



Workin' with Tradition

Culturally-Relevant Soft Skills Program for Workplace Success

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Developed with Opportunity Link Havre, MT in cooperation with Chippewa
Cree TANF, Blackfeet Manpower, and Fort Belknap 477 Programs

PROGRAM INFORMATION

THE PROBLEM

Over the past 15 years, employers across the United States have clearly indicated their single greatest pre-employment training concern: SOFT SKILLS. Individuals with good soft skills have the ability to handle stress, get along well with coworkers and supervisors, motivate themselves, and manage workplace challenges. These characteristics make job seekers extremely desirable to employers, and have been closely correlated to job satisfaction, retention and promotion.

Traditional soft skills programs are often focused on issues more common to busy urban or suburban communities with larger employers and industries. As a result, these curricula have limited relevance to rural, frontier, Native American, or close knit communities. The goal of "Workin' with Tradition" is to offer soft skills strategies that more accurately reflect work traditions, family values and employment barriers of Native American job seekers, and other job seekers from small rural areas.

THE SOLUTION

The "Workin' with Tradition" program has been designed in concert with Opportunity Link of Havre, MT, with input from employers and key individuals representing north central Montana's Blackfeet Nation, Chippewa Cree Tribe, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community. It was created in response to the region's need for a culturally sensitive and appropriate training curriculum intended to:

1. Acknowledge the difficulties faced by Native Americans who seek employment on or off the reservation;
2. Prepare job seekers for cultural differences encountered in many employment settings;
3. Explore the expectations of employers from within both Native and non-Native cultures;
4. Affirm the Native employee's personal need to keep his or her tribal culture and indigenous identity intact throughout their working lives.

THE DETAILS

"Workin' with Tradition" is a 10-lesson cognitive-behavioral program that targets job seekers of Native American heritage or from close-knit rural communities who are experiencing challenges entering or succeeding in the workforce. Through realistic stories with culturally-relevant characters and thought-provoking activities, "Workin' with Tradition" participants gain self-awareness, emotional self-control, and social skills in interpersonal problem-solving.

The program works best when delivered to groups of 12 to 16 participants by 1 to 2 trained instructors, who are sensitive of the needs of such communities, over the course of 3 to 6 weeks. It may be supplemented with academic and vocational skills training, as well as more traditional employment training such as resume writing, job interviewing, etc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Workin’ with Tradition” consists of ten 90-minute lessons (plus a brief closing session), each of which addresses social issues scenarios and exercises. The curriculum is divided into four sections, each focused on developing a different set of insights and skills needed to successfully transition from home/community to the workplace while honoring important cultural values.

Section 1: Self-Awareness

Lesson 1 Challenge of Change

Lesson 2 Positive Goal Setting

Lesson 3 Understanding Conflict

Section 1 teaches about five stages of change seen in people who make lasting improvements in their lives. It goes on to offer strategies for setting goals, and then explores the cognitive process by which we either motivate effective or justify ineffective behavior, including fight, flight, and freeze reactions.

Section 2: Transitioning to Work

Lesson 4 Work and Self-Worth

Lesson 5 Unspoken Rules of Work

Section 2 first explores the value of work to strengthening individual, family, and cultural identity. It then goes on to explain a number of hidden employer expectations essential to success in the workplace.

Section 3: Managing Emotions

Lesson 6 Understanding Stress

Lesson 7 Stop & Think

Section 3 helps participants better understand the debilitating impact of stress, and identify specific situations which provoke a strong emotional response. It then teaches a step-by-step strategy for keeping strong emotions in control so that clear headed thinking can inform decisions.

Section 4: Handling Problem Situations

Lesson 8 Planning & Time Management

Lesson 9 Expressing Concerns

Lesson 10 Logical Decision Making

Lesson 11 Closing

Section 4 teaches three specific soft skills which workers/participants and their employers agree are most needed for success in the workplace: (1) managing time to arrive promptly everyday at work; (2) expressing concerns directly to keep managers and coworkers informed of home/work conflicts; and (3) making decisions based on facts rather than assumptions or worries. The final lesson closes the curriculum with a summary and celebration of success.

More information about this program, including samples of the workbook, may be obtained by contacting the author, Dr. Steve Parese (SBParese@aol.com).