

50+ WORKS

Case study: interview preparation and techniques

Kennedy Scott, Harrow

When Rajeev (62) first came to Kennedy Scott, he had been out of work for more than five years. He had a disability and had been on Incapacity Benefit for five years. But he had recently been reassessed as capable of working and was transferred onto Jobseeker's Allowance.

Rajeev was a highly qualified accountant. When he started to receive Jobseeker's Allowance, he tried to look for work and was invited to several interviews but had had no success in finding a job. Jobcentre Plus then directed him to Kennedy Scott for further help.

He felt depressed as his disability had worsened and he was under financial pressure because of his mortgage payments. He felt a failure as he couldn't provide for his family.

Warren, the Personal Development Coach at Kennedy Scott, says about his first meeting with Rajeev: "He had a very soft voice. He was swallowing his words and I had difficulty in understanding what he was saying. This was a barrier he had to overcome."

When Warren recognised that Rajeev was feeling very low, he offered him free counselling. "At Kennedy Scott, we buy professional counselling from another organisation. Rajeev was able to benefit from counselling support in parallel with the job search support I was providing. This continued for about seven months until he found a job."

"We then turned to his CV. I needed to review whether his accountancy knowledge and skills were up to date. I came to the conclusion that they were as he was being invited to interviews. His five years out of work were easily explained by his ill health. It was also helpful that he had taken some courses on the latest version of Microsoft Office.

"After that, we needed to look at his interview technique. The way Rajeev spoke gave the impression that he lacked confidence but it was difficult to tell him this and I had to handle it sensitively. So I suggested that we analyse the unsuccessful interviews he had had. I asked him how he felt, leading him into discussing the problem areas and their possible causes. As a result, Rajeev admitted that he didn't give a good impression of himself and that made it easier for me to help him."

It was, nevertheless, difficult for Warren, as a younger man, to coach Rajeev. In the Asian culture in which Rajeev had grown up, older people have to be

shown respect. Warren got over this sensitive cultural issue by asking Rajeev to treat him as his son, explaining that he needed to understand him better to help him succeed.

“I had to be sure to adopt the right approach. At first I sympathise with my customers to help them open up but then I have to take a different tack to give them feedback on what they can improve. I always work with examples as I find my customers are more receptive to this approach. When working with Rajeev to improve his interview skills, I told him that if his posture and body language were wrong, if he shrank into himself, he was effectively saying *I am not the right person for the job*. I also mentioned that if he thought he was good and could handle the job he should say so loudly and clearly..

“From then on, we held some mock interviews. At Kennedy Scott, we try to make them as authentic as possible. We take the ‘candidates’ into a special room, where a colleague plays the role of the interviewer. I just take notes or film the session. We run through the entire interview procedure from beginning to end.

“Rajeev enjoyed the mock interviews and was even able to laugh at himself when he discovered what he was doing wrong. We practised several times until he made a noticeable improvement. I also made sure I met Rajeev a day or two before a real interview to bolster his confidence.”

In the end Rajeev found a full time job as an accountant with a large company. After five years of unemployment and more than seven months of job hunting, he achieved everything he wanted.