

Case study: building rapport

Dealing with hostility

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

Jack, 57, had worked in the EU for 20 years.

- He had formerly been a self employed builder
- He had worked in EU, running his own company
- He had returned to Britain two years previously and had not worked since
- His marriage had broken down and he was living in council accommodation
- There were some issues about his personal presentation skills (hygiene, etc)
- He was a very intelligent person who had lost a lot of personal control over his life
- He had been advised by his Jobcentre Plus adviser to come to WorkWise for help

Although we assured Jack that his attendance at WorkWise was voluntary, his behaviour throughout our initial meetings was very defensive, hostile and bordered on being aggressive. He would constantly turn up without an appointment and was very controlling and demanding. He had a very abrupt and impatient manner and complained bitterly about the quality of help he had received from the Jobcentre and a previous organisation he had been referred to.

It became apparent that Jack was outside his comfort zone and was testing the relationship before he was prepared to put his trust and confidence in the service and in his assigned adviser. We recognised we would have to spend time listening and talking to him to build mutual trust and develop a shared approach to working together.

It took time and a lot of patience to get to know Jack. We spent time listening to him, enabling him get things off his chest and talk about his life and his experience of working in Germany. This helped diffuse his frustrations and build a rapport. We did not take offence at his abrupt manner but would always stay calm, friendly and in control while showing an interest as he described working in the EU. This prompted him to open up a little bit more each time. In other words, we treated him as an equal and showed interest in and respect for him as a person.

Our discussions with Jack revealed that many of his difficulties in finding a job stemmed from his attitude. He over-compensated for his lack of confidence by trying to appear as some one in control. He was impatient at not getting what he wanted, implied he didn't need help and questioned everything. At times his sense of humour bordered on the offensive.

Before he could move forward and benefit from our support he had to be helped to come to terms with the fact he had not been able to find work on his own. However we stressed that this did not make him a failure.

Establishing a mutually respectful relationship was an important step in helping Jack recognise and accept the professional advice and guidance we were offering. We gave him positive feedback, were empathetic and respected the experiences he had used to make his decisions. But we also encouraged him to consider other angles.

Once Jack had been helped to control his initial hostility we were able to establish that he didn't want to return to the building trade. He didn't know what else he could do as he didn't have any qualifications and constantly referred to his age as a major barrier saying he didn't know how he could be helped and felt he had been "written off".

As he relaxed we discovered that quite a large element of his responsibilities in Germany had been site security. He then became open to discussing job opportunities available in security. We referred him to a local partner organisation to obtain his relevant Security Industry Association badge and licence and he is now applying for work.