

Case study: Benefits of mixed age sessions for older and younger customers.

PPDG (Per Temps People Development Group) in Hull offers jobseekers referred by Jobcentre Plus a full day course on finding work.

The course, which is for people who have been out of work for a short period of time, covers four topics: the local labour market, CVs, letters and applications, and interviews. Up to 15 people of different ages and backgrounds attend. Typically it is around 11 or 12. Two trainers lead the day, usually Jayne, who is in her 20s, and Ray, who is in his early 60s. This mix helps engage both younger and older customers.

Jayne doesn't view her age as an issue when she leads the course: "If an older individual is dismissive because I am young, I put it to one side. People always have preferences about delivery staff, and they are not all related to age. For example, they may prefer a man to a woman, etc, and we always try to accommodate them. Barriers do crop up between customers and coaches. Lone parents, for example, may think: 'You don't know what it's like to be a single parent if haven't been through it'. If I haven't personally experienced people's situations, I encourage them to talk. We aren't teachers – we are there to facilitate."

Ray says the first 30 minutes of the course are key to getting the group to gel and to engage everyone present. "First we have a bit of chat to get some background on the participants and find out what they want from the course. It is important to get to know the group. It is quite informal and relaxed. As an icebreaker we do an exercise: *Tell two truths and one lie about yourself* and then, as a group, we try to work out which is the lie. The exercise also serves as training in dealing with perceptions. The best way to deal with potentially negative attitudes is to make participants laugh."

He also stresses that interactivity is important throughout the day. He constantly asks questions. For example: 'If you were an employer, what would you want?' People may then respond by saying they would want someone who is honest, experienced, etc, and by doing this they are already working on preparing their CVs.

In the last 30 minutes, in a round table session, the trainers ask course participants typical interview questions. And then they ask the participants to put interview questions to them and the trainers play the role of jobseekers at an interview.

Ray says that mixed age groups work well but they have to be well managed. "It's not a problem even if we have people with a range of skills because the

sessions involve discussions in pairs or in groups and we put people together according to the best fit.”

“Having a mixed age group puts things in perspective for both younger and older people. While older people often say that they don’t get jobs because they are too experienced, younger people tend to think they don’t get jobs because they don’t have enough experience. Both of them have to sell themselves in the right way.

“A range of ages also helps group dynamics. An older person, for example, can stimulate discussion by talking about their experiences.

“Older people have often spent a long time in the same job or industry and aren’t aware of the skills they have. They may not have had a job interview for a very long time, don’t know how to apply for a job in the modern market and may be uncomfortable about ‘selling themselves’ into a job. If this is the case, role play and psychometric testing can help although older people may find these tools alien. Interactive exercises such as: ‘What is the benefit of an apple pip?’ (an exercise aimed at developing creativity) may give rise to reactions like: ‘I don’t want to do this. I want a job’. Having a mixed age group does help because it makes it easier to engage older people in such activities. In the end, when older customers overcome their initial reservations, they really enjoy these exercises and benefit from them. They develop a better idea of their own value and become energised.”