

Case study: overcoming barriers

Joe had worked in the construction sector for almost 30 years before becoming unemployed three years ago, mainly because of back problems. From the very first day he felt uncomfortable and even angry at being sent on a New Deal course, saying, "I am 53 years old, what the hell can you teach me?" Joe was especially annoyed by some of the behaviour of younger clients on the same course.

The first thing I did was explain what we could offer, to show Joe that what we offered was nothing like school and to emphasise that he would not be treated like a schoolkid. At BEST we have found that the best way to help more mature jobseekers is through the creation of a group of all those aged 50+. Joe immediately preferred the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of this group.

In the following weeks, I had several one-to-one discussions around Joe's individual training plan and to identify how his barriers could be overcome. This was the approach I used:

Barrier 1: no experience in using a computer

"It's too late for me to start learning now and I don't need it anyway!"

Solution: I encouraged Joe to see the learning as fun, and highlighted that he wasn't the only one in the classroom who has never turned on a computer before. We then ran a computer session purely for those who had no basic IT knowledge. Slowly Joe began to enjoy using a computer and felt more confident learning a new skill.

Barrier 2: difficulty gaining a job in the construction sector due to a bad back

Solution: After several discussions we discovered that a career in care work might be something that would suit Joe. He wasn't sure about this but we set up a placement in a care home for two days a week, really just to introduce him to the care home environment. Joe had some excellent feedback from the care home manager and really enjoyed the experience. He asked to increase his placement days to gain more skills and knowledge working as a carer for older people.

During the 10 weeks Joe was with us he became more confident and greatly improved his motivation. A week before the end of the New Deal course, the manager from the care home offered Joe a part-time post. Given the same support and guidance, we at BEST feel that many older jobseekers can be successful in finding suitable employment opportunities.