

# **Job Training That Gets Results**

## **Ten Principles of Effective Employment Programs**

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## Overview: The Ten Principles

This is a book about the big challenges facing workforce policy-makers and practitioners in the early twenty-first century.

As a practitioner on the local and state levels for more than 25 years—the last five as director of a state labor department—I have seen considerable changes in the job training world. Two areas, job training and welfare, have shown marked improvement: Our government-funded job training system has become more market-oriented and effective over time, and employment of welfare recipients has risen significantly since the federal welfare reform of the 1990s. In job training, the big challenges we now face lie in building on that market orientation and in positioning training in the face of the ongoing impact of technology and globalization on job opportunities. In welfare, the challenges lie in formulating the next stage of welfare reform, in increasing job retention, and possibly in skills upgrading for former welfare recipients.

In two other employment areas, workers with disabilities and the low-wage workforce, less progress has been made over the past 25 years. Despite the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, unemployment among workers with disabilities has actually increased over the past decade, as has dependence of these workers on the government benefit program Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Similarly, despite extensive discussion in the press and in academia of the low-wage workforce, large segments of this workforce continue to show limited economic self-sufficiency and professionalism. Further, the skills upgrading and career ladder projects that have been tried so far have had little success in improving the skills or wages of this group.

Thus, these four areas—job training, welfare, workers with disabilities, and the low-wage workforce—each present distinct challenges for practitioners in 2005.

For five years, from 1999 to 2004, as director of California's Employment Development Department (EDD), the state's department of labor, I was involved in numerous employment initiatives, both state-wide and nationwide. These were aimed at restructuring job training

for Welfare-to-Work, and at restructuring training targeted at workers saddled with disabilities or low-wages. This book draws on the results of these initiatives, as well as on the results of other cutting-edge government- and foundation-funded efforts in recent years.

## **FOX AND HEDGEHOG: MANY THINGS VS. ONE BIG THING**

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” In his 1953 essay “The Hedgehog and the Fox,” British philosopher Isaiah Berlin uses this line from the Greek poet Archilochus as a starting point for his division of intellectuals and writers into either “foxes” or “hedgehogs.” The foxes (Aristotle, Pushkin, Goethe, Shakespeare) deal in myriad ideas and truths, sometimes “unrelated and even contradictory.” The hedgehogs (Plato, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Dante), in contrast, “relate everything to a single central vision” or theme—“a single, universal organizing principle” (Berlin 1953).

Much of this book discusses the “many things” of the fox in making job training programs more effective. It identifies ways to improve performance among Workforce Investment Act (WIA) contractors, and it explores what the best uses of state discretionary WIA funds are. It also breaks down what makes an effective career ladder program, how postemployment welfare retention or skills advancement programs can succeed, and what kind of intensive training workers with disabilities must go through to get employment or keep their jobs.

However, running through the book is also the “one big thing” of the hedgehog: *policymakers and practitioners need to go well beyond the government program mind-set*. This central principle recognizes that a system of government programs, even when well structured, will reach only a small percentage of the unemployed and low-wage workforce, no matter how much money is spent. Going beyond this program mind-set means rationalizing the incentive structures of government benefits. It also means giving a greater role to extragovernmental networks.

Rationalizing the incentive structure is done by aligning benefits more closely with employment. Illustration can be drawn from the welfare system. For years, government job training programs enrolled welfare recipients and helped train and place them in jobs. Indeed, welfare

recipients form the group that has been most successful in job training from the 1970s to the present. However, the sharp drop in welfare rolls and the sharp increase in welfare recipients getting jobs came only when the incentive structure changed, starting with the Family Support Act of 1988 and culminating in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Further, some of the best welfare-to-work results have come from efforts by extragovernmental groups: the faith-based and affinity groups.

Conversely, for years individual employment programs for workers with disabilities have successfully placed these workers in jobs. Despite this, unemployment among workers with disabilities increased over the 1990s as the incentive structure of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the main benefit for workers with disabilities, went unchanged. The Clinton administration spent a lot of time trying to improve SSI's employment orientation through the drafting and promotion of its Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIA), which President Clinton signed in December 1999. Yet the act's first four years of implementation brought no significant rise in the employment rate of workers with disabilities.

Among extragovernmental networks, the faith-based groups are prominently emerging in the employment field; they have had positive initial results in attracting volunteers and in motivating persons to work who have not been motivated by secular groups. Other promising employment and antipoverty projects are being tested using mutual-support affinity groups—groups of persons linked by race, ethnicity, or neighborhood who spur one another on in trying to achieve economic goals. The affinity groups show how much can be accomplished in gaining employment and self-sufficiency by families working together, outside of government structures.

## **THE TEN PRINCIPLES**

As an organizational device, I have collected operational and policy lessons into Ten Principles. These principles are aimed at the professionals who design national, state, and local employment policy, as well as at the professionals who operate the training, both in the private and

in the public sector. In other words, they are aimed at both policymakers and practitioners.

When I was appointed EDD director in April 1999, our California state librarian and historian, Kevin Starr, called and advised, “Your office is a rare window on California government and policy; keep notes and write about your experiences.” Lawrence Mead, New York University professor and welfare scholar, made a similar recommendation: “Chronicle your experiences,” he said. Over the years as EDD director, I did keep extensive notes, taking time three or four days a week to write about our workforce initiatives, including both those that moved forward and those that did not, and about our internal debates and daily work life. These experiences are incorporated in the Ten Principles.

The Ten Principles start with several of the key employment dynamics today. Principle One discusses why a strong private economy does more to reduce unemployment than any government program. This point will seem obvious to many policymakers, but it is often missed in discussions of job training and its interaction with other economic forces. Principle One also discusses the enormous job creation that is ongoing through good times and bad, and its implications for training.

Principles Two through Eight discuss the big challenges in job training as they involve Welfare-to-Work, workers with disabilities, and the low-wage workforce. Three chapters are given over to the low-wage workforce and to career ladder projects. The low-wage workforce is the area of job training that is least developed, both conceptually and operationally. Among the outstanding issues: What mobility is possible, and for how many workers within a firm or an industry? What investment in training should be expected of workers, of employers, and of the industry? What is a sustainable skills upgrading model, one not dependent on short-term discretionary government training funds?

Principle Nine looks at extragovernmental networks, focusing on the Family Independence Initiative, based in Oakland, California. The project, which involves the aforementioned affinity groups, is the brainchild of Maurice Lim Miller, who spent 20 years running a government training program, eventually becoming convinced of the limits of government efforts.

Principle Ten brings job training into the new economic world of globalization, competition, and outsourcing.

## THE CRAFT OF JOB TRAINING

Present in all of the principles is the theme of job training as a craft. By “craft” is meant mastery of a body of knowledge, as well as a code of behavior and a sense of social obligation. There is no exam that one passes to enter the job training field, no certification process or graduate requirement. Yet the practitioners who are craftspersons are those who have taken time to learn about past employment initiatives, their consequences (intended and unintended), and the ongoing shifts in job opportunities. They are like the craftspersons of the past, the silversmith or furniture maker or glass blower, in their concern for the work. They operate with an emphasis on results, not process; with integrity; and with a determination to develop a high-quality product.

Over the past 25 years, I have met such craftspersons as they fulfilled their roles at community-based agencies, local and state government entities, private firms, industry associations, labor unions, and private foundations. You will meet some of them in the next pages, as the Ten Principles are set out.

They are the true directors of employment.