Wage Replacement And Job Stability Fall Short In Every State

In our nation's job centers, the same low outcomes appear in every state and among every client population, in the Job Service and in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult and Dislocated Worker programs alike. Clients are not getting their wages back, and too many are not keeping the jobs they find. In Program Year 2024, clients of all three programs who held steady employment in the year after exit kept 82 cents of every dollar of their best prior wage. Those who changed industries kept 58. Nearly 3 in 10 who found work never settled at all. Job stability decides how much of a client's wage survives. Job instability is often the result of settling for an available job where the match doesn't work for either party.

A stable job is where the benefits of employment come from: a wage that holds, raises and promotions, employer benefits, and a work record that leads to the next job.

> ***The goal of staff assisted job search should not be immediate employment. It should be appropriate employment: a job the client can keep.***

An Alternative Staff Assisted Job Search Model Exists

The proposed alternative staff assisted job search model structures the short time with clients around that goal, starting with the client being guided toward an informed target occupation selection. Attention is paid to this choice, since it dictates the entire path and is pivotal to job stability. The tool staff would be using applies human capital marketing concepts that stress relevant transferable skills and productivity, to achieve replacement wages for experienced workers and economic mobility for low income clients. Effective networking is examined in detail.

With proper tools, staff become direct advocates for their clients, preparing them for the job search that awaits them outside of the office. Every client exits with serious value added in their hands and new hope.

Evaluate A Proposed Staff:Client Job Search Assistance Tool That Improves Wage Outcomes

This tool is being circulated for evaluation before general release, to gather a wide range of feedback so modifications can be considered. Please explore all sections. Of special interest is the business intelligence section, which identifies the paths others in similar circumstances took to sustainable employment. It draws on the National Workforce Outcomes File, a newly built longitudinal database of more than 23 million individual client outcomes from Job Service and WIOA programs over eight years. These paths should be of value to a wide range of clients, particularly dislocated workers, and provide the foundation of an effective networking campaign.

Experience Path To A Job As Staff Would: pathtoajobevaluation.netlify.app

THE PIVOTAL MOMENT

The Most Consequential Moment in Job Search Assistance Is Treated as an Afterthought

Selecting A Target Occupation Sets The Entire Course Of The Search

Selecting a target occupation is the pivotal moment for future wage outcome and job stability — and it happens at the worst possible time, decided under the worst possible conditions. Clients are still reeling from job loss when staff ask "what do you want to do?" in a tight window, with a long checklist competing for attention. The single most consequential question in the process gets treated as an afterthought; the consequences show up later as low wages and poor job stability.

It's the scene between Alice and the Cheshire Cat, at a junction with many paths:

> ***"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"***
> ***"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.***
> ***"I don't much care where—" said Alice.***
> ***"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.***
> ***"—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.***
> ***"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."***

The Cheshire Cat is right. Without a well-grounded rationale for "where do you want to get to," any path looks equally acceptable, so clients default to the last position held, whether or not it's advantageous, because it requires no reflection — or to whatever's easiest to get. Those jobs are easiest because employers with high turnover hire fast, so the job board is disproportionately stocked with this kind of opening.

Too many job center clients are subtly slotted by a model designed for speed of placement. Until the Internet's broad adoption, the Job Service was joined at the hip with unemployment compensation, whose mission was fast claimant return. That ethos shaped the front-line culture long before UC was automated and moved out — the systems separated, but the reflex stayed: speed to placement remains the institutional instinct, and the client's well-being gets lost in it.

Alice is right that she'll get somewhere regardless; that's exactly the problem. Far too many land in work that doesn't pan out and call it a result, because "I got somewhere" becomes the consolation prize for never seriously addressing the question. A well thought-through target occupation is the precondition that makes every subsequent step point somewhere chosen instead of nowhere at all.

Replacing that reflex should be a client self-assessment of prior experience, weighing five separate factors, not just recency:

- Longest worked
- Paid most
- Best stability
- Best overall experience
- A job they've never done before, but always wanted to

These considerations don't usually converge on the same occupation. Surfacing where they diverge, and letting the client weigh the trade-offs, builds the buy-in that shapes the entire job search and ultimately both their wage replacement and their job stability.

Structured properly, this self-assessment doesn't demand much staff:client time. It's a short, guided exercise, not a lengthy intake, just enough to make sure the few minutes staff already spend on "what do you want to do?" go toward the right question instead of an offhand one with a predictable answer. Every client's target occupation is screened for ability concerns. Staff are provided a screen built from the occupation's actual tasks to explore those concerns with the client and, where needed, discuss specific possible accommodations.

THE TOOL

Occupation-Specific Mock Interviewing's Hidden Benefits

The Logical Next Step Once A Target Occupation Is Chosen

Once a target occupation has been chosen — and chosen for the right reasons — the logical next step isn't the resume. It's the occupation-specific mock interview. Mock interviewing is usually sold on its obvious benefit: practice reduces nerves and improves performance in the real thing. That's true, but it undersells the approach. Used well, an occupation-specific mock interview does something the occupational-choice conversation alone can't — it tests the chosen occupation against reality, before the client has invested weeks pursuing it. It also does something no worksheet or intake form can: it quickly establishes staff-client rapport and trust, because the client experiences staff actively working alongside them rather than processing them.

An occupation-specific mock interview ferrets out unrealistic paths early. A target occupation can sound reasonable in the abstract and fall apart the moment the client has to answer real questions about it — questions that surface a gap in experience, a credential they don't have, or a fundamental mismatch between what the job actually involves day-to-day and what the client imagined. Better to discover this in a 20-minute occupation-specific mock interview than three weeks into a job search that was never going anywhere.

This occupation-specific mock interview is grounded in the target occupation, not a generic exercise. Real interviews test fit against a specific job; a mock interview should too. Built from O*NET's actual skills, tools, and technologies for the target occupation — not a generic bank of interview questions — it tests whether the occupational choice itself holds up, and surfaces exactly where the client's strengths, weaknesses, and gaps sit relative to that specific occupation.

Transferable skills become a real sales point, not just a phrase. Most approaches to job search treat "transferable skills" as something you say, not something you prove. An occupation-specific mock interview is different — it's built around the actual skills, tools, and technologies O*NET identifies for the target occupation, which means it's the only approach that can test whether skills, tools, and technology used in any life context — a prior job, a hobby, a military assignment, unpaid caregiving — genuinely transfer to what the client is now pursuing. For a client venturing outside their typical occupation, this turns "I have transferable skills" from an unsupported claim into something concrete they can actually demonstrate and document in their resume.

Possible ability concerns are flagged. O*NET tracks the abilities required to perform the tasks involved in every occupation, and an occupation-specific mock interview surfaces where a client's own ability concerns intersect with those requirements. Concerns a client may not have raised, or may not even have recognized in themselves, tend to surface under the mild pressure of the interview — giving staff a chance to address them constructively, rather than let them go unaddressed until they cost the client a real interview.

The output is a document the client keeps. After the interview, staff can share a writable PDF version of the session — capturing not just the questions but staff's own notes and observations — that the client can take with them. Instead of the mock interview's value disappearing the moment the conversation ends, it becomes something concrete the client can revisit, reference while building their resume, or bring into a real interview.

Treated this way, the occupation-specific mock interview stops being a discrete practice exercise tacked onto the end of job search prep. The tool becomes the approach — the mechanism by which occupational choice gets tested, strengths and gaps get surfaced, and ability concerns come to light, all before the client ever sends a resume.

THE OUTPUT

Mock Interviewing Produces More Compelling Resumes

Mock interviewing built on O*NET job analysis data is also what makes real resume work possible: the keywords a mock interview surfaces aren't generic "resume tips" — they're the same vocabulary practitioners and hiring managers in that occupation already use. That's the difference between a resume that reads as competent in general and one that reads as fluent in the target occupation specifically. A generalized resume, however well-written, doesn't survive contact with someone who actually works in the field; an O*NET-grounded one does. And it makes obvious to the client, in a way that's hard to argue with, that their resume needs to be rethought to incorporate these insights — a conclusion staff telling them outright rarely lands with the same force.

THE SAME TOOL, ONE MORE STEP

Career Exploration: The Path to Economic Mobility

Most job seekers assume a college degree is the price of admission to good work. It isn't. The large majority of American jobs don't require one — yet the tools available to job seekers rarely help them explore that entire landscape in a way that's grounded in real data and their own locale.

For clients whose realistic options don't require a college degree, the assumption is often that the choice is between the job they just left and something just as precarious. It usually isn't. Within their own locale, there are frequently occupations that pay meaningfully more and offer far greater stability, calling on skills the client already has or can build on quickly.

Generic career exploration tools don't surface this. They tend to list occupations in the abstract — national averages, general descriptions — without connecting them to what a client already knows how to do or where they actually live. This Career Exploration tool works differently: it starts from the target occupation itself, takes its broad industry classification, and explores the full range of other occupations within that same broad category, in the client's own local labor market, that pay above the local median for jobs at a similar skill level. Because the comparison stays within a sector already tied to the client's chosen occupation, the recommendations aren't a leap into the unknown; they're a next step built on ground the client already stands on.

It's also not a separate step the client has to be routed to. Career Exploration is embedded in the same tool that produces the occupation-specific mock interview. It's a one-step process.

> ***For low-income clients, the goal stops being wage replacement and becomes economic mobility instead. For this client population, landing something that simply matches what was lost is self-defeating.***

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

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