

# Hiring IPS Employment Specialists

## Background and Experience

Many programs report that they attempt to hire people who have marketing or sales experience. Others try to hire people who have been employers in the past, and still others attempt to hire people who have a background in mental health. Obviously, all of these types of experiences would be helpful to an employment specialist, though it is usually quite difficult to find someone who has such a varied background.

Another approach is to think about the personality type of a successful employment specialist. For example:

A recovery oriented candidate is someone who:

- is hopeful about every person's ability to succeed in employment
- is open minded about helping people move into competitive jobs, regardless of active substance use disorders
- believes that work can help people manage mental illness
- believes that people learn and grow from their experiences.

A creative problem-solver might:

- be someone who can think of more than one possible solution to a problem
- ask questions to learn more about a particular problem.

A candidate who is genuinely interested in the job:

- would attempt to learn about IPS supported employment (interviewers can provide the link to IPS Employment Center website: [www.ipsworks.org](http://www.ipsworks.org))
- ask questions about the job and their potential job duties.

A candidate who would be a good job developer:

- would present him or herself in a professional and confident manner
- may have a gregarious, "sales" personality or may be quiet, yet persistent
- would be a good listener—interested in learning about other people.

## Sample Interview Questions

*Below questions, in italics, are suggestions for things that interviewers can listen for.*

Did you have a chance to read about IPS supported employment? Based on that, what do you think a typical day would be like? (While setting up the interview, share the following website with the candidate: [www.ipsworks.org](http://www.ipsworks.org))

*-Was the candidate interested enough to read about IPS? Does the person have a good understanding of the job—does s/he know what s/he is applying for?*

What would you enjoy about this job? What would you not enjoy about this job?

*-Does the person have a good understanding of the job? Is the candidate able to provide a thoughtful, honest response about parts of the job s/he would not enjoy?*

How do you go about finding jobs for yourself?

*-What type of job search skills does the person already possess? Does the person use networking as one strategy?*

What would you do if one of your clients began missing appointments?

*-Does the response seem to blame the client or is the candidate using more of a problem-solving approach?*

What do you think about helping people with active substance use problems find employment?

*-Does the person have a determined opinion about waiting for people to become sober? If so, how does the candidate respond to information from the reviewer about zero exclusion?*

What would be your expectations for the people you would serve?

*-Does the candidate have ideas such as, “People have to be working as hard as I am on the job search”?*

How would you learn about employers and their job opportunities within this community?

*--Does the person have some creative ideas? Does the candidate think of ways to get out of the office to meet employers or does the candidate suggest websites, only?*

How would you build credibility and strengthen relationships with employers?

*--Does the person have ideas such as using face-to-face meetings, following through with things s/he says s/he will do, listening to what is important to the employer...?*

Role-play: Candidate is approaching a restaurant manager for the very first time. Candidate has a client in mind—a person who is interested in food prep.

*-This may be very difficult for someone who has never done job development, but listen to see if the candidate listens carefully to the employer, talks about her client’s strengths, asks questions...*

Role-play: Candidate is going back to the restaurant after the person has been working for one week. Manager reports that worker is too slow.

*-Does the candidate try to ask questions to figure out what is going on? Does the candidate try to figure out how the worker's slow work speed is affecting the business? Does the candidate listen carefully to the employer to learn what is important to him or her? What type of solutions does the candidate propose—more than one?*

Why do you think it would be important to stay in close contact with the mental health team? With VR counselors?

*-Does the candidate understand how to work as a team member?*

What do you hope to be doing in 5 years?

*-Does this job really fit the person's work interests?*

For candidates who do not have mental health experience but who are final candidates for the job: Offer to let them shadow an employment specialist for a few hours. Ensure that the employment specialist will be working in the community, visiting people at their homes, etc. (Be sure to have completed releases in advance of going out with the candidate.)

*-Does the candidate think that this is work that s/he will enjoy? Does it feel okay to go into people's homes? To spend his or her days out and about, rather than in an office?*

For candidates who are final candidates for the job: Offer to let them shadow an employment specialist while s/he makes some employer contacts. (Be sure to have completed releases in advance if talking about specific clients or meeting clients.)

*-Does the candidate think that s/he would enjoy job development and be able to develop good job development skills over time? Does s/he understand that job development would be part of his/her weekly responsibilities?*

## Sample Employment Specialist Job Description

**Overall Function:** Carries out the services of the IPS Supported Employment program by assisting clients obtain and maintain employment that is consistent with their vocational goals.

**Responsibilities:** Engages clients and establishes trusting, collaborative relationships directed toward the goal of competitive employment in community job settings with other workers without psychiatric disabilities.

Assists clients in obtaining information about their benefits (e.g., SSI, Medicaid, etc.) and how they will be affected by employment in order for clients to make good decisions about employment opportunities. Refers clients to benefits counseling, as needed.

Assesses clients' vocational functioning on ongoing basis utilizing background information and work experiences. With the client's permission, provides education and support to family members. Discusses client's preference for disclosure of psychiatric status to employers.

Conducts job development and job search activities directed toward positions that are individualized to the interests and uniqueness of the people on his/her caseload, following the principles and procedures of supported employment.

Conducts a minimum of six employer contacts per week. Employer contacts are designed to learn about the needs of the business, describe supports offered by the program and describe client strengths that are relevant to the position.

Provides individualized follow-along supports to assist clients in maintaining employment.

Provides education and support to employers as agreed upon by clients that may include negotiating job accommodations and follow-along contact with the employer.

Provides outreach services as necessary to clients when they appear to disengage from the service. Uses a variety of methods to provide outreach.

Attends weekly meetings with mental health treatment team and communicates individually with team members between meetings in order to coordinate and integrate vocational services into mental health treatment.

Has face-to-face meetings with vocational rehabilitation counselors at least once a month to coordinate services for clients.

Develops an individual employment plan with the client, mental health worker, other treatment team providers and updates it quarterly. Develops job support plans with the client

using input from the client, mental health workers, family members, past employment experiences and information about current job.

Spends 65% or more of scheduled work hours in the community. For example, meets client at community locations such as home, workplace, coffee shop, library, One-Stop, VR office, family home, etc. or takes client to apply for jobs, investigate local GED or colleges, etc.

Provides supported education, using principles similar to supported employment, for clients who express interest in education to advance their employment goals.

Is responsible for a minimum of \_\_\_ number of job starts per year or maintaining \_\_\_% employment on caseload.

**Qualifications:** Education and experience equivalent to undergraduate degree in mental health, social services, or business. Experience working with people with serious mental illness, experience providing employment services, and knowledge of the work world are preferred. Ability to work as an effective team player is essential.

## **Employment Specialist Competencies**

Develops relationships with employers by learning about their businesses, hiring practices, hiring preferences etc., over multiple visits.

Investigates the local business community in order to learn about different employers and types of jobs available.

Utilizes good client interviewing skills in order to learn about individual preferences, past experiences, hopes and concerns regarding employment.

Effectively collaborates with mental health practitioners, VR counselors, family members and other members of the vocational unit.

Utilizes a strengths-based approach when serving clients by recognizing each person's skills, experiences, personal values that support employment.

Employs a recovery-based orientation including the belief that people learn from their experiences, develop new skills, and achieve life goals over time.

Keeps current with, and applies, new work methods, skills and technologies to complete work.

Assists with finding and accessing resources such as work incentives planning, local schools, available transportation, etc.

Uses a problem-solving approach when faced with challenging or difficult situations.

Conducts work in community settings (at least 65% of work week).

Assists individuals to analyze each work experience for lessons learned, using input from employers, the worker, mental health practitioners, VR counselors, family members or others.

Writes person-specific plans that are congruent with each person's goals and includes specific steps that will be taken to meet those goals.

Provides timely documentation that meets requirements of various funding sources including VR, Medicaid, and others.

## IPS Supported Employment Supervision Record

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Employ  
Specialist: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Discussed	Issue Discussed	Plan to Move Forward
Person in Job Search More Than 3 Months	Discussion	Plan to Move Forward

<b>Person Starting Job</b>	<b>Person's Strengths &amp; Possible Problems</b>	<b>Job Support Plan</b>
<b>Client Outcomes</b>	<b>Celebrations/Areas to Improve</b>	<b>Plans to Move Forward</b>

<b>Other Issues</b>	<b>Celebrations/Areas to Improve</b>	<b>Plans to Move Forward</b>

How will (supervisor) help with plans to move things forward--what type of assistance would ES find helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

Next supervision date/time: \_\_\_\_\_ Field mentoring  Office

Monthly Supported Employment Program Outcomes

Employment Specialist	Caseload Size	#/% Competitively Employed	#/% of People in School	#/% in Job Search	#/% No Contact
Paul	17	10/59%	1/6%	4/23%	0
Becky	19	6/32%	0	5/26%	2/10
Jeffery	15	8/53%	1/6%	6/40%	0
Tanya	21	16/75%	1/10%	1/5%	1/5
					4%
Team Average:	Goal: 20 or fewer Actual:18%	Goal: 50% or higher Actual:55%		Goal:25% or higher Actual:22%	Goal: 0 Quarterly Actual:4%

## Individual Plan to Achieve Goal

Date:

Supervisor:

Employment Specialist:

Related to client outcomes, an area to celebrate:

Related to client outcomes, an area to improve or enhance:

What is the goal for the next quarter? (For example, "Increase rate of competitive employment by 5%):

What steps will be taken to achieve goal:

1.

2.

3.

How will supervisor help?

4.

5.

6.

When will this plan be reviewed?