**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**H-1B Ready to Work**

**Strategies for Retaining Participants**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Again, if you haven't done so already, please introduce yourself in that welcome chat right now. Welcome to H-1B Ready to Work strategies for retaining participants.

If you haven't already, please take a second and answer our opening poll. And that poll question says, let's get to know who's on the call today. Using the poll, select the role that you play in your H-1B RTW grant. For this grant initiative I am the authorized representative, program director/manager, IT/data manager or staff, training partner, employer partner, or service provider. So please take a second and fill that poll out right now. All right. And I see people are dialing in right now with that. We're going to keep that up for a couple more seconds. OK.

So without further ado, I'd like to introduce – I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Ayreen Cadwallader, workforce analyst, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Ayreen?

AYREEN CADWALLADER: Thank you so much, John, and welcome, everybody. Good afternoon or good morning to our friends on the west coast. Very excited to have you here today on what is one of my favorite technical assistance activities, our subject matter expert series for the long-term unemployed for the H-1B Ready to Work grants. And today's topic our subject matter expert will be talking about strategies that will help you keep the participants that have enrolled in your H-1B training program.

We know that you are in the third year close to rounding out the fourth year of your grant, and program completion is certainly a topic that we're all excited about and wanting to make sure that you receive continued support on. And so we did bring our subject matter expert for today's webinar to provide you with some strategies and some tips to encourage your participants to keep them in your training program. With that I would like to turn it over to my colleague, Angel Harlins, with High Impact Partners. Angel?

ANGEL HARLINS: Good afternoon, everyone. I will be your facilitator for today, and today I'll be introducing Dan Salemson who is going to be our subject matter expert, like Ayreen mentioned, who will be talking a little bit more so about retaining your LTU participants in your program. Prior to – after this session we will, like John mentioned before, have a feedback survey where you could provide us with some input on this session and also discuss any additional technical assistance services you might need in the future.

So with that, today's objective is going to be to provide Ready to Work grantees with practical strategies to engage and reengage your participants in training programs in order to boost your program retention.

OK. And then today's agenda is going to go over – we're going to discuss the customer retention principles from the business world perspective. We're also going to discuss some retention as a toolkit and also do you have the right tools. Tool number one, we'll talk about how you collect your information. Tool number two, again, we'll discuss building a retention culture at your organization. Tool number three is to boost motivation for people to stay. Tool four we're going to discuss maximizing positive influencers, and lastly, we'll go over tool number five, which is to recognize, recognize, recognize your participants for your program.

So without further ado, I'll hand it over to Dan who's going to start our presentation, and we hope you enjoy.

DAN SALEMSON: Great. Good afternoon, everyone. It might even be good morning for some of you if you're on the west coast. I'm so pleased to be with you today to talk about retention. It's one of my favorite topics. I have been in workforce development for about 17 years now, and I've worked with – primarily with disadvantaged populations, very hard to place individuals. I've run a program for people who are coming out of the criminal justice system, and these are folks who had either been in prison for long periods of time or in some cases they were sentenced directly to my program as an alternative to incarceration by a judge.

But in any event, when they came to my program, they were required to be there, and the alternative for not coming, the punishment for not coming was to go back to jail or to go to jail. And still, even in that situation where the alternative was going to jail, some of them would not come back. I could not retain them all, and I always felt very bad that they seemed to prefer jail to me.

Retention is very difficult, and I had to think long and hard about how we can encourage our jobseekers to stay in a program because let's be honest. Looking for work is not an easy process. It's a demoralizing process. It's a very depressing situation. Oftentimes there's a lot of pressures on people to get jobs immediately to deal with their own family issues or health issues or whatnot. So there's a lot of barriers that keep people from completing programs, and we need to do whatever we can to try and overcome those barriers.

I'm really excited to work with you today. We've got a lot of different tools and strategies that we're going to go through but before we start I want to place you in the position of someone who is the subject of a retention effort and we're going to do it with a little poll. So how does a business retain you? And let's think about – let's think about the way it works in our lives. So most of us go to a grocery store at least a few times each month. Some of us do it voluntarily; some of us less so. Think about the main place where you buy your groceries, and from this following list here, the list up on your screen, just choose the one reason why you go to the store that you go.

So it could be convenience of the location, the lower prices than competitors, the range or the quality of food that they offer, the non-food products and services that are in the store like a bank branch or dry cleaner, pharmacy. Maybe you go because you like the rewards card and loyalty bonuses. Mine gives me discount on gasoline if I spend a certain amount of money, or there may be other reasons. So whatever your top reason is, just go ahead and select it there, and we'll give you about maybe another 15 seconds to make sure that everybody has a chance to choose the appropriate one. So I always feel like I should do the Jeopardy theme song at this point. Do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, boom.

All right. Thank you, everyone, for voting who's voted. So we'll just take a quick look at the results here. So 26 percent of you, almost 27 percent said that you chose the convenience of the location. Nearly half of you said lower prices than competitors. So the price is very important. Thirteen percent said the top motivation was the range or quality of food. Nobody seems to care about the auxiliary services that are offered. Some of you chose the rewards card and the loyalty bonuses, and then 6.67 percent, one of you had another reason for going to the store that you go to. So as we can see, there are many reasons why people choose one store over another, and that really gets to the key point of today's webinar.

Retention is a toolbox. Not one tool is going to work for everyone. Because people are motivated by many different motivations, by many different influences, not one tool is going to work for everyone. So we have to have a range of tools available.

And you think about the grocery industry. The grocery industry is one of the most competitive in the United States. There are tens of thousands – literally tens of thousands of stores, ranging from Walmart all the way down to your local convenience store, and now, we even have online services like Fresh Direct and Amazon. These compete every day to capture a slice of the $600 billion market, but it's a very, very competitive industry where the profit margins are just 1 to 2 percent, which means that of every dollar that gets spent there, they get to keep one or two pennies. So retaining their customers is really crucial to success.

Now, grocery companies have spent millions of dollars, many millions of dollars in the past decade figuring out ways to both steal companies as customers from other stores and to keep people coming back week after week and maximizing the amount that they spend. So in the rest of the presentation we're going to talk about some of these lessons that the business world has learned that you can use in your own program to boost retention amongst your participants.

All right. So let's see. So as we've seen, the first retention tool, number one, is information. We have to have information; right? In order to know why people are leaving or staying or when they leave, we need to be able to look at some data, and the business world does this all the time.

So surveys show, for example, that on average businesses lose customers for the following reasons. 4 percent of people move away or they pass away. 14 percent are lured away by a competitor. 14 percent are turned off by quality dissatisfaction, and 68 percent are unhappy with how they are treated. So there are a number of reasons why businesses lose their customers, and obviously, that's going to change by industry.

What's going on in your situation? Are you being ghosted? And for those of you who aren't up on the lingo today, ghost is a new verb that was in fact just added to the dictionary by Miriam Webster this year which means to be abruptly cut off all contact with, usually in the context of a romantic partner but not always, by no longer accepting or responding to phone calls, instant messages, etc. Feels very much like what we endure all the time in our programs. So do you know when and why your participants leave? When are the major drop-off points in your program cycle?

Can you pinpoint the day in your cycle where most people – where the majority of people stop showing up? Do you know why people stop participating? Do you have the reasons why they're not coming? What is the most successful method for keeping in touch? OK. Not – just as people are motivated by different things, there are different ways that are going to work for people to stay in touch with you.

Some people are phone people. Some people are e-mail people. Some people are social media people. Some people are text people. We have to know how we're supposed to keep in touch with people in order to be able to keep in touch with them. And finally, sort of summing all this up, do you actually have the tools you need to track all this information? Do you have a customer relationship management system or another robust tracking solution that can tell you all this?

We often have a gut feeling about where drop off occurs, but unless we know all of these things, it's really hard for us to respond accurately. So could you easily pull up retention numbers for day 5 or day 29 or day 179 of your program cycle? Do you keep track of every outreach attempt and method? Every time someone picks up the phone or sends an e-mail, is that logged in the database somewhere so that you can find out what the response rates are?

One program that I consulted with, they were having a terrible retention problem. They crunched their attendance numbers, and they actually found that participant drop off really started on the Thursday after the Monday orientation. So in order to address that they bumped up a very popular field trip from later in the program to that Thursday, and they found that it helped convince a fair number of people to hang around because they had something to look forward to.

A YouthBuild program that I did consulting with discovered that its participants ignored phone calls and e-mails, as young people tend to do these days, but they would usually respond to messages sent through Facebook or Snapchat, and so it put more emphasis on getting them to like the program's Facebook page at the beginning of the cycle. We also really do need to know why people aren't participating. Is it a childcare issue? Is it transportation? Does the schedule not work for people because they have other challenges or they have other obligations in their lives?

We need to ask our participants at the very beginning of the cycle what they foresee might be their biggest challenge in completing the program. And for those who have left, reach out to them. Reach out to those participants who have dropped out and ask them for candid feedback. In short we need to improve retention – in order to improve retention we need information.

OK. Let's go to the next slide here. So if information is tool number one, tool number two is building a retention culture and how do we send the right message. Well, the number one rule in marketing is people don't buy goods and services. They buy good feelings and solutions to problems. Let me say that again because it's critically important. People don't buy goods and services. They buy good feelings, and they buy solutions to problems.

In other words, the specifics of a product is generally less important than how that product makes people feel or the ability to improve someone's life. And you think about the major advertising campaigns that we see. Nike has just do it, and they show pictures of sweaty athletes in midair about to dunk the ball; right? That helps customers imagine their own fitness in a way that's simply describing a hue never cooked.

Or if you look at Apple, Apple's the most successful company in the world right now. If you look at their ads, their ads are minimalist to an extreme. Oftentimes what you'll see in an Apple ad is just a picture of their device, sometimes even just a portion of a device, a few words maybe, and lots and lots of white space.

What that ad conveys is a cool factor, a coolness factor, a hipness factor that people want to be a part of. They want those white earbuds. They want to be seen carrying the latest iPhone because it conveys a certain feeling of hipness, and that's what people are buying. They're not buying so much a phone. They're buying this feeling that comes with owning a particular type of phone, the iPhone. Who doesn't want to be cool?

Or you think about insurance companies. Now, insurance has got to be the most boring business out there; right? They essentially sell the same product. It's something that most people don't really care all that much about unless they actually need it or until the moment that they need it, but when you're shopping for insurance, you've got a lot of choices. They all look about the same. So how do they get your attention? Well, they don't focus on the boring details like what are your premiums and your deductibles. They make us laugh with caveman and geckos, and they focus on how much money they can save us.

So let's take a look at a few supermarkets, since we started with a supermarket. Let's take a look at a few supermarket websites to see how supermarkets do it, and I'm going to show you three different websites of three different types of supermarkets so you can see how it works. The first one is a chain called C-Town, and C-Town is a northeastern chain that's located primarily in low income neighborhoods where price is often the major motivator. And its clientele consists heavily of recent immigrants and people – and low income individuals. And so because of who shops there, the website reflects that. It reflects things that are going to appeal to people, to its customers.

Its website highlights affordable brands such as Clorox, Campbell's, Dominos, Jif. It focuses on money-saving coupons. Down in the lower right there's something that says featured coupons and weekly specials. And the website's very basic because it knows that its customer base doesn't – probably doesn't have a lot of internet access. They may not have high levels of literacy. They may not have time to read something very dense. So it just sort of flashes up there pictures of brands that people know and feel comfortable with and are going to relate to.

And in the middle it focuses on holiday – on the holiday that's important to its immigrant customer base, Cinco de Mayo. Now, you may see right above it it says Bimbo. For those of you who aren't aware, Bimbo is actually the leading brand of bread in Mexico. It's kind of like our Wonder bread. So this is a supermarket that appeals to mostly lower income shoppers.

Here we have a brand – a chain called Harris Teeter, and Harris Teeter is a chain with stores in the south and Mid-Atlantic states that targets solidly middleclass families with children. So think about your soccer moms. That's really who they're going for. So instead of just focusing on brands and lowest prices possible, here we have an emphasis on charitable giving; right? So three times on this one page they're talking about their charitable giving. On the upper right corner, $22 million given to schools since 19-something. I can't really read it.

And then in the center it says it again, together in education, over $22 million, and then in the lower middle together in education. So clearly education and charity is important to the families that shop there. Convenience, they have online shopping. They talk about parties to go, meal deals. Quality, there's something about whole beef tenderloin here. Price, there is some recognition of price, though it does talk about the e-VIC, which is their rewards card, and the weekly specials. And then it does actually talk a little bit about the extra services with the pharmacy that's down below in the bottom left-hand corner.

Now, the next one you might not even recognize as a supermarket website at first glance. Here we have the very famous Whole Foods, which of course it targets the affluent. And when you first look at this website, it's big. It's beautiful, bold. Almost nothing, though, about shopping; right? It's very focused on creating this image of good feeling. It's very created on – very focused on creating a luxurious idealic atmosphere with images of fresh flowers, freshly baked treats, fresh tomatoes, things like that. A person who had never heard of Whole Foods before would probably get a very positive feeling just from looking at this website without even knowing anything about Whole Foods; right?

So let's think about how your program conveys to participants good feelings and solutions to problems. How are you sending these messages? All right. Building a retention culture. So how does your program space and your message land? So let's think about what people see and what people hear. You know that if you walk into a store that's clean and the staff is friendly, you're going to want to come back. If you walk into a store that's dirty and the staff are rude, you probably won't come back.

So what are your customers seeing when they walk through your door? Is this a place that you personally would find appealing? If you think about your own program space when you walk in first time, you put on your first day student hat, it you walked in and looked around, would you say, wow, this is a place that says success to me? This is a place that says I'm going to be happy here. This is a place that says I'm going to learn important things here. Are there positive images of success strewn about your wall; right? How are you conveying positive success? Do the staff and the participants seem engaged? If everybody's just sitting around moping, that's not going to give you a good feeling.

Then think about what they're hearing during orientation, during any sort of classes, during any interactions that they have with the staff. Is it a level playing field, or do they feel like they're being talked down to? One of the big challenges we have, of course, is that unemployment is a very depressing, demoralizing time, and people often feel very disempowered during that process; right?

If they walk through your doors and there's just someone talking to them and telling them what to do and they're just a passive recipient of information, they're not going to feel very engaged. So we want to try and have what we call a level playing field. Is it a two-way process? Are the participants really engaged in both setting expectations for the program, for – in their own training process, for each other's success? And we're going to go over this in detail a little bit later about how you can really create an empowered participant group.

Is there results orientation? And what we mean by results orientation is do you just talk about what's going to happen in the program, or are you really focused on what happens after they get out of the program, because we really want them to be able to – we want them to really be thinking always about, yes. I've got six more weeks to this training. It's hard work. It's a real challenge to me to find childcare.

I know I could go to that new convenience store that's opened up down the street and get a job at $8 an hour, but if I can just hang in here, I'm going to start at $15 an hour and then by the end of the next year I might be up to $18 an hour and five years from now I might be making $32 an hour as a supervisor; right? So we really need to be focused on not what we're doing day in and day out but where what we're doing is going to get us, where it's going to get us to.

Are there genuine emotional connections? Are we really making those connections between the staff and the participants because, as we're going to talk about later, that emotional connection that you make with people is probably your strongest retention tool? And then finally, do we have very high levels of expectations both for people's participation, their outcomes, and their behavior?

Nothing is as off-putting as going into a program and you see people who aren't really participating, who are showing up late and there's no consequences for it. People are skipping and it doesn't seem to matter. The staff doesn't really seem to care whether people are doing well, or the message just doesn't convey that this is a place where we have high expectations that everyone's going to make it through. We're all going to work together to make that happen, but we need everybody to participate actively and fully. We definitely need all of those things in order to build a retention culture.

So let's take a look at what that might actually mean. So which place would you rather spend your day? And we have two classrooms here. They're two fairly standard classrooms, but the classroom on the left side is a speaker in front and he's got his PowerPoint up and he's talking and talking, but look at the participants. The participants are passively listening. They're not very engaged. In fact, the guy at the very back seems to be asleep. He has his head down. Look at the classroom walls there. They're this beige color. Completely bare except for the clock, and you know that people are just staring at that clock wishing it would speed up, and there's just not much there that would make this – make you say, wow, this is really a great room that I want to spend eight hours in.

Now, look at the classroom on the other side; right, on the right side. Here we have a bright space. We have natural light. We have plants all over. People aren't just sitting in rows. They're sitting – I mean, of course they're sitting at computers, but they're sitting in a way that they're able to talk to each other. The instructor's able to move around easily and help people. They can help each other. This just seems like a much more engaged group; right? So think about even the physical layout of what your rooms look – your training spaces look like, your waiting spaces look like.

How can we make it more interactive and just more of a place that we want to be? Unfortunately, we can't all have nice bright corner rooms with lots of light, but we can put up plants. We can maybe put up some nice posters on the wall. We can hopefully put up some nice lights, if that's possible. There are a lot of things – a lot of small things that we can do to make a room more appealing. And I'll show you just some ways that you can make success visible; right, and talk about making it visible, being retention or outcomes oriented.

Just put up some posters like this one here, ladder of success. To be successful, try, try again until you succeed. 0 percent, I won't. 10 percent, I can't. 20 percent, I don't know how. 30 percent, I wish I could. 40 percent, what is it? 50 percent, I think I might. 60 percent, I might. 70 percent, I can – I think I can. I can. I will, and I did. It's a silly thing. It's a small thing, but it actually has impact on people.

On the right side we see the United Way cycle of success, which is putting – this is putting the idea into people's minds. It's all related here. Go to high school or you get financial stability. You can get school readiness. There are all these things that work together that help you build a good life. Lots of free posters are available. You can create your own. Plaster your walls with them. There are some other things that we will talk about.

OK. So important to keep in mind, and I touched on this a couple times. Retention issues often reflect the stress of unemployment. Research studies have shown that job loss can take a psychological toll and biological toll as well, leading to depression, anxiety disorders, increased somatic symptoms such as fatigue or headaches, and higher rates of medical illnesses. This toll may be worse for men who are socialized to evaluate their self-worth in terms of financial and career success.

Right. And so we need to do everything we can to help overcome that, and there are some ways that we can really help people to overcome these negative feelings that come about through unemployment. We need to really focus on people's sense of worthiness or unworthiness because, even if they put up a good front, probably deep down inside they're feeling a bit unworthy for not being able to find a job after 26 weeks or more. Their sense of competency has been shaken, especially if it's a – they find – they had a job that they really identified with.

One of the biggest benefits of coming to a program like yours is that it gives them a structure in their day, and structure is really important for people who are unemployed because without that it's very easy to slip into depression and very easy to slip into non-action. So having routines and projects to structure one's time is really important, and you can emphasize that in part – even as part of your – as your marketing. Right. And then the reemployment expectancy, always talking about how you really believe there is a job out there for everyone, that you're going – that as long as people show up and work hard every day, that they're going to find a job, and you're going to continue working with them until you find a job. That is crucial.

Now, I know that's easier said and done. So there are some tips that you can use, some psychological tips that you can use that will help. Some of you may have heard of motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a type of therapy that was really developed back in the 1980s and '90s to deal with people who had very extreme behavioral issues relating to criminality and addiction, behaviors that seemed really implacable and – but psychologists found that there are ways that you can use certain techniques to help overcome the resistance that oftentimes people show.

In clinical terms it's a goal oriented, client-centered counseling style for eliciting behavior change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence. That's the psycho talk, but what this means in plain English is that, even when people know intellectually that they need to make a change in their lives, they're often not ready emotionally to make that commitment. Motivational interviewing overcomes the resistance by encouraging them to identify for themselves the consequences and negative behaviors and envision a better future. This process of just talking through consequences and positive alternatives has been shown to significantly strengthen the internal motivation to achieve desired change.

So what are some of the principles here? The first is that arguing, pleading, and ordering are rarely effective in overcoming resistance. They may possibly cause a temporary change in behavior but rarely do they cause a long-term change and internal drive and that's really what we need to do. So you can't say show up here tomorrow or else because there's some people like I found when I – even when I had the court system behind me, the or else may not be enough to make them come. They have to want to come; right?

The key to successful change – and this is really important. People tend to commit to actions that they verbalize. If you can get someone to say that they will do something, they are much more likely to actually do it; right? So one of the goals in your program at the very beginning is to get people to say out loud and even put into writing that they are going to show up every day for the rest of this program cycle, that they make a promise to you and to themselves because once they say that, that really plants the seed inside to make them want to do that; right?

When you're using motivational interviewing principles, you use strategic questions to prompt positive talk about challenges, and you encourage people to identify for themselves the pros and cons of an action. It's not good enough to say you need to show up. Otherwise you're never going to get a job. You need to get them to say, I think I should show up because it's much more likely that I'm going to get a job if I do; right?

This has been a very, very brief introduction to motivational interviewing. It's actually something that has full-day seminars to get people up to speed on. I am giving you a link at the end for a great workbook that you can go through, easy to read, and you can very quickly get the key steps in much more detail. OK. But let's take a look at a very quick conversation, a motivational versus a non-motivational conversation that you might have with a jobseeker, participant in your program.

So a participant might come to you, and I'm sure we've all heard this at some point or another. There's no point in continuing here. I'll never get a job at my age. And the staff member says, oh, yeah. Sure you will. Yeah. Lots of people like you do. Just keep showing up and see what happens; right? And the person then says, OK, yeah, whatever. And then what happens? The participant is never heard from again; right, because you've just told them what to do. They haven't really agreed to it. They just said something so they could leave.

Now, a motivational interviewing approach to the same situation would be like this. There's no point in continuing here. I'll never get a job at my age. So the staff member, instead of just saying, yeah. You need to come back, says, wow. I really hear that you're frustrated. So what will you do if you stop coming? And the participant says, I don't know. I haven't really thought about that. I just know I'm frustrated.

And the staff member says, well, what's the hardest part of coming here for you? What's hard about this? And the participant says, well, I see other people finding jobs, but it never happens for me. And the staff member says, OK. So why do you think that is? Again, we're not telling. We're trying to get them to identify for themselves. The participant says, well, I guess they've been here longer than me, and they've been sending out more applications. Aw, so now the staff member can rephrase that in a positive way.

OK. So consistency and numbers are really the key. How many applications are you willing to commit to doing before you call it quits? And then the participant says, I don't know. Maybe I'll do 50. OK. Great. 50 is a great number. Let's get started. Let's start getting those out.

So the same conversation but in a different approach. You can see by the way motivational interviewing approach gets the jobseeker to sort of get it in their mind that, oh, yeah. Wait a minute. I'm going to come up with my own solution here. I'm going to try this. I'm willing to make this commitment. And oftentimes it's as simple as getting them to say what they're willing to do to actually get them to do it. It's not going to work every time, but if you start trying to integrate some of these motivational interviewing principles in your interactions with participants, you're going to find a lot less resistance than if you just try and be directive. OK.

So just to summarize, remember people tend to commit to actions that they verbalize. So how can we incorporate this? On the very first day have the participants tell the rest of the group why they joined the program. During your orientation or the first day of the training, have them actually sit down and say, I joined this program because I want a better life for myself and my kids. I joined this program because my factory shut down, and I don't know what else to do, whatever it is.

So this would work if you have a fairly small number of people. If you have a lot of people, you're not going to have time for 60 people to say the same – to go around and give their reason. So another way to do it is that you can – now, before I go on, what you can do is have them – break them up into groups and have each, say, five people, and have each – have the group members tell each other why they joined the program, and then each group can choose one person to share with the rest of the group. So it's a lot quicker that way.

Another thing that you can do – I've seen programs do this with very good effectiveness – is have the participants write a letter to their future selves listing all the reasons for joining the program, what they hope to accomplish, and why that's important to them; right? This becomes then – they put it in an envelope. They seal it up, write their address on it. This becomes a really important tool for you. They give it back to you.

What you can do is you can either send it to them after they successfully completed the program so they can see how far they've come, which is always nice, or if they stop coming, if they disappear for whatever reason, if they no longer respond to your phone calls, you can just drop this in the mail as a reminder and hopefully this will be what triggers them to come back; right? Say, look. Here's what you said you wanted to accomplish. Here are the reasons that you decided to come. We hope that you decide that you want to continue. And it does work as a retention tool. OK.

The next step is we want to maximize – tool number four is we want to maximize the positive influencers, and the major positive influencers that we have available to us are constructive competition and peer pressure. So this obviously varies from person to person, and it changes with age. But human beings in general are hardwired to respond to competition and peer pressure. We root for one team over another. We succumb to the latest fads, and we look to our friends and families for validation. Used correctly, these forces of competition and peer pressure can significantly boost attachment to your program and harness the power of the group to encourage participant – encourage completion. Excuse me.

So how do we incorporate competition and peer pressure? First, think about ways, any ways that you can to divide participants into groups, and then make each group responsible for the success of all of its members. Right. Make the curriculum team-based to the greatest extent possible. For example, if you offer computer technician training that leads to the CompTIA A Plus Certification, you might have small groups assemble a computer from scratch collectively rather than have each person do it individually. OK.

The next step is you want to identify positive outcomes and behaviors that you want your participants to master in your program. So for the CompTIA A Plus example, this could include small things such as just showing up to class every time every day on time to an achievement as big as passing the certification exam. The specific items are going to vary depending on what your program model is and what you choose to emphasize. But if you can have a team-based structure where people are responsible for everyone's success and then you tie individual and team-based incentives and rewards to those team efforts, then that's going to leverage the power of the group and leverage competition in order to boost your outcomes. Right.

So how do you set up competition in a program structure? Well, so I found in my own experience the optimal size for a group is about five members. If you have too many, it's easy for individuals to slide by on the work of others. If you have too few, though, the team can get dominated by one person or sputter along if it doesn't have enough people who are driving it. It's also important to include a variety of skill levels in every group so that stronger members can assist those who need more help, and to make it fun have the group collectively agree on a group name and slogan.

Set up clear point systems that award points for the positive behaviors and outcomes that you want to achieve. For example, let's see. A group might get one point very day that all of its members come to the training on time, if one of the things that you're trying to instill is punctuality. Or you might give three points to a group whose members all complete the unit first or five points when the group successfully builds the computer system from scratch.

To really create the sense of competition, make a points chart on a dedicated whiteboard in the classroom. Write the team names that they've selected on the left side of the board with the days of the week on the top. Add the points as they're earned each day and total up at the end of the week. So here you can see on the right side I've created a very simple chart. The Breezy Badgers versus the Hardy Herons versus the Precise Penguins, and then every day they each – each team gets a certain number of points. And at the end of the week looks like the Precise Penguins have won with 27 points; right? That builds a sense of excitement and fun into the program.

So tying individuals together unleashes positive peer pressure within the group. People try harder and they support each other when their own behavior impacts a group, and then competition between the groups creates and sustains excitement over the long term. So if done well, these three components, small teams, earning points, and visible scores, can really develop – help people develop an attachment to the program. Right.

So what happens in the groups is that advanced individuals have a vested interest in supporting other team members, and I've even seen situations where people will call each other in the morning before the program starts to make sure that everyone is woken up and they're going to make it to the program on time. So once we do that we need to actually have some sort of rewards because at the end of the day people like rewards.

So tool number five is recognize, recognize, recognize. And what kind of recognition is most effective? Well, there are some things we know. We usually think about cash or cash equivalents when we talk about recognition. The truth is that cash actually is a pretty bad motivator. It does have some short-term impact, studies have found, but it quickly fades. When people have looked at what happens to productivity in an office when people get a raise, they find that productivity increases but only for about 30 days and then it returns to its original level.

And this makes sense, when you think about it, because in our mind money quickly changes from an incentive to an expectation; right? I mean, our paychecks are an incentive for us to work, but we're expecting that to come along every two weeks or every month, however often you get paid. You're probably not going to your boss every two weeks and saying, thank you so much for paying me, but you will show up at your boss' desk if you don't get that paycheck; right?

So a better form of recognition is actually peer recognition because that has a medium-term impact, and when people feel like they've been recognized and validated by their peers, they feel much tighter connection to the group. Right. So – and if you think of yourself, if you're known as the office expert on something, that does create a certain amount of pride and sense of satisfaction that money alone can't provide; right? If people come to you because they know that you're the only one in the office who knows how to fix a problem, that actually makes you feel really good usually, unless they're coming to you too much and then you just feel overwhelmed.

But the strongest form of recognition is individualized recognition that comes from a mentor or admired authority figure. Right. And we really cherish the recognition that's given to us by those that we consider mentors. Walk around any office and look at people's desks, their spaces, and you'll usually see something like a congratulatory note pinned to a bulletin board or a prized keepsake that's been given by a mentor. It may not cost a lot. It may not have a lot of real value, but it has a lot of emotional value for the people. Think about the people who were the most influential in your own life. There are probably at least a few of them that you would do nearly anything for because you value their relationship so highly. And when participants can develop that kind of mentor relationship with the program staff, they are virtually guaranteed to come back.

So a couple ways to build in recognition, Dr. Bob Nelson, who is the leading expert on corporate recognition policies, he's come up with a model called the ASAP cubed model of recognition. And he says that all recognition should happen as soon as possible after somebody does something positive, as sincerely as possible. There's nothing worse than saying – when you get someone who comes up and says, oh, yeah. Great job. You want to be as specific as possible.

Not just, oh, you're really great, but we really value the fact that you were able to get through those three reports in – when it would have taken someone another week to do them. You want to be as personal as possible. It shouldn't just be a generic thanks. As positive, so sometimes bosses have or people have a tendency to couch things in a way that is both positive but then also might have a touch of negative, sort of like, wow, I'm really impressed that you've increased your typing speed to 60 words a minute, but you're still making a lot of spelling mistakes. That's tempering the recognition. You really just want to be positive; right?

And then be as proactive. Try and catch people doing the right thing. Sometimes we're so focused on trying to see who's breaking the rules that we don't really look at who's following the rules, who's doing really well, and we want to call them out too because that's going to build an attachment for them. In counseling we often say we spend 80 percent of our time on 20 percent of our clients. We don't want to ignore the other 80 percent. OK.

So at the end of the day it is nice to have things like cash, cash equivalents. I understand that you're not allowed to spend the money in this grant on cash equivalents, but there are ways to get things for free or from outside sources that you can use as rewards. So if you're not familiar with them already, check out websites like freecycle.org or the free section of Craigslist or a website called Nextdoor, which is relatively new. It's like a neighborhood website, and people often post things there that they just want to get rid of for free.

And when Freecycle first started, I used it all the time to get rewards items for my participants, and it was amazing sort of the random amount of stuff that I would get. One week I'd be able to give a prize of a foot massager. The next week it would be a whole set of encyclopedias. The next week would be someone's CD collection that they didn't want anymore. It didn't really matter so much what it was. It was just that people like to receive things, and so you can get things for free relatively easily through these sources.

You can also ask your coworkers if they have things at home that are just sitting in boxes that they don't want anymore. Bring them in. Donate them to the program and especially if you're a – if you're a non-profit program, you can even give them a receipt letter so that they can take a tax deduction for their donation.

You can also get free tickets and services from local businesses. So contact your local theaters and sports teams and other entertainment venues and ask for comp tickets. Usually they have a whole program of giving away comp tickets to schools and non-profits and others to reward the community. You can also talk to local businesses and see if they'll pony up $5 gift certificates for their services. They're often happy to do that.

You can get gift cards and cash through different ways. One of the things that I used to do was keep a jar in my classroom and in my office, and any time someone had spare change, those pennies that nobody wanted or nickels and dimes, they would just drop it in there.

And then every once in a while I would take that jar to a Coinstar machine, pour all that in. The machine would count all the change for me, and then it would spit out gift cards to Amazon, to iTunes, or a whole bunch of other places. You can do that yourself. There's no fee for it. It's very easy to do. Even some banks have these Coinstar machines. You can also have – if you have a qualified non-profit organization, you can sign up for rewards programs through AmazonSmile where you get a percentage back of the purchases that people make, or you can ask for donations from board members, contractors, employers, and others; right?

Couple of other ideas here. Peer recognition. If you have name tags, put different colored stickers to reflect people's progress through the program like karate belts. So people start with a white sticker, a yellow sticker, blue sticker, all the way up to black to show how far they've progressed.

The student group of the day music selection. We used to let people choose music to play right at the beginning of the day for 10, 15 minutes, and it was something fun to do. It rewarded them for doing something well the day before. Have certificate award ceremonies, weekly prize drawings. Ask outstanding participants to speak at the next orientation or to teach a workshop. Install – and this is really fun too. Install a classroom bell that people get to ring whenever they do something really, really good, whenever they master a skill. A birthday club and things like that.

We're running a little bit short on time. So I'm going to go very quickly here. Things like for – to build that mentor relationship, handwritten notes of congratulations, inexpensive mementos that you can hand out to participants. Invite people who do really well to have one-on-one or small-group lunches with staff members, with the director of your program, or ask the outstanding participants to become mentors to others in the program. This is really – a really good way for people who are very advanced to help out others who are less advanced.

So creating formal teams and expectations. Set clear expectations. Things you can do are have a punch card where people – you give people – it's kind of like if you go to a store and you buy 10, get 1 free. You can give people a card where they get a punch every day they show up, and then after 10 days they get a little prize.

Try and replicate the classroom team structure whenever possible. Do micro-interventions, brief check-ins via text, phone, e-mail, social medias. They've been shown to have a big impact on behavior, just sending a text. Hope you're doing well. Haven't seen you in a day or two. Give me a call if you need. That can be a great way to keep – bring people back in. And then create a lounge where people can hang out, if they want, so it's not just about coming in and doing the work.

OK. So a few other ideas but that I'm going to let you read those because they're fairly self-explanatory and I want to make sure that we do have a few minutes for the remainder of this.

So the key takeaways. Retention is a process that must begin on day one of a program. The retention – number two, the long-term unemployed have significant – unemployment has significant impact on financial, physical, and psychological well-being that's going to impact participation. We have to always be aware of these factors in order to mitigate them, and to do that we need accurate, complete tracking of participation and contact to identify where key drop off points are and any possible warning signs.

Our physical space and how we present our program has a significant impact on participants' desires to stay. And OK. Principles of motivational interviewing, competition, and peer pressure are powerful influencers of behavior, and frequent recognition following the ASAP model builds program attachment. All right.

So at this point I'm going to close it here and turn it back over to the moderators.

MS. CADWALLADER: Thank you so much, Dan. That was really, really informative. You certainly got me when you opened up the conversation on are your participants ghosting you? Hopefully, our listeners got that as well.

I just want to let everyone know that these last slides that we went through we'll certainly cover again during tomorrow's round-table call, and we can certainly – we have a few minutes to answer any questions that someone might have, any dying questions or comments that you might have to Dan now. I think you can unmute your lines by pressing \*6. Anyone? OK.

MR. SALEMSON: I stunned them into silence apparently.

Q: Hi. This is Liz.

MS. CADWALLADER: Hi, Liz.

Q: Hi. It's easier for me to talk than type it in because it was going to take too long. The question I have for Dan is that we certainly have customers with different barriers here in Denver, and I'd say more than – they're more customers that they're maybe a more mature population that haven't necessarily competed with the millennials or Gen X environment or customers where they haven't interviewed in a while because they have had a job for such a long period of time.

They've either been unemployed or maybe went back as a consultant and they're trying to get back into the industry. How do you think – maybe there's a couple key things where some of this would translate to them because we don't have classes, per se. Customers go off to their separate training. So what are your thoughts on this?

MR. SALEMSON: Yeah. Sure. That's a great question, and it's one that's actually dear to my heart because – because of incarceration many of my folks had not actually competed for a job in many years. And so when they came to me, some of them had never touched a computer before because they hadn't been allowed to touch a computer while they were incarcerated. And so one of the big challenges we had is how do we get someone who has been out of the workforce and doesn't have a lot of skills or qualifications, how do we show that they're really job ready and not just to compete but actually to win in the selection process?

So the biggest benefit that I've found, the biggest is that you need to do a lot of interview preparation and not just in the classroom, although you have to give people sort of the basic script that they're going to need and help them understand the questions. But then actually get the in real life or as close to real life situations as possible.

I used to bring in volunteers who – businesspeople who would volunteer their time and they would come in and we would have mock interviewing hours several times a week where the participants would have to show up dressed for an interview. They would sit in front of people that they'd never met before.

They would be grilled like they would be in an interview, and it's a completely different experience than doing it in a classroom with people that you know and you trust. And what we found is that after doing that four or five times they actually did much better on real interviews than they did just with the classroom preparation because it is very – it is one of the most challenging situations that any of us ever find ourselves in in our life because, when you go to an interview, you're essentially saying to the person, do you think I'm worthy?

And they are asking you lots of questions to find out whether you're worthy or not, and you sort of feel like you have those bright – (inaudible) – lights in your face and you sort of – and then your mind goes blank, and you don't know what to say. And so the more actual sort of real life practice they have, the more likely they are to get through the interview process in a way that convinces the employer that, even though they might have some barriers, they seem like they have a lot of potential. They seem like they're ready to go.

MS. CADWALLADER: And thanks, Dan, and thanks, Liz, for your question. We definitely will have enough time tomorrow to kind of go over some additional questions that you all might have. We are at the 3:30 mark, but I did want to close out with a few of our closing discussions.

Next up we do have our round table discussion tomorrow at 2:30. That will be a great opportunity to ask any questions of our subject matter expert, and also we will be having a grantee featured on that call as well to kind of go over some of their retention models for how they're keeping participants in their program.

As always, we do have our community of practice open where we have a list of resources for grantees to go in and see different types of resources everybody's work is coming up with, and also let's utilize our LinkedIn platform. You guys have questions following up this? Let's have an open discussion on the LinkedIn platform and discuss retention and what message you guys are actually using to keep your participants there and going through those trainings and completing your training program.

So without further ado, we do have a feedback tool that we've asked you all to fill out. If you could, just please rate the quality of our session today and provide us with some answers to the other questions as well.

And we want to thank you all for joining us today. This was a very interesting conversation to hear from Dan, and we really appreciate your theatrics, Dan. It was definitely something that we could listen to and also engage in on our end. So we really want to thank you for joining us. We can't wait to have that discussion tomorrow, really go into the weeds of it, and answer any questions that grantees may have. So once again, thank you so much, Dan.

MS. HARLINS: And thanks so much, everyone. Have a great day.

MR. SALEMSON: Thank you, everyone.

MR. VEHLOW: And I just want to – thank you, Dan.

MS. HARLINS: Thank you.

MR. VEHLOW: And I just want to say thank you to everyone.

(END)