



CASE MANAGERS SHARE INSIDER TIPS

A RESOURCE GUIDE
OF BEST PRACTICES



Department of Labor
National Farmworkers Job Program



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INTRODUCTION

Why do some case managers always get thank you notes from clients they have successfully placed and from employers who are happy with their new workers? What is it they do to put people at ease and how are they able to assist even those with few skills or difficult backgrounds?

The National Farmworker Jobs Program of the U.S. Department of Labor, asked these questions of WIA 167 case managers at four focus groups during 2003. We wanted to find out what case managers do to make their job easier and to be more effective.

We gathered information from case managers who have been in their position for years, including some who are now supervisors. Many told us what they have personally tried and found to be successful or what they learned from watching someone else.

The resulting ***Good Case Managers Share Insider Tips: A Resource Guide Of Best Practices*** is not a step-by-step training manual, but instead offers hints from case managers to case managers. The information covered includes:

- How to make clients comfortable.
- Ways to offer encouragement.
- Hints for working smoothly with employers.
- What to do when a placement does not go as planned.
- Ideas for coordinating with local One-Stop networks.
- How supervisors and agencies can help case managers do a better job.

The **Guide** is divided into sections (study methodology is described at the end):

- What makes a good case manager?
- Getting started with clients.
- Client follow-up.
- Using One-Stop networks.

Throughout this document, italicized text has been used to represent actual statements of case managers. These statements may have been combined or paraphrased.



INSIDER TIP



Along the way, we have included 'Insider Tip' boxes that highlight particular techniques described by case managers which you might want to try.

- Working with employers to help clients.
- What can supervisors and agencies do to help?
- Personal payoff for doing a good job.

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Section

What makes a good case manager

1

Good case management has to be in your heart. The book doesn't tell you everything.

Key Words

The best case managers are described as having special qualities that make them really good at what they do. For example, good case managers are:

- Empathetic/in-tune with their clients – able to relate to clients and their needs.
- Flexible – recognize that every client is different so there is no one way to be of assistance.
- Good listeners – look for clues in what clients say that can help assess and encourage.
- Motivational/encouraging – able to keep clients' morale high; serve as their job coach and mentor.
- Realistic – make sure clients' goals are obtainable.
- Honest/direct – admit when they do not have the answers but work to find them.
- Broad minded – see the larger picture; know helping clients can affect the entire community.



- Professional – set high standards for themselves to maintain their credibility in the community and with clients.
- Caring – treat clients more like extended family; earn their trust.
- Balanced – set personal boundaries, realize it is not possible to do everything.
- Aware/knowledgeable – know when and where to refer.
- Dependable/accessible – available and willing to be of assistance.

General Principles To Remember

Case managers set the following guidelines for themselves in dealing with clients:

- Working with clients is on a long-term basis. Not everything has to be accomplished immediately. *It is an ongoing process to get to know your clients – to build up trust over time.*
- Always treat clients with dignity and respect – like equals.
- The case manager's role is to help clients solve problems, not solve problems for them.

Getting started with clients

Section

2

Before You Begin

It is important to make sure the client feels what he/she tells you is confidential. This starts with assuring the place you meet is private. A first meeting can be fairly casual – you might meet the client somewhere other than your office, even in his/her own home. But when you start talking about the program and assessing background and skills, you want privacy in a quiet setting.

Along with privacy, you should make sure you are not interrupted. *If I have an appointment with a client and someone wants to talk to me, I make a point of saying 'hold my calls' so the client feels important.* This is part of convincing clients you are interested in them.

Experienced case managers advise to make sure that the first meeting is not rushed. It should be at least half an hour of uninterrupted time.



Make The Client Comfortable

Ensuring clients are as relaxed as possible is the best way to both get and give information. Case managers say many new clients are hesitant, unsure, and nervous when they first come to the office. It is the case manager's job to put them at ease. Here are some things that might help break the ice.

- Smile... People might forget what you give them, but they will never forget how you make them feel. A smile means you are there to help them.
- Offer them coffee, and also offer coffee to their spouses or anyone else who comes with them.
- Make the situation informal; simple for them. It can take a lot of courage for them just to come through the door.
- Immediately give them a tour of your facility while you provide more information about your organization. This can help give them confidence that you will be able to help.
- Tell clients something personal about yourself; e.g. 'cooking for my husband.'
- Use examples from your own experiences.
- Ask them where they are from. Find out something about their lives.
- Let them know they made a good decision by coming to your agency.

INSIDER TIP: TO MAKE THE CLIENT COMFORTABLE



Find or say something the client can easily relate to:

I took a calendar with pictures of farmworkers and framed them. Anyone coming into the office knows this is a farmworker program without having to ask.

I put a map of Mexico on the wall behind my desk. When I first meet clients from Mexico, I ask them to point on the map to the place they are from.

Some bring their kids to the first meeting. The kids might be intimidated by me and the situation. I tell them [client and their children] I used to do farm work. I always offer them water and candy for the kids.

I like to start with a conversation off the subject, like where they are from, things about their lives.



It is not essential that clients tell you everything about themselves the first time you get together. *Remember you will see them more than once.*

Case managers advise not to make difficult referrals immediately. Let the clients talk. For example, do not rush to give drug use referrals right after they tell you about their 'problem.' *You have to take it slow, build their trust in you, and then they will be more interested in listening to what you suggest.*

The client's most immediate need may not be a job. It might be food or housing. Sometimes you have to help them address their emergencies first before you can assist them with their work-related needs. You may find you have to refer them somewhere else to receive the immediate help they need. *People come to us and we never say you don't belong here. We find out where they do belong and get them to the proper place and even contact the proper person for them.* Tell the individual to let you know how it works out, or to come back if the referral does not work out. An individual may return when he/she is more prepared to take advantage of the services you have to offer.

Even if clients are ineligible for your services, you might be able to help by providing referrals, or by encouraging them to at least look at your agency's job postings. *If they aren't eligible for some reason, find someone else who can help. If you treat them well, they may refer more people to you.*

Case managers have other suggestions on how you can continue to help clients feel comfortable and at ease as you talk:

- Ask them to feel free to ask questions.
- Watch your body language. *Keep a non-judgmental expression no matter what you hear.*
- Watch the client's body language. Don't always say 'I know what you're going through,' as the client might think you feel sorry for him/her and do not really want to help.
- Know the cultural norms for your clients. For example, is it culturally appropriate to continually look at the person talking to you?
- Always be respectful.

INSIDER TIP: TO LET THE CLIENT KNOW YOU ARE INTERESTED



Remember something about each client's situation – something specifically mentioned, such as an illness. Then, the next time you see the client you can ask if he/she is over the illness. This makes clients feel like you are dealing with them as individuals, on a personal level.



Getting Through The Paperwork Hurdle

You are the case manager and you do not like doing all that eligibility paperwork. How do you think the clients feel? *Although they may dislike it, case managers understand paperwork is important.* Yet it can be overwhelming for new clients. Case managers have found some techniques for introducing and completing necessary paperwork that seem to help:

- Don't make the first meeting focus only on the paperwork. *Some clients won't come back for a second visit if you push the paperwork too much.* Wait until the second meeting to complete all the forms.
- Slip the paperwork in between conversations with clients so they don't feel like all the focus is on the paperwork.
- Get some of the information you need, like date of birth, by talking to clients on the telephone before they even come into the office. Begin filling out the forms before you see them.
- Do some of the preliminary paperwork in a group setting to get it out of the way. Then follow-up with more personal information in a one-on-one meeting.
- Explain that this paperwork will help determine their eligibility for services, and without it, you cannot help them.
- Let them know the state or another source requires this paperwork, not your organization. *The best way to say it is, it's a requirement of the program.*
- Do not let clients feel intimidated because they cannot read or are unable to complete the paperwork.
- Make sure clients understand why you are asking for each piece of information, what you are writing on the form, and exactly what you are asking them to sign.
- Sometimes joking about the paperwork helps, but it still has to be completed.

Case managers say one of the most difficult things is trying to get clients to bring in required documentation and completed paperwork. Some case managers use this as a test of a client's readiness to accept the help the program has to offer. *If they won't bring the information back; chances are they won't do well holding a job.*

In the end, however, it is the client's responsibility to follow-through, and the case manager can only do so much to help. *Tell them: When you're ready, bring it in, then we can move forward.*



INSIDER TIP: TO GET PAPERWORK COMPLETED



When a client says, 'it's a lot of trouble.' I reply, if we didn't have all these papers, I wouldn't get to spend time with you.

If they don't bring in the paperwork, I reschedule them three times. And after that I tell them if you are not going to work with us now, you have to go to another organization for help.

Assessing Skill Levels – The Basics

Assessing skill levels can be uncomfortable for the client. *Clients feel embarrassed. They will highlight their inabilities.* Case managers should try to be sensitive to how the client might feel, always remembering: *You need to let them keep their dignity.*

Case managers suggest assessing clients during every interaction.

- *I give clients the reading and math assessment to take home and complete and mail back to me. This also tells me if clients are the type that will follow through on something they're told to do and can work on their own.*
- *Does the wife make the initial call to the agency for her husband? Do they lack confidence in themselves?*
- *Giving them these assessments tells me a bit about how the clients react to problems.*

Other forms of assessment might involve being sensitive to a client's unspoken needs. For example, it might be necessary to visit a client in his/her home if you sense lack of transportation or gas money is making it difficult for him/her to come into the office. Several farmworkers living together in a labor camp might have no telephone and little access to transportation, and so could benefit if you can arrange office visits for all of them consecutively on the same day, as well as help them all find transportation.

Assuring Clients That Assessing Their Skill Levels Won't Hurt

Just introducing the idea of a skills assessment can be intimidating for some clients. Here is how some case managers handle the situation:

- *Make the assessment positive, not negative. Say the results won't fail you from the program. The assessment is not to learn what you don't know, but what you do know and then build on that.*



- *Say I have to do this to serve you better, understand your goals and then determine how to help you get to them.*

Standard assessment tests can make clients feel like failures if they can't answer questions. Case managers tell their clients *this test is set up so you're not supposed to answer everything*. On the other hand, questions they cannot answer offer clues about areas in which each client needs help.

Assessing Skills Indirectly

One tip case managers share is they do not ask every question. Sometimes, they can get the information without possibly embarrassing the client. For example, if the client cannot read, there is no sense in asking him/her to read test questions. If the client stumbles through English words, the case manager might not bother testing his/her English language skills. *Listen for red flags. Clients will go around what they really need. You have to look for audible clues.*

Case managers say you might be better off piecing information together and not asking all the questions at once. Maybe the client has an obvious lapse in time sequence in his/her job history. The answer will come out as you continue to work with the client and he/she comes to trust you.

Another technique might be to ask open-ended questions and let the client volunteer information. Then you can follow-up to learn anything he/she has not covered.

Making Client's Comfortable About Their English Language Abilities

The client's knowledge of English can be a sensitive area. Case managers feel this is one area in which clients need reassurance. *Just because some people don't know English doesn't mean they don't have skills. They can still bring a lot to the program.*

Clients need to be encouraged to keep their English language goals. *When they say it is so difficult to learn English, I tell them: Your lack of English can't stop you unless you say I don't want to learn any more.*



INSIDER TIP: TO HELP CLIENTS SET AND KEEP ENGLISH LANGUAGE GOALS



*Ask them how badly do you want to reach your goal?
Learning English will help you get to that goal.*

*Help prepare them with specific vocabulary they need for the job.
I had a client who could sew but didn't know the English words for
some of the sewing terms. We taught her those English words.*

*Have them practice, practice, practice. At some point you have to only
speak English to the client.*

*When you place a client in employment, create a buddy system.
Pair a bi-lingual employee with a mono-lingual co-worker.*

*Enroll them in Junior College English classes and work with them to get
their employers to reimburse the cost.*

*Give the client an English-language dictionary with simple phrases, the
English alphabet and everyday words to help improve language skills.*

*Order 25 'Pictionary' games. Let each client use one of the games for two
weeks. Then bring the client in for a mock interview.*

Helping Clients Understand Skills Come At All Levels

Some clients feel they have no skills because their experience or training was obtained in another country. Case managers need to reassure them. *Asking them what they did in their home country or how they were schooled helps get things going. That lets them know their past experience is valuable in this country. I tell clients things like math knowledge is the same in both countries. When you learn it, you learn it – just in a different language.*

Other clients might feel like they have no skills. Case managers ask clients about their experiences and relate these to skill levels. *For someone working on a farm, I will ask questions like, do you drive farm equipment? Maybe you'd be interested in driving trucks.*

Setting And Following Through On Goals

Setting goals and encouraging clients to meet them is a matter of making clients believe in themselves. *You have to help them cross that barrier of not knowing they can succeed.*



It is important to let clients know the timeline for receiving services. They should be clear that finding the right job or connecting with needed training may take awhile, so clients should not be disappointed because they expect immediate results.

Encouraging clients to follow-through to accomplish their goals is very important. Taking small steps that lead to bigger goals is one way to keep clients working in a positive direction. *We set more basic goals. Find any job, even if it is not ideal, so that their basic needs can be met.*

INSIDER TIP: TO ENCOURAGE CLIENTS



I tell my clients to start dreaming of what they want to do, what they are interested in. I then follow-up a few days later by calling and asking them what they're thinking about. Then I have information available about their dream job or career the next time they visit. They love it because they know I took the time to be interested in them. It brings them back and motivates them.

Some feel intimidated about computer use. You can make them feel really good if you teach them how to use a computer a little, then praise their accomplishments.

Have a 'Hall of Fame Board' which shows where people have been placed and are working.

Take pictures of clients in training. Send them a copy. It will make them proud. I also put their pictures in our brochures and use these for outreach. It makes people feel good.

I have former clients come talk to groups participating in job search workshops. They talk about the specific skills they use on the job. They are success stories for the clients.

We will lend answering machines so employers can get hold of clients.

It might be helpful if you set milestones and rewards for clients to reach. If the goal is to buy a decent car we set small goals to get there. First get a job. After four weeks of continuous work, treat yourself to something nice. After two more weeks start to set aside some money from that paycheck, and so on until a year has gone by and the sock is full of money for a down payment.

Always adjust and revise goals along the way. Things don't always go according to plan. You must empower, help, guide and work together with the clients to accomplish their goals.



Sometimes it might be necessary to help clients find other assistance that can help them keep their goals. For example, direct them to support groups, help them arrange babysitting or transportation, connect clients who can drive together to training.

For clients who are intimidated by the workplace environment or entering a new industry, it might be helpful to scope out everything for them before sending them for a job interview. This can include finding the best route to get to the site, telling them exactly what the building looks like, making sure they arrive at the interview on time (even if you have to drive them yourself), and telling them as much about the potential employment situation as possible. In fact, one case manager said that the best, most comfortable place to talk to clients is driving them to a job site.

Another case manager suggests that you and your client go on-line to look up the potential employer and his/her company as preparation for the client's job interview.

Continually following-up with clients to assure they stay on track is a way to encourage them. *Communicate with the clients; connect with them. Call them and ask how they are doing.* Let clients know you have a desire for them to succeed. *You have to get excited with the clients in order for them to get excited.*

Section

CLIENT FOLLOW-UP

3

Case managers say checking-up to see how clients are doing and following-up on referrals made on their behalf are very important activities.

For clients who are working on their goals or placed in employment, many case managers feel that how often they follow-up depends on the activity engaged in by the client. Once a week might be fine, but if they are involved in a work-experience program, it might be too much.

To help with follow-up, case managers suggest making sure clients can reach them if there is a problem, if they have a question or if they just want to talk. One case manager tells all her clients to call her any time, but to be sure they can reach her she keeps Monday as her in-office day. She even puts this information on her business card.

Another case manager gets clients involved in monthly agency meetings so they become part of the program. Follow-up happens naturally this way. Also, if you tell every client that follow-up is part of the program, h/she will expect to hear from you on a regular basis.



USING ONE-STOP NETWORKS

Case managers connect to their local One-Stop network whenever possible to extend their resources.

Here are some ways case managers use One-Stop resources and personnel:

- Connecting clients with their job developers.
- Assisting with resumes.
- Referring to and possible help paying for training.
- Offering access to computers.
- Referring to ESL classes or on-site teaching.
- Arranging joint on-the-job training.
- Finding jobs for WIA167 training program graduates.
- Providing local resources information to tell people where they can get emergency help such as food, housing, and other basic assistance.

A good working relationship can mean the WIA 167 case manager and One-Stop personnel refer clients back and forth. *They know we can help [MSFWs], and the One-Stop usually can't. They refer farmworkers to us.* Often WIA 167 case managers are called upon to educate new One-Stop staff about MSFWs and what the WIA 167 program offers. When relations are good, One-Stop personnel feel free to call WIA 167 case managers with any questions or for help with Hispanic or farmworker clients. *We have a very good relationship and learn from each other.*

INSIDER TIP: FOR WORKING WITH ONE-STOPs



When a large agricultural production operation closed, the WIA 167 program and the local One-Stop office worked together to provide ESL and retraining classes, and eventually found the workers new jobs.

In some locations, WIA 167 programs have an office or at least a desk at the One-Stop site. At least one case manager said One-Stop staff visit the 167 program several times a week to help farmworker clients.

WIA 167 case managers also offer suggestions to the One-Stop network for better service to Hispanics and MSFWs. For example, case managers said they have recommended more ESL training, computer classes in Spanish, and bilingual business classes.



WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO HELP CLIENTS

Getting To Know Employers

Case managers have lots of tips for successfully working with employers to get their clients into jobs. Many say the key word is 'trust.' Employers need to be confident of your ability to refer good workers. Case managers stress that you should never think of an employer as just another number. *You must have trust, loyalty, respect, and honesty with your employers.*

It is important to make sure the employers know you are interested in them; that you will check on the workers you place, and that they can call on you at any time if they have a question or an issue. *You're not just a 'drop and go.' You are going to try to solve any problem that comes up. Case managers say, whatever you are doing takes a back seat if you get a call from a client or an employer. I always respond when an employer calls. Also, if you promise an employer something, make sure you follow through.*

Your first placement with a new employer should be someone you are fairly certain will succeed. This helps build trust and start your relationship off on good footing. *I did a work experience placement that was a great success, and then next time it was easier to get someone placed there. The employer will call you looking for someone to be placed.*

Honesty is a word that case managers use often when talking about their relationships with employers. They find that it pays to be honest and direct when trying to place clients.

- *Call an employer and say I'm not sure about this one. They respect that and may take the person anyway.*
- *I had one client who had been incarcerated for eight years. I told him to be honest when he went for his interview. He was. He was given the job but told by the employer he would be the first person suspected if any tools were missing. The client stayed with that job for a long time.*

Learning About The Business Before You Refer A Client

Case managers suggest educating yourself about the industries in your area so you can ask the proper questions and ensure that you are sending the right people with the right skills for the job.



Case managers feel it is essential when connecting with a new employer to make a personal appearance to find out as much about the business as possible. *We need to learn for ourselves what we're trying to teach clients to find out about employers.* This includes knowing something about the employers before you meet them.

You should be familiar with the terms employers use in a specific industry so you can understand what they are looking for in an employee and make a good job match.

It is worth the time to take a tour of each new establishment and look closely at the site where the new employee will be working to fully understand what will be required of him/her. *You can then reassure the client about exactly what's involved.*

Persuading Employers To Sign-On

Case managers say you have to sell your program to employers by talking about the benefits for them. That is one reason it is important to learn as much as you can before you visit a business.

You might offer incentives for taking placements, such as the on-the-job training (OJT) program which will pay half of the employee's salary for a period of time. One case manager says he uses this enticement for employers taking hard-to-place clients.

Another positive sales pitch is to take advantage of a common notion that *Hispanic workers work hard*. Case managers use this concept to *convince employers that the people you place will be loyal and will stay*. *Employers look for work ethics in their employees, and farmworkers already have this, so employers are not risking anything by hiring a farmworker.*

You can stress that your program already performs the required documentation check, which means that an employer taking any of your clients does not have to worry about being raided by the INS. Case managers suggest taking a sample contract with you when you visit potential employers so they can see exactly what they are agreeing to.

Another suggestion is to tell employers success stories.

It is important to listen to employers when they talk about what they need. Combine that with information about the employer's industry and about his/her particular work site, then refer the right client with the needed skills. Job matching is very important.



Connecting With Employers

Case managers say it is important to make direct contact with as many potential employers as possible. Here are some suggestions:

- Go to Job Fairs.
- Become a member of your local Chamber of Commerce.
- Hold open houses for employers so they can see what your agency accomplishes.
- Get yourself invited as a guest speaker and talk to members of a trade association about what they need.
- Look for companies where management level employees are ex-migrants and might be more sympathetic to hiring others with the same background.
- Do a public service announcement or host a program on a local radio station.
- Ask to tour a local business to find out more about it. Then, send a thank you note saying if they need any help with potential employees to let you know.
- Offer to serve as a first screening source of potential applicants for employers who do not have the time to wade through the hundreds of applications they might get for a single job posting.

INSIDER TIP: FOR WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS



In a community where many farms are going out of business, one case manager works closely with agricultural employers to help find new jobs for the farmworkers.

In another location, the case manager gets local employers interested in the program by spreading the message that WIA 167 clients have something to give back to the community.

One case manager talks to employers about placing someone who is bilingual, such as a farm crew leader, to act as a supervisor for monolingual Spanish-speaking clients.

A case manager went to the City Manager to tell him about the program and learned that this official was looking for someone to serve as a liaison to the Hispanic community. The case manager helped the City Manager with his needs and in return got personal referral assistance to local employers that helped the case manager's clients.



When Things Do Not Go As Planned

Despite your best efforts, it may be that a client job placement simply does not work. This could happen for any number of reasons including such things as the client does not like the job or the employer does not like the client's personality. Case managers say that employers should understand from the outset that they are not obligated to keep any client. *Tell the employer you have other people to send over if the one you place doesn't work out.*

On the other hand, case managers stress the importance of trying to avoid conflict situations by meeting them head-on. Case managers should continually check with clients after placement and make it known to both parties they are available to troubleshoot and mediate if necessary.

Sometimes a client might act inappropriately resulting in his/her firing. Case managers strongly suggest not making excuses to the employer but to be humble and apologize with: *Please don't judge all my clients by one bad apple.*

When Things Go Right

A positive relationship between a case manager and an employer can greatly benefit both parties. Employers will even refer business owners to you or give you contacts at other companies. *I have seven employers where we can't place any more because the clients are loyal and there are no slots to fill at these companies... there is no turnover. It's a good problem. Some employers will call you before they post a job in the newspaper because you came through when they needed it the first time.*

INSIDER TIP: FOR THANKING EMPLOYERS



Give employers plaques for all the support they show your program.

Remember special occasions for employers (e.g., birthdays, birth of a baby) and send flowers.



SUPERVISORS AND AGENCIES

Case managers understand their programs are driven by goals set at the federal, state and agency levels. They know the agency does not set the guidelines for the WIA167 program, but they are aware that their agency can interpret these guidelines. They want to be clear on what is expected of every case manager.

Traits Of A Good Supervisor

Case managers want their supervisors and agency directors to be aware of what is required to do their job. For example, case managers may need to be away from the office a great deal of the time. They appreciate supervisors who understand this aspect of their job and do not question *why they never seem to be in the office*. And, case managers say it is their responsibility to make sure management is aware of all that the case managers do as part of their job.

The best supervisors seem to be those who were once case managers because they know what to expect and are willing to go out into the field with staff to get a hands-on look at what is going on. Case managers say a good supervisor ‘supports us 110 percent.’ This means:

- *I know all I have to do is pick up the phone and I'll get support in good or bad situations.*
- *Lets each case manager make the majority of decisions.*
- *Lets me make mistakes and doesn't berate me when things don't go the way I think they will.*
- *Doesn't hem me in.*
- *Always returns my calls.*
- *Offers recognition; shows appreciation.*
- *Walks through the process with manuals or guides me through them.*

Supervisors who are upbeat are greatly appreciated. *I never hear her in a bad mood when I call her. She's always willing to help. Always ends on a positive note.* Case managers want a supervisor with whom they can freely talk – someone who will offer advice not criticism.

Last, case managers appreciate supervisors who know resources in the community and can offer information or referrals to help clients.



Flexibility/Congeniality

Sometimes you just need a mental health day. Case managers say they want some flexibility and understanding within management to avoid the burnout that can occur from constantly working with needy individuals. This could mean taking some time off when they need to, such as leaving two hours early on a slow Friday afternoon or taking half a day off for personal reasons. These activities are seen as rewards for doing a good job and serve as incentives to help keep case managers motivated and at peak performance levels.

Case managers want to feel they are part of a team. They appreciate things like a staff picnic or an office potluck to *allow a little downtime for employees of the agency to relax together.*

Case managers know that due to budget constraints, they may not be able to receive higher salaries. But they do want tangible signs from their agencies that their hard work is recognized. This could come in the form of a certificate of appreciation or other tangible display. *We need attention as much as [program] participants.*

INSIDER TIP: HOW TO AVOID BURN-OUT



Chocolate works well.

In this job, you have to have humor.

Something positive. When clients [I have helped] come in to visit., they treat me like I'm a friend.

Colleagues will help out when you need some time out.

Offering Training

Case managers feel that continual training is important to their job success. Some agencies offer all-staff training which case managers think is a good idea. Case managers also appreciate the opportunity to suggest training topics.

Some case managers feel they would like more training in identifying false documents. Although it is important never to turn anyone away who desires services, they are unable to offer the full level of employment-oriented assistance to those who are undocumented.

Case managers believe that *if you establish a rapport up front with individuals, they will be forth-coming regarding their documents.* You can then explain why your



agency is unable to provide the full range of services, but you might be able to refer them to other local services and programs that are not as restrictive.

Networking Opportunities With Peers

The case managers who contributed ideas to this Resource Guide were mostly found at conferences. Many of them insisted that this setting is one of the best ways they have for keeping up with what is happening in their field. They are able to receive training to enhance their skills while having an opportunity to look at the larger picture beyond their particular program. This can include finding out more about their own agency as well as seeing how what they do fits into the larger picture of helping farmworkers meet their needs.

Conferences provide case managers with an opportunity to meet and talk to individuals from different organizations who do the same job. They can exchange ideas and learn from each other. *Case management is the same thing no matter where. The difference is who you do it for.*

As much as anything, conferences offer case managers an opportunity to understand that their peers are dealing with the same issues they are. *We can see that we all have the same problems. Can offer each other suggestions.*



PERSONAL PAYOFF FOR DOING A GOOD JOB

Case managers say they are rewarded continually for helping their clients. They are members of the same community where their clients reside and can expect to see those clients and their family members at the grocery store, at public events and elsewhere. Because they have built a high level of trust, clients are always happy to see their case managers and eager to tell them how well they have succeeded. *Case managers gain friends. Parents respect what the case manager does. Satisfied customers bring in other clients. We get invited to family parties.*

- *Working with our clients is an ongoing relationship. Just because you exit someone doesn't mean that's the end. They know you will always be there for them.*
- *In my case, I was a client once, and my case manager is now my boss.*
- *My clients call me 'La Maestra' not case manager.*
- *One client received job training through the program and then got a good job. He came back into the office to reimburse the agency because he credited the program with giving him exactly the skills he needed. He was doing well now and wanted to contribute the money back to help someone else. He gave \$2,800.*
- *I get e-mail from past clients saying I now have a job that pays \$15 an hour. Years later they come in to tell me how they're doing.*



HELPING NEW CASE MANAGERS

After completing focus groups with case managers, we knew we had good information, but found it was only from established case managers. We had not heard from people new to case management about what they wished they knew to help them do their jobs better. We went back to ask case managers, but this time talked to those who had been at their jobs only 6-12 months.

Below is what they had to say about the training they received, the training they would like, and what they want to know about helping clients and working with employers.

First Job Impressions

New case managers who had not been employed in a similar occupation found the job overwhelming.

I've always been a quick learner but this position has provided more challenges than I've ever encountered in a job. I feel as if I'm just getting on my feet after six months.

Basically, I was told 'here's the paperwork; here's how you fill it out.' I had some experience working with clients or I would have been totally lost.

One thing that seemed to surprise many new case managers, something they felt unprepared to do, was recruit clients.

One day the supervisor said, 'today you are going recruiting.' I thought recruiting for what? Clients. Wow! I don't have a client. Have to go get me one!

Some new case managers also felt they had issues relating to clients and had to learn their 'people skills' on the job.

My first meeting with a client was just awful. I don't think it'll be in the case manager hall of fame. I learned very quickly what to do and what not to do.

For example, four new case managers said they had to learn to work with people from different cultures. Another said some clients are likely to say 'yes' to everything because that is what they think you want them to say, even though 'yes' might not be what the client really means. An additional new case manager said she did not know how to ask clients for documentation without feeling she was offending them.

That was the one thing I was not comfortable with because I didn't know how to ask.

Encouraging clients to learn English or stay in ESL classes was another area new case managers found difficult.



Many new case managers said they did not know how to work effectively with employers. This included the best ways to represent their agencies and their clients, how to answer employers' questions, methods to get employers to complete necessary paperwork, and just generally how to establish a good working relationship.

I need to get better at what techniques and skills I use in order to convince the employer to hire this individual.

Training

The kind of training new case managers were offered when they started work varied considerably. Three of those we talked to indicated they received hands-on training and another was able to attend an intensive off-site case management training course, although this took place after the person had been on the job several months. Many of the other new case managers said their training consisted mostly of reading a manual and learning on-the-job.

You figure things out when you figure them out. No one's going to spoon feed you anything.

I learned everything from my mistakes. Sometimes mistakes on your job are good ways to learn, sometimes they're not.

New case managers said there should be more training when they first start their job to help them come up to speed more quickly. Ideal learning opportunities might include:

- A formal class on basic case management skills which would last a week or longer. Topics might include: how to identify a client's marketable skills, preparing Individual Employment Plans, career development, goal setting, WIA regulations, and other areas.
- Shadowing another experienced case manager who could serve as a mentor. The new case manager would watch how the mentor handles clients, employers and other aspects of the job. The experienced case manager would be someone the new staffer could turn to with questions or for help in handling certain situations. This relationship should extend for some period of time – a month or longer.
- Instruction on doing an intake, using a computer to enter client information, and completing necessary paperwork.

I wish I could have observed an intake before I did one.



- A dictionary of common acronyms used in the program.
- Someone to show the new case manager around and introduce him/her to key community contacts such as staff at social service and referral agencies, and area employers.
- A way to learn people skills particularly how to work with individuals from different cultures.

Sometimes someone will come in a very nice dress, and the case manager might think they don't need help. But in their culture you make yourself as presentable as possible when you are asking for help.

There are other topics around which new case managers said they would like to receive training.

- Laws and regulations particularly those concerning immigration and the Workforce Investment Act.
- Working with employers such as locating them, what employers expect, and how to respond to their needs.
- More information about their overall agency.
- Client counseling techniques to help those with low self-esteem or address client substance abuse problems.

Soon after I started, a client had to drop out of the program because he was going into rehab for substance abuse. I never had knowledge before of how to deal with these kinds of problems. Another case manager who had been there a long time was able to identify the problem right away. It would have been nice to have training.

What Supervisors And Agencies Can Do

Some suggestions were made by new case managers on ways supervisors and program administrators could be helpful. One was by offering more feedback *to know what I'm doing right and what I'm doing wrong*. Similarly, another case manager appreciated the fact that every week her supervisor sat down with her and asked how it was going. *I liked this so much I now do it with the two staff I supervise.*

New case managers, similar to other case managers attending focus groups, valued the opportunities they were given to learn from each other. They enjoyed attending conferences where they could meet their peers. Even weekly staff meetings were discussed as offering a chance to communicate with co-workers.



STUDY METHODOLOGY

An Advisory Group, composed of WIA 167 grantees, helped outline an approach to gathering information on ‘best practices.’ It was determined there were sufficient information sources and training opportunities available for case managers instructing them on job requirements; however, what was missing was knowing the ‘tricks of the trade.’ These were defined as techniques and methods concerning how to best assist clients, which were usually learned on-the-job or passed from experienced case managers to those new to the role.

The best resource for such information was found to be case managers themselves. After consideration of different methodologies, it was decided the most reasonable way to allow for an open discussion of useful concepts would be through focus groups.

The project team first reviewed several sets of training material to get an idea of the issues considered important for case managers to do their jobs. An interview guide of such topics was then prepared (a copy is included in the Appendix.) Staff from the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs assisted HMA in contacting WIA 167 Executive Directors to inform them of this project and seek their help in encouraging case managers in their programs to participate (a copy of the informational leaflet sent to Executive Directors is in the Appendix.)

Case managers were contacted at events in which they were already participating. This included two regional and one national conference either targeting case managers specifically or all WIA 167 staff. Working with the conference hosts, case manager participants were identified and specifically invited to attend a focus group discussing “best practices.” The first session, held in Florida, was used as a pilot test of focus group topics and information gathering techniques. Table 1 (in the Appendix) details focus group locations and states represented. In summary, a total of 57 individuals participated representing 21 states.

Notes from the focus groups were transcribed and the results coded by location, topic, and sub-topic. Similar and diverse discussion was analyzed and the results written into a draft Resource Guide. This document was reviewed by staff of the U.S. Department of Labor, National Farmworker Jobs Program. A user-friendly format was designed and applied to the narrative.

A second phase of this project looked at information that might be most useful to new case managers. These were defined as individuals at their jobs for at least six months but not longer than a year. The six month period was set in recognition of a necessary period of learning that could be expected for any new and intense job. After that time, it was thought case managers might be able to recognize areas in which they felt they could use additional assistance or ideas on how to improve their skills.



An interview guide was prepared for use with these new case managers and the assistance of WIA 167 program Executive Directors obtained to identify and contact any employees fitting the study target group (copies of the new case managers interview guide and informational leaflet sent to WIA 167 Executive Directors are included in the Appendix.)

HMA staff followed-up on any referrals received, arranging a convenient time for a telephone discussion. These participants were sent a list of topics prior to their interview. The first two interviews were considered a test. Upon completion, the two participants were asked to critique procedures, topics and approaches to each item. Their comments were incorporated into the interview protocols.

All individuals identified by program Executive Directors as fitting the target group description were contacted. This totaled 24 individuals. For a variety of reasons, only 14 could be interviewed. They represented 12 states across the country (Table 1 in the Appendix indicates the exact states.)

Notes from these interviews were transcribed and coded in relation to the topics on which the interviews were based. Results were compared to previous information obtained from case manager focus groups to find what was particularly relevant to “new” case managers.

Interview results were compared to identify patterns within the information, and a draft document was prepared. This material was integrated into the existing Resource Guide in a similar user-friendly format.



APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS

INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of focus groups ('Best Practices in Case Management'.)
2. Plans to conduct similar focus groups in other locations.
3. Want to talk only positive. Not discuss barriers but instead what really works.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- 1. Complete this sentence: Describe a 'great' case manager working with customers of WIA 167 adult and/or youth programs. [20 minutes]**
Possible Probe Points:
 - a. What does he/she do that is out of the ordinary?
 - b. What is his/her interaction with customers?
 - c. What is his/her interaction with employers?
 - d. What is his/her interaction with the community?
 - e. Give me some examples of a 'good case manager.'
- 2. What within a program/agency helps a case manager be great? [10 minutes]**
Possible Probe Points: [10 minutes]
 - a. Support from management?
 - b. Training opportunities?
 - c. Role model or mentor in the program/agency?
- 3. What are some 'tips' to successfully working with One-Stops? [15 minutes]**
Possible Probe Points:
 - a. Provide positive examples.
 - b. How to set up a mutually beneficial referral system.
 - c. How to work together on programs, screening, training.
 - d. Examples of successfully working with One-Stops.
- 4. What other things help case managers succeed? [15 minutes]**
Possible Probe Points:
 - a. A good local job market.
 - b. Availability of public transportation.
 - c. Geographic factors.
 - d. A program continually striving to improve.
 - e. Seeing a customer succeed after receiving help from the case manager.

Can you suggest any great case managers we might contact to ask these same questions? [Get names and contact information.]



EXAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP INVITATION (E-MAIL/ FAX) TO CASE MANAGERS

CASE MANAGERS YOU ARE INVITED – PLEASE ATTEND

The DOL/NFJP Office and WIA 167 Programs are creating a guide on ‘Best Practices for Case Managers Working With MSFW Customers,’ and

We need your help.

The best way to get ideas on what assists case managers to succeed is to ask those who do this job every day.

We would like to invite you to meet with us on **Tuesday, August 5, from 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.** at the Rocky Mountain Hi Coalition Conference and participate in a focus group of case managers to discuss your ideas around:

- How to describe a ‘great’ case manager.
- Special features within a program or agency that help a case manager succeed.
- Good ideas for working with One-Stops to assist MSFW customers.
- Other factors that can benefit really good case managers.

The focus group will take place after your scheduled conference activities conclude for that day, in the same conference room.

We want to thank you in advance for your help. It is through talking to those of you on the front lines we can gather good ideas to help others become great and successful case managers.



TABLE ONE

CASE MANAGER FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

State	Number of Participants
Florida	13
Nevada	22
Washington, D.C.	Focus Group 1: 12
	Focus Group 2: 10

States included:

Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Washington,

Focus Group Locations:

2003 Symposium for Farmworker Youth Service, Clearwater Florida, June 24, 2003, sponsor: Rural Opportunities, Inc.

Rocky Mountain High Coalition Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada, August 5, 2003, sponsor: Portable Practical Education Preparation.

2003 National Farmworker Partnership Conference, Washington, D.C., October 1, 2003, sponsor: Association of Farmworker Opportunities Programs.

NEW CASE MANAGER INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

14 new case managers interviewed

States Included

Arkansas, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Wyoming



INFORMATION SHEET FOR WIA 167 EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

CASE MANAGERS SHARE INSIDER TIPS

RESEARCH ON WHAT NEW CASE MANAGERS WANT TO KNOW

We need your assistance in contacting new case managers to find what might help them become more accustomed to their jobs. These would be areas established case managers handle more easily over time as they learn how to better assist clients.

We would like your permission to contact new case managers in your program and interview them by telephone to gather ideas on what they would find most useful. The results will go into the resource guide, *Case Managers Share Insider Tips*, developed for the DOL National Farmworker Jobs Program. It will be distributed to all WIA 167 programs by the end of the year.

Please read further for more details.

Last year, on behalf of the NFJP, we asked case managers about their “tips for success.” We wanted to find those special things that a good case manager does to help clients meet their goals. For example, techniques case managers use to put clients at ease during their initial visit.

Most of those we talked to were seasoned case managers who had been in their positions for some time. They were able to give us some great ideas on what techniques and tricks work for them. But we felt there was one area we were missing: what new case managers wish they knew.

Now we would like to talk with new case managers to ask what would help them do a better job. Similar to the information we gathered originally, we are not talking about training topics or how to complete forms. What we are looking for are those little things new case managers wish they could do better – things that seem to make a difference in helping their clients achieve success.

To gather such information, we would like to identify new case managers and interview them by telephone, a process that should take approximately 15 minutes. What they tell us will go into a new section in the publication: *Case Managers Share Insider Tips: A Resource Guide of Best Practices*, to be distributed to all WIA 167 programs.



We would like to ask your help, first, to receive your permission to contact new case managers in your program. These would be individuals who have been in their positions for at least six months but not more than a year. If you approve, we would like to ask you for a list of your program's "new" case managers along with their contact information. We will then ask for their help and arrange a convenient time for their interview.

Because we are trying to gather the information we need this summer, and complete the entire Resource Guide by the end of the year, we ask that you respond to our requests by July 1.

We thank you very much for your help. Our initial focus groups with established case managers gave us many good ideas to share with others. With the help of new case managers, we hope to add even more information and offer a **Resource Guide** that can help all case managers improve what they do for their clients.



INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR NEW CASE MANAGERS

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is _____. I am working on a project for the U.S. Department of Labor, National Farmworker Jobs Program, which is the federal office that funds your program. The project will develop a Resource Guide that we hope will be helpful to case managers like you.

I got your name from _____, at _____ as someone who had been in the position of case manager over six months but not more than a year. Is that true?

Last year, we gathered information from case managers asking what they thought made a good case manager. We were interested in learning some of the tricks and techniques they have developed that make it easier for them to help their program participants succeed – such as how to make clients comfortable on their initial visit. The resulting Resource Guide, Case Managers Share Insider Tips, will be distributed at the end of this year.

We got lots of good information, but we found the people we talked to were mostly case managers who had been in their positions for some time. What was missing was the viewpoint of someone like you: a case manager who has been on the job less time.

This is why we would like to talk to you. As a relatively new case manager, we would like you to tell us what you or other new case managers wish you could do better – things that would make it easier to work with clients. We would like to arrange a telephone interview with you, at your convenience, which should take around 15 minutes.

I want to assure you that this is in no way an evaluation of how well you do your job. We are just trying to gather information from people like you, relatively new case managers, to help us develop a Resource Guide that can be of use to lots of case managers. Everything you tell us will be grouped with information we hear from other new case managers. Your individual comments will remain anonymous.

Does this sound like something you would be interested in helping us with?

[Pause for response and interviewee asking questions. They might ask how many people we plan to talk to. How many people we talked to for the first round (slightly over 50). How we reached the people we talked to earlier. (Focus groups at three WIA 167 conferences last summer.)]



DISCUSSION TOPICS/QUESTIONS

1. **How long have you been a case manager at [name of organization]?**
 - a. How many clients do you have now?
 - b. How many clients have you helped since you became a case manager?
 - c. [Find out other background information for example if the person is bilingual, if they are a full-time case manager, or other details that might help clarify their responses.]
2. **Were you a case manager before coming to [name of organization]?
[If yes, get details.]**
3. **If this is your first case management job, what were your expectations about case management and how is it different from what you expected?**
 - a. What preparation or training did you have to be a case manager?
4. **Is there any additional preparation or knowledge you wish you had before starting as a case manager?**

When you started as a case manager, you probably found you had to deal with a lot of different types of people and program requirements. You may have found this to be different than what you had done previously. What we'd like to talk to you about now are some of those areas that you might have found to be a little different or hard. We'd like you to tell us if there's anything that you wish someone could have told you before you started or if there's something you wish you knew how to do better.

5. **Can you think of any areas around first meeting a client that you wish you knew more about?**

Possible Probe Points

 - a. How to get individuals to apply for services.
 - b. Ways to make clients more comfortable.
 - c. Ideas for getting clients to bring in required paperwork.
 - d. How to respond when the client says "there's too much paperwork/you ask too many questions."
 - e. Being able to relate to your clients linguistically and culturally.
 - f. Other areas.
6. **Can you think of any areas around assessing client skills that you wish you could do better?**

Possible Probe Points

 - a. Encouraging a client who feels he/she has no skills.
 - b. Helping the client to think about his/her background and identify useful experiences and skills.
 - c. Using standardized tests to assess skills.
 - d. Supporting a client who feels uncomfortable because he/she does not know English, does not have much education or is not literate in English or Spanish.



- e. Setting goals.
- f. Other areas.

7. How about areas around helping clients meet their goals.

Possible Probe Points

- a. Locating referral resources.
- b. Encouraging a client to keep going/that he/she can succeed.
- c. Following-up with a client.
- d. Other areas.

8. [First ask the following:] Have you tried to place any of your clients with employers? [If they answer 'no,' skip this question.]

Do you wish you knew more about working with employers and placing clients in jobs?

Possible Probe Points

- a. Identifying employers who might be interested in working with your clients.
- b. Convincing employers to hire clients.
- c. Following-up once clients have been placed.
- d. Mediating between clients and employers when problems arise.
- e. How to handle a placement that doesn't work out.
- f. Other areas.

9. How about working with local One-Stop offices?

Possible Probe Points

- a. Learning about One-Stops and how they can help your clients.
- b. Developing a good working relationship with One-Stop staff.
- c. Other areas.

10. My last topic: anything your supervisors or the agency you work for could do to help make your job easier? You don't have to give me any individual names; just some ideas of how supervisors and agencies could help new case managers do a better job.

Possible Probe Points

- a. Offer more training [in what topics?].
- b. Provide more opportunities to talk with other case managers.
- c. Keep up-to-date on changes in the agency or the program requirements.
- d. Other areas.

11. Are there any other areas we haven't talked about where you think new case managers might need some help?

Thank You very much for your help.



Acknowledgments

Case Managers Share Insider Tips was developed through a contractual collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor, Division of Seasonal Farmworker Programs. We thank all past and present staff for their assistance in developing this Guide.

We would particularly like to thank the many case managers who gave us insight into how they do their jobs and provided us with the valuable information we have used for this Guide.

Our sincere thanks also to the members of the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) community who helped guide us, assisted in locating the best individuals with whom we could talk, and offered us space during their conferences for focus groups. This includes the Association of Farmworker Opportunities Programs and the Executive Directors and program staff of the WIA 167 grantees.

Harrison Maldonado Associates (HMA) wrote and coordinated the production of the Resource Guide.