



DISABILITY MENTORING DAY

Planners Guide

So you have been asked to serve as the DMD planner for your office. What do you do after the panic subsides?

Relax, Disability Mentoring Day is one of the most fun and rewarding ways to connect employers and customers with disabilities in a way that can be meaningful and educational for both. In the process, you and the staff in your office will have the opportunity to develop relationships with some wonderful and caring employers who are dedicated to equality in employment. These employers may be excellent sources for jobs and internships in the future for your customers. These employers may be willing to come to work support groups, employer panels, interview clinics and various other events that will benefit your customers. Think of this as a great excuse to get out and rub elbows with some wonderful forward thinking employers.

Some of the first questions that need to be addressed when planning Disability Mentoring are: Why are we doing this? What's in it for me? For my customers? For the employers in my area?

The benefits of mentoring are numerous for all parties. For DRS customers mentoring can provide an excellent opportunity for career exploration. In some cases mentees are exposed to an entire industry not just "a job". Job seekers with disabilities often don't have exposure to information that will lead them on a career path. Mentoring can be the map or "G.P.S." that provides guidance and information all along the way. Mentoring can open lines of communications and networking opportunities a person with a disability may not ordinarily have access to.

For employers the benefits are clear. Employers are frequently civic minded and want to feel they have given back to their communities. Employers get exposure to a new set of potential customers who they have the opportunity to impress as open minded, diversity aware and accessible. Employers have the opportunity to learn not only about the potential employee, they can also learn about reasonable accommodations in a safe environment through the support of Vocational Rehabilitation Staff. Employers benefit from contact and exposure to VR staff, which can provide information regarding reasonable accommodations, ADA, and provide qualified applicants to fill vacancies. As the pools of qualified candidates shrink, this valuable source of workers can be a real asset to employers. Since workers with disabilities are dependable and tend to have job longevity, Employers benefit from knowing where to find employees separate from the DMD experience. Employers also benefit from the relationship should the need for job retention or retraining arise if an employee or family member should acquire a disability.

DRS staff benefit from DMD in many ways as well. They have the opportunity to provide meaningful employment and career exploration opportunities to customers who may need concrete hands on learning situations. DRS staff benefit from networking opportunities with employers that may provide viable job leads and future employment opportunities for a variety of customers. DRS benefits from this relationship by having employers at the ready to attend job clubs, job fairs, employer panels and other DRS sponsored events designed to facilitate preparing job seekers and hiring workers with disabilities. DRS also benefits in terms of outreach for new VR customers

What are the goals for DMD?

The expectation from the agency is for each VR counselor to provide two mentoring situations.

DMD can and should be a team building activity that can culminate as a once or twice a year event, or a year long activity that culminates in one major event. Each office is free to create whatever plan works best for them and best provides opportunities for their job seekers. It can be tailored to meet the needs of specific employers and job seekers and can evolve as the needs of the office and its customers change. Encourage staff to be creative and take chances. Find ways to make the goals fun, create fun ways to report activities and be liberal with praise for work well done, goals attempted and achieved.

What are the time lines we need to meet?

This is a team effort; failure to complete your part of the goal has an impact on everyone. While we would like to report as many mentoring situations in October as possible, this should become a year round activity. Supervisors will be asked to report to their ABCs until the office goals have been met.

Have a tracking and recording plan so that the office can easily report how many mentoring opportunities have occurred, and how many are "in the works".

How do we enlist support from employers?

One of the most challenging and rewarding tasks the DMD planner will have is to train staff who may not be comfortable contacting employers to get out of their comfort zone and contact employers. The planner's goal is to encourage everyone to set goals (individually and as an office unit) and to ensure that those goals are met. Set milestones and make reporting activities easy and fun for all staff. Provide suggestions regarding employers who may be approachable and eager to participate. Employer lists from previous DMD events may be useful as well as case closure information of employers who have previously hired workers with disabilities.

Most employers are glad to feel they can give back to their communities. Once employers understand that a large part of the goal of Disability Mentoring Day is career education and learning about the work place they are eager to participate. This is an easy and fun way for them to open their doors and help a person with a disability. This can be the beginning of a great long term networking situation for your customers and staff.

Explaining to employers that mentoring can be time limited and does not require the commitment to hire can take a load off the employers mind. Remind employers that if they meet a candidate who meets their hiring needs, DRS can assist in preparing that job seeker for the job.

THIS IS A DRS PROJECT AND DRS STAFF ARE RESPONSIBLE TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN AND TO FOLLOW UP.

DRS staff has the responsibility to make and keep contact with both mentors and mentees. They should help both groups understand their roles and responsibilities and should ensure that the mentoring situations happen. Success in a mentoring situation can mean many things; it can mean simply that the event took place. In some situations both mentor and mentee will agree that this is not a good job match. This is a success, and a great lesson to learn before time and training monies are spent preparing for a job that is not a good match. Sometimes both mentor and mentee agree that this is a good job match and efforts to make employment happen should proceed. This may include employer paid or DRS paid training. One thing that is important to remember is that when employers and job seekers are together, good things happen.

Be sure to utilize all resources available such as the AAPD site <http://www.dmd-aapd.org/> this site has wonderful ideas and resources for Vocational Rehabilitation staff to use. Be sure to include your ERS as a resource.

Some ideas for successful events

- A luncheon or breakfast to recognize mentors and mentees. Provide certificates of completion to mentees and certificates of appreciation to Employers. This could occur at the end of a week of mentoring events or could be an annual event that honors mentors and mentees throughout the year.
- Ask an employer to sponsor a day at their work site for several mentees that will include a tour of the site, and descriptions of various jobs. This tour could include a short presentation on how to apply for jobs and what the employer looks for in applicants.
- Ask different employers to present at the job club each week for a set time. Bring in a variety of employers to talk about jobs of interest to your job seekers. At the end of the year, recognize these employers with certifications.
- 2 or 3 offices could work together to have one recognition event.
- Before the event begins, ask local employers to be DMD sponsors, create a sponsor sheet that can be shared with other employers to enlist their support for future events. Offer thanks and congratulations to employers who "sponsor" events by doing a write up for One Net or get a newspaper release for a local newspaper.

- Provide an information session for employers in the local office. Provide coffee and donuts as you share information and request support for events.
- Involve the mentees in contacting employers, they could be the first contact with the employer to do an informational interview and learn about the company. DRS customers and staff can “team up” when they are making appointments to meet with employers.
- Be creative, ask customers and employers for input on how to make the day more meaningful for them.
- Mentoring can easily become a tool used year round to place customers in employer sites for career exploration and to prepare for a job search. The networking possibilities are endless for the job seekers.
- Keeping a year round mentoring attitude also keeps the DRS staff in touch with employers all year long. Most employers are eager to speak at employer panels, work support groups or to review resumes or do practice interviews. Giving people the opportunity to give back to the community is a great gift that many employers value.

Details are important! Decide who does what, when, where and how! Talk it all out and be as complete as possible. The more effort that goes into the front end, the less it takes as the event approaches. Do a mental walk through for each event, try to anticipate what might go wrong and be pro-active in finding solutions. Work as a team whenever possible.

For more great ideas go to the DMD website <http://www.dmd-aapd.org/> or talk to your ERS

How can we measure our success?

Have a plan for follow up. Follow up happens at all stages of the event. Making sure that things are done on time and that results are achieved at each step. Staying in touch with the mentees will help keep them on track and focused on attending the mentor opportunity. Mentees can be prepared to ask questions and also to follow up with a thank you to the employer. Follow up with the employers will provide the opportunity for feedback for the next year, and should provide feedback that will assist the mentee in finding work, either with that employer or at another site. This also creates the opportunity to develop a relationship with the employer that may lead to jobs in the future. Employers who trust you and feel that you provide mutually beneficial services will feel comfortable coming to you to meet their staffing needs.

Be sure to involve all staff, and report all the successes. If your STEP or transition program is working on DMD activities, be sure you communicate with each other and report all DMD activities to the Office Supervisor.

Be sure to have a plan of action for after the event. Writing thank you notes may take time but is an important follow up task that should be shared by the whole team and can be done as a group. (Have a pizza day in the office to write all the thank you notes as a team). Present certificates of appreciation to the employers, and/or certificates of participation to the customers. Remember to keep careful track of all the mentoring situations and report the numbers to the Supervisor and ABC.

Be sure to use your ERS as a resource in contacting employers and creating your DMD plan.