

Case study 1: expectations and goals

The case study has been provided by an employability programme adviser, specialising in working with unemployed people aged 50 and over.

Patricia's story

Patricia was aged 52 when she joined the employability provision for a second time.

She had been a pub manager for over 10 years and then a wages clerk for five years before being made redundant and visiting the employability service for the first time. Patricia had then been assisted in securing a job as a skilled production operative in the motor industry. She attained an NVQ level 2 before being made redundant again two years later when the company closed their local site and relocated production to China.

She had not been able to find a permanent job during the previous 10 months and had signed on with a number of employment agencies. However, due to the recession, production and manufacturing had been badly hit in the local area and finding a similar full-time permanent position was proving very difficult.

Having worked so hard to make her last career change, Patricia was determined to continue to job search for a similar post on her own, but she was becoming increasingly despondent about securing work so she turned to the employability service that had helped her previously.

The adviser's insight

Patricia's story illustrates how important it is to provide a truly customer-centred approach when supporting people aged 50+ to return to work. It is vital to recognise that no two customers are ever the same and the need to tailor your approach to each customer. In Patricia's case, it was evident very early on that she would not have continued to use our help if she had felt she was being pushed. We therefore focused on giving guidance and information that ensured Patricia felt in control and was able to make an informed choice.

At first, all Patricia wanted to do was update her CV. She continued to look for production work but was not successful. Although there were other measures we could have introduced, these were only going to be effective once she saw the need and benefit. We therefore decided to adopt a patient, measured approach. After a short time we suggested tentatively that she might consider broadening her horizons and think about changing her career direction as there were local growth sectors (for example, care and security).

Patricia required a lot of time to think her situation through and come to terms with the fact that although she could hold out for another production job it would probably mean prolonging her period of unemployment. It was a challenge to accept that she had another option: to review and rethink her career path.

Initially she was very resistant but agreed to complete a self analysis using the Adult Directions toolkit. She found this a positive experience and was surprised by the outcomes which highlighted a breadth of interpersonal skills as well as her practical abilities.

The programme suggested a range of occupations where her mix of skills was very relevant and although she had never considered herself to be a 'people person', the analysis indicated this. As a result, she agreed to explore jobs that involved working with people.

Patricia was also persuaded that she might benefit from finding out about other qualities and skills she had through completing the empowerment tool Promicad. This enabled her to be supported with improved skills-matching in her job search endeavours and informed her CV with additional information for her personal profile, key strengths and transferable skills.

Patricia considered working in the care sector. But, on being encouraged to 'explore before you decide', she liaised with people in the industry and opted to take a closer look at security work. We arranged a place on a security industry recruitment event where she was able to broaden her view of her options and she learned there was a shortage of female staff in the sector. She returned enthusiastic about setting a new goal of working in the field of security.

Broadening her perspective and expectations opened new doors for career choices. She completed the Security Industry Authority training and obtained her licence to operate.

After assistance with her application forms and some interview skills coaching Patricia secured employment and is now working for a large retail company as a shop floor, plain clothes security officer.