

New Orleans Jobs Initiative

DESCRIPTION OF A CUSTOMIZED TRAINING PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE NEW ORLEANS AREA FOOD INDUSTRY'S NEED TO PREPARE INDIVIDUALS FOR LONG TERM CAREERS WITHIN THE FOOD MANUFACTURING AND PROCESSING FIELD

THE PROBLEM

The food industry in the New Orleans area has experienced persistent difficulty in recruiting entry-level workers who are prepared to make an adjustment to the culture and conditions that are typical in a food manufacturing environment. This lack of preparation is indicated by excessive absenteeism and other behaviors that ultimately result in an unacceptably high turnover rate, and too few employees who are sufficiently motivated to progress and grow.

Current recruiting methods, while perhaps producing a large number of applicants, also attract too many whose lack of basic academic achievement, poor work histories, or other factors make it highly unlikely that they will be successful in making the adjustment to employment in the food industry.

The industry has previously tried other approaches to identify, select and prepare applicants, but has expressed disappointment with the results

THE SOLUTION

NOJI recommends a period of pre-employment preparation that will ensure that 60 men and women who would not normally meet the hiring requirements of the food industry are prepared to make a successful transition into the permanent work force of several food manufacturing or processing firms (The Coalition) who have agreed to work together with NOJI on this program. This pilot program will have a number of precisely integrated components that are customized specifically for the food industry, and will be delivered in four 15-person classes, which will be six weeks in duration and will be scheduled about 60-75 days apart. The approach combines the ability of the Coalition companies to provide job-specific instruction with NOJI's nationally recognized job readiness and life skills program, the *21st Century Success Principles*.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING

Recruiting will focus upon unemployed and underemployed residents of Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. The task must be a joint undertaking of NOJI, which has credibility among the target population, and the Coalition, which alone can describe the present-day working environment and the many opportunities available to permanent employees. The effort will emphasize personal appearances, job fairs, contact with One-Stop Centers and Job Service Offices, orientation of the staffs of those offices and other workforce-related agencies, and inclusion of Coalition information in NOJI's routine recruiting efforts.

NOJI and the Coalition will jointly develop screening standards that will enable NOJI to enroll only those who will have the greatest prospect for success. At a minimum, NOJI will conduct a test for illegal substances, ascertain basic academic skill levels, measure vocational interests and administer

a Work Keys assessment. Coalition personnel will assist in all aspects of the process. The Coalition partners will also have had many of their jobs analyzed by qualified Work Keys profilers, which will enable NOJI to match each participant with the most appropriate position. Additional selection criteria may be developed jointly by the Coalition and NOJI to assure that potential trainees are appropriate for entry into the food manufacturing field.

ENROLLMENT AND ORIENTATION

After this extensive screening process has been completed, successful applicants will be enrolled in the program and receive a thorough orientation both to the program itself and to the food industry. This will also be a joint venture between NOJI and the Coalition and will include familiarization visits to a representative sampling of the Coalition's various production sites. We believe this is important, since not everyone may be able to successfully adapt to a manufacturing environment.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION

NOJI will deliver a six-week pre-employment program that will include the following elements or features:

- NOJI's copyrighted and nationally recognized *21st Century Success Principles* course, which will equip participants with the personal characteristics, work habits and coping skills to make them excellent employees. This is normally a 4-week course, but it will be expanded to 6 weeks in order to accommodate the workplace literacy and customized food industry content, each of which is discussed below.
- An integrated literacy component that will begin to address the needs of each trainee to raise his/her skills from their current level to a target level that will enable them to realize their full employment potential. The academic program will only be started during this six-week program, and NOJI will work with the Coalition members to establish Learning Centers at their sites, thus enabling the trainees to continue their progress seamlessly after their employment.
- The pre-employment training hours will be increased on a graduated scale to move the trainees from an initial 6-hour day to an 8-hour day to be sure they are prepared to spend a full day of activity before they begin their permanent employment.
- The number of on-site visits to the production facilities will also be increased from one during the first week to 3 or 4 during the final week. The objective is for the trainees to be as familiar as possible with the work environment, the personnel and the physical layout of the facility before their first day of actual work.
- The training will include a complete orientation to the food industry, by introducing the trainees to the terminology, tools, safety standards, sanitation and hygiene regulations, etc. that are intrinsic to the industry.

TRANSITION TO JOB-SPECIFIC TRAINING

The entire pre-employment sequence is designed to lead seamlessly into the Coalition's existing training programs. In fact, the NOJI training will include more extensive food industry content each week and will also include more frequent visits to the production facilities as the transition point approaches. During the final two weeks of the pre-employment training, the Coalition will identify a specific job at one of their production sites for each trainee, so that trainee will know his/her initial employment assignment well in advance. At various times during the first 90 days following their employment, NOJI will conduct short seminars to reinforce the lessons learned by the trainees during their pre-employment training. These seminars can also be made available to other Coalition employees, at the discretion of the individual employer(s)..

TRAINEE SUPPORT

At the very beginning of the program, each trainee will be assigned to one of the NOJI staff, who will serve as that trainee's Coach/Counselor for an entire year. This will provide both the trainee and the Coalition members a level of support that will have a dramatic effect upon the overall retention rate, not only during the pre-employment component, but during the critical first weeks of employment and throughout the trainee's first full year. The Coalition members will need to furnish space at their sites to accommodate the Coaches during the periods they spend on-site.

SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

It would be an extremely valuable addition to the entire program for those who will be supervising these trainees to be made aware of the extent and content of the training the trainees have undertaken. NOJI can design such a program in concert with the Coalition. Previous experience also indicates that some training of front-line supervisors to improve their ability to lead a more diverse workforce is invaluable in reducing the turnover rate among new production workers, whether they come through this program or are direct hires from the general population.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The estimated annual cost of the program is \$240,000. If it is funded as a Customized Training program using Federal funds under the Workforce Investment Act, the food industry will be required to match this amount. However, that match can include a wide variety of donated space, equipment, personnel and other "soft" contributions and need not be actual cash.