

Progressive Employment: Success Stories



Progressive Employment (PE) is based on the needs of the job seeker and their skill level, and the needs and requirements of the employer. PE provides a means of entering the work force gradually and with little risk. If a PE experience does not work out, it is not a “failure” on a resume, but experience. The work experience may also provide the job seeker with valuable information about what jobs they don’t want, or about work cultures they might want to avoid.

PE can take many forms. A job seeker might take a company tour, or shadow an employee at a business. Someone else might use a series of work experiences to develop soft skills and learn technical skills. For a job seeker with some established job skills, a PE work experience might add to the person’s resume, increase their skill level, and serve as a risk-free way to introduce the job seeker to the employer—who is under no obligation to hire the individual.

Our experience tells us that over half of work experiences end in a job offer, even if the employer had indicated that there were no openings at the time. For youth exiting school, the percentage of job offers is even higher.

Here are some examples of various PE situations that assisted a range of job seekers to gain experience, confidence, and business connections. These are all true stories, but we have changed people’s names to protect everyone’s privacy.

1. TOM'S STORY

- ▲ Overcoming fear
- ▲ Achieving results despite lack of work experience
- ▲ Starting at a very elementary level

Tom is 19 years old, and graduated high school with virtually no work experience. The employment consultant set up a work experience for Tom at a coffee production company. The plan was to have him help with production and other warehouse-type duties. The employment consultant would provide on-site support initially.

On the first day, the employment consultant met Tom in the parking lot of the company. The idea was for them to touch base, make sure Tom was ready, and enter the business together.

Tom refused to get out of his mother’s car. The employment consultant and Tom’s mom tried to talk him into it, but he would not speak or even make eye contact. At one point he even slammed his door shut. Tom was obviously experiencing anxiety, but would not communicate verbally about what he was feeling.



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After several unsuccessful minutes trying to persuade Tom to try it out, the employment consultant went into the business to explain the situation. The supervisor in the coffee company was understanding, and told the employment consultant to take as much time as was needed.

Once Tom realized he wasn't going to be forced through the door, he agreed to get into the employment consultant's car to talk privately. The employment consultant explained exactly what Tom could expect when he walked through the door of the business. She used positive reinforcement, praising him for even making it to the parking lot. She asked him not to look at this experience as a giant whole, but rather in less overwhelming, smaller pieces.

Finally, the employment consultant made a deal with Tom. She said, "Today you've made it to the parking lot. Tomorrow, let's make it inside." Tom agreed to a 15-minute visit the following day, an hour visit the next day, and then to see how he felt after that.

The next day, Tom went with the employment consultant through the door into the business. They stayed and chatted for a little bit, and it was easy to see Tom's tension start to dissipate. Instead of only doing the 15 minutes they'd agreed upon, they ended up staying over an hour.

Now Tom is going to the work site independently, and the employment consultant is doing minimal check-ins. Tom is learning hard and soft skills and gaining confidence in himself.

2. MARY'S STORY

- ▲ Enhancing skills
- ▲ Increasing confidence to reenter the workforce
- ▲ Networking for other permanent positions

Mary had worked in data analysis and reporting, but she hadn't been employed for several years and felt that her skills were out of date. Because of this, she lacked confidence in her ability to get back into the workforce.

Mary was in a program to become self-sufficient run by the state housing authority. The employment consultant identified a local United Way organization as a possible work site. The employment team (vocational rehabilitation counselor, the employment consultant, the case manager from the housing authority) and Mary met to prepare for an informational meeting and for a possible work experience.

Mary then met with the employer, who agreed to provide the work experience. The employment consultant helped to develop a time line and goals, beginning with a two-week period for orientation and settling in. During those two weeks, the employment consultant met with Mary and the employer separately to discuss progress.

After the orientation period, the employment team and Mary met to map out goals, a timeline, and benchmarks. This plan was presented to the employer during Mary's third week on the worksite. The plan listed specific examples of the experience and work skills Mary wished to

develop and demonstrate. In addition, the employer agreed to provide contacts to potential businesses and job opportunities in the community.

Mary made a significant contribution to a United Way research project, and demonstrated her skills to the United Way and to herself. Since then, she has begun the networking phase of her work experience. She recently attended a Chamber of Commerce mixer, and has made contact with potential employers.

From this experience, Mary has identified and demonstrated specific skill sets and will have a reference letter as well as continued networking from the United Way. Mary's comfort and confidence have increased, and she has received praise from the United Way for her work. She was even recommended to the Chamber of Commerce president to consult on a research project.

3. KAREN'S STORY

- ▲ Progressive movement off TANF benefits
- ▲ Work experiences before and after paid employment

Karen had very little work experience and was receiving TANF benefits. She was also coping with depression and anxiety.

The employment consultant arranged two separate work experiences: one at a non-profit organization, and the other at a bookstore. Karen completed both successfully. With these experiences on her resume, she was able to get a seasonal job at a nearby ski area.

After that job ended, Karen wanted to hone her office skills. She did another work experience at the bookstore, and took a career readiness course. She got re-hired at the ski area part time during the next snow season, and felt confident enough to try other better-paying and more permanent positions.

Karen applied at a local dollar store, was hired, and worked her way to assistant manager. When the business opened a new store closer to her home, she was asked to be the head store manager.

Karen now works full time as the dollar store manager. This progression spanned about three years, but she is now completely off TANF benefits.

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