

Ministers and Employers Luncheon
July 27, 2006
Draft Notes

Steve Jones, Red Petrovs made introductions
Clay Gilbert facilitated

Red presented information given by employers at two meetings regarding their experience with applicants' readiness to work soft-skills, hard-skills levels, drug screening, hiring from surrounding counties, etc.

Group was asked to review this information and give feedback:

-Minister- (Rev. Killian)- It used to be you didn't get hired if you were black, now you can't get hired if you've been to jail, but it's the same thing.

-Does anyone in here not hire felons?

-UGA (Sige Burden) has a policy that is set by the Board of Regents for all schools in the state system that it cannot hire felons. If someone is hired and then a felony is discovered on their record they are let go and their records are flagged so that they will not be rehired.

-Peter Van Brusselt - Because they produce pharmaceuticals that can be abused they cannot, Noramco, also said that it does not hire anyone with a felony record.

-Bart Freeman, Power Partners uses Flex Staff temp agency- they ask about convictions on applications and do a background check, but they look at the crime and how long it has been- they look at it case by case. They do not use race as a criteria. In fact, in the last 2 months they've hired 200 people (due to turn over), 85% of them are minority and a majority of those are black men.

-Power Partners did say that they had to go through 15 to 18 people to get 1 person- they look at GED, and use hiring tools like a test of work keys, and you have to pass a drug screen. On average 6 in 10 people fail the drug screen.

-Board Member of Athens Justice Project gave personal account of being a convicted felon who served his time but never "stopped paying" until he was given a chance. He said that you can't make it on \$6.50 an hour washing dishes your whole life and look in the mirror and have self respect if doors don't open. He has a family to support, he gives back to his community, and, because he was given a chance, he has a job that he has been able to advance in.

-Employer- Employers want to hire people like this Board Member, people who have changed their lives, but how do we figure out who has done that.

-Debra Gowen, ED of Athens Justice Project, cited data collected by the Presidential Community and Faithbased Initiative- the Prisoner Reentry Program that shows ex-offenders who are unemployed are 3 times as likely to re-offend vs. ex-offenders who are working with faith based and community based organizations whose results are almost unanimous in success. You can look at an applicant and say “what is their support network, are they in recovery?” and you will know more about that applicant than you do about the person who has no record.

-Dr. Washington, with New Grove Baptist, said that he works with several young men who ended up with felony records because they had to plea bargain because they couldn't afford representation. He asked if employers would partner with local churches and organizations like AJP to identify unemployed and underemployed parishioners that they are working with to create a pool of people for the employers to hire from. He will pull pastors together and they would “back” parishioners if the employers would give them the opportunity.

-Lewis Shropshire (Holiday Inn) said that his company was hungry for employees they don't have many to choose from. They would take a reference from Drug Court, a Faithbased Organization, a Probation officer, from anyone and it would be 1 more reference than most of the applicants come in with. They need workers so badly that they definitely don't discriminate on color of skin.

-Dr. Washington said this brought up another point he wanted to make- there is a problem with the level of basic education people have- high illiteracy. Partner with the churches to let them provide training- work keys, literacy skills, interview skills. Employers give the churches funds to do this training.

-Athens Regional Medical Center's Mr. Rivers is also a minister at Hill ST. Baptist and he agreed. He said that ARMC would participate with the ministers.

-Power Partners also said they would partner, but they want to see a strict structure and plan for supporting these applicants, not just giving them a letter to get the job, but through their working too. Said they had to change their payroll day from Thursday to Friday because 20% of their workforce just wouldn't show up the Friday after payday. It was really unfair to the 80% who do show up, but they had to do it.

-ARMC (Anne Young) wanted to add that they don't look at background until after offers are made as long as the applicant disclosed their conviction on their application they try to find an appropriate place.

-Kentrik's Livia Musso asked if the national rise in law suits filed by employees against employers for negligent hiring if something goes wrong on the job is happening locally too.

-Judge Jones said no, only in rare cases has it come up and the examples have been very obvious.

-Dr. Washington asked for Judge Jones' help in setting up a program and designing it so that it could track the people they put forward for employment to check attendance and really support them.

-McLane Southeast (Richard Boone) said that they spend \$5200 to train a person and would prefer to keep them- not have turn over.

-Delene Porter with Partners for Prosperous Athens added that employers use terms like lack of work ethic to describe poor attendance and lateness, but during Community Conversations she has heard that women truly are having to stay home with sick kids (there is no sick-child day care in town), other daycare issues, and transportation issues.

-Employer mentioned that employees are given a certain number of absences and that they don't come and talk to the employers until it's beyond the acceptable limit.

-Delene asked if this group could also look at a way to improve communication between employers and employees so that there would be open lines of communication when emergencies arise.

-ARMC's Mr. Rivers agreed that there are "work-life balance" issues that need to be addressed. Attendance and absence are their two biggest problems and that for legitimate reasons someone could rack up the "occurrences" quickly.

-Pastor Bolen from Milledge Avenue Baptist pointed out that we are still dancing around the way we see racial issues in this community. If 60% of incarcerated men are black in Georgia and 65% of the felons in Athens are black, the businesses may say that racial discrimination is not a practice they condone, it looks different from the other side of the table. Kids as young as Pre-K already have fatalistic attitude about their long term future. We need a strategy to deal with endemic poverty and deep fatalism- people realize or believe "why step up" when you can't get any where. We need to talk about racial issues because they are a component of poverty.

-Employer agreed that there is a generational problem. We have people who are adults who can't get into the system and a new generation age 0-6 that if the system doesn't get fixed they won't be able to get in when they reach the working age either.

-Employer- Power Partners - we have Partners in Education program starting at 6th grade to teach what employers will expect from them

-Gilbert- and teach hope.

-Jean Miller with Board of Education- said they do push for high expectations of their students.

-Employer- Power Partners -you have to be careful with the word discrimination. When an employee says that they've been discriminated against I immediately ask that they show me how they've been discriminated against rather than just having something negative happening to them.

-Employer- the problems start when children are born and they are difficult to change by the time they're old enough to work- broken families, hard to teach anyone you can't control.

-Kentrik's Tom Dillon (Attorney at Law) said we have to look at those statistics again because they do show discrimination. If Blacks are only 28% of Georgia's population and the represent 60% of the people with Felonies, that would make a black person twice as likely as a white person to be convicted of a felony. From his world travel and legal experience, no race is more likely to commit a crime than any other, but it may make you more prone to getting arrested.

-Kentrik's Musso said that this dovetails with poverty since we know that if you can afford an expert legal team you are less likely to get convicted.

-St Mary's Jeff English said that they have a core value of holding reverence for each person and they have a strong diversity initiative in hiring. Doing this is important.

-Judge Jones- we want to take care of the present workforce- PPA will commit the Workforce Sub-Committee to support ministers working with employers to help people have a chance to work. Who is willing to be a part of this? Wilson-ABH, Rivers-ARMC, Shropshire-Holiday Inn, English-St. Mary's, Washington-New Grove, Gowen- AJP, Freeman- Power Partners, Rev. Wills Stewart. Dr. Washington will get ministers together to discuss by August 28 PPA meeting.

Upcoming Meetings:

Monday, August 7 11:30 Minister's lunch at Holiday Inn

Monday, August 28 11:30 Ministers and Employers lunch at Athens Tech, Business and Industry Conf room A

Monday, August 28 5:30 Volunteer Fair at Clarke Central High School

Monday, August 28 7:00 PPA Community Meeting at CCHS (progress report will be presented)