

# 5 Simple Ways to Support Job-Seekers Who are In Distress



By Silver Rose

As dislocated workers flood into One-Stop Centers looking for assistance, staff members are faced with the growing dilemma of how to effectively support them. Although one-on-one assistance is sorely needed, the sheer volume makes it nearly impossible to deliver. Given that fact, how can staff members, who want to help, support their clients, especially those who are in distress?



Even if you only spend a minute or two with a visitor to your One-Stop, there are a number of simple, easy-to-implement techniques that will significantly help ease their distress:

1. **Address the client by name.** People who have lost their jobs often feel tossed aside and unimportant. The simple act of using their formal name (Mr. Santiago or Ms. Brown) implies a respect that will go a long way toward soothing their bruised egos. If they insist you use their first name, so much the better. It indicates you have already put them more at ease.
2. **Set their expectations.** Even though much of your job may be routine, it is all new to the job-seeker. Whether you are the receptionist or a case worker, let your clients know (at the very beginning of your interaction) how much time you will spend with them and what you can do. Upsets happen for all of us when we expect X to happen and Y happens instead. Clarifying expectations at the beginning of your interaction takes only a few seconds and will go a long way toward avoiding problems when it is time for you to move on to the next client.
3. **Give your full attention to the client you are talking with.** As a nation, we are poor listeners. We routinely multi-task, looking at computer screens or paperwork instead of directly at the person we are talking with. If you need to look at your computer screen or consult paperwork, let your client know what you are doing. "Let me look that up on my computer," or, "Let me look at these guidelines to see what they say." This shows respect. Also, if a co-worker interrupts you with something that must be dealt with at that moment, say to your client, "Please excuse me for a moment," before responding.
4. **Be sensitive to the situation and use appropriate behavior.** If you are in a restaurant with someone you care about and they tell you they lost their job, you probably would not ignore him or her to tell jokes or gossip with the waitress; that would be insensitive. Likewise, when you are working with clients, it is insensitive to be talking with a co-worker about last night's *American Idol* or discussing what you plan to eat for lunch. Non-work-related talk should be restricted to your breaks or when there are no clients waiting (which, alas, these days is never).

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5. **Avoid expressions that might upset.** Although well-meaning, we often say things we hope will be soothing that instead spark negative emotions. Avoid the following expressions:

*I know exactly how you feel.*

No, you don't! Clearly you have a job; the client does not.

*Don't feel upset – or- be angry – or - think like that.*

No one likes to be told how to feel, think or be.

*Things will get better (or other cheerful expressions).*

Instead try the reassuring phrase, *“We have lots of resources that can help.”*

*I'm sorry, I can't do that.*

Most people hear “I WON'T do that.” Try instead, *“Here is what I CAN do.”*

As a workforce professional, your job is to serve the public and the current jobs crisis is an opportunity for you to shine even brighter than usual. Use all of the above tips and you will find that most of your clients will leave feeling better than when they first walked in. As a bonus, you'll feel better, too!



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