitating discussions and interactions with fellow job seekers in the form of checking each other’s résumés, sharing leads for jobs, and just being there for each other as a source of encouragement and support (Braddy & Gray, 1987).

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