

Case study: meeting your 50+ customer - dealing with anxiety and hostility

Before being made redundant in May 2009 Alan (56) had been a skilled engineer and hydraulic pipe fitter in the car industry for most of his working life and had earned a good salary. He was referred to the service from both the local Jobcentre Plus and another provider. He had been with the provider for six months, compiled his CV but had not been able to secure work.

Alan was very anxious and defensive when he came for his first meeting, not sure why he had been referred again and expressed the view immediately that he wasn't sure what I (an employability programme adviser) could do to help him. Alan couldn't relax, wouldn't take off his jacket and refused a drink. However, he did immediately open up with an outburst of information, stating that:

- he felt very angry and rejected
- he hated going to Jobcentre Plus; he felt ashamed that he had to walk through a crowd of young men and women congregating outside the building
- he didn't have a computer, didn't trust the internet and had only input data onto a computer using a diagnostic programme at work
- the previous organisation had sent out his CV to numerous companies and he hadn't heard back
- he didn't particularly like his CV – didn't feel he had had much input into it
- he desperately needed to get back to work for financial and confidence reasons.

At this point all I had done was listen and give prompts so he knew I was listening to him. I knew it was important to allow his outpouring of pent-up feelings and concerns. It became clear that he had been holding himself together very tightly and had got a lot off his chest and exhausted himself.

I reassured him that while he was not under any pressure to come to use our service, it might help if he knew what we could do to help him and, more importantly, the approach we took and why he might have been referred. It was at this point Alan relaxed. On being casually asked if he felt he would like a drink, he accepted; he also asked where he could find the men's. When he came back he took off his jacket; he said he felt much better.

I listened to and respected his view. He then took a very positive part in the rest of the meeting in which he:

- was helped to identify some of his personal barriers
- listened to an explanation of what we could do to help
- was reassured that we could help him tackle the barriers he was experiencing

He saw that he wasn't alone or unique and that if he joined the provision and completed the initial stages he could benefit from one-to-one support and peer group support and activity.

Alan and I were able to fully complete his first meeting, agree to a subsequent meeting and start to look forward. Alan joined the provision and has become actively engaged in his own self-development. In particular, he has addressed a previously unrecognised and important need he had that related to enhancing his interpersonal skills and ability to join in with other people. Alan has also begun to address his second major barrier and with coaching is using a computer to job search and tackle the internet.

He is now more confident and is much more positive and realistic about securing employment. He has also acknowledged an identified need around IT skills and accepted a recommendation to undertake a computer course.