



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA: *Advancing Work and Career*

Tierra de Oportunidad - Module1 Making Choices About Jobs

Overview

Even in the tight labor markets faced by immigrants, it is possible to choose among potential jobs. These choices almost always involve weighing factors such as hourly wage versus stability of employment, good supervision versus earnings, or distance to work versus pay. This module focuses on building the basic decision skills workers need to weigh different alternatives and some of the basic math skills needed to quantify the information used in making informed decisions.

The absolute basic information workers need is about their legal rights as workers. Beyond that floor of minimum knowledge, there is a great deal that workers can do to find their way to the best available working conditions. Workers in blue-collar jobs can benefit, just as professionals and executives can, from constantly examining their options but, at the same time, being cautious before making a move which will affect their job stability.

Individual interests, aspirations, and concerns vary but workers' bottom line must be to earn enough to support themselves and their families, to be treated fairly by supervisors, and to have opportunities for advancement, not just a job for the moment. Workers in unskilled jobs requiring hard physical labor need to prepare for the future when they can no longer work so hard or compete with younger workers in better physical shape.

Basic Skills Development

This module integrates basic skills development in computation and numerical reasoning with values clarification, and the development of analytic and problem-solving information. It can be used as the basis for a one-time educational workshop or meeting activity, a weekend 2-session workshop, as a special topic unit in an Adult Basic Education or ESL course, or as a thematic strand throughout an ESL or ABE course.

<i>Basic computation skills:</i>	multiplication, division, addition, subtraction
<i>Mathematics applications:</i>	estimation, use of ratios for comparison
<i>Reference skills:</i>	securing oral/aural information, telephone book, government pamphlets
<i>Communication skills:</i>	discussions with co-workers, supervisors, employers
<i>Analysis and Problem-solving:</i>	deduction, contingency planning, synthesis of divergent information

Teaching Points

1. **In California, the minimum wage is \$6.75 per hour.** Workers must be paid the minimum wage even if they are paid on a piece work basis, i.e., a certain amount per lb. of produce, per garment sewed, etc. Workers also must be paid for waiting time if the employer told the worker to wait, for example, when a conveyer belt has broken.
2. **Workers should be paid one and one-half times their salary, at least \$10.13 per hour for a minimum wage worker, for overtime.** Overtime is more than eight hours in one day or more than forty hours in each week. If a worker works more than twelve hours during a day, he or she should be paid double time for the hours worked over twelve. Many employers will, however, fire an employee for being a troublemaker if they demand overtime pay.
3. **Workers have a right to a check stub showing the hours they have worked and the deductions from their pay** for Social Security tax, income tax withholding and any optional employee-authorized deductions such as health insurance. Employers who do not pay by check or who do not provide their workers with a check stub are violating state and federal law and are likely to also be violating the worker's rights. The check stub should also include information on number of hours worked and hourly wage or number of pieces of work done and pay rate.
4. **Almost all workers have the right to be covered by unemployment insurance, disability insurance, and Workers' Compensation.** Workers' compensation should pay for medical costs and, in the case of serious injuries, for retraining, for on-the-job injuries. In some cases even injuries suffered on the way to work may be covered. Disability insurance pays benefits to a worker if they are disabled for a period of up to a year. Unemployment insurance pays benefits to workers who are laid off but not to workers who quit a job or who are fired.
5. **It is illegal to fire a worker for standing up for their rights.** However, workers should understand that if they are illegally fired, they will need patience and perseverance as they follow through with legal action to seek recourse.

Thinking About Earnings And Acting

6. **There are sometimes trade-offs between hourly wage rate and employment stability.** Workers need to think carefully about those tradeoffs. It is always a good idea, if possible, to talk to workers currently working at a company about it before taking the job -- in part to find out whether there's high turnover because the work is difficult, because the supervisors are bad, or because the employer often fires workers.
7. **The best time to think about getting a better job is when a person is employed.** Thinking about getting a better job should usually start by thinking about whether there are opportunities for promotion at the place where a person begins working. But in order to get ahead, a worker should always keep a network going, asking friends about job openings, looking in the newspaper, reading help wanted signs, and even stopping by the Job Service office. Part of getting a better job is doing well at one's current job, even if its not one that the worker likes a lot. U.S. employers like people to show ambition and make it clear that

they are trying to advance themselves.

8. **If there seems no way to get a better job, the only answer is to consider how best to learn new skills.** There are actually many ways to learn new skills. They include talking to friends who do a kind of work one likes, helping those friends, talking to co-workers and helping co-workers, reading books, as well as going to an adult education class, a vocational skills training class or an employment training program. Looking for a new job is like a business itself one should always consider what it costs, in time and money, and what benefits it might bring.
9. **Workers should find out the full name of the company they work for.** Many workers in immigrant dominated industries such as farm work are hired by a *mayordomo*, a labor recruiter, or some other labor market intermediary and do not know the correct name of the company which employs them. Workers should be sure to get the correct and full name of the company, not only the person they work for, e.g., "El Chato".

Long-Term Work Life Planning

10. **People have different earning needs at different points in their life.** Young workers can afford to take a job which pays less but is better in terms of job advancement potential, than a slightly older worker who has a family to support. Older workers need to worry about whether they can keep on working in the work they do if it is physically demanding. Sometimes it is better to take a job for less pay if it provides more security.
11. **In the next twenty years, almost every kind of company will need more supervisory and managerial workers but less line workers. Demand for bilingual/bicultural supervisors will increase rapidly.** A very useful strategy for many workers is to understand that if they get along well with other people, enjoy helping them learning something new, and like to take initiative, they should build on those skills to maximize their chances of moving into a supervisory or managerial position. The need for bilingual workers will be particularly acute, so there is a real payoff learning English well, not simply to get along.
12. **In the next twenty years, almost every kind of company will require workers to be constantly learning on the job.** Very few workers will learn how to do a trade or occupation before they are employed. More will learn on the job, going to special training sessions, reading technical manuals, watching videotaped operations, working on a computer-based learning system, talking to co-workers, and sometimes deciding to take a special set of classes which they think will help them compete better for jobs, e.g., accounting. Practicing learning, and learning how to enjoy learning is an important investment.
13. **An important aspect of thinking about earnings is to think about the costs of working as part of deciding on a job.** Financial costs often ignored in thinking about a job possibility include transportation costs, child care costs, and the costs of living near a given job. Non-financial costs are also ignored sometimes, i.e., time away from one's children, conflict with co-workers and family from working at home.

Suggested Learning Activities

1. Brainstorm and create an exhaustive checklist of positive and negative aspects of the jobs that people in the class work in. Some examples of positive job conditions are: good pay, good hours, chances for advancement, good benefits, safe working conditions, fair and equitable treatment of all workers, training for workers such as workplace literacy classes, classes to obtain special class driver's licenses for driving trucks and heavy equipment or classes in management development, how to be a better supervisor, etc. Negative aspects of jobs are whatever students think are negative. After students have created two lists, have them rate their own job using the lists and write a report or make an oral presentation to the class.
2. Using the dual lists of positive and negative aspects of jobs, have students in the class discuss what might be done to overcome the negative aspects of their own job. In the discussion, focus on whether the desired changes might really be feasible and, if so, how they might convince their employer to make those changes. Changes might be as minimal as having a lunch wagon come around at noon every day or as major as unionizing.
3. Have students read a description of the life situation of a fictitious person. Then have them read a detailed description of two job options. Have the class discuss which job would be a better choice for the person and why. This activity could be done more than once with people with different life situations and different job options.
4. Invite good role models to class, such as people who are immigrants and who have been particularly successful in obtaining better jobs. Let them tell their story and let the students ask questions. Be sure to ask the presenter to discuss the sorts of problems they faced and have overcome.
5. Poll the class and find out what kind of jobs students would be interested in having or knowing more about. Invite someone working in that field to the class to tell how to go about getting such a job and what are the positive and negative aspects of that job.
6. Discuss the concept of workplace literacy programs, emphasizing the fact that workplace literacy programs always should be customized to help workers improve the specific skills they need to do their job better. Have students list the kinds of skills upgrading they think would be useful to do their job better. Ask if any of the students would like to invite their employer to the class to discuss the possibility of setting up a workplace literacy program.

Resources List

1. Wallet Card, "Trabajador -- conozca sus derechos", CHIRLA
2. "Sueldo M'nimo, Tiempo Extra, y Otros Derechos en el Trabajo", Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. (Also English version).
3. "Como Archivar un Reclamo con el Comisionado Laboral", Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (Also English version)
4. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division Complaint Form
5. Sample check with check stub information

6. Resource Sheet #1 Work-Related Benefits and Deductions.
7. Resource Sheet #2 Hourly, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, and Annual Earnings Worksheet
8. Resource Sheet #3 An Individual worker's Earnings.
9. Resource Sheet #4 Piece Rate Earnings, Hourly, and Daily Earnings.
10. Immigration-Related Employment Discrimination: A Practical Legal Manual -- 3rd Edition, available from the National Immigration Law Center

Organizational Resources

1. **Employment Law Office**
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
1636 W. 8th St., Suite 313
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 389-3581
2. **U.S. Department of Labor**

Wage and Hour Division
3660 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 600
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(213) 252-7566
3. **CHIRLA, c/o United Way**

621 South Virgil Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90005
(213) 736-1324

Commercial ESL Textbooks

- Apply Yourself, English for Job Search Success, Longman
Unit 1, Getting Ready for Your Job Search
- How to Sell Yourself, VCA Publications
Chapter 4, Questionable Questions
- It's Up to You, Longman
Unit 1, Who Do You Think You Are?
- Job Search Education, Educational Design, Inc.
Part 2, Exploring What's Out There
- Money Management, Prentice Hall
Chapter 1, Tax Forms and Pay Checks

- More Than a Job, Readings on Work and Society, New Readers Press
Book, Audiotape and Teacher's Guide
- The Non-Stop Discussion Workbook, Newbury House
Unit 19, Into the Future
- People at Work, Pro Lingua Associates
Lesson 1, Freddy Gallagher, Bank Teller
Lesson 2, Dolores Silva, Co-Owner of a Small Business
Lesson 3, Neal Wade, Waiter
Lesson 4, Bertha Haynes, Elementary School Teacher
Lesson 5, Douglas Clegg, Folk Singer
Lesson 6, Helen Chandler, Volunteer
Lesson 7, Sam Adams, Industrial Engineer
Lesson 8, Rebecca Kraus, Assistant Dean of Students
Lesson 9, Tom Hyatt, Medical Intern
Lesson 10, Connie Snow, Building Contractor
Book and Audiotape
- Real Life Employment, Scholastic
Unit 1, Job Hunting; Unit 8, New Jobs/New Technology
- Work Tales, Globe-Fearon/Janus
"A Robot Instead"
"Fighting Words"
"Handle With Care"
"Help When Needed"
"The Rip-Offs"
"The Road to Somewhere"
- Work-Wise, Tactics for Job Success, Contemporary Books
Unit 7, Adapting to the Work World
- The Working Culture, Career Development for New Americans, Book 2, Prentice Hall Regents
Part 1, Making Decisions About Work: Chapter 1, What's Important to You in a Job?
Part 1, Making Decisions About Work: Chapter 2, Identifying Your Skills and Trying to Use Them in the United States
Part 1, Making Decisions About Work: Chapter 5, Factors in Choosing a Job
- Workplace Dynamics, SLRC Library
Unit 4, Company Benefits
- Workskills, Book 2, Prentice Hall Regents
Unit 9, Goal Setting
Book and Audiotape

- You're Hired, Book One: Charting Your Career Path, Contemporary Books

Unit 1, Values

Unit 2, Skills

Unit 3, Interests

Unit 4, Careers

- You're Hired, Book Two: Getting the Right Job, Contemporary Books

Unit 1, Information

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