

102/26

JOB-FINDING CLUB: A GROUP-ASSISTED PROGRAM FOR OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT*

N. H. AZRIN, T. FLORES and S. J. KAPLAN†

Behavior Research Laboratory, Anna State Hospital, Anna, IL 62906, U.S.A.

(Received 15 July 1974)

Summary—Although joblessness is a major problem, no method of job-counseling has been demonstrated to be superior to usual job-finding practices. The present study describes a new type of program, which has now been evaluated experimentally in a matched-control design. The new program was conducted in a group and stressed such distinctive techniques as mutual-assistance among job-seekers, a 'buddy' system, family support, and sharing of job leads. In addition, the program arranged special ways of using such common practices as searching want-ads, role-playing, telephoning, motivating the job-seeker, constructing a resumé and contacting friends. Within 2 months 90 per cent of the counseled job-seekers had obtained employment vs. 55 per cent of the non-counseled job-seekers. All clients who attended the program regularly obtained employment. After 3 months, 40 per cent of the non-counseled job-seekers were still unemployed. The average starting salary was about a third higher for the counseled job-seekers. The present procedure appears to be an effective method of assisting a greater proportion of the unemployed to obtain jobs and more quickly, and at a higher salary than they could obtain when they used the usual job finding procedures.

Unemployment has been correlated with higher crime rates (Johnson, 1964), alcoholism (Plaut, 1967), and mental hospital institutionalization (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958) and is generally acknowledged as a major problem for an individual as well as for society. Yet, the typical job-seeker is usually left to his own initiative. He is likely to use generally known procedures such as help-wanted advertisements and to ask some of his friends (Jones and Azrin, 1973; Sheppard and Belitsky, 1966) in an unstructured manner. Job counseling programs and job-seeking manuals (Jameson, 1973; Marshall, 1964; Lyons and Martin, 1940) have been devised to meet this urgent need, but none seem to have been experimentally evaluated to determine whether they succeed in obtaining employment more efficiently than the job-seeker could have by his own efforts. The need exists for a job-counseling program which has been shown experimentally to be superior to the efforts of the individual job-seeker. To meet this need, the present study devised a counseling program which consisted of many different procedures, some of which have been used relatively infrequently, such as group counseling as well as other procedures which have been used commonly but in different ways than in this program. The effect of the program was experimentally compared with the results of the efforts of non-counseled job seekers.

The hiring process was conceptualized in a previous report (Jones and Azrin, 1973) as a social reinforcement process in which skill-irrelevant factors played a substantial role. The present study extended that view to the job-counseling situation. Job-finding was viewed as requiring a number of complex skills which should be learned best in a structured learning situation that emphasized such learning factors as motivation, maintenance

* Reprints may be obtained from Dr. Azrin at the above address.

† Currently at: School Psychology Services Unit, Duval County School Board, Jacksonville, FL 32217, U.S.A.

of behavior, feedback, imitation, and practice. Job counseling was considered as a learning experience which should be taught in a structured and continuing manner until the job was obtained. In addition, the present program was a 'systems' approach oriented to the perspective of the job-seeker: the program assisted the job seeker in every area that was believed to be influential in obtaining a job. Assistance was provided for such diverse problems as discouragement in job-seeking, need for family understanding, transportation, peer assistance, professional advice, job leads, preparation of a resumé, interview skills, techniques for approaching friends, practice in obtaining interviews, scheduling of one's time, and expanding one's vocational choices.

METHOD

Setting

The program took place in a small college town located in a sparsely populated community with no public transportation and a long history of above-average unemployment. Many of the 30,000 population of the town were students.

Clients

The clients were referred from several sources, including a newspaper advertisement, a State of Illinois Employment Service Agency, the personnel departments of several large businesses, and word-of-mouth information. The only criteria for selection were that the individual desired permanent full-time employment and was not currently employed full-time. An initial orientation meeting described the overall counseling procedure and the need for daily attendance. All clients who agreed to that participation were considered. The only individuals excluded were those receiving unemployment compensation since preliminary study indicated that some of these individuals made little effort in the program until their payments terminated.

Experimental design

All clients who indicated a desire to participate were matched in pairs each week after they were given a description of the program. An overall criterion of probable employability was used as the general matching criterion and was based on the more specific criteria of age, sex, race, education, marital status, desired type of position and salary level, number of dependents, and current financial resources to the closest extent that such matching was possible. The individuals were divided into pairs and a coin toss determined which individual in a pair received the counseling. The other member (control client) received no counseling. Clients who attended four sessions or less were omitted from the study and their matched controls also were not considered. Of the resulting 60 clients who received counseling for at least 5 sessions, 28 were male and 32 female. They had an average age of 25 yr, had 14 yr of education, and had been employed an average of 6 months during the past year. The 60 persons in the control group differed only slightly; 27 were male and 33 female, they had an average age of 26 yr, also 14 yr of education, and had been employed an average of 5 months during the past year. There were 9 blacks in the counseled group and 8 in the control.

Session scheduling

The clients were given group counseling, the size of the group being determined each week by the number available for starting that week and varied from two to eight clients. The first two sessions were about 3 hr in duration, whereas the subsequent sessions were 1-2 hr. A new group was started about every 2 weeks. After the first two lectures, the new clients met with the clients who had started in earlier weeks. The sessions were scheduled daily and the client was urged to attend each day until he obtained a job.

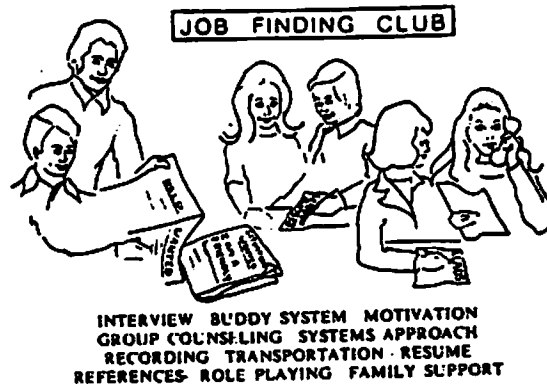


Fig. 1. Pictorial representation of the job-seekers in the Job-finding Club.

Group meeting

Job-seeking is usually considered to be a solitary concern. The present program made job-seeking part of a group effort by having the clients meet in a small group as pictorially illustrated in Fig. 1. The group meeting allowed the use of the buddy procedure, mutual auto transportation to employers, role-playing, supervision of their manner of telephone inquiry, mutual review of their resumés, sharing job leads and mutual encouragement by a peer group.

Buddy system

To provide strong social support from their peers, the clients were paired off with each other during each session. They could thereby give individualized as well as group assistance, advice and encouragement to each other.

Motivation

Job-seekers frequently became so discouraged by their failure to obtain a job that they abandoned all efforts. To overcome this discouragement, the present program (1) enlisted support from the applicant's family, (2) provided statistics and played tape commentaries of former job-seekers in this program who were successful in obtaining employment, (3) enlisted encouragement and support from other group members, and (4) provided encouragement from the counselor.

Family support

Job-seekers often receive no psychological support from their family and indeed are sometimes hindered by the new duties that their family imposes on them because of their unemployed status. To reverse this attitude, the family was viewed as a strong potential

source of encouragement and assistance. The counselor sent a letter to a family member (spouse, sibling or parent) or friend with whom the job-seeker was living, and explained how that person could help the job-seeker obtain employment. The assistance suggested was: (1) limiting use of the family 'phone by other family members, (2) providing arrangements for transportation of the job-seeker, (3) emotional support and encouragement, (4) offering of job leads and making suggestions for his job search, (5) making allowances for the great amount of time spent job-hunting.

Full-time job search

The job search is usually considered a part-time incidental effort, but as other programs have emphasized, the job search deserves full-time concentration. The present program required the applicant to be occupied full-time in such activities as phoning, being interviewed, writing letters, and contacting friends and relatives. Counseling sessions were arranged daily to provide a structured setting for these activities and to review the job-search activities he performed outside of the session.

Widening variety of positions considered

Applicants often limit themselves to considering only one type of job, such as waitress or factory worker, and by so doing have few positions to choose from. The applicants were, therefore, encouraged to consider many other types of positions. They were given examples of other positions for which they would qualify and were made to realize that many employers will provide on-the-job training, especially if they like the person. Examples were given of previous clients who obtained better positions by considering many types of jobs.

Self-help

Having obtained previous jobs by the direct intervention of another party (employment agency, relative), the job-seeker may later be at a loss regarding job finding when such direct assistance is not available. The present program taught the job-seeker the various techniques of job seeking such that he would be in a better position to obtain employment in the future. This instruction was accomplished by providing no more assistance than was needed and by requiring the client to explain the procedures to the other clients, especially his 'buddy', in the group. The counselor never arranged the interview; the client learned to do so himself.

Dress and grooming

The initial impression that a client makes on an interviewer is probably influenced greatly by the manner of dress. Consequently, written instructions as to the need for dressing appropriately for the position were given to the clients and discussed. Yet, some younger clients considered such advice as unimportant, especially regarding length of hair. To influence them more meaningfully, the 'buddy' was required to comment on the suitability of the clothing and grooming of the client during a role-played interview, thereby bringing peer standards to bear, rather than those of the counselor.

Personal attributes

As noted previously, employers seem to hire in large part on the basis of personal-social attractiveness of the applicant. Therefore, the program emphasized these personal-social

characteristics by such procedures as including on the resumé a photograph and a list of hobbies and interests, use of friends and relatives as referral sources, and attempting face-to-face interviews, or at least phone contact, rather than merely submitting an impersonal application form.

OBTAINING JOB LEADS

Procedures

Job leads from other job-seekers. Each job-seeker must discover anew by his own efforts the existence of job openings that are not widely publicized. As found by Jones and Azrin (1973) most jobs were not publicly advertised. To minimize the need for this continued re-discovery of the same job leads, each new job-seeker was provided with the job leads obtained by the other job-seekers in the program. The counselor arranged for the job-seekers to inform each other (1) of job offers that they did not wish to accept, especially after having accepted an alternative position, (2) of job openings they had discovered incidentally but for which they were not qualified or interested, and (3) after they were hired, of openings available in their new place of employment as well as a list of all previous potential employers that had expressed interest or granted an interview. This communication was facilitated by the group meetings, by having each job-seeker keep a record of his job contacts, and by mailed inquiries to job-seekers after their employment.

Friends and relatives

Friends and relatives are the single most important source of job leads (Jones and Azrin, 1973; Sheppard and Belitsky, 1966), yet this source is typically pursued in a happenstance manner. The present program structured the use of friends and relatives by having the client list all close friends and relatives, then contacting several of them in the following manner: (1) asking them for use of their name as a reference on application forms, (2) asking them for incidental job leads or openings at their place of employment, and (3) asking them for an open letter of recommendation.

Situation wanted advertisement

Very few job-seekers advertise their need for a position, perhaps because so few jobs are obtained by this method (Jones and Azrin, 1973; Sheppard and Belitsky, 1966). When such advertisements are used, the usual practice is to list only one's formal qualifications. The present program used these 'Situations Wanted' newspaper advertisements for all clients and, in contrast, emphasized attractive personal attributes by such phrases as 'likes to meet people' in the advertisement.

Help-wanted advertisement

Help-wanted ads are the most often used source of job leads by job-seekers and of public notices of position availability by employers. Yet, job-seekers did not seem sufficiently exhaustive in their examination of the advertisements, often dismissing a position from consideration because of slight preferences regarding geographic location, the type of job, presumed lack of training, or simply because of incomplete information in the ad. The present rationale was that job prerequisites are flexible, that apparent deficits might be outweighed by other unknown attractions and that the personal factors would weigh heavily. Consequently, the job-seeker was encouraged to explore every reasonable lead. By meeting the employer in a personal interview, the job-seeker could obtain the additional

information and allow the personal factors to operate. The help-wanted section of the local newspapers were closely scrutinized during each session. The counselor, the group members and, especially, the client's 'buddy' pointed out every possible job of interest for each client.

Former employers

Former employers have the unique status of having first-hand knowledge and appreciation of a former employee's productivity and reliability, especially if the employment was terminated under pleasant circumstances. The job-seeker was instructed to follow up several possible options. He could ask his former employer for: (1) his previous position or any openings in the near future, (2) other positions he might be qualified for because of increased experience or education, or openings in a branch of the company, (3) incidental job leads that the employer knew about, (4) an open letter of recommendation, or (5) a personal referral to other employers. The job-seekers engaged in supervised practice of what to say to previous employers.

Telephone

Telephone contact with potential employers appears to be used as a minor procedure by job-seekers. The present program made extensive use of phone contacts since this medium was far more efficient than traveling to the job location. Telephone conversation with the employer was usually obtained more easily than was face-to-face interviews, yet the face-to-face interviews could then be arranged more readily once phone contact was made, even more so than by a written request alone. The client was given a prepared outline of what to say over the phone. The counselor, the other clients and the client's 'buddy' advised him on his telephone manner of inquiry. Especially suitable for phone contact was the listing of the telephone classified directory (yellow pages) of companies that were especially likely to be interested in the client's skills. In the phone contact, the client attempted to speak directly to the person who did the hiring, to arrange an interview, and, if not, to obtain suggestions for other potential employers (see Personal referral procedure below).

Personal referral procedure

When a potential employer states that no positions are available, the usual practice is to terminate the discussion. The present program taught the applicants to obtain suggestions from the employer regarding other possible employers, and, further, to request permission to use the referral source's name in making the future inquiry. This personal referral resulted in a continual source of job leads and made the subsequent initial contact more personalized and comfortable for the applicant.

PURSUING LEADS

Resumé

A convenient method of presenting one's distinctive and positive attributes is the personal resumé. Yet, job-seekers often omit this submission, especially in the non-professional types of positions, or do not furnish it until after the initial screening, or omit highly relevant personal-social characteristics, or organize it such that the employer will not easily discern the positive attributes. The present approach was to view the resumé as a

tool for impressing the employer with one's strongest assets. The resumé was submitted at the time of initial contact, was organized into easily distinguishable topics, and emphasized the positive personal-social attributes as well as the distinctive vocational skills, and included a photograph for distinctive personal identification. The resumé was given for every job contact including (a) before an interview, (b) as an attachment to application forms if an interview was unobtainable, (c) with letters of inquiry about openings, or (d) when applying to a help-wanted advertisement or a telephone interview.

Open letter of recommendation

A recommendation from a friend is a method of providing a favourable portrayal of one's assets. Yet, the inconvenience of obtaining a letter of recommendation is so great that employers seem to obtain a letter from possible references only in the final stage of hiring, if at all. In order to obtain an initial advantage by the present program, the client obtained 'open' letters of recommendation and presented them at the time of initial application. In addition, this request for a recommendation seemed to serve as a subtle but acceptable method of notifying friends of the desire for a position without appearing to impose on the friendship.

Interview instruction and role-playing

Many job-seekers have had little experience with interviews, do not know what to anticipate, and fear the confrontation with potential employers. Intensive instruction and supervised practice was given by role-playing between buddies, and by comments on the telephone contacts made during the sessions. Barbee and Kiel (1973) have demonstrated the value of such instruction in a simulated job-seeking situation.

Call-back

Job applicants usually do not inquire further from a potential employer who has no positions available at the time of the initial inquiry. In the present procedure, the clients requested permission to call again. They called back one or more times in order to obtain an interview. After an interview had been obtained, they called back rather than waiting for the employer's decision. The clients were given printed forms to simplify their scheduling and timing of these calls.

Recording

In order to keep one's job search adequately organized, one must maintain records. The job-seekers recorded information about job leads, such as the name of the personnel manager, his address, phone number, and the overall results of the first contact. The recording assisted the job-seeker in making the future call-backs and in providing leads to other clients.

Transportation

Lack of transportation to potential employers often prevents job-seeking in a wider geographical area, especially in rural areas where public transportation is unavailable and the client has no auto. The program reduced this problem by encouraging mutual auto usage between clients in the group, by encouraging their family members to provide transportation, and instructing clients to seek out a 'car pool' from their fellow employees if the job was obtained.

Job-finding materials and aids

In order to assist the job-seekers with tangible items that some of them could not afford, various aids were made available to the clients, free of charge. Clerical staff assisted in typing resumés, letters of recommendation, letters of inquiry, and employment application forms. The postage for letters and applications was also supplied. Photocopies of resumés, letters of recommendation, and important papers such as transcripts and teaching certificates were supplied when required for the client's job application. Local and area telephone directories were made available and also specialized listings of industries such as members of the local Chamber of Commerce, a list of social service agencies, and a list of day care centers. Telephones with extension lines for monitoring were also available for use by the job-seekers. Instant-developing photographs were given to the clients to give to employers.

RESULTS

The average job-seekers who were counseled started work in 14 days (median time), whereas the average non-counseled job-seeker started work in 53 days. (The median, rather than the mean, time was necessary since some persons did not obtain a job and no specific time could be assigned to them.) This superiority of the Job-finding Club was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) by the Wilcoxin Test (Siegel, 1956). Part-time jobs of 20 hr or less per week were not included in this calculation. Very intensive efforts were made to obtain the necessary follow-up information, but six of the non-counseled clients could not be located; therefore, their data were not included in the calculations, nor were the data of their six matched clients who were counseled.

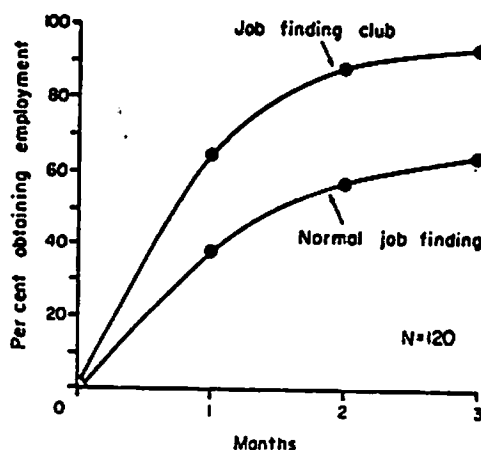


Fig. 2. The percentage of clients who obtained full-time employment. The upper curve is for the job-seekers in the counseled Job-finding Club. The lower curve is for the matched control clients who were not enrolled in the Job-finding Club. Each data point is the cumulative percentage of clients who had obtained employment by the time specified on the abscissa.

Figure 2 shows the progress of the counseled and the non-counseled job seekers during the first 3 months. One month after counseling began, about two-thirds of the counseled persons, but only about one-third of the non-counseled persons, had obtained employment. Two months after counseling began, 90 per cent of the counseled clients had obtained a job, compared with 55 per cent of those who were not counseled. After 3

months, the status of the job-seekers was little changed. Ninety-two per cent of the counseled group had found a job, but 40 per cent of the non-counseled persons had not found full-time employment. Interpretation of the status of the job-seekers after 3 months became ambiguous since some individuals were no longer seeking employment because of such factors as enrollment in college, marriage, or a return to parental support.

The mean starting salary for the jobs obtained by the counseled clients was \$2.73 per hr vs. \$2.01 per hr for the jobs obtained by the non-counseled job-seekers. This 36 per cent greater salary was statistically different by the *t*-test ($p < 0.05$).

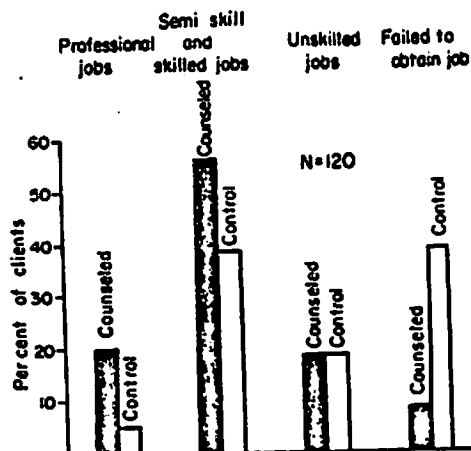


Fig. 3. Type of job obtained by 60 clients in the Job-finding Club and 60 clients in the control condition (non-counseled). The ordinate is expressed in terms of the percentage of clients. The solid line bar designates the percentage of clients in the Job-finding Club whereas the white bar designates the percentage of non-counseled clients (control condition). The time period was 3 months.

The speed of finding a job was greater for those clients who attended regularly than for those who attended irregularly. The Pearson *r* correlation coefficient between the proportion of sessions attended and the number of days unemployed was -0.80 and shows that regular attendance was highly correlated with early success in finding a job. The five clients in the Job-finding Club who did not obtain a job attended very irregularly or attended the club for no more than three weeks at the longest. All the clients found jobs who attended the sessions regularly and continuously.

Figure 3 shows the type of job obtained by the end of 3 months. The same proportion of the job-seekers (17 per cent) in each condition obtained unskilled jobs, but a higher proportion of the counseled members obtained professional employment (20 per cent) than did the control group clients (5 per cent). Also the proportion of counseled clients who obtained skilled types of jobs was greater than for the control clients, 55 vs. 38 per cent. As noted also in Fig. 2, 45 per cent of the non-counseled clients did not obtain a job vs. only 8 per cent of the clients in the Job-finding Club.

DISCUSSION

The present program was more effective than the individual efforts of the job-seekers. Under the program, virtually all (90 per cent) job-seekers obtained full-time employment within two months in comparison with only half of the non-counseled seekers. The average

counseled person obtained his job within 2 weeks compared to about 8 weeks required by the average job-seeker who was not counseled. The average starting salary was about a third higher for the counseled job-seekers than the non-counseled. All clients who attended the classes regularly and consistently obtained a job. These findings appear to provide the first controlled demonstration that a job counseling program is more effective than the usual unstructured job-seeking.

From the perspective of the job-seeker, the program provided assistance, as well as abstract advice. He received this assistance for as long as he required. He was assisted not only in such obvious matters as manner of dress and his interview conduct, but in areas that are ordinarily neglected, such as discouragement in job-seeking, transportation, telephone availability and usage, maximum use of friends, resumé preparation, and peer assistance.

From the perspective of the counseling agency, the present program appears to be practicable. Because of the 'buddy' procedure, each client receives continuing individual attention. The cost was fairly moderate, about \$20 per client for the unusual, tangible commodities and services such as photocopying, resumé photographs, postage, and telephone.

The present program appears to be applicable to unemployment situations that offer special problems. Since job opportunities are less available in rural than urban areas, the success of the program in the rural environment of the present study suggests that an urban locale would be an even more favorable environment for this type of program. Some subpopulations suffer especially from joblessness, such as the ex-alcoholic, ex-mental patients, the teenagers, the elderly, females, and blacks. Although the present sample was insufficiently large to include representation of all such 'disenfranchised' clientele, the program seems well suited to their common need for continued assistance, especially their common problems such as job discouragement, transportation and telephone usage, and relative lack of financial resources. The successful application of this type of program to alcoholics (Hunt and Azrin, 1972) demonstrates this applicability to one of these special populations of marginal employability.

In the selection of clients for this study, clients were deliberately excluded who were currently receiving unemployment payments since their motivation was often low. This exclusion was dictated primarily by research consideration to avoid drop-outs from the counseling program. If participation in the present program was a requirement for obtaining unemployment payments, the time and effort required by this participation in the program would reduce the opportunity for competing leisure activities and would be expected to motivate the client to obtain employment.

Acknowledgement—This research was supported by the State of Illinois Department of Mental Health. Grateful acknowledgement is made to R. Philip and J. Ulman for their advice and assistance in conducting part of this study.

REFERENCES

- BARBEE J. R. and KEIL E. C. (1973) Behavior modification and training the disadvantaged job interviewee. *Voc. Guid. Quarterly*, September.
- HOLLINGSHEAD A. B. and REDLICH F. C. (1958) *Social Class and Mental Illness*. Wiley, New York.
- JAMESON R. (1972) *The Professional Job Hunting System*. Performance Dynamics, Inc., New Jersey.
- JOHNSON E. H. (1964) *Crime, Correction, and Society*. Dorsey Press, Illinois.
- JONES R. J. and AZRIN N. H. (1973) An experimental application of a social reinforcement approach to the problem of job-finding. *J. appl. Behav. Anal.* 6, 345-353.
- LYONS G. J. and MARTIN H. C. (1940) *The Strategy of Job Finding*. Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.

- MARSHALL A. (1964) *How to Get a Better Job*. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York.
- PLAUT T. F. A. (1967) *Alcohol Problems. A Report to the Nation by the Cooperative Commission on the Study of Alcoholism*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- SHEPPARD H. L. and BELITSKY A. H. (1966) *The Job Hunt*. Johns Hopkins, Maryland.