

Welfare to Work The Opportunity

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ANY ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS HAVE FAILED BECAUSE

of the misguided notion that simply providing jobs and training will somehow break the poverty cycle. Such programs neglect the most important aspect of job matching: determining whether individuals possess the essential motivations and potential needed to perform well in a particular position,” says Herb Greenberg, Ph.D., President and Chief Executive Officer of Caliper. “In our assessments of nearly

two million individuals for over 25,000 companies worldwide, we have found that regardless of experience or background, people who are matched to jobs, based on their inherent personality attributes and motivations, and are then given appropriate training, will succeed,” he adds.

This same job-matching process is the key to breaking the vicious welfare cycle, according to Greenberg.

Back in 1965, Caliper was provided with the opportunity to put this assessment approach to the acid test. The human resources consulting firm was given a grant by the then existing Office of Economic Opportunity to place “chronically unemployed individuals” in San Juan, Puerto Rico in professional-level sales jobs. None of these individuals, who by law could not have earned more than \$1,800 per year, met any of the stereotyped criteria that companies normally look for when making hiring decisions. Certainly, they had very little professional experience. And they were not adept at hiring interviews. This project was designed to assess the basic personality attributes and motivations of each individual to determine whether they were suited for sales positions.

To accomplish this goal, Caliper consultants had applicants take the Caliper Profile, a proprietary comprehensive personality assessment instrument, then followed up with

intense interviews.

Those individuals who possessed the potential to succeed in a sales job—particularly, the motivation to persuade, the empathy to understand a prospect’s needs and the ability to handle rejection—were then enrolled in a training program which prepared them for job interviews and other expectations of the work place.

Prior to the interview, human resources executives of the participating companies were provided with the results of the personality and skills assessments, so they had a clear understanding of why each individual was being recommended.

Greenberg recalls, “The success of the initial program led to additional funding. In total, 350 people were placed in professional sales jobs with oil companies, mutual fund houses, radio stations, newspapers, business forms operations, etc. A chronically unemployed woman who babysat for my son became the first woman ever to be licensed to sell mutual funds on the island of Puerto Rico and she came back six months later to hire five people from a subsequent class to work for her. This is but one example of many success stories that could be cited.”

While this initial project was successful on many levels, Greenberg felt there was much more that could be done. “We were able to place 350 people in sales jobs.

But there were another 1,350 who could have been successful at other endeavors, only we did not have those jobs available. Many had the assertiveness, interpersonal skills and empathy to be good supervisors. Others had excellent service motivation, detail ability and problem-solving skills, which would enable them to do well in customer service positions. Others had the personal organization, conscientiousness, and self-structure to coordinate projects for positions such as a traffic manager. Without these jobs available, however, we were unable to place many capable people.”

Then, executives at Oppenheimer Management, Inc. asked if Caliper could help find 15 welfare recipients to fill back-office positions. “We received 68 referrals from the New York City Department of Welfare, who we assessed to determine, among other qualities, their levels of conscientiousness, flexibility and detail ability,” Greenberg says. “We were then able to place the 15 people who Oppenheimer requested, and with Oppenheimer’s permission, placed an additional 30 individuals with a number of other New York City companies in a wide range of jobs.”

With these two programs as background, Caliper received a grant from the United States Department of Labor and was able to place over 3,000 “hard core

unemployed” individuals in 55 job categories in New York City.

From this pioneering work to more recent initiatives, Greenberg has discovered, “Most welfare recipients, for a multitude of reasons, have not had the opportunity to play to their particular strengths. The reason our assessment program worked so well is that it was designed to cut through the superficial background factors to uncover those nuggets of strength in each individual that were buried under the debris of discrimination in our nation’s welfare cycle. Then, when those key strengths were uncovered, training could be specif-

ically applied to maximize those strengths. There was no attempt to push people into jobs for which they were fundamentally unsuited in the hope that training could perform magical wonders. In such instances, we preferred not to place an individual, rather than to add still another defeat to an already losing psychology.”

Greenberg believes, “Breaking the welfare cycle and tapping the enormous hidden human resource reserves that exist in the current welfare population will require a partnership between business and government. Executives need to be willing to replace their usual hiring

criteria, including experience, with the one criterion that marks job success—the basic appropriateness of the individual to the job.”

He adds, “Funding should involve a partnership between companies offering jobs and government agencies that help subsidize the selection and pre-job training components of such a program. This blueprint will take a tremendous commitment, but can work.

“Assessing talent and applying training to match that talent to appropriate jobs provides an opportunity to finally break the welfare cycle,” Greenberg concludes. ■

Herb Greenberg, Ph.D., President and Chief Executive Officer of Caliper, (pictured) **“YOU CAN TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS BY UNCOVERING THEIR REAL POTENTIAL.”**

