

PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Fall/Winter 1999

Information for Preferred Workers who haven't yet used their return-to-work incentives

Focus on worksite modification

As a Preferred Worker, you may be eligible for worksite modification to help you perform your job duties. But what *is* worksite modification?

The administrative rules that govern the Preferred Worker Program define worksite modification as altering a worksite by purchasing, modifying, or supplementing equipment or changing the work process to enable a worker to work within the limitations imposed by compensable injuries or occupational diseases. Your eligibility for worksite modification hinges on the following questions:

What are your permanent restrictions and limitations caused by your Oregon on-the-job injury?

To answer this question, a re-employment consultant will review

medical documentation that describes your permanent limitations and restrictions. Decisions about permanent restrictions are usually made when you are medically stationary. Depending on your injury and recovery, the permanent restrictions document may limit the amount of weight you can lift and carry or how long you can sit, stand, or walk. The restrictions may limit repetitive use of your back, hands, or feet. Permanent restrictions are different for every worker. Re-employment consultants usually get the medical documentation from your insurer.

How is the job normally performed by a non-injured worker?

What are the job duties and the physical requirements of your job?

What equipment is used? What materials are handled and how are they handled? To answer these questions, a re-employment consultant will interview you and your employer. Is the worksite an office, a warehouse, a vehicle, or some other situation? The consultant may visit the worksite to better understand the job. During this process, differences between the demands of the job and your limitations should become apparent; worksite modification can be used to address them. Keep in mind that a worksite may be your personal vehicle or your home office if you are required to use either for your job.

Creating a new job

It's important to understand that the basic equipment needed for any person to do the work must be provided by the employer, even if the employer created the job to accommodate you. Only if modification to that equipment is needed, does worksite modification come into play. For instance, if your main job duty is data entry, we would expect the employer to provide at least a desk, a chair and a computer. But if you have a low back injury and your physician requires you to

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Success story

Cory successfully used the Preferred Worker Program twice. He injured his back in 1992 while working at a web press printing company. He hurt himself lifting boxes of chemicals and could not return to the same kind of work. Cory first talked to Re-employment Specialist Tim Kessel in 1996, after he was found eligible for the Preferred Worker Program. With Tim's help, he secured a job on the range crew of a Roseburg golf course. His employer used premium exemption and wage subsidy, and Cory got needed clothing and tools.

Cory's Preferred Worker eligibility was about to expire when he called Tim again. He was looking for an opportunity to move to the Salem area and wanted a full-

time job with a golf course. An avid golfer himself, Tim gave Cory several potential employers' names. One of those contacts panned out — and, with Preferred Worker incentives to offer, Cory found a great position in grounds maintenance. He's been working steadily since April 1999 and is enjoying an outdoor job he can physically handle. Brian, his employer, is equally enthusiastic, praising the program for its ease of use. Tim recently visited the golf course to help the employer complete his final wage subsidy reimbursement request. While we can't always provide such personalized service, Tim certainly enjoyed the opportunity to help the employer get a \$4,500 wage reimbursement check. ■

Finding unadvertised jobs

Did you know 50 to 80 percent of all job openings are never advertised? Numerous studies show jobs in the hidden job market are filled by people the employer already knows. It pays to build a network of potential employers.

Begin tapping into the hidden job market by telling all your friends, relatives, neighbors — *everyone* — that you are looking for a job. They may know about job openings. Ask them to refer you to people who may be hiring.

After you get a referral, make an appointment for an informational interview. There are good reasons to interview with a potential employer:

- To establish rapport with the employer
- To get information about the employer's company and industry
- To get feedback about how your skills might fit in the industry
- To get referrals to other informational interviews (expand your network)
- To be favorably remembered by the employer

Setting up the informational interview

Write a letter to the employer. Explain that you would like a brief interview to get information and advice from the employer. Say you will call in a few days to arrange a time. Follow up with the phone

call, and ask for a 15-minute or half-hour interview.

You may be surprised at how easy it is to get an interview. Most people enjoy giving information and advice and being helpful. Because you're asking for information only (not a job), there will be no pressure on either party.

The informational interview gives you a chance to practice interviewing without the pressure of a job interview and to make a great first impression!

Preparing for the interview

Be sure you are well-prepared for the informational interview. Look your best. Be there on time. Prepare a list of questions to ask the employer. Take a notebook to jot down important information. Don't forget to take your résumé.

The interview

Here's a sample of the kinds of questions you could ask during the interview:

Company/industry questions:

- What are the trends in this industry?
- How does this company stand out from the competition?
- What challenges face your company today?

Personal questions:

- What do you like best about working in this industry?
- What is your background and training?

- What kind of skills do you look for when hiring?

Questions like these will give you valuable information about the industry, the company, and skills used in the industry.

After asking your questions, give the employer a copy of your résumé and ask for feedback.

Résumé questions:

- Do you have any feedback for me about my résumé?
- Where do you think I could serve in this industry?

Now the employer is thinking about where you could fit in the company or the industry. Even if the employer has no current openings, openings come up unexpectedly. Having met you, the employer may not need to advertise the next job opening!

Keep the interview short

Show that you are well-organized, you value the information you've received, and you respect the employer's busy schedule.

The employer probably has many contacts. If you've made a good impression, the employer will probably refer you to others for informational interviews. Ask for referrals by saying something like, "This has been very helpful. Now I'd really like to talk with someone in the _____ end of the industry. Is there someone you could refer me to for a brief meeting like this one? May I mention you when I contact that person?"

Always follow up on the referrals you receive, repeating the process described above.

After the interview

After the interview, send the employer a thank-you letter. Be sure to mention something you learned in the interview. Ask the employer to keep you in mind for future openings.

You'll notice your confidence building by the time you've had just a couple of informational interviews. Your network in the hidden job market will be growing, too. ■

The *Preferred Worker Adviser* is a quarterly newsletter of the Workers' Compensation Division.

Editor:

Billie Healy
WCD Administration

Contributors:

Barbara Smith, Mary Hoskins

Design and production:

Shonnie Emerson
DCBS Communications

Visit the Workers' Compensation Division Web site at:
www.cbs.state.or.us/wcd

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Oregon developing job "One Stops"

The *Workforce Investment Act of 1998* paved the way to improved services for employers and people looking for work. This federal law requires that workforce programs provide services locally in One Stop Centers, where all adults and displaced workers can get all the different types of assistance they need in one place. The goal is to help people like you find employers who need you.

State and local officials are working on plans to implement this program. Employers from local industry will play a key role in developing the One Stop Centers to ensure that the services will help people get and succeed in jobs. In Oregon, the Employment Department services are the hub of the One Stop system. The following services will be available:

- Job-search assistance
- Career counseling

- Information about the local labor market and job vacancies
- Information about community college, university, and other training programs
- Access to the Vocational Rehabilitation Division, which specializes in assisting people with disabilities
- Adult literacy services

When the centers are completed, you should be able to go to one place to access all the services you need as a job-seeker.

A few of the One Stop Centers are up and running; others are still in the planning stages. They are slated to be fully operational by July 1, 2000. Watch for news of the One Stop Centers in the coming months. Contact your local Employment Department field office for information about the One Stop Centers in your area. ■

Questions & answers

Q I've lost my Preferred Worker card. What should I do?

A You can get another Preferred Worker card by calling the Workers' Compensation Division Benefits Section (800) 445-3948 and asking for a replacement card. We'll send a duplicate along with program information and forms, within a few days of your request. This will not extend the end date of your Preferred Worker eligibility.

Q I used wage subsidy with an employer, but was laid off before the end of the wage subsidy period. Now I have a new job. Can I use the rest of the wage subsidy with my new employer?

A No. An approved wage subsidy agreement is not transferable to another employer. However, remember that you can use two wage subsidies: one with one employer and one with another. If you used your first wage

subsidy with the employer that laid you off, you can use the second wage subsidy with your new employer. Call us at (800) 445-3948 if you need a Wage Subsidy Agreement form.

Q Most of the jobs I want to apply for require some knowledge of computers, and I've never used one. Will the Preferred Worker Program pay for computer training?

A The Preferred Worker Program only pays for instruction required by the employer *for an obtained job*, so the answer is "yes" only if an employer has hired you and requires you to learn specific computer skills. Training through the PWP is usually used to update existing skills, and, again, you must have already landed the job. The maximum expenditure for tuition, books, and fees is \$750. ■

Meet your Preferred Worker Program representatives

You may have had an opportunity to talk with Tim Kessel, RAU's lead re-employment specialist. Tim has been with the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) since October 1994 and is our resident expert on Obtained Employment Purchases. He has been especially helpful to Preferred Workers who've needed to relocate for new jobs. Customers describe him as enthusiastic, friendly, and outgoing. His co-workers rely on his technical expertise and program experience. Increasingly, we've asked him to make public presentations for the PWP.

Tim has a strong customer-service background, with 10 years in sales and retail management. Because he understands retailers, he is especially good at resolving vendor and payment issues for the Preferred Worker Program. He is also a computer expert who helps us diagnose and fix hardware and software problems.

Tim lives in Keizer with his wife and two young children. He is an all-around athlete and sports enthusiast. He is a vocal supporter of the Oregon Ducks and the McNary High School Celtics. An avid golfer, he makes golf clubs and has a "personal best" score of 68 at McNary Golf Club.

Tim's e-mail address is timothy.j.kessel@state.or.us ■

Focus on worksite modification

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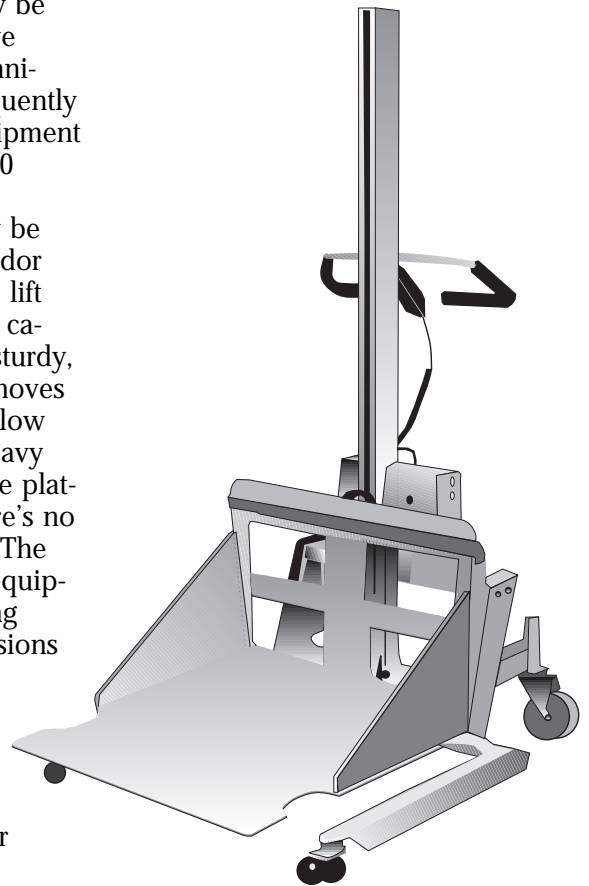
alternate sitting and standing every half hour, the Preferred Worker Program would most likely provide an adjustable workstation that would allow for sitting or standing. If your injury requires you to avoid prolonged, unsupported sitting, and your current chair doesn't provide good low back support, the Preferred Worker Program might provide an ergonomic chair with lumbar support.

Getting started

Sometimes an employer and worker know exactly how a job can be modified. If the modification costs less than \$2,500, it can be requested using the *Worksite Modification Agreement (Limited to \$2,500)* form that you received with your identification card. If the modification costs more than \$2,500, or you don't have a form, call the Preferred Worker Program and request worksite modification assistance. We'll help you with your request. If an item you request costs more than \$2,500, you will be required to submit cost quotations for the item from three different vendors. ■

Server lift

A new occupation that may be attractive to workers who have back injuries is computer technician. But that occupation frequently involves lifting computer equipment that may weigh from 30 to 150 pounds. One solution to this workplace challenge may be a "server lift." An Oregon vendor customizes a standard electric lift to accommodate various load capacities and lift heights. The sturdy, thin, beveled-edge platform moves all the way to floor level to allow the operator to easily slide heavy servers from the floor onto the platform. With the server lift, there's no need to manually lift servers. The power lift mechanism raises equipment to a comfortable working position. The platform dimensions can vary to accommodate equipment as large as CAD monitors. Prices of about \$6,000 include a safety strap. Call a re-employment consultant, (800) 445-3948, for more information. ■



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Workers' Compensation Division
350 Winter St. NE., Room 27
Salem, OR 97301-3879

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