

“Surviving the World of Poverty”

Helping Hard to Serve
Customers Make the Transition
to Work



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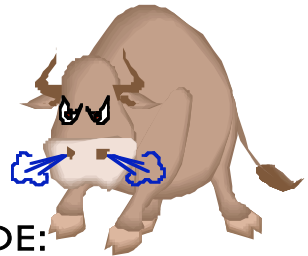
Workshop agenda

Dr. Steve Parese, presenter
Author of the "Workin' It Out" training series

This workshop will provide human service professionals with a greater understanding of challenging customers from poverty. Questions we will address:

- (1) What values, skills, and attitudes are needed to survive in the world of poverty?
- (2) How do these values, skills, and attitudes prevent success in the world of work?
- (3) What intervention strategies can ease the transition from poverty to the world of work?

Survival Quiz



1. How to SURVIVE A BULL STAMPEDE:

- (a) Lay down and curl into a ball.
- (b) Run alongside the bulls.
- (c) Kneel in the street and pray for Divine Intervention!

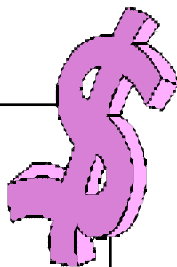
2. How to TAKE A PUNCH TO THE HEAD:

- (a) Turn at the last minute and take it on the jaw.
- (b) Move into the blow, take it on the forehead.
- (c) Push your best friend in front of you and let him or her "take one for the team!"

3. How to PROTECT AGAINST GRIZZLY BEAR:

- (a) Lay face down with hands over neck and legs spread.
- (b) Make eye contact and stand your ground.
- (c) Place a bottle of honey on the ground and back away while quietly humming a song!

Poverty Statistics



1. A person working full-time at minimum wage would have an annual income of \$_____.
2. In 2004, the Federal poverty threshold for a family of two was \$_____.
3. In 2000, there were _____ U.S. children living in poverty.
4. 13% of all White children live in poverty, but ___% of all Black or Hispanic children live in poverty.
5. Poor inner-city youth are ___ times as likely to be victims of child abuse or neglect than are children of higher SES.

Surviving Poverty

Poverty is painful! Surviving the harsh realities of years of poverty requires (and reinforces) a specific set of values, skills, and attitudes very different of those from other classes. The habits of poverty focus on survival, whereas those of the middle class focus on achievement.

Based in part on work of Ruby Payne, Ph.D. (2003).

1. Comparing Class VALUES:

POOR	MIDDLE	WEALTHY

2. Comparing Class KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS:

Check the ONE response in each set that best matches your abilities.

- I know the name of a bail bondsman who could get me out of jail.
- I know the name of an attorney I could call for legal help.
- I have at least two attorneys on retainer for legal matters.

- I know exactly when and where the bus stops closest to my home.
- I know how to get the best interest rates on a new car loan.
- I have a car and driver, or know the name and number of a very good limousine service, whom I have used in the past month.

- I know someone who will watch my children for \$10/day.
- I have the name and number of a quality day care center.
- I can recommend a specific au pair service.

3. Comparing Class ATTITUDES:

The poor and the middle class have very different perspectives on life. Each class has its "hidden rules," or unspoken understandings, cues, and habits that help its members reach their goals.

Poverty	Middle Class	
	MANAGING MONEY	
	VALUE OF EDUCATION	
	OUTLOOK ON FATE OR DESTINY	

Personal Beliefs

1. Life should be fun.
2. Family should come first.
3. Friends should help each other out with problems.
4. Personal appearance should be a personal decision.
5. You should be able make your own decisions in life.

- A. Do what you are asked to do, even if you don't want to.
- B. Do your best to fit in.
- C. Stay out of other people's problems.
- D. Work is work. Don't expect it to always be fun.
- E. Work comes first. Don't let personal issues get in the way.

In our personal lives, we use our personal beliefs to judge the appropriateness of our actions. These beliefs naturally justify our thoughts, feelings and behaviors in difficult situations.

What personal beliefs justify each character's behavior ?

1. Patty gets an unexpected \$2500 refund from the IRS due to a calculation error from a tax service. Although she'll almost certainly have to return the money, she uses it to buy a 42" plasma screen television, which she installs in her trailer. "They'll always be bills, but how often do you get the chance to buy a fatty @\$@ plasma TV? You gotta live while you can!"



Patty's behavior is driven by belief # ____



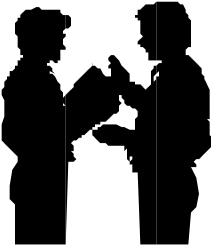
2. When his addicted mother called at 2 AM from jail, 14-year-old Jonathan woke a neighbor to watch his younger brothers and sisters, then tracked down a bondsman to bail his mother out. He got home at 7 AM, just in time to get his siblings off to school. "You do what you gotta do. It's my mother. Was I supposed to let her sit in jail?"

Jonathan's behavior is driven by belief # ____

Professional Expectations

People from difficult backgrounds find that their personal beliefs often conflict with employers' unspoken expectations.

What personal or workplace beliefs justify each character's behavior?



1. Jermaine takes a job at the front desk of a major hotel chain. He has a disagreement with his supervisor when she asks him to remove some of his jewelry.

Jermaine: "Who is she to tell me I can't wear a nose ring? What does that have to do with answering phones or checking people in?"

Jermaine is justifying his behavior with personal belief # ____.

Supervisor: "He's a good worker, but he doesn't understand about company image. A nose ring really turns off some of our guests, and in our business, you have to keep up a certain image."

Supervisor is basing his/her objection on workplace rule # ____

2. Lori works as a clerk in a supermarket. Her supervisor asks her to clean up a spill in the back, but she ignores him.

Lori: "I'm a clerk, not a janitor. He should get a janitor to do stuff like that. Why do I always have to do what HE says?"



Lori is justifying his behavior with personal belief # ____.

Supervisor: "If she's standing there doing nothing and everyone else is busy, I'm going to ask her to help out. She's always bending the rules, like they don't apply to her."

Supervisor is basing his/her objection on workplace rule # ____

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

STRATEGY #1: Build respectful relationships

No significant intervention occurs outside the context of a relationship, especially with people from poverty. Resist the temptation to be judgmental, and allow yourself some empathy for your most challenging customers. Remember that **POVERTY IS PAINFUL**, and build relationships based on respect for their ability to survive in harsh circumstances.

STRATEGY #2: Be a work-culture interpreter

Understand that people from poverty often view the middle class world of work as an unfriendly foreign land, and themselves as unwelcome tourists. Acknowledge the discomfort of your most defensive customers, and offer important insights into the workings of this new world, especially regarding the hidden or unspoken rules of conduct.

STRATEGY #3: Actively teach and model skills

Provide safe opportunities to learn and practice vital soft skills using a direct teaching approach, a charismatic instructor, and a well-organized curriculum. Learning new interpersonal skills is daunting for adults, especially those accustomed to their own way of doing things. Be open to questions and sensitive to learning anxiety.

STRATEGY #4: Resist authoritarian discipline

Prevent problems whenever possible by establishing mutual goals with customers, and by clearly explaining rules and consequences. If/when customers violate these rules, avoid acting like an angry or disappointed parent, as this only encourages customers to act like children. Instead, ask for and listen to a brief explanation. Summarize their reasoning, then re-explain the rules in a factual, "Sorry, my hands are tied on this" tone of voice.

STRATEGY #5: Reframe work-related problems

Reframe work-related problems in terms of home rules versus work rules. "At home you would argue if someone questioned your taste in clothes, I understand. But this is work, and the rules are different. You couldn't play basketball using the rules of tackle football, could you?"

KEY POINTS

KEY POINT #1



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People raised in poverty often develop values, skills, and attitudes which help them survive the harsh realities of their day-to-day lives. This survivalist perspective is often very different from the world view of other social classes.

KEY POINT #2



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In our personal lives, we naturally use our personal beliefs to judge the appropriateness of our actions. Inexperienced workers, especially those from poverty, mistakenly use the same beliefs in the workplace too, creating significant conflicts with coworkers, supervisors, etc.

KEY POINT #3



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The most successful strategies are those which build upon respectful relationships. We must help challenging customers develop a new set of skills and attitudes that they may use when visiting the foreign world of work.

For more information about other staff workshops, or to find out about becoming trained to deliver classroom-based programs for difficult workers, please contact:

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