









## Dr. C's Do's and Don'ts for Communications Aimed at Workers (Potential / Enrolled RETAIN Participants)



Based on an October 2019 analysis of state recruiting and enrollment materials by  
 Jennifer Christian, MD, MPH, FACOEM  
 Senior Advisor to ODEP RETAIN Team



 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p><b>PURPOSE / STRATEGY</b></p> <p>Do think of brochures as a way to ATTRACT workers to your program -- and PERSUASIVELY inform them about it – to increase the likelihood they will agree to accept your services (and participate in the study).</p> <p>Do think of brochures as an invitation to engage with you in an on-going relationship. The brochures will signal what that relationship will be like.</p> <p>Do make sure it is clear what the next steps will be. Also tell them how to contact you / find out more.</p> <p>Do make it easy for workers to say yes. Think of ways to simplify the process and eliminate every possible roadblock. Each extra “click”) reduces adherence.</p>	<p><b>PURPOSE / STRATEGY</b></p> <p>Don't underestimate the importance of having worker-oriented information about RETAIN services available to candidates— most importantly on paper and less critically on the internet – to support the referral and recruitment process.</p> <p><i>Don't use a generic brochure for both employers and workers, especially if it positions the info for employers first and for workers second.</i></p> <p><b>SENSITIVITY TIP:</b> The worker and employer are not always on the same page. Moreover, some people consider RTW the EMPLOYER's goal, not the worker's. Workers see their main priority as getting their WHOLE LIFE back to normal – which usually includes work.</p>
<p><b>UTILITY</b></p> <p>Do provide the recruitment staff as well as your referral sources (employers, insurers, and medical offices) with a</p>	<p><b>UTILITY</b></p> <p>Don't spend time and energy on brochures on general topics for</p>



 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>supply of worker brochures to hand out when making referrals and explaining why they did so. The brochure will make it easier for them to answer the worker's questions.</p> <p>Do encourage the worker to take the brochure home so they can use it to jog their memory if they say they need to discuss whether to participate with their family.</p>	<p>workers (or other parties) BEFORE you have a successful recruitment process going and workers engaged in your program</p>
<p><b>EMPHASIS OF MAIN MESSAGE</b></p> <p>Do put the worker's normal human concerns and worries in front.</p> <p>Do express an awareness of / compassion for the wide variety of reasonable and predictable concerns working people have when their lives and work have just been disrupted by a new or changed medical condition.</p> <p>Do name a few in the brochure to signal that awareness. The most common ones involve fear: of reinjury or of their pain, of being unable to meet job demands if they do go back to work, of the future, of not having enough money to buy food or pay the rent, of not knowing what is going to happen or what to do next, and so on.</p> <p>(At this point, most of them will think the main issue is medical, will still be actively receiving medical care and the extent of their recovery is still unknown. They are uncomfortable with symptoms, and are being</p>	<p><b>EMPHASIS OF MAIN MESSAGE</b></p> <p><i>Don't lead off with your research project.</i></p> <p><i>Don't describe the program using the same bureaucratic wording the RETAIN grant does.</i></p> <p><i>Don't use the phrasing used in other disability programs. (The RETAIN target population is NOT "people with a disability." It IS people who think of themselves as sick or injured. They are not looking at the world the same way the usual population of PWD is.)</i></p> <p><i>Don't presume they currently feel ready to and are eager to return to work.</i></p> <p><i>Don't imply that their main goal should be to SAW/RTW and stay employed. They may not currently feel they are well enough, may not believe work is safe and appropriate at this time, or may not even feel physically or emotionally ready to think and talk about it yet. Other issues are looming larger.</i></p>

 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>inconvenienced by not being able to do the things they want/need to do. They have put parts of life on hold while waiting to get better. The impact on many aspects of their everyday life may be significant –and uncertainty about the future may loom large.</p> <p>Do send a clear signal that you are willing to meet them where THEY are NOW (which will earn their trust) and help them deal with the WHOLE THING -- and simply subtly assume that SAW/RTW/finding another job or career will be part of that future.</p>	<p><i>Don't imply that you are only interested in and available to help them with SAW/RTW issues, or only medical and SAW/RTW issues.</i></p> <p>SENSITIVITY TIP: The ones at highest risk for a poor outcome may not currently feel they are well enough, may not believe work is safe and appropriate at this time, or may not even feel physically or emotionally ready to think and talk about it yet – because other issues are looming much larger.</p> <p>See separate list of typical / frequent wonderings, concerns, issues, and worries.</p>
<p><b>WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING</b></p> <p>Do offer things that the worker may see as valuable to them: access to a caring, helpful expert, and practical guidance and services.</p> <p>An appealing offer might be: “[a chance to receive] a free and helpful service. It is only available for a limited time because we have a grant. Those who receive services must agree to meet some requirements set by the funding agency.”</p>	<p><b>WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING</b></p> <p><i>Don't offer them a chance to “participate in research project.”</i></p> <p>How many workers in your target group would find this proposal attractive? <i>“an opportunity to be a research subject in a Federal government study which might or might not involve the subject receiving services.”</i></p>
<p><b>LOOK / STYLE / “FEEL”</b></p> <p>Do use easy to read fonts, simple words, and plain language.</p>	<p><b>LOOK / STYLE / “FEEL”</b></p> <p>Don't use <i>small font, long sentences, and fancy words like “detriment.”</i></p>

 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>Even people with limited interest or ability for reading should be able to get the message.</p> <p>Do use photographs to communicate empathy and create a positive emotional response to your program.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Portray their current distress: show a person with a new health problem (such as wearing or sling) who is feeling unsure (looking worried while holding paperwork).</li> <li>2. Portray a happy future that is their goal such as photos showing smiling workers at job and someone playing outdoors with kids or friends.). This nonverbally implies that's what your program will deliver.</li> </ol> <p>Do draw them towards to your program with a warm and caring tone that expresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- Your interest in what they, as an individual, are dealing with, and what their goals are.</li> <li>-- The benefits to them of "taking advantage" of your services – in various areas of life</li> </ul>	<p><i>Don't emphasize the association with government, especially the Federal government, since it makes many people wary.</i></p> <p><i>Don't waste your reader's limited interest /attention span by going into detail on research designs and the source of the funds.</i></p> <p><i>Don't have an coolly scientific, impersonal, just-the-facts tone to the materials</i></p>
<p><b>WORKER SAFETY AND AUTONOMY</b></p> <p>Do demonstrate trustworthiness and awareness of their reasonable concern for keeping their jobs by making it clear that they will be in charge and make the decisions. Say things like "we will work together with you to design a plan that works for you."</p>	<p><b>WORKER SAFETY AND AUTONOMY</b></p> <p>Don't forget to address the worker's reasonable concern that you might interfere in an already-fraught situation in a way that means they lose their job or benefits. <i>Don't send the message you'll "take over" the SAW/RTW process and handle the communications. Saying the wrong thing to the</i></p>

 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>Consider describing coordinators as guides.</p> <p>As an example, say you can prepare the worker for important conversations with their doctor or employer, or even do them together.</p>	<p>worker's doctor, employer, or insurance company might jeopardize the worker's benefits / reputation / job / livelihood.</p>
<p><b>CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN YOUR EXPERTISE</b></p> <p>Do position your team as experts in helping people deal with their current predicament. Point out that you have watched / helped hundreds or thousands of people recover and get their lives back on track -- so you know what needs to happen / how to help them / have resources at your fingertips.</p> <p>Do create confidence in your services by saying things like: "Studies have shown that people in situations like yours can really benefit from services just like the ones we are offering you. They feel better and focus on getting their everyday routines back to normal step by step – which keeps their spirits up. They lose less time from work and start feeling productive again --and they go back to getting a full paycheck sooner too. And because of all of those things, they are much less likely to lose their jobs and end up on the disability rolls."</p> <p>IMPORTANT TIP: As soon as possible, include brief testimonial quotations from workers who are satisfied with</p>	<p><b>CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN YOUR EXPERTISE</b></p> <p>Don't create uncertainty about whether your assistance will make a difference by describing the program as an attempt to improve strategies or to figure out what works best, e.g.,</p> <p>-- Don't say "<i>we are <b>looking for ways</b> to improve return to work outcomes</i>"</p> <p>-- Don't say this is "<i>a federally-funded initiative <b>exploring SAW/RTW strategies</b></i>"</p> <p>Don't start off by creating uncertainty about whether they will even get the service</p>

 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>your service. Research in persuasive techniques has shown that this type of “social proof” is very effective.</p>	
<p><b>EVIDENCE-BASED PERSUASION TECHNIQUES</b></p> <p>Do mention that the service is free – maybe even “an unusual opportunity because we were awarded this grant.”</p> <p>Do tell them the offer is time-limited. “This service is only available for a limited time.” Or we’re only taking new referrals for a limited time.” (Consider carefully; may be a two-edged sword if you create uncertainty that they can get everything they need.)</p> <p>Do offer EVERYONE at least a little thing THEY will value, which might simply be an informational brochure or a brief conversation with someone who is interested, will listen, and who cares – and is expert in the matter at hand.</p> <p>Do offer a life preserver by promising PRACTICAL help to the people most at risk for a poor outcome: those who are feeling uncomfortable and uncertain about their future, a bit lost in this unfamiliar territory and unsure whom to trust.</p> <p>Do offer a free sample during the interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Here’s what working together with me / us would be like.” then listen, pay attention, and ask what is important to them. Ask them what they miss most now,</li> </ul>	<p><b>EVIDENCE-BASED PERSUASION TECHNIQUES</b></p> <p>Don’t count on pent-up demand. (Those most in need of support don’t think now is the time to think about work. They don’t know what they don’t know about what is ahead of them!)</p> <p><i>Don’t list monetary incentives you will pay them first. And don’t use the word “incentive.”</i> These things imply that YOU think they require a monetary reward or even a bribe -- which casts doubt on the value of the program itself. Remember, the word “incentive” actually means ANYTHING that increases motivation. That said, monetary incentives are a good idea because they offset any financial burden or inconvenience and make it much easier for workers to say yes.</p> <p><i>Don’t use scare tactics as your primary persuasion technique.</i> Emphasizing the negative consequences of prolonged work disability (without any positive view of how to create a better future) may paradoxically make the workers at highest risk of a poor outcome even more likely to give up rather than reach out for help.</p>

 <b>DO - Desirable Feature</b>	 <b>DON'T - Undesirable Feature</b>
<p>while they are not working. Ask them why it is important for them to return to work. (They have probably not thought about these issues. Your questions will bring them to front of mind, which will give them higher priority.)</p> <p>Again, include brief testimonials from workers who were satisfied with your service. You don't have to wait for "success stories" per se. They can simply be a sentence expressing appreciation and gratitude for your kindness and helpful suggestions, etc. Research in persuasive techniques has shown that this type of "social proof" is very effective.</p>	