

School: Return to Work
Course: Voices of the Workers
Faculty: Rosemary McKenzie-Ferguson, Founder, Craig's Table
Ryan Guppy, Director of Work Disability Prevention, Linea Solutions, Inc.

Summary

The course "Voices of the Workers," presented by Rosemary McKenzie-Ferguson and Ryan Guppy, centers on the crucial role of listening to and understanding the experiences of injured workers in the workers' compensation system. McKenzie-Ferguson, founder of Craig's Table and an advocate for injured workers, and Guppy, Dean of the School of Return to Work, share their insights into the often-overlooked voices of injured workers.

A key theme in the presentation is the importance of actively listening, hearing, and understanding the unique language and experiences of injured workers. McKenzie-Ferguson emphasizes that truly listening to a worker involves more than just hearing words; it requires paying attention to tone, body language, and context. For instance, she recounts an incident where a worker described their pain as "vacant," a term that was misinterpreted by a case manager. McKenzie-Ferguson stresses the need for deeper engagement to capture the full scope of an injured worker's experience.

The presentation underscores the emotional impact of workplace injuries, including feelings of fear, isolation, and being undervalued. Injured workers often feel like they are treated as just another case number rather than as individuals with unique needs and aspirations. Guppy and McKenzie-Ferguson discuss how fear can be paralyzing, causing workers to avoid asking important questions or expressing concerns. They advocate for a more empathetic approach where workers are seen and respected, which can lead to a significant positive shift in their recovery journey.

McKenzie-Ferguson also shares practical strategies for empowering injured workers. She highlights the importance of asking empowering questions such as "Where are you going?" and "What help do you need to get there?" These questions encourage workers to think beyond their current situation and envision a path forward. By giving workers permission to ask "Why?" they can begin to challenge the rigid, often impersonal processes of the workers' compensation system. This simple act can help workers reclaim a sense of control and agency.

Personalization and compassion are recurring themes. The presenters advocate for personalizing interactions with injured workers, including acknowledging their personal lives and significant events. McKenzie-Ferguson describes how remembering and

acknowledging personal milestones, like a child's birthday, can make injured workers feel valued and seen as more than just their injury. This approach can lead to building trust and creating an environment where workers feel safe to express their concerns and aspirations.

The course concludes with the idea that workers' compensation should be a collaborative and empathetic process, rather than a rigid system driven solely by regulations and compliance. By adopting a more human-centered approach, professionals can help injured workers transition from a state of feeling "broken" to a state of empowerment and self-advocacy. The ultimate goal is to foster an environment where injured workers are not defined by their injuries but are supported in their journey to recovery and finding a new sense of purpose.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of listening to the voices of injured workers in the workers' compensation system.
2. Recognize the emotional impact of workplace injuries on workers and how it affects their recovery journey.
3. Explore strategies to effectively communicate with injured workers to ensure their needs and concerns are heard.
4. Learn the significance of empathy and personalized support in helping injured workers transition back to work.
5. Identify methods for empowering injured workers to advocate for themselves within the workers' compensation system.

Primary Takeaways

1. Actively listening and understanding injured workers' experiences and language is crucial for their recovery and feeling of being seen.
2. Emotional reactions from workers stem from feeling unheard or undervalued, and addressing this can build trust and facilitate a smoother recovery process.
3. Personalized interactions, such as acknowledging the worker's family or sending a card, can significantly impact the worker's perception of the system and their own self-worth.
4. Asking empowering questions like "Where are you going?" and "What help do you need to get there?" can shift a worker's mindset from feeling broken to feeling capable and in control.
5. Fear is a major barrier for injured workers, often due to the confusing and rigid nature of the workers' compensation system. Compassionate communication can help alleviate this fear.

Course Outline

- 1) Introduction to the Workers' Compensation Experience
 - a) Background of Presenters
 - i) Ryan Guppy: Experience in vocational rehabilitation and return to work
 - ii) Rosemary McKenzie-Ferguson: Founder of Craig's Table, injured worker advocate
 - b) Importance of the Worker's Voice
 - i) Commonly missed elements in the workers' compensation process
 - ii) The impact of regulatory compliance on worker experiences

- 2) Key Aspects of Listening and Understanding Workers
 - a) Listening, Hearing, and Understanding
 - i) Importance of active listening to worker's words and non-verbals
 - ii) Example: Misinterpretation of a worker's pain description
 - b) Impact of Effective Communication
 - i) Building trust through empathy and personalized interactions
 - ii) Consequences of not feeling heard: emotional and psychological effects

- 3) Personalizing Worker Engagement
 - a) Beyond the Claim Number
 - i) Acknowledging personal aspects of the worker's life
 - ii) Methods for showing genuine concern (e.g., asking about family)
 - b) Changing the Worker's Mindset
 - i) Empowering workers through meaningful questions
 - ii) Shifting focus from limitations to possibilities

- 4) Addressing Emotional Reactions and Fear
 - a) Understanding Fear and Its Impact
 - i) The confusion and rigidity of the workers' compensation system
 - ii) How fear hinders the worker's ability to participate in their recovery
 - b) Strategies to Alleviate Fear
 - i) Clear communication and education about the process
 - ii) Creating a safe environment for the worker to express concerns

- 5) Empowering Workers Through Support and Advocacy
 - a) Asking the Right Questions
 - i) "Where are you going?" and "What help do you need?"
 - ii) Encouraging self-advocacy and self-discovery
 - b) Implementing Practical Support Measures

- i) Craig's Table initiatives: Certificates, self-empowerment tools
 - ii) Examples of successful empowerment leading to career transitions
- 6) Redefining Workers' Compensation
- a) Workers' Compensation as a Team Effort
 - i) Collaboration between all parties for the worker's benefit
 - b) Breaking Down Barriers
 - i) Shifting the perception of injured workers from "broken" to "capable"
 - ii) Building a more humane and supportive system

NOTE: Artificial Intelligence was used in the creation of this document.