

CHALLENGES OF SERVING DISLOCATED PRODUCTION LINE WORKERS USING THE ACP MODEL



A Case Study of Blackhawk Technical College and the
Closing of the General Motors Plant in Janesville, Wisconsin

Sharon A. Kennedy, Vice President of Learning
Darian Snow, Program Advisor

About Us

- ▣ Third smallest technical college in Wisconsin
- ▣ Offer Associate of Applied Science Degrees, One and Two-Year Diplomas and Local Certificates
- ▣ College district has essentially an agricultural and manufacturing work base
- ▣ Located 35 miles south of Madison, Wisconsin and 35 miles north of Rockford, Illinois at the stateline
- ▣ General Motors plant employed 2,400 at time of announcement of closing in spring, 2008
- ▣ Auto-related industries employ another 2,500

Review of Premise of Adult Career Pathway

- ▣ “Many adult Americans are capable of making good lives for themselves and their families but have stopped far short of their potential....They feel that the door to a better life is closed to them.”
- ▣ Our adult/students made a good life for themselves and their families by working in jobs below their potential but making outstanding wages and feel the door has slammed in their face
- ▣ The difference in circumstance plays a significant role in the dynamics that play out on campus

The Profile and Traits of the Adults we Are Serving

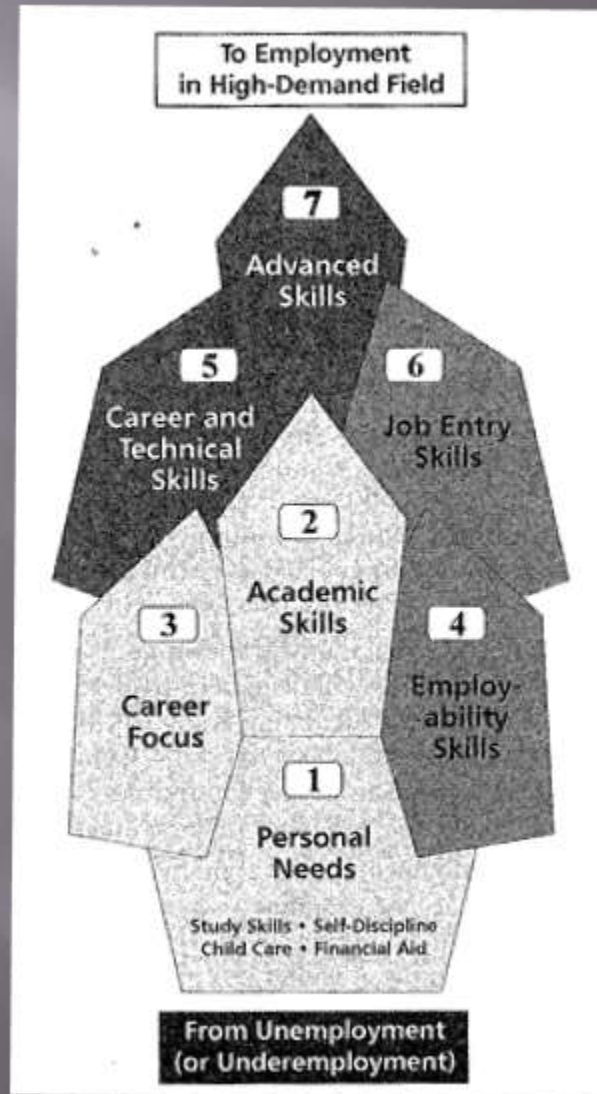
- ▣ Of the six categories identified in Chapter 2, *Adult Career Pathways*, most students are high school completers, no college:
 - Age range from 25-55 (average 38)
 - Must support themselves
 - Academically weak; require remediation
 - Low self-esteem, confidence, and interest in school
 - Lack study skills, computer skills and soft skills
 - Motivated to replace their former wage in many cases
 - Average to above-average intelligence, but no previous experience in being a “learner”

Quotes from our Adult Students

- ▣ Students in First Category (those we lost because they did not want to do the work or could not do the work):
 - (a) “But you don’t understand, I’m just an old factory woman.”
 - (b) Student enrolled in IT-Networking, 5 weeks into the semester: “I drove a fork lift. I can’t read the book. I will have to drop out.”
 - (c) Student enrolled in Accounting who did not have the math foundation to be in the first course: “I’m a truck driver. All I want is a job. I don’t want to take all of these courses.”

- ▣ Students in Second Category (those who embraced their second chance):
 - (a) “I always wanted to be a police officer, and now I’m going to do it.”
 - (b) “I always had an interest in health care, so now I’m going to pursue this field.”

The Seven Components of an Adult Career Pathway



Introduction to the Process of Serving Dislocated Workers

- ▣ All unemployed persons had to be certified as eligible for training/education benefits
- ▣ Benefits differed, depending on the employer
- ▣ Some received TAA and some received WIA
- ▣ There is a maximum amount each worker receives
- ▣ There were many, many Rapid Response meetings between the Workforce Development employees and the college
- ▣ Started meeting about every two weeks

Challenges with Component #1 Personal Needs

- ▣ Of four categories of needs, i.e., financial, logistical, personal, and ESL, personal was the greatest
- ▣ We responded to what we “believed” would be a need
- ▣ Sponsored a Community and Family Picnic in summer, 2008
- ▣ Offered Child Care, food, orientation sessions, registration, counselors
- ▣ Purpose was to emphasize that becoming a student was a family affair
- ▣ Believed social environment was less intimidating at a picnic
- ▣ Served about 100 students at the picnic

Challenges with Component # 2: Academic Skills

- ▣ Remedial and Career Foundational Skills needed by most
- ▣ Beyond the math and English remediation, the most significant deficit was computer skills
- ▣ Many students did not know how to use a computer beyond surfing the internet and sending e-mail, if at all
- ▣ On day three of the fall semester 2008, students were coming into the counseling center already behind in assignments

The Technology Tunnel: Remediating Computer Skill Deficits

- ▣ Gearing up for academic and computer skills at the same time was more than students bargained for
- ▣ Responded in two days to address immediate need
- ▣ Set up schedule of one-on-one tutoring from 9:00-3:00, using staff throughout the college for one hour a day in our Teaching and Learning Center
- ▣ Added more sections of Basic Computer Skills, both credit and non-credit
- ▣ Hired two students to tutor for 20 hours each

Premise of Component #3: Career Focus

- ▣ Purpose is to help students identify where the good jobs are
- ▣ Additional purpose is to help students acquire the personal qualifications and behaviors that will contribute to their success
- ▣ Some of the competencies employers want to see in employees include problem solving, technology knowledge, critical thinking, and higher level cognitive skills

Challenges with Component #3: Career Focus

- ▣ Students wanted to replace their current wage with new careers at similar wage
- ▣ Use of *Job Fit* , a career assessment tool, by Job Center staff was very beneficial
- ▣ Many students were unhappy at the hourly wage of the possible choices
- ▣ Many did not have the foundational science and math needed for those careers with high wages, i.e., health sciences and Advanced Manufacturing programs, for instance

Challenges with Component #4: Employability Skills

- ❑ Good jobs require higher order thinking and some foundational skills
- ❑ Most production employees have not had to acquire these skills and are accustomed to rote work
- ❑ In some cases, funding agency demand was for quick training/ turn-around
- ❑ Education in higher order thinking is a process that takes more than eight weeks to progress from rote duties to analysis and problem solving
- ❑ Additionally, working in teams did not come naturally in the previous work environment

Challenges with Component # 6

- ▣ “Nearly all employers value workers who can use computers, productivity software, and/or the Internet.” (*Adult Career Pathways*, p 44)
- ▣ Basic IT skills are considered “job entry skills.”
- ▣ Basic IT skills are mandatory for being a successful student
- ▣ Basic IT skills must be considered “student entry skills”
- ▣ Workers who do not have “some proficiency” in these skills will not make it through the pathway

Recommendations for Adjusting the ACP Model to Serve Production Line Workers

- ▣ Apply an adjusted model for production workers without post secondary experience
- ▣ Combine Component #6 (basic computer skills and internet skills) with Component #1 Personal Needs
- ▣ Computer literacy needs to be addressed up front; students' skills need to be assessed
- ▣ Use contextualized refresher academies, with math, communications, basic computer skills, and Student Success course in first 8-12 weeks of college

Recommendations to Education Providers

- ▣ Assess student skill level, possibly using the TABE test
- ▣ Use an aptitude test such a *Job Fit*
- ▣ If you do not have completion deadlines, do contextualized foundational work in first semester
- ▣ Give students choices in career exploration in first semester
- ▣ Begin second semester prerequisite/technical courses

Recommendations to Agencies Funding Dislocated Worker Training using the ACP Model

- ▣ Most training/educational benefits through the Department of Labor are limited to two years
- ▣ Most two-year college students take three and one-half years at least to complete a degree
- ▣ Imposed time limitation for instruction does not take into consideration the remediation and other skill deficits of the students
- ▣ At least one semester of basic skills training, such as a 12-week refresher academy, is needed to acclimate students to post secondary education

Questions?

Sharon A. Kennedy

skennedy@blackhawk.edu

Darian Snow

dsnow@blackhawk.edu