

Turning a Conversation into an Opportunity: Success Story

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When Shelley began working with Utah State University's Center for Employment and Inclusion, she brought years of experience in networking, sales, customer service, and entrepreneurship. However, stepping into employment services meant learning how to apply those skills in a new way.

Through ACRE training and individualized Technical Assistance with Amber Marsh, Shelley has been learning strategies for community research, employer engagement, and relationship-based job development. A major focus has been moving away from simply asking businesses if they are hiring and instead learning how to build genuine relationships, ask questions, understand a business, and identify opportunities that may align with the people she supports.

After spending some time away from active networking, Shelley admitted she felt a little rusty and apprehensive about jumping back in. During Technical Assistance, she was encouraged to practice starting with the relationships and connections already around her and to approach networking as a natural conversation rather than a formal sales pitch.

One morning at the gym, Shelley decided to put those strategies into practice.

She started a conversation with Ashley, a front desk employee she had gotten to know through her regular visits. The conversation began naturally. Shelley asked how she was doing, shared that she had recently started a new job, and eventually asked about employment opportunities with the company.

That simple conversation opened the door to much more than a job lead.

Ashley shared information about possible opportunities at the Orem location, an area that could work well for several of the individuals Shelley supports. She provided the manager's business card and shared helpful information about his interest in networking and community involvement. Shelley also learned about the workplace culture, staffing needs, turnover, and the company's experience employing an individual with a disability.

Instead of walking away with only an answer to "Are you hiring?" Shelley walked away with a contact, information about the business, potential opportunities for job seekers, and a natural reason to continue the relationship.

The experience reinforced many of the strategies Shelley had been practicing through training and Technical Assistance. Community-based job development does not always begin with a formal employer meeting or a perfectly rehearsed pitch. Sometimes it starts with curiosity, a conversation, and taking the time to listen and learn.

Shelley also reflected on her own communication style after the interaction. She recognized that she and Ashley connected naturally through shared experiences and similar communication styles. At the same time, her years of experience in customer service have taught her that successful networking requires adapting to the person in front of her, listening, and allowing relationships to develop naturally.

For Shelley, this was more than one successful networking interaction. It helped rebuild her confidence and showed her that skills she already possessed could be combined with new job development strategies to create meaningful opportunities for the people she supports.

Shelley continues to receive individualized Technical Assistance through CEI as she develops her skills in employment services. TA provides an opportunity to take concepts learned in training and apply them directly in the field through coaching, problem solving, community research, employer engagement, and other individualized support.

Shelley's experience is a great example of what can happen when training moves beyond the classroom. With individualized support, opportunities to practice, and a willingness to try something new, one conversation can become the beginning of an employer relationship and, eventually, an employment opportunity.

Individualized Technical Assistance is Available

Our CEI Training and Development Specialists provide individualized technical assistance at no cost to help employment and education professionals strengthen their skills and put effective practices into action.

For employment programs, we can provide support with job coaching, discovery, job development, and other employment practices. For education teams, we can help strengthen work-based learning experiences and support students in developing skills and preparing for employment.

Technical assistance is available virtually or in person and is tailored to the needs of you, your team, and the individuals you support. Contact one of our CEI Training and Development Specialists below to get started.

- [Hillary Hase](#) - Job Coaching and Customized Employment
- [Taylor Walters](#) - Job Coaching and Customized Employment
- [Amber Marsh](#) - Assessment, Job Development
- [Jeremy Musgrove](#) - Work Based Learning Experiences, School Employment Programs