

Five Questions About Doing Placement

These answers are directly from the professionals at
Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation.
(In their own words)

1. How do you decide which employer to contact?

“It depends on your purpose. Is it for general information regarding an industry, i.e., trucking companies, restaurants, manufacturing, etc., or is it for a particular consumer that wants a specific job?”

“Employers with jobs that match the job goals of the VR consumer base or the individual caseload. Employers that have some chance of turnover or job availability i.e., not employers that never add staff.”

“I may contact a couple of businesses to begin establishing a relationship while a consumer is still in the planning stages. I also contact new employers and/or new businesses in town. Sometimes I’ll meet them during a Workforce tour and call them back to make a personal contact. Cooperating with the Workforce Coordinators has also been very valuable. They keep me informed as to new businesses, who is sensitive to hiring persons with disabilities and sometimes, who to avoid.”

“Where I have a contact and sometimes location. Of course, the consumer’s job goal is a factor too.”

“I look at job goals for the consumers I have and also jobs for students 16 years of age.”

“Based on consumer’s goal, former positive relationship with VR, proximity to consumer’s home or major transportation – if needed.”

“Depends on goal, work history, contacts, consumer and the situation.”

“I primarily decide which employer to contact based on my current consumer caseload. I consider their job goal and where they live. I also try to find businesses that I know will be a reputable company for them to work for. Secondly, I consider my team’s caseload as a whole and what goals are being written. And thirdly, I consider the consumers that are in planning and what type of jobs that they are going to need. I also look at last year’s placements and I can see where most of our placements have been.”

WHOM TO CONTACT?

- Businesses that match the consumers job goals
- Businesses close to transportation options
- Businesses that employ our consumers
- Businesses with current openings

How do you decide which employer to contact? (continued)

“I usually contact employers who have a current opening or employers that I have a consumer interested in. I seldom make a new employer contact if I don’t have someone (or something) in mind for them.”

“In small communities such as where I work, you need to listen to the consumer. If you are doing a match with them directly, determine the types of areas they want to go into and then see which employers fit the description and desire of the consumer. If I do not have a consumer in mind, at this point I just try to contact employers in the area to get to know more about their business.”

“At times, this depends on the consumer’s application to the company and the perception if the VR contact will be of assistance to the consumer’s hire or not. Other times, if the employer is well known to appreciate VR’s assistance and has hired VR consumer’s, then this employer will be contacted if a qualified candidate is employment ready.”

2. How do you make the initial contact?

“That too depends on your purpose. Sometimes cold contact is made and other times a phone call is made to set up an appointment.”

HOW TO CONTACT

- Cold call and visit
- Phone call
- Email
- Letter of introduction
- Whatever it takes

“Call the employer and ask to set a time to stop in at the company to “gather information”. I explain that my job is to assist applicants with “return to work” or with skills training services and that I need to understand local company needs. Once in the meeting I focus on who they hire, what they need. I do explain that VR is an applicant referral source and that we can provide cost cutting and assistive technology services to employers.”

“Sometimes I will research on the Internet, trying to find an HR contact name or call the front desk and ask who makes the hiring decision. I prefer to make a 15 minute in-person appointment but if the employer seems busy, I will request a 15 minute phone interview. We usually schedule it at time that they choose. At that time I will ask them about their business, their jobs and their plans for the future. It seems I am doing more and more on-line and telephone relationship building. This seems to be an efficient way for both of us to do business. Sometimes I’ll ask another person in the business for the email contact information of the hiring decision maker that I need to contact. They don’t seem to question how I got their email.”

How do you make the initial contact? (continued)

“Two different ways I prefer to contact them are by phone and set up an appointment so they know I value their time and don’t just show up expecting them to give me their time. If I am simply going to get job leads I will go to the businesses and just ask if they are hiring and then get a few details.”

“Usually by phone requesting information – either about the company in general or about the specific job that is being advertised. If after receiving the information and I think there might be a good match – then I will discuss that I work with people looking for work and I think I may know a perfect candidate for their job. Wow ! I would proceed to tell them about VR. Would you like to meet them? How should they apply? Etc.”

“Do what is necessary - call, e-mail, letter or personal contact. Depends on consumer, employer and the situation.”

“This depends on the type of the business that I am approaching. Generally, if the company is a larger company, I will call first and try to get an appointment. If I cannot get an appointment, then I might stop in and try to get an appointment. Usually with smaller businesses, I will just walk in and try to speak to the person that does the hiring. Then, depending on the situation, I will talk to them right then and there, or I will make an appointment to come back.”

“I usually make a phone call to them explaining my role and ask for appointment and brief tour. Unsuccessful attempts at phone calls usually prompts me to just drop by for a cold call. I also cold call if I have extra time or I am out exploring a community for a specific consumer and am just looking for options. If it is an employer from my human resources association, I have their e-mail addresses so may try that also.”

“I do a lot of cold calling on this with the usual approach of something like “I was in your community today and had a cancellation with a consumer. I have driven by your business several times and would like to get to know more about it and also give you an opportunity to know more about VR and the WOTC Program to see whether or not we might be able to work together.” I request only a few minutes of their time. If they do not have that available I than ask about trying to set an appointment to come back at another time.”

“Contact by introductory telephone conversation and ask for appointment to meet in person – have the employer suggest a time, day, etc.”

“Generally, I’ll make a phone call to find out whom the decision maker is. Once I get in touch with that individual, I send them more information via email, with a request for a meeting time. There are also times, too, when a consumer has put in an application somewhere and I’ll follow up with a phone call. This often opens the door for an employer to learn a bit more about VR’s services.”

3. What do you see as advantages of cold calling and making an appointment?

“It also depends on the situation. If one is making cold calls in a new geographical area, then stopping at the employer’s business initially to introduce oneself works for me.”

“Cold calls do not result in any particular “relationship” with the employer. The information gained by cold calls is generally available to the public via INTERNET or WFD. Applicants could get this same information by making a phone call to the employer.”

“Cold calls are an interruption or distraction to most employers. Employers are busy people, they like the option of scheduling time to see or talk together. Email is less intrusive and I seem to be able to have more frequent conversations if email communication is established.”

“Advantages of face to face appointments- they have a face with a name. This seems to be more personal and makes a longer impression, even if I only meet them once.”

“Disadvantages - You may never be able to get in to see that employer, sometimes they avoid us.”

“Obvious ones. Time can be wasted if the person I need to talk to isn’t there or they are busy. I think it is best and most professional to have an appointment.”

“Cold calls: don’t really like this and try not to do it unless I am simply finding out if they are hiring. Making appointments I would much rather do this so employers understand I value their time. Also this way I know they have scheduled me in and will be able to talk and answer any questions I have. I think businesses appreciate this. There are a few places that I can just drop in anytime to see how things are going and they are fine with that because they know me and we have developed a good relationship.”

“Years ago cold calling seemed to work in Lincoln – it was more laid back. Times have changed and it is rare that someone will have the time or give you the time if you just show up out of nowhere. So, I now call for an appointment if I want to see the work place or just to talk about VR. A lot of times these appointments are made during a job fair – it’s a nice easy way to show your interest and try to move a step closer to developing a relationship. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.”

ADVANTAGES OF COLD CALLING

- Allows you the flexibility when you are in the area
- Easier to meet the hiring manager
- Sometimes employers are willing to listen right then

What do you see as advantages of cold calling and making an appointment? (continued)

“The advantage of cold calling by just stopping by in person is that most of the time it is easier to get to see the hiring manager this way. When I try to call ahead, I have to leave messages that don’t get returned or I have to go through a gatekeeper who tends to not let me in. I also like the fact that they can see me face to face and have the opportunity to like me, instead of just hearing my voice over the phone.”

“The advantage of making appointments is that I know that I have been given a time slot and that they are at least interested enough to see me for a few minutes. I can also better prepare for the meeting, and then ask for another longer meeting if I need to.”

“I try to make appointments but sometimes I don’t get results and I then I just try to drop. It is harder for an employer to put you off if face to face. I have found that using the method above, I am rarely turned down for an opportunity to spend at least 5 minutes with an employer. I do give them information regarding VR and WOTC. I follow-up with a short visit the next time I am there to see if they have any questions and may do this a couple of times before I really get to spend much time with the employer. I have not always gone to them with someone in mind to try to place there. I really try to stress the fact that I want to know more about their business so I could take the right person to them when an opening in their business occurs. If I am turned down by this method, I do request a chance to set up a time to meet with them later or at least gather a business card in order to contact them at a different time. At that point, I at least have the correct person to contact. Smaller communities don’t always have the person in charge that I need to talk to listed through websites and other information. I have always been more successful getting a few moments to talk to someone and working into a relationship than I have setting appointments. My territory seems to be too busy and they really don’t like dealing with people on the phone they don’t know. Giving them a face first has helped. This approach may be different in a rural community than what is seen in the urban areas. That may be why it is a little more successful for me.”

“Some employers are more receptive to cold calling, however, some employers seem to be put off by this as they prefer to be prepared for whom they will meet and/or their schedule is not able to accommodate. Expectations are not clear for employer. It can be and inefficient use of time – for both parties.”

ADVANTAGES OF THE APPOINTMENT

- Opportunity to talk to someone with authority
- Receive a specific time
- Employer is more prepared for the visit
- Lets VR know the business is interested in working with us

What do you see as advantages/disadvantages of cold calling and making an appointment? (continued)

“Advantages to cold calling: Very often, if I catch an employer at the right time, they’re willing to listen. Once they find out that I can help them to efficiently find an appropriate candidate, they’re very happy to talk with me.”

“Disadvantages to cold calling: I might not catch an employer at a time when he’s receptive to what I have to say. Sometimes, employers think they have an idea about VR, and more often than not, it’s not an accurate picture of what we do.”

“Advantages to making appointments: I get the opportunity to talk directly with someone who has the power to make decisions regarding hiring. Plus, it allows me to get more information about the business, the positions available, and how I can best serve the particular employer.”

“Disadvantages to making appointments: I don’t see a whole lot, except that if I schedule a meeting too far in advance, the employer either forgets or cancels.”

4. What is your favorite approach to use with an employer i.e. WOTC, OJT, explain how VR works, etc.?

“Usually find out if employer is familiar with VR and then introduce WOTC, OJT, etc. i.e. explain that VR is a career counseling and job-matching agency. I explain that our role is to update skills and to place applicants into jobs that best match them and the employer. I listen to the employer to learn what they value. I do let employers know that we offer some cost cutting options (OJT/ WOTC) and that we would like to become a referral source to periodically refer applicants. If possible, ask about the option of the employer participating in an OJT.”

“I like to discuss these with the employer after I have asked them about their business, their positions and their goals. I use the last 10 minutes to discuss some of our services. I like to give examples of successful relationships for employers in this conversation, citing some difficult situations and our problem solving actions.”

“My favorite approach is to take the consumer on a tour of the business and then talk about our various programs later.”

“I like to tell people I am with the Department of Education. It seems less threatening and I get a better response from employers. I like to explain to employers what VR is and what I do to help people get and stayed employed. I also explain that our consumers don’t just come in and we say you should do this job. We explore interests and abilities and they go through a job skills workshop so in a sense we do most of the work. I also then explain the retention piece.”

WAYS TO INTRODUCE OTHER SERVICES

- Ask about their business
- Listen
- Ask what they know before explaining our services
- Keep it simple
- Ask for what you need

What is your favorite approach to use with an employer i.e. WOTC, OJT, explain how VR works, etc.?(continued)

“Dept of Education is always in my opening statement. I don’t want to lose someone in trying to figure out what VR is, does, who they assist. I want information about the company. My time is just as valuable as anyone else’s – so, I want to establish if this is a company that I want to develop a relationship with, or at the very least know about it should someone from VR or a consumer ask. We are not at the bottom of the food chain – and I think we need to promote ourselves as a valuable resource of qualified applicants. I remind employers we use a variety of measures to determine if the individual we are working with would be a good match for their job – better than just seeing who applies or walks in off the street.”

“Obviously, I’m always happy to talk about VR and our services, - I’m very proud of what we do. If appropriate I’ll mention the OJT-OJE and discussion of the WOTC. One step at a time - I always think that if someone is overwhelming me with information then it’s difficult for me to focus. We should be about keeping things simple and saving employers time.”

“If we need information - ask for that; if looking for informational interview - ask for that; if looking for interview - ask for that; if looking to forward, fax, etc. resume - ask for that; if OJT/OJE appropriate - ask for that; use something that has worked before. Be creative.”

“What works best for me is to approach the employer with the motive of first finding out what their needs are. I ask a lot of questions. I do not approach them with the idea of promoting VR first. I want to find out if they have a need that we can meet. I want them to know that I am interested in them and I want to build trust and a relationship with them. I want them to buy into me first, and not necessarily our programs and offerings. Then I let them know what we can do to help them. I let them know that we can provide them with quality candidates and that we can help to keep good employees working for them.”

“I usually begin with an employer that we are from the Department of Education and work with people of all ages to discover what employment opportunities are out there. I talk about working with the schools to help students with career planning so take the “tomorrow’s workforce” approach. I ask for information about the types of jobs they have and a tour so I can advocate for their business to my consumers and take the “recruiter” approach.... I always promise them I will never send someone I don’t truly feel will work out because in that case I haven’t done the employer, consumer or myself any favors. If working with a specific adult, I talk about what VR is about and the range of individuals we work with. I talk about the evaluations we do to discover strengths, advocate for the consumer, and explain the WOTC, possible OJT and our retention services.”

What is your favorite approach to use with an employer i.e. WOTC, OJT, explain how VR works, etc.?(continued)

“As I have previously stated, usually it ends up being a cold call wanting to know more about their business and giving them information regarding the WOTC Program. I will talk about modifications, etc., when they ask questions. I try to push the fact that VR will look at doing a good job match for them, stressing the fact that training people is an expense to them and if we can bring them the right person to begin with, this would eliminate some of that cost. The consumers that I place directly this way, I do a follow-up with as well as with the employer. I also stress this with the employer so that if there are problems or issues, I am available to address them right away.”

“Lead with the employee qualities and the benefit of this worker. Leading with incentives may give the impression that the consumer is not quite qualified or ready to work.”

“I generally don’t lead with any of these things. I don’t think it’s in VR’s or the consumers’ best interest to lead with money. It’s almost as though I’m saying, “I’ll pay you if you hire my consumer,” and I should have enough confidence in the consumers with whom I work not to have to get them into a job that way. That said, I often provide the WOTC information after a hiring decision has been made. Employers love this tax break, and are often grateful that I provide them the information. I generally discuss what VR can do for their business, the ways in which I can provide them a valuable asset to their workforce, and the fact that we provide “service after the sale” (to both the employer and consumer).”

5. Other techniques that you use?

“I am very careful about who I place so that the employer will have a good experience and be willing to consider the next consumer I refer to them.”

“If I call to check on the consumer, I try to consider the time of day and the concerns from the employer’s point of view. Is the consumer able to do the job to their expectations? Have they been dependable? Are there specific areas they need more training or more time for adjustment? What are they pleased with? Sometimes the employer needs to be reminded of the good traits of the consumer, so as to give them encouragement for the extra effort they may have to expend due to the disability of the consumer. I usually comment on their great team and how much the consumer loves working there (if they do).”

OTHER GREAT IDEAS

- Carefully match your consumers to the job
- Call the new boss to make sure they are satisfied
- Designate consumers as an “Insider Contacts” at their jobs
- Contact employers soon after Job Fairs
- Network with employers at events
- Drop off a brochure, then follow up

Other techniques that you use? (continued)

“When I place a consumer into a business, I often assign them the job of ‘Business Insider’. These consumers will let me know when the business is hiring and, after I’ve given them some information, they recommend other consumers to these positions!”

“I can think of a couple of times this experience has been the only way the consumers were able to maintain their position, because the other consumer is committed to helping them adjust. The goal of all relationship building is that someday the employers will consider us before advertising any open position.”

“After a consumer is hired I make a follow-up call to the employer to make sure they still understand the retention part that we do so if a problem were to arise they hopefully remember to call us.”

“Quick follow-up phone call after Job Fairs if you’ve met someone that may be a good resource.”

“Go with your instincts. Be credible, tactful, honest, professional, sincere, talk about the business - they like to hear about themselves. Find a comfortable style for you. “

“Depending on the type and size of the business, I might drop of a brochure with my business card and then follow up on it with a phone call. Or I might stop by again.”

“If I know that a consumer has started working somewhere, I might stop in to meet the manager if I know that it is OK with my consumer. I do this to help the consumer working there and in hopes that I might develop a relationship with that manager for future placements.”

“Be charming and professional at the same time!”

“As I have previously stated, usually it ends up being a cold call wanting to know more about their business and giving them information regarding the WOTC Program. I will talk about modifications, etc., when they ask questions. I try to push the fact that VR will look at doing a good job match for them, stressing the fact that training people is an expense to them and if we can bring them the right person to begin with, this would eliminate some of that cost. The consumers that I place directly this way, I do a follow-up with as well as with the employer. I also stress this with the employer so that if there are problems or issues, I am available to address them right away.”

“Networking with employers at events to get to know them better and have confidence in VR services.”