

# THE NEW WORKER

**ee** ASSOCIATES  
INCORPORATED *est. 1983*



Spring 2014

---

## Professional Development for Occupational Rehabilitation Professionals

By Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., and Fred Heffner, Ed.D.

### Introduction

Essentially all professional groups have chosen to embed their membership in the work of certification boards, and these certification entities generally require continuing education involvement of their members. Members of both the medical and legal professions accumulate a minimum number of continuing education units (CMEs and CLEs respectively) over an established period of time to stay accredited. In short, professional groups recognize the need for their members to stay abreast of new, ongoing developments in their fields, thereby staying proficient as practitioners.

The purpose of this article is to identify specific means for rehabilitation professionals, especially those working with occupational rehabilitation, to be involved with ongoing education opportunities. There are, in any profession, two ways in which members can stay relevant:

1. Become certified by the appropriate certification boards and participate in their requirements.
2. Continue education and training beyond those required for certification and maintenance.

### Rehabilitation Counseling Certification

To gain certification as a professional in disability management programs in the workplace, one has to adhere to the requirement of the appropriate certification

commissions. In terms of professional rehabilitation, the certifying commissions are:

- [Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification \(CRCC\)](#)
- [Commission for Case Management Certification \(CCMC\)](#)
- [Certification of Disability Management Specialists Commission \(CDMSC\)](#)

Once certified, the requirements set forth by CRCC, for example, are often, but not necessarily, "pre-approved" by the commission for continuing education units (CEUs). These exposures are sometimes designed to "support the development of leaders who may assume supervisory and leadership roles within the rehabilitation counseling profession." Further, the CRCC identifies two focus areas with appropriate subject matter that relates to professional development within rehabilitation counseling, and must include one of the following:

- Leadership skills development
- Staff recruitment, management, and development skills

Certified professionals can achieve their requirements through continuing education programs that offer approved course work. Presently, the largest providers of these courses are entities that submit appropriate content to the certifying board for acceptance and are subsequently approved or not approved as the case may be. (Full disclosure: CEC Associates, Inc., the author of this article, has been a long-time provider of online CEUs.) Members are required, as stated above, to earn a set number of CEUs for a set period of time, generally five years, to retain their certification.

Online articles that satisfy CEU requirements for continuing certification can be found, among other sources, at <http://www.cecassoc.com>. At this site, there are currently [eight Series](#) including:

- Disability Proneness and the Injured Worker
- Ethics
- Disability Management
- Practical Aspects of Disability Management
- Positive Psychology
- Disability v. Impairment
- Assessments
- Leadership in Employee-Employer Relationships

Each series contains from 4 to 8 separate articles for a total of 43 articles. While the articles are read primarily by rehabilitation professionals for the purpose of maintaining certifications, the articles, all vocational disability oriented, can also be used as a focus for non-certification in-service skills development, as well as in college

classrooms.

## **Continuing Education Opportunities not required for Certification for Rehabilitation Professionals**

Most employers with successful businesses recognize the need to offer ongoing, in-service training and education for their employees. Employers should, first and foremost, require their employees to become certified professionals, but beyond that, there should be thoughtfully planned opportunities for employees to stay well informed and relevant.

"Continuing Education" (educators generally prefer the term "Lifelong Learning") is an especially appropriate term for the workplace, where the emphasis needs to be on "continuing." Employers and their managers need to search for opportunities for enrichment on a regular, ongoing basis. This effort by employers sends the message that the employees themselves need to stay current to thrive in a particular work environment.

## **Specific Activities That May Serve as Guides for the Development of In-service Programming for Rehabilitation Professionals and Others**

While each employer must determine the specific nature of the training needed at a given time based on an assessment of need, here are some basic ideas that may serve as prompts for professional development. As a second disclosure, at CEC Associates, all of these topics of professional development have been utilized to enrich and enhance staff development.

### **I. *"Managing Your Boss":***

In 1980, two professors at Harvard, John J. Gabarro and John P. Kotter, published an article in the Harvard Business Review titled "[Managing Your Boss](#)," which should be required reading for both employers and employees of any organization. To simplify, this concept holds that employees should do everything in their power to make their boss succeed, since as the boss succeeds, so in turn do those supportive workers. In some companies, this concept is retitled "[Managing Up](#)." Whatever it is called, it is a valuable tool to share with staff.

### **II. [Quicken Loans "ISMs"](#):**

Most companies would be happy to boast of one award; Quicken Loans is a company that holds a list of awards. One of them is "#1 in Workplace Dynamics' National Top Workplace List." If a company is that successful, it may behoove other companies to see what they do that is special.

One of Quicken Loans' activities that can serve other companies as a development tool is what they call their "ISMs." There are 19 ISMs with brief explanations for each. Sample ISMs are:

- You have to take the roast out of the oven.
- Responding with a sense of urgency is the ante to play.
- Obsessed with finding a better way.

As a staff learning activity, ask individual members to choose a favorite ISM and to explain why they think it is a concept that might work for their company. Staff meeting organizers can envision different ways to think about the applicability of the Quicken Loans ISMs in their own company. Since Quicken Loans publishes their ISMs online, they are inviting others to explore them as they will.

### III. *Contribution to the Community:*

Every company should dedicate itself to making a group contribution to the community, that is, a special effort involving the entire staff on a specific day (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr. Day) in addition to individual contributions throughout the year. Every company in America should contribute, no exceptions. Involve the staff in choosing the place to volunteer: [Habitat for Humanity](#), an area nature conservancy, food kitchens, etc.

### IV. *Assertiveness and the [Nominal Group Technique \(NGT\)](#):*

In whatever way staff development is planned and structured, it should include the input of every individual in the group. That is the NGT. Everyone is required to contribute equally. "Everyone a leader." All activities that invite group input should be done on a one-by-one basis. No one is allowed to dominate, and everyone has to contribute.

One activity that can reinforce individual participation is assertiveness training, which presents an opportunity for the company to bring in an outside resource as an expert. Outside experts should be used on a regular basis, a minimum of twice per year. Experts can infuse valuable new ideas into the mix. NGT and assertiveness training are essential methods of confidence building and interpersonal communication.

### V. *Teaching Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution:*

Workers in our changing economy have a growing need to communicate electronically, and as a result, the art of listening and the ability to resolve disputes are becoming lost. Interpersonal communication, including [active listening](#) and problem solving, nonetheless remains a critical business skill in all organizations. We strongly recommend the tools available from [Gordon Training International](#) for leadership development.

### VI. *Describing the Company Culture and Discussing the Need for Change, If Any:*

Over time, work organizations acquire, by design or by osmosis, certain basic characteristics. These characteristics can be said to be the specific culture of the organization. It is likely that an examination by employees of the existing "culture" can be useful and satisfying. Discussing why separate aspects of the culture are acceptable and therefore willingly supported by individual staff members is an exercise in loyalty. If there are concerns about one or more specific aspects of the culture, they can be discussed and modified. A culture cannot be imposed; it needs to have evolved freely among its participants.

### VII. *The Societal Culture and the Company's and Individual's Responsibilities:*

Individual employees are members of a work organization as well as a community and a country. These larger bodies also have identifiable cultures, but they are different, by

and large, from company cultures. One definition of, say, "American culture" includes the "arts." The arts, in turn, include the music of the country, the visual arts, drama, dance, literature, etc. Compositely these individual arts are called "American culture," which obviously differs from Polish culture, from South African culture, etc.

It is important to recognize that our American culture will not sustain and grow without everyone contributing to it. That is, those who do not actively support the culture are abdicating their rights to be part of its formation and furtherance. An interest in, and support of, the arts is to the benefit of the work organization on behalf of its members, just as it is for individuals in society. Work organizations can support the health and vitality of American culture, and they should.

#### VIII. *Positive Psychology and Values in Action:*

In 1996, Martin Seligman, a professor in the psychology department of the University of Pennsylvania, became president of the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#). His first course of action was to advocate for a new focus on the work of psychologists. Instead of having a primary focus on treatment, Seligman called for profession-wide advocacy of positive psychology as a way to promote and sustain health and happiness.

While psychologists still treat dysfunction, Seligman argued convincingly that the professional focus should be on instilling and nurturing positive outlooks and outcomes, thereby reducing, over time, dysfunction in the first place. The positive psychology movement is now worldwide, but it maintains an active online hub at the [Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania](#).

Positive psychology holds a wealth of ideas and tools for rehabilitation professionals, including Values in Action (VIA) and the [Questionnaires Center](#), including the valuable "VIA Signature Strengths" survey. Every rehabilitation professional, at every level, should take the survey and become aware of his or her "strengths."

#### IX. *Leadership Skills and Leadership Development:*

Leadership development evolves from a complexity of specific skills, but the following three concepts are considered key:

- [experiential learning](#) (as described by David A. Kolb, whose model consists of concrete experiences, observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts, and testing new situations);
- [self-efficacy](#) (confidence in finding the right solution and leading others); and
- visioning (formulating new methods/products).

Essentially all of the resources discussed above are basic and should be considered for all employees. Leadership skills, on the other hand, are more advanced and should be undertaken as self-studies (e.g., MBA degrees, [Center for Creative Leadership](#)) as opposed to activities that are planned and delivered by supervisory personnel.

#### X. *Identifying and Using Relevant Information and Methods Sources:*

Continuing education for rehabilitation professionals should include the following online

offers from high quality programs. Some relevant entities are listed below:

- [The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania](#)
- [Harvard Business Review](#)
- [NewEngland Journal of Medicine \(NEJM\)](#)
- [Positive Psychology \(University of Pennsylvania\)](#)
- [MOOC/Coursera](#)
- [PewNews Now](#)

The Wharton School is one of the top business administration schools in the country. They publish an online, free issue of [Knowledge@Wharton](#) weekly, which contains articles relevant to company development.

[Harvard Business School](#) reports on research conducted at Harvard, and the *Harvard Business Review* provides information on employer/employee relations. Wharton and Harvard are the top two MBA programs in the country.

The *NEJM* frequently publishes research papers that are just as useful to employers as they are to those in the medical profession. And, amazingly enough, they animate some of their reports to prove that their findings are not only for doctors but also for other researchers.

As noted, positive psychology originated at the University of Pennsylvania with Martin Seligman. There are extremely important components of positive psychology that add significantly to occupational rehabilitation. CEC Associates, Inc. has written extensively about [the field](#).

Coursera is a major program in the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) movement. MOOCs are created and presented online by the leading universities in America (Stanford, Harvard, MIT, Penn, etc.). All of the courses are free and many of them, if not most, are designed for employers/employees. If an employer wants an employee to take an advanced accounting course or beginner's computer program, for example, MOOCs can be a valuable resource.

*Pew News Now* is a weekly newsletter of the [Pew Charitable Trusts](#), a nonprofit organization that does extensive research on demographics (based on the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)) and is a valuable, ongoing asset for employers.

#### XI. *Minimum Methods and Materials for Quality Workplace Disability Management Programs:*

If an organization includes a workplace disability management program, that program should be predicated on a framework established by exemplary programs in America. The individual parts of this program include, at minimum:

- Management's Role in Program Formation and Ongoing Support
- Program Components

- Transition to Work: Methods and Materials
- [Employee Assistance Programs](#)
- [Managerial Mediation Methods](#)
- Creating Valid/Defensible Job Descriptions Based on "[Essential Functions](#)"

These individual components of disability management programs are available from most well-managed companies. More information on each can be found [here](#).

## XII. *The Quality of Our Schools:*

Employers and employees are more responsible than others for the quality of their proximate schools. For one thing, future employees are the product of the local schools. [Amanda Ripley](#), author of [The Smartest Kids in the World: And How They Got That Way](#), contributes significantly to the spreading of knowledge about school issues. Ripley also writes a [blog](#) on the issues of which we should all take notice in our neighboring schools. In addition to being individually engaged in this critical issue, employers and employees should encourage others to speak out.

## XIII. *Hiring Appropriate Majors and Reimbursing Payment for Graduate Work:*

Programs in which rehabilitation is a primary focus should, as they hire new personnel, look for individuals who have earned degrees in rehabilitation. Colleges and universities that offer majors in rehabilitation are doing their part; employers need to reciprocate.

Tuition reimbursement programs should be offered in well-managed companies to employees who take graduate courses in subjects relevant to the workplace. In this arrangement, the employer is ultimately the primary beneficiary.

## **Final Words**

Employers should demand full participation by their employees in the betterment of the company and they should demand excellence at every turn. Employers would be wise to set the table.

---

# **A Personal Development Plan: Some Ideas for Employers to Consider in Planning In-Service Training**

## **Positive Psychology: The VIA Survey of Character Strengths**

An important step for planning in-service training for employees is to have them take

the self-administered "VIA Survey of Character Strengths" instrument offered by the [Center for Positive Psychology](#) at the University of Pennsylvania. Details on the background of this essential assessment instrument are provided in the article above. This tool is a cornerstone of contemporary staff development; employees who wake up with their strengths in mind may just be empowered to use them in the workplace.

## **MOOC Courses**

There are moments in the management of all businesses when employers see the need to have one or more employees update their skills to meet emerging developments in a specific content area. The answer may be Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), also described in the article above.

There are several online "aggregators" of specific courses available. Two examples: [www.mooc-list.com](http://www.mooc-list.com) and [www.coursetalk.com](http://www.coursetalk.com). Employers looking to update individuals in engineering, programming languages, software development design, or business, for example, can easily search for a MOOC in that specialty.

MOOC courses are developed and delivered by top tier colleges and universities. The courses are free, and participants who complete a course are given certificates from the university that taught the course specifying that they have successfully completed the course. To earn that certificate, however, the individual must devote serious attention, participate in the course work as required, and complete the requirements. But the rewards are worth the effort.

## **Individual Personal Development**

Individual employees should take a personal responsibility to keep abreast of developing methods and technologies beyond what the employer offers. A personal plan could include some or all of the following:

- Update your résumé.
- Enroll in a graduate course.
- Take on a community volunteer commitment.
- Learn about the requirements for a professional certification in your field.
- Make an appointment to talk to your supervisor and have a prepared list of questions and points.
- Set short- and long-term goals, perhaps by creating a "Personal Lifeline," or in the same vein, a corporate lifeline that plots the goals of your business (see CEC's next New Worker for more on creating your personal and business lifelines).
- Choose a "Career Partner" (not a Mentor, that's another idea) and meet with that person on a prescribed schedule: write out a list of (meaningful) things you want to talk about.
- Create a "Self-Assessment." Be tough but not unrealistically brutal. Keep it real. What are you limited by, if anything? What are things that you are good at (everybody has some good attributes). Write it all down.

In addition:

- Write out at least three things in your life that went well.
- Write out at least three things in your life that didn't go well and that you view as

- not very good, but add what you would do differently.
- Call people to whom you are grateful and thank them for what they did for you.

And, be a role model and have a "hero" or two:

- Think about some people whom you admire. Choose and store in your memory one or more individuals whose success-level you'd like to reach and name exactly what is admirable in them that you hope you could also achieve.
- Remind yourself occasionally of your heroes.
- Be more like those people or that person.

---

## Time Management:

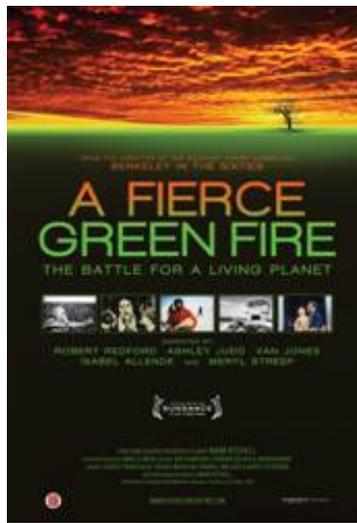
One commercial company that provides excellent online materials for professional development is [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com). One of their evaluation tools is an online assessment of "time management" for employees. That is, employees who take the online assessment become aware of the continuing need to use time at work in a smart way and that it is critical in their overall effectiveness. Specific skills in the set include: prioritization, concentration and focus, and scheduling.

Whether or not time management is high on the priority list of skills to be reviewed and taught in professional development programs, we believe that the Mind Tools assessment will be a valuable concept to consider in planning an in-service training program. After all, time is all we have...and it is passing quickly.

### **UPCOMING MOVIE EVENT! – [\*A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet\*](#)**

In honor of Earth Day, CEC Associates, Inc., is sponsoring our second green-focused movie at the historic Colonial Theatre in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. Approximately 250 people came out for the showing of *Chasing Ice* last February, and we'd love to multiply the audience count this year! Mark your calendars:

**Sunday, April 27<sup>th</sup> @ 4:30p**



*The first big-picture exploration of the environmental movement – grassroots and global activism spanning fifty years from conservation to climate change. Directed and written by Mark Kitchell, Academy Award-nominated director of Berkeley in the Sixties, and narrated by Robert Redford, Ashley Judd, Van Jones, Isabel Allende, and Meryl Streep.*

**Please join us at the  
Colonial Theatre in Phoenixville!**

For ticket information call Liz at 610-935-7560

or visit: [www.thecolonialtheatre.com](http://www.thecolonialtheatre.com)