

Utah Video 2 Script

Hi, my name is Debra Joffe, an associate manager at Public Consulting Group. This presentation will discuss how to build executive function skills. We will discuss how you may already be helping customers build their EF skills through approaches such as coaching, motivational interviewing, and trauma informed care. We will talk about how to talk to customers about EF challenges and motivate them to improve. Finally we will share what human services agencies across the country are doing to help their customers build Executive Function skills.

In the previous video, we learned about Executive Function and eight Executive Skills. Are there ways we can help our customers build their own Executive Skills?

[Slide 3] Yes, there are! The good news is --- you are already doing it!

Using coaching - motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed approaches, we can address Executive Function challenges. The use of these techniques can help improve skills in our customers, therefore helping compensate for Executive Function challenges.

How should human service professionals talk to customers about any Executive Function challenges that they may notice?

First you have to know what to look for. The customer's behavior will help us understand how to work with them.

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- Are your customers frustrated?
- Do they have a short fuse or are they distracted?
- Do they exhibit poor time management?
- Have they been fired from several jobs or started and stopped several educational programs?

These could be signs that they have executive function challenges.

But it is important that we not pathologize them, diagnose them or think of our customer as “broken”; that is not our job.

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And we don't necessarily talk about Executive Function, per se, but instead we talk about the behaviors the customer is exhibiting and try to find the root causes of those behaviors.

Above all else --- you must ensure you are not judging or placing negative value on the customer's behavior.

We must strive to move from **judgement** to **curiosity** – and to work with our customer to develop **individualized solutions**.

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Customers enter our offices facing a host of challenges and barriers, all of which can be overcome. It is our job as human services professionals to help customers understand that these barriers do not define them.

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Instead ... our customers should be defined by their strengths and celebrated for their successes.

Remember, people are resilient. When faced with a challenge or weakness, we will adapt. Someone who is bad at remembering details of previous conversations will learn to take copious notes; someone who cannot read or use a computer will develop coping mechanisms to allow them to proceed through life.

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As you consider how to work with your customers, remember these three hallmarks of positive relationships. Without honesty, trust, and respect, you cannot successfully use coaching or MI to help customers achieve their goals.

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One way to think about this is to consider what it means to case manage with a “coaching mindset.”

Create a partnership of equals. Allow the customer to have ownership over their own life and destiny, and give customers the freedom to make the right decision. Using these techniques will allow the customers to build their own Executive Skills.

How can we help customers build their Executive Skills?

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There are several ways we can help by reducing the cognitive load and increasing customer skills and capacity.

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There are some system-levels ways in which human services agencies can lay the groundwork.

These include

- streamlining business processes,
- making forms easier to understand,
- and leveraging technology for increased efficiency.

By employing these techniques, human services agencies can help reduce the burden on the customer’s cognitive load.

This frees up their bandwidth to address issues that are more important than how to fill out a complicated form correctly. Your agency may have already taken several of these steps.

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But it is not just up to the **human service system**. Each **human services professional** has the power to make a difference for their customer's lives.

By meeting customers in the present... focusing on where they are... and creating a positive relationship, you can help your customers *acknowledge and overcome* their Executive Function challenges – and help them build their own Executive Skills.

Can you give a specific example of what a human services professional can do?

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Sure! One technique that can be employed is scaffolding....

The definition, from Dawson and Guare, is on the screen.

“Scaffolding is a technique that often incorporates a graduated use of open-ended questions as well as other techniques for supporting individuals as they learn new skills, without giving them the answers or doing the tasks for them.”

...This is just a fancy way of saying --- break tasks down and goals down into bite-size pieces that can be achieved.

Think about it -- when you want to lose weight, it may seem impossible, but if you focus on changing one habit – drink more water each day... don't keep candy at your desk – you can envision success. When you can see the path to success, you are more likely to achieve it.

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Remember in the Theory of Change video that building a solid foundation – without cracks – creates the building blocks for success for adults and children.

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Scaffolding helps people grow to a level that is just beyond their current level.

Another way to think about it is that Scaffolding gradually **shifts responsibility** to the customer, and helps them become more **independent**. They are in the driver's seat of their own life.

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The theory of scaffolding is borrowed from education, where teachers are tasked *every day* with teaching new skills to a classroom full of children at different levels.

Some tangible classroom strategies can be used to help adults build their own skills. For example,

- Give explicit instructions
- Use visual tools (checklists, timelines, illustrations, maps)
- Establish routines – and stick to them
- Explain the rationale behind the task

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By using scaffolding, human services professionals can help their customers build soft and hard skills that will improve their chances of success. These include:

- The soft skills of planning, organization or time management
- And the hard skills of how to use a bus schedule, write an effective resume.

And research has shown in education shows that these techniques are especially effective for English language learners and people with disabilities. Since scaffolding is beneficial to these populations in particular, it is certainly very relevant to us.

These techniques sound a bit theoretical. How does this happen in real life?

They happen naturally when someone is motivated to make a change and succeed. The skills you've learned in Motivational Interviewing and Coaching will allow you to help your customer find their motivation for each task.

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Motivation is key! For example, this is my dad. He is a smart man, a lawyer... But he and technology are not the best of friends. In 2013, I think he still had a flip phone and definitely didn't know how to send a text message.....And then I had twins.

He *quickly* had to learn about Skype, Google Hangouts and all the things smart phones can do to enhance his relationship with his granddaughters.

For my dad, this was a natural way to build a skill --- **He had a goal** (to see his granddaughters grow), and - given the distance between us -he few options but to learn how to use his smart phone more efficiently.

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So, now let's talk about applying this to our customers. A human services professional could coach clients in something as simple as how to make a grocery list before going to the store. It could help them find their motivation for making a list - be it healthy eating, organization, fewer trips or saving money - making a list is a practical way that customers can practice developing many Executive Skills at once.

They are taking the first step by creating the list.

- They are more organized and have planned for the week ahead.
- They can use their time more efficiently by making the trip shorter.
- They can stay within budget by buying only what's on their list.
- And they can help with impulse control by reducing spontaneous purchases.

A simple task, like making a grocery list, is a natural way to help develop skills that are key to success in the workplace without calling attention to executive skill deficiencies.

Now I know that it's probably not the job of most human services professionals to help make grocery lists! But you can see in this example that, by breaking tasks down, even everyday tasks, you can help your customers build their executive skills in a natural, practical way.

Are there human services agencies that are successfully implementing Executive Function-informed models?

There are a few, but it is important to remember that this is an emerging and growing field. A lot of programs, like Utah's, are just getting underway and formal results are not yet available. However, there are a few examples that show promise.

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Ramsey County, MN, for example, is going through a comprehensive system change focused on coaching and lifelong learning. As part of this initiative, the MFIP program, which is Minnesota's TANF program, has trained all of their counselors in Motivational Interviewing and Coaching and Ramsey County is working to reduce cognitive load and build essential skills by developing counselors and redesigning processes. The program is being evaluated to determine its success, but in the months since some of the changes have been implemented, the County has met and exceeded its outcome driven performance measures. Such as the state measure for focusing on increase income in families. They have also improved their engagement rate and decreased sanctions.

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PCG has also infused Executive Function informed models into our case management in San Diego County, CA. For example, we ran a small but promising prototype program that combined traditional job search with health and wellness education and exercise. The program leveraged EF models such as coaching and peer support. The results were promising –

participants were three times more likely to be employed – and their health improved through reduced blood pressure and weight loss.

Similarly, when we trained our regular job search instructors in coaching, we saw improved outcomes for our customers.

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Not only were we pleased with the promise these programs showed, the customers understood the benefits to themselves and their children. These are quotes from two of the women who participated in the health and wellness job search program. As you can see, the program had a second generation impact.

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Finally, Washington State has launched a Career Readiness Project, which has two interventions.

Career & Life Coaching includes Coaching and strengths-based goal-planning for returning TANF customers. The aim is for customers to have the career-readiness skills to obtain high quality, long-term employment and achieve financial security.

Best U is focused on soft skills development for TANF transitional jobs program recipients. The goal is for parents to learn to understand and stop negative thought patterns and responses, how to communicate and work in a team, and how to set goals that motivate change. The program is designed to complement other TANF programming skills like interviewing and resume writing.

These programs are fairly new, so there are no outcomes posted to-date. But a report may be released later this spring.

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If you're interested in learning more about these interventions or about Executive Function, here are some good resources for you to visit!

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