



Case Management

How can case managers set up their students for long-term success?

Overview

The modern economy has faced many changes and challenges, and the need for skilled laborers in some industries has sharply risen while the labor supply has dwindled. While we have the manpower to fill these jobs, our citizens are not chasing after them. If we exclude those with a high school equivalency diploma, high school graduation has just about stagnated since the 1960s, while many of those who do graduate go without a college education. In this report, we explore the importance of case managers and their role in shaping the future of America's students and our economic success. We will discuss what makes an effective case manager, some obstacles they face, and some recommendations for the future.

PREPARED BY

Joseph Rosenbaum,
SMRT Psychological Research Analyst

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Introduction

“College for all!” It is difficult to disagree with that statement, and it is not our place as researchers to judge the mantra. We do believe there is a caveat to the comment, though, as many believe that “College for all!” is equal to “Four-year college for all!” Although this is more specific, it may lead to a misunderstanding in the need for a post-secondary education. Baby boomers benefited from the logic of a four-year college, which often guaranteed them a job that made it possible to afford a comfortable quality of life. The world is changing faster than ever, and the same logic is deteriorating fast in the face of what the numbers tell us. The SMRT team believes this is largely an issue of miscommunication, and a lack of useful knowledge about our economic needs. Imagine the economy as a thirsty person, and she is bombarded with ads for energy drinks, filled with all sorts of vitamins and special herbs that promise vitality and peak performance, while also quenching the thirst. After a few cans of “Econergy,” she is alert and works beyond what anyone thought possible, so she has a few more cans. At some point, though, she will be sacrificing health for efficiency. Although Econergy is great to jumpstart the economy, it is not sustainable without water, which is nourishing, healthy, and practical. So how do we find the balance?

The Changing Landscape

Democrats blame Republicans for destroying the economy with trickle-down economics that lead to the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer. Republicans blame Democrats for trying to turn the nation into a socialist country, which will destroy jobs and the opportunity for economic growth and investment. What rarely gets talked about, though, is how the economy has changed since the 1950s, and what this change means for the future of how we can educate tomorrow's youth effectively to fill the jobs that we can all agree need filling.

First, it might be useful to understand the difference between what “skilled” versus “unskilled” refers to within an economic context. Skilled work refers to employment that requires specific training, knowledge, or ability in a certain area that can take years to learn, while unskilled labor requires little to no prior knowledge or experience to perform well and typically involves manual labor. For example, if your computer were to stop working, you would not bring it to the salesman to fix it, but to a computer technician who specializes in the hardware. A quick but less elegant way to separate the two is to ask yourself, “Can I learn this job in 30 days or less?” If the answer is yes, then the job is probably defined as unskilled. Our point is not to devalue unskilled labor, as it is integral to the smooth running of our economy; we seek to highlight that the need for unskilled labor has changed in recent years compared to its more nuanced counterpart, skilled labor. We need our grocery clerks, our gas station attendants, our waitresses. The problem occurs when people spend exorbitant amounts of money on

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postsecondary education, and subsequently find themselves in jobs where they cannot exercise the skills they learn, unable to pay off loans or afford housing or food.

Many unskilled jobs, particularly in manufacturing, have moved away from the United States to other countries like China. In fact, during the 1950s and through much of the remaining century, 4 of every 5 jobs were considered unskilled. But today that has flip-flipped, with about 85 percent of open jobs now considered skilled (Carnevale et al., 2013). It is important to know that manufacturing is not dead in the United States. But the move from a low-skilled to a skilled economy is

merely a reflection of cultural change. Think of the evolution from VHS tapes to Blu-rays and now digital downloads. Nationally, there are 600,000 advanced manufacturing openings that require skilled laborers, including machinists and machine operators, most of which are going unfilled (Carnevale et al., 2013). That number could fill more than

six football stadiums, and increases every year, possibly growing to 2 million by 2018, mostly due to baby boomers retiring (Carnevale et al., 2010).

A high school diploma no longer guarantees one a successful career like it used to, but graduating high school is related to several positive outcomes (Balfanz et al., 2013). Individuals with diplomas are more likely to have jobs (U.S. Census 2010), are less likely to commit a crime or need social services (Sum et al., 2009), and have better life expectancy (Meunig, 2005). This is why many concerned parents, community stakeholders, and policymakers have demanded that what we learn in schools ought to serve us well in what

future we may have. But what about those who do not complete high school? The 2010 census found that almost 25 million Americans of working age are without a high school diploma or equivalent credential, and even an equivalency diploma confers little substantial benefit over no credential at all (Heckman et al., 2010). How much does the U.S. economy stand to lose if that number becomes a reality? The estimated loss in services used over taxes paid per dropout is \$70,000. Compare this to the earnings of someone with a high school diploma, who will on average contribute more than \$230,000 more in taxes in a lifetime over services used (Sum et al., 2009).

That's high school, but what about postsecondary school? The picture is not a pretty one. The average college graduation rate within four years is 38.6 percent, or 54.3 percent after six. Two-year programs sit in between these numbers at 42 percent (NCES/IPEDS, 2014). This results in the highest college dropout rate in the industrialized world, putting us under countries like Poland and Slovakia (Symonds et al., 2011). As mentioned above, the idea of "Four-year college for all!" could be sending the wrong message. There are about 29 million skilled jobs available right now that require less than a four-year degree, and may only need a certification (Carnevale et al., 2012). These jobs are only increasing as baby boomers age out of their professions, and the cost of getting the proper certifications are significantly cheaper than the average four-year college.

Even people with bachelor's degrees are having difficulty finding jobs after college and find themselves in a deep hole of debt. According to the *Millennial Jobs Report*, released by the nonprofit Generation Oppor-

tunity every month, millennials are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed compared to the national average (Generation Opportunity, 2015). There are jobs to be filled, and people to fill them, so what's the problem? Why are we still rushing to gulp down Eenergy drinks when we are surrounded by water and know it's doing more harm than good? SMRT believes we have the answer.

The Case for Case Managers

A case manager can go by many names: employment specialist, career navigator, career planner, etc. Whatever the nomenclature, the purpose of a case manager is to provide guidance and support to a person on the path toward getting a job or career advancement. There is a growing need for people to gain skills in specific areas in order to reinvigorate our economy, but in order for people to understand or become aware of those needs, there must be people educated in career paths, and with the ability to set people on trajectories toward success. Enter Case Managers, capitalized here because they deserve capitalization.

An effective case manager must build a deep understanding of his or her client. A case manager must be an active listener, and have strong interpersonal relationship-building skills, and care about the student's success. This is not meant to understate the importance of a case manager's knowledge of the current economy, available jobs, and how students can launch themselves from the platform of education into a job. Instead, a case manager shares many of the requirements that a social worker or therapist might, which is to say that without building a positive foundation in the relationship,

prospective students and future employees will never get to the more technical aspects of case management like job placement. Beyond that, an effective case manager must be effective at four tasks: career planning, linking clients to supports, job matching/placement/follow-up, and tracking the outcomes of clients.

Career Planning: Imagine handing a starry-eyed student a map with landmarks, and an X to mark the spot where buried treasure can be found, or even better, her or his future career. In order to create that map, the case manager needs to collect information on the client’s skills, interests, and other assessment results, and then examine current labor market information (LMI). Having LMI is a prerequisite for case management, and case managers must know short-term job openings and wages, high-growth or in-demand occupations and industries, employment trends, and projections of future supply and demand in the labor market. In other words, to make the personal career treasure map, a case manager must know where the landmarks are, and where the treasure can eventually be excavated. This information is easily accessible online, and is a necessity for any case manager. Using this information, a case manager can synthesize and develop an employment plan that is feasible for the client and can be easily organized to include both short-term and long-term goals for achieving the requirements to get the agreed-upon job. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), described above, refers to this as the Individualized Employment Plan (IEP), which is an agreement between case manager and client to establish benchmarks for success of a goal. IEPs include the necessary goals, objectives, and required

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services for success. IEPs have been shown to be an effective career planning tool, both for parents and the students themselves (Miller, 2015).

Linking Clients to Supports: The need for this will differ depending on the school, but a case manager must understand the needs of the client, and that they do not exist in a vacuum. Particularly in lower-income areas, and community colleges, students will likely face significant barriers to completing their IEPs, and eventually getting jobs. A case manager must be knowledgeable of available services to students, and play the role of broker to direct them toward those services. They should know about local workforce programs, support services, community partners, and other relevant agencies. They must have cross-organizational knowledge to connect people with things like transportation and childcare assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), financial counseling, and whatever else they need to complete the IEP, or find and maintain employment.

Getting a Job: Case managers must play the role of educators as well, not only providing career planning, but also teaching the client how to write a resume, how to interview well, and how to find links for acquiring a job. The Case Manager’s job does not end when the client is placed, but must also continue after placement to ensure she or he has the needed support for success, and to help the client advocate for her or himself. Follow-up is also a useful tool, which provides the client with updated LMI, and can expose her or him to new workforce programs or opportunities for career advancement. The reality is that case managers

will have a difficult time maintaining the desired contact with a client, but they can use electronic communication through emails, social media, and text to check in and receive updates. This can be particularly effective for youth, who may prefer this sort of contact to speaking in person or over the phone.

Tracking Outcomes: Although it might be considered busy work, the ability of a case manager to take notes that document the client's eligibility for programs, services received, and the outcomes of the services is essential for success. Case notes can come directly from the clients, or with the clients' permission, the clients' social system and network. The notes must include the case manager's observations and discussions with the client, so that both can be held accountable for outcomes.

A Look at the Hurdles

Below is a quick list of some of the challenges case managers face, taken from *Career Counseling: Bridging School to Career in the Workforce of the Future*.

Systemic:

1. The training and certification of career counselors typically does not provide the knowledge and skills necessary for them to work with all students.
2. The ratio of career counselors to students in high schools has grown substantially over the past several decades.
3. High school career guidance counselors today appear to be spending the majority of their time with administrative and disciplinary issues rather than career guidance counseling.
4. Career counseling is often inadequate at the postsecondary level as well.
5. Career counselors may not have effective system tools available, which provide labor market data or information

on occupational knowledge associated with career pathways. Others may not be aware of these tools, or require training to use them.

6. Young people do not have the opportunity to experience career pathways beyond what they see and experience in their family and/or neighborhood and are not meaningfully exposed to the world of work until they enter the workplace.

Procedural:

1. Many public school systems operate with little attention to career counseling for all students. Instead, they focus their time and resources on advising students who plan to apply to college. But even these students often don't receive much career counseling. Career counseling in many, if not most institutions, is piecemeal and, in many cases, almost nonexistent.
2. Career counseling, where it does exist, often begins in 10th or 11th grade in high school, well beyond the point at which students should have begun to examine their career pathway options.
3. Too little is shared or documented in the career counseling area about what works in helping students develop their pathway, and how and why it works.
4. There is little support from school administrators for career development activities.
5. There is a disconnected and weak interaction between education and industry, outcomes and school policy and innovations being implemented across the country.
6. Career counseling is largely missing from federal legislation focused on education and workforce development, and funding for it has been largely deleted from the federal budget.

Recommendations

On a broad, systemic level, we must turn our attention to the current economic needs of the United States, and provide our students with some direction for completing an education that will lead them to the jobs that need filling. The SMRT team recommends this to begin as early as elementary school with career awareness programs that identify more careers than those often associated with success like medicine, law, and finance. More realistically, there needs to be a heavier focus on case management before post-secondary school. If nothing else, creating a pathway to a career will make the subjects learned in high school more concrete and relevant. Students may not care about finding the hypotenuse of a triangle if they plan on becoming a corporate lawyer, but they will if they are pointed toward a career centered around engineering or architecture. Survey data shows that nationally 81 percent of students are disengaged — and largely because they don't see the relevance of what they are learning in school as it relates to the real world (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Student disengagement is one of the leading causes of the decision to dropout of school, community life, and becoming a productive learner (Washor and Mojkowski, 2014).

In a similar regard, it would behoove classes to connect content to the workplace, relating specific skills or knowledge to jobs, creating a contextualized learning experience. What if we expected all high school students to work toward certain career-related credentials? These credentials could be industry specific, like

the construction or nursing industries, designing a new website, or learning how the exhaust system of a car functions. This would be an investment well spent.

SMRT researchers would also like to express the importance of community involvement, specifically in terms of helping to develop career pathways. Depending on the community, this may not be feasible, but connecting different organizations in the community to the schools, as well as those working in different jobs within the community, could provide students with a more concrete image of available jobs options, and provide an opportunity to ask questions about those jobs.

Moreover, above we described what it takes to be a case manager, but those are the minimum requirements. At SMRT, we believe in excellence no matter what your profession, and case management is no different. A SMRT case manager would be certified or demonstrate competence in counseling, analyzing, and communicating the requirements of specific career path-

ways, and have an understanding of several industries and the associated technologies that are used. Case managers should also take an externship every few years in order to expand their own experiences and see how things are done at different organizations. Relationships are not only important with the individual client, but also with businesses and industries in the area. Creating and maintaining relationships not just with the client, but with local businesses and industries, will make it easier to place individuals. An

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important aspect of a successful case manager is accountability, or the ability for him or her to transition each student into a career, and have that student excel at that job. This means case managers should not only be measured by how many students graduate or get jobs, but also by how many retain employment over a long period of time and get promoted.

So how do we get the economy off this Econergy drink addiction? It starts with one drop of water at a time, working with individuals, and then communities, and then across the country to show people that they have support, they can find the open jobs, and they can succeed. But most importantly, it starts with a relationship; it starts with caring and empathy, and a desire to help. ●

Summary

There are currently 600,000 openings for advanced manufacturing positions that require skilled laborers, yet we are having a difficult time filling them.

In spite of these opening, Americans are choosing to go to college, where many of them will pay costly tuition fees but still end up dropping out. For those who do graduate college, they are having a difficult time finding the jobs they want.

Individuals with a high school diploma are more likely to have jobs, less likely to commit crimes, have better life expectancy and pay more in taxes.

Case managers can be an invaluable resource in redirecting students toward industries that have labor shortages and away from going to college for the sake of going to college.

Case managers must have knowledge of the current economy, availability jobs, and be able to place clients — but they must also listen well and develop positive relationships with clients and employers.

A Case manager needs four skills: career planning, linking clients to supports, helping the client get a job, and tracking outcomes.

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