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>> HOST: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's webinar. My name is Jeremy, and I am a research associate at the American Institute for Research, and a member of the RETAIN TA team. Please feel free to ask questions. Before we start, I want to give a brief note about RETAIN. The Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network is funded by ODEP under the U.S. Department of Labor, a joint initiative led by ODEP in partnership with the Employment and Training and Social Security Administrations, through the work of eight state teams. RETAIN focuses on important return to work strategies. It is about helping people who become ill or injured to remain in the labor force.

Today we have two presenters, Leslie Dawson, the State Administrator of the Vocation and Rehabilitation Division, and Shara Kempster. I will ask them to introduce themselves.

>> Hi, it's great to be here with you. I'm the Leslie Dawson, State Administrator of the Business Relations Program in the State of Alabama and have spent a good part of 15 years doing job retention and return to work with individuals with disabilities and with the businesses who employ them. So, glad to be here with you guys today.

>> Good afternoon, I am Shara Kempster a human resources business partner at a plant in Alabama called PHIFER, Inc. We are a locally owned company that has plants and warehouses internationally. We are the world's largest producer of insect screening. And we have other products that we also manufacture. Our plant in Alabama employs about 1300. And with those 1300, about 575 fall under my branch of human resources. I spent most of my career in retail management. The past 18 years. And then about a year ago decided it was time for a change and came on board here at PHIFER. -- I have a boss that is very involved in workforce development. And so, I've been able to learn a lot. And I'm hoping that I can give you guys some insight around some things to help you as well.

>> We will get started. If anybody has any questions as we go along, feel free to put those in the chat and we will answer them as soon and quickly as we can. Today's webinar is going to highlight and provide information on several aspects of working strategically

with the business sector. So, some of the things that will be highlighted are focusing on the "gotta wanna" of return to work and stay to work, the reality of return to work and stay at work, providing what's in it for me for the employer and employee, and provide suggestions for building RETAIN partnerships with employers.

Our learning objectives are to first understand why an injured, ill, or disabled employee is hesitant to participate in the RETAIN program, discover the complicated facets of return to work and stay at work for employers, and gain insights and suggestions on recruiting RETAIN participants from the business sector. And we do have a question already. And that question is, does today's webinar address both non-occupational and occupational injuries. And the answer to that is yes. These will cover any of the injuries that occur.

So, to begin with, I'd like to start with a poll. So, we'd like to know where you have been getting your referrals from. So, we have healthcare/occupational health provider, marketing to the public via the email center, or media, through third-party providers or other providers such as short and long-term disability companies, or vocational rehabilitation, or from business and industry. We'll give a few more minutes for people to answer the poll.

Okay. So, what I'm going to assume here is that the majority of folks are getting referrals from the healthcare or the occupational health provider. That is probably part of the RETAIN grant or an additional, maybe, healthcare provider that they're

working with. So, our next poll when it comes to the referral sources, we would like to know, how have those recruiting efforts been working out for you? So, are they working out amazingly well, fair to partly cloudy, which in the South means average, has it been slow starting out but getting better, and is the effort there but the response is sorely lacking?

Okay. So, it looks like about average. And mainly slow starting out but getting better. And I think that has a lot to do with the grants being in the startup phase and moving forward from there. So, hopefully after today's webinar we'll be able to provide you with some additional insight and connections to some referral sources. Okay. So let's get started and talking about the "gotta wanna" of return to work and stay at work. One of the things that we use here at our agency, it's so much easier to work with somebody if they have the "gotta wanna" to work, or the "gotta wanna" to return to work or stay at work. The first thing I would like to do is revisit one of the data charts that was shown in a prior webinar.

And so for those of you that joined us in the previous webinar, about working with vocational rehabilitation services, you'll recall some of the data that was shared with you from Alabama's VR Retaining a Valued Employee program. I wanted to revisit the data chart quickly. As you can see with the data, the two highest referral sources over the past four years -- and I don't have 2019 up there, but it also

would go right along with the trend. But the two highest area are employee referrals and self-referred individuals.

And the data chart speaks to what we're going to be talking about, which is the "gotta wanna" of return to work and stay at work. In order for return to work and stay at work efforts to be truly successful, the main players in return to work and stay at work, which are the employer and the employee, have to want to return to work and stay at work, despite the obstacles that get in the way for an employer or for an ill, injured, or disabled employee. Our high number of referrals from employers and employees do not just happen by chance, nor did it happen overnight.

So as you'll see during this webinar, return to work and stay at work is not an easy process for an employer or employee, even as beneficial as it is. But our agency made a concerted effort to build our job retention program around the concerns and needs of businesses and the injured worker in order to make our program beneficial to the employer and the employee, and to facilitate retention. So, when we -- as we proceeded to do that, the first thing that we looked at were the needs of the business and the worker, and, again, what we refer to as the "gotta wanna".

It is a given that we all have will reasons for our actions. I doubt any of us act without a purpose, a result, or a payoff. When we talk about the "gotta wanna" of return to work and stay at work, that's what we're talking about. That is what are the motivating

factors that calls a participant to want to participate in return to work and stay at work. Now, there's all kinds of factors associated with the "gotta wanna" of return to work and stay at work, and depending on who you are within this process, your motivating factors will be different from other participating factors.

So, let's take a look at the "gotta wanna" of all of you as RETAIN grant recipients. Clearly the Office of Disability Employment Policy, ETA, Department of Labor and Social Security Administration saw the value of return to work/stay at work programs, or they would not have offered the opportunity to explore, implement and assess return to work and stay at work programs. And clearly each of you realized there was value on focusing on return to work and stay at work or you would not have spent the many hours and time formulating a program for which you submitted and received a grant.

So, the value or motivating factor of the RETAIN program for everybody is clearly stated in the grant RFP. And those are an increase in employment retention and labor force participation of individuals who acquire and/or at risk of developing work disabilities, and reduced long-term work disability among participants, including the need for federal disability benefits -- for example, Social Security disability and SSI. So each of you are attempting to increase employment retention, labor force participation, and the need to reduce federal disability benefits through the provision of comprehensive coordinated health and

employment-related services and supports that include early intervention and the coordination of health services and employment.

So, it's very valid that the "gotta wanna" for you guys is that you want to increase the workforce needs and reduce federal funds. However, your "gotta wanna" is very, very different from the key players in return to work and stay at work's "gotta wanna", and that is the employer and the employee. And this is where I think some of the struggle is coming when recruiting participants for your return to work and stay at work program. So I'm going to be a little blunt here.

I know I'm from the South and it's very hard for Southerners to be blunt, but I'm going to give it a try. So, return to work and stay at work for an employer and an injured, ill, or disabled employee has nothing to do with increasing a state's labor force participation or decreasing the need for federal disability benefits. And therefore, your RETAIN program must approach business and injured employees from their motivating reasons to participate in return to work and stay at work services.

Again, we all have our motivating factors, but these are not motivating factors for an employer and an employee. Knowing these motivating factors of the participant and the employer can greatly enhance conversations that your return to work coordinators can have with the employer or the injured, ill, or disabled employee in order

to get them on board with your RETAIN services and moving forward with successful retention outcomes.

So, let's take a look first at the employee's "gotta wanna", or their motivating factors for participating in your RETAIN program. So, the first is maintaining income level. Now, I think that this is kind of one of those things where you're like, we get that. But I think that it's important to keep in mind that the employee needs to maintain their income level because they have worked for a while, they've had a consistent salary, and they've used that income to purchase a house, a vehicle, maybe a boat, four-wheeler, depends on where you live, and to take care of a spouse, children, and just regular daily needs.

One of the most concerning issues for any injured worker is loss of income, even if the employer offers a short or long-term disability program. I highly encourage return to work coordinators to learn about the income levels that are associated with short-term disability and long-term disability, and the fact that most short or long-term disability policies pay only two-thirds of the income when someone goes onto long-term disability. And I think that it's important that return to work coordinators also learn about the aspect of short-term or long-term disability when it comes to the employment relationship with an individual who has gone out on long-term disability, because many times that employment relationship is terminated when that happens.

Employees may understand that an employer has a benefit -- a disability benefit and will offer short-term or long-term disability. But those employees do not understand the intricate components of that program. I have been in situations where when I brought up the point to an individual who was an employee and said if you go out on short-term disability or long-term disability, this is going to be the amount of income that you're going to get. And by the way, your employer will terminate your employment relationship with you. So if you're wanting to come back to work, your chances of getting back with the same employer are not very good.

And then also, bringing up the fact that in some states, if an individual does receive Social Security Disability Income, their long-term disability benefits are reduced by the amount of the Social Security Disability Income. So it's those sorts of conversations that are critical for a return to work coordinator to have with that injured, ill, or disabled employee that shows them that we understand you have an income level need, but these are the things you need to keep in mind if you're going to go out, or think it might be better to go out on long-term disability.

The other thing that is important to emphasize is that long-term disability usually only lasts two years before a third-party provider starts to really, for lack of a better term, bombard, because that's the word that was given to me by some employees. But the third-party starts to bombard them to return to any kind of job. And it's at that

point that they wish they would have retained their job with their previous employer. So those are great conversations to have upfront. The other thing is that they would want to stay at work in order to maintain or improve their skills.

With today's WIOA, Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, I know I'm speaking to the choir here, with all of the focus on additional training and employers are taking advantage of funds to help up-skill their workforce, if somebody were to be able to stay in the workforce, they're going to be able to improve their skills and maintain their current skills by continuously doing the job. And then last but not least is the psychological and social benefits of staying at work. What is that question that everybody is asked when we first meet somebody, or we're coming into a group to meet somebody for the first time?

They're going to ask, what kind of work do you do? So the psychosocial benefits of staying at work are definitely a motivator for an employee to continue to work. The last big motivator that's actually not on the slide, but I think is very important to mention, because we are specifically talking about partnering with businesses, is that if you are partnering with a business to identify participants for your RETAIN program, one very important motivator is that the business is leading the referral process. And when a company tells an employee, "I would like for you to meet with this group or this program," or "Our company is working and partnering

with this RETAIN program, and I need you to meet with them and, kind of to follow through with what they're saying," your participation rate will skyrocket to almost 100% if it's coming from the employer.

So that in and of itself is a very motivating factor for an employee to continue with retaining a job. So at this point in time, I'd like to take a look at the employer's "gotta wanna" for stay at work and return to work and what their motivating factors are. I've asked Shara to talk with us about some of the experiences that they have had and let us hear first-hand from an employer as to what is the motivating factor for them to participate or to emphasize return to work and stay at work. So, Shara, I'll turn it over to you.

>> SHARA: Thank you, Leslie. So, very valid points from the employee perspective of the "gotta wanna" part of, either returning to work or staying at work. But you really have to look at it also from the employer's aspect, because the bottom line is, we're here to operate a business and to make money. And so you have to speak to your employers in terms of how this is going to benefit the employer. So if we look at this slide, we talk about reducing cost associated with disability-related leave.

So, the lost time of the employee can be from the aspect of the employer when it comes to, ... we consider that all of our employees are valuable, their skills are valuable to us. So that lost time can be a major hit for us. Also, looking at your turnover cost. If that employee does not return to work then we have to look at things like

hiring another employee, training that new employee. And from a recruiting aspect the biggest thing that we run into in just this day and age, finding willing and able bodies that are -- have the desire to come to work and want to be an integral part of a team.

And with those employees that we have who have sustained injuries, we already have that in them. So why would we not want to do what we can to try to accommodate and retain them? And then as Leslie spoke to, the short-term disability and long-term disability cost of it. So, from an employer aspect, we understand what those costs can mean to a business. But as she spoke, also making sure that the employee understands the logistics of those. The maintaining of production levels of a company -- this is huge.

And in my business, because we are -- we run our plant 24 hours a day. So, if we have a person out due to injury, then that's obviously going to hinder our production levels, our production speed, whether we are getting the end product to the customer on time. So there's just an array of issues that run into that. And then also, just complying with disability-related legislation. So, from my aspect, one of the things is just making sure that the employer understands the value of being able to have that employee return to work or stay at work.

You have to be able to show them that when you retain this employee, all the things listed on this slide are going to be able to -- things that are going to be able to add value back to your

company. And then also, seeking the employer's input. I know that, there's a lot of different aspects from the healthcare perspective and other perspectives that you can look at when looking at this program. But really, you have to find out from your employer, seek their input, what are they looking to accomplish, what can you help them with.

Also, making sure -- we're going to go over a slide in a little bit. But making sure that they're aware of the resources that are available to them, and that they're not going to walk through this process alone. There's going to be someone who helps them through this process. Also, making it convenient for them. I often joke that I am the busiest person in HR. But everybody in the HR department feels that way. So you've really got to make it convenient for that employer, make it easy for them to be a participant in a meeting.

Maybe it's not necessarily a person-to-person meeting. Maybe you create some type of conference call or webinar like we're doing today. Anything that you can do to make it more convenient for them. As employers, especially in human resources, we're under time constraints. You want to keep that in mind when you're working with the employer. Like I said, this is so valuable. I have seen first-hand how valuable this is to us, especially from a perspective of this employee had the skill, the knowledge, and the abilities before they were injured.

And after injury, they still have that knowledge and those skills. We just may have to adapt to what their ability is now. And I have been able to see first-hand -- have an employee who has a long-term injury. And we were able to retain him as an employee through working with ADRS and being able -- for them to come in and create accommodations that help him continue to do his job. And what I found in these cases is that these employees want to come back to work. It's not a question of, their willingness. Most of the time they're willing.

They just have to understand the how of how they're going to be able to come to work. And the employer plays a key point in that process to be able to show them that we're here for you, we're going to work alongside of you. So it's really important that you get the employer's buy-in when it comes to this process. Leslie, I'm going to turn it over to you.

>> LESLIE DAWSON: Thank you, Shara. I absolutely agree. And what you -- the last thing that you said about the importance of getting the employer's buy-in. And feel free to correct me if I'm wrong, but when it boils down and it comes down to staying at work, or returning to work, it's really the employer's ultimate decision.

>> SHARA: It is.

>> LESLIE DAWSON: So there's no way -- and this is just my opinion -- but there is almost no way to facilitate return to work or stay at work without that employer's involvement.

>> SHARA: Yeah. It's definitely a key component.

>> LESLIE DAWSON: Thank you, thank you. So, when we talk about motivation for employers, then we have to also look at the reality of stay at work and return to work for an employer and for an employee. And I'm sure you've all heard the saying that reality is in the eye of the beholder. And although there are motivating factors for employers and the injured or disabled employee to participate in return to work or stay at work, there are actually even more reasons why they are hesitant to participate. I'd like for you to take a close look at the picture on the slide.

This is a picture of a bridge that seems to just end in the middle of the sky. Now, I actually took this picture during spring break in March of this year. We were in Florida and it was early morning and the fog was still lingering. And we came up over a hill, up over an incline. And all of a sudden, the bridge just ended in mid-air. And when you're driving at 70 miles an hour, and you come over the hill and see that the bridge in front of you just ends, well, it is very disconcerting. And although we know that there was a complete bridge there -- we just drove back over it the other way the day before -- we knew that we needed to stay the course.

And that was the correct thing to do. But the struggle to move forward at that particular time was very real. It was just the most unusual feeling ever. And I think that's how it is for the business. They know they need to do return to work. They know they need to do

stay at work because there's motivating factors. There's financial benefits of doing it. But the struggle to actually move forward with this is real. And as you learn the struggles and the risk, for lack of a better term, that a business may face, you can then overcome those risks or those objections in order to bring that employer on board with the RETAIN program, and same thing with the employees.

If you know what their risks or their objections might be, you can overcome that and then encourage them to not only participate, but to continue and to stay participating within the RETAIN program. So, let's look at the employer's return to work and stay at work reality and I'll turn this over to Shara.

>> SHARA: Thank you. So, looking at what the reality is for an employer, and things that we definitely have to keep front of mind are employment laws such as FMLA, OSHA regulations, Americans with Disabilities Act amendments, workers compensation, and then the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act. So, when we're talking about, the employee coming back to work, these are all things that as an employer, we have to think about.

The second point is reinjury resulting in workers comp claims. I can say personally, this is a big one for myself. Just thinking through, when we bring this employee back, are the accommodations going to help not to reinjure them or to have more complications with their current injury. So that's a reality that we have to face and think about. And, working with ADRS and the ergonomic engineers who

will walk you through the process of making those accommodations, it puts your mind at ease that the right accommodations are being put into place.

And then thinking about healthcare providers, working against the return to work, stay at work. That's something that employers have to face. And we have to work with the healthcare provider as far as whether the employee is under restrictions or if they have certain guidelines that they have to follow. That's definitely something that we have to think about and make sure that we are adhering to.

As an employer, we are unsure how to accommodate them. And I think that is what you have to make sure that your employers know is, it's not up to them. It's not that weight of that, and not falling solely on their shoulders. They can work hand in hand with their local, vocational rehab, ADRS office to make sure that the correct -- like I said, the correct accommodations are being put into place. I see there's a question from Chris. You mentioned that the employer's involvement is necessary, but some workers have indicated a concern that their employer finds out they are participating in this type of program. Any suggestions for addressing this?

That's a great question, Chris. So, I think how you can kind of ease their hesitation about involving the employer, especially if it is a nonoccupational injury, is just making sure that they know that their employer has bought into the process, making sure that

they know that they are a valuable asset to their company, they've gained the skills, the training, the knowledge that that company needs. And as employers, I mean, retention is number one on our list. We don't like turnover. We want to see that percentage as low as possible. And so you have to make sure that from the employee's aspect, that they understand that they're a valuable asset to the company and that the company is going to be willing to work with them and help them out.

And I know that, we run into cases where that may not necessarily be true. And it may be a little bit harder to get that employer's buy-in. But for the most part, I can say that we want to retain our employees as much as possible. And maybe it's not that they can go back to the exact job that they were in previously, but with them having working knowledge of the company, and the company's, culture and the processes, then more than likely there may be somewhere else, another job that they could be an asset to in the company. Leslie, is there anything that you'd like to add to that?

>> LESLIE DAWSON: I think that absolutely you hit on that. And that's why I think it's important for the RETAIN programs to target employers, because that does immediately support the value that retention brings to the employer and to the employee, that it is a valuable asset. And also, it will encourage that open communication for somebody who would not want to disclose. Now, if you're looking at getting participants without that partnership with a business,

one thing that knowing what the employer's reality is around return to work and stay at work will help you to better prepare and will help you better support the employee who does not want their employer to know about their injury or illness, because you can then say well, this is going to be important to your employer.

And this is how you can overcome what a potential objection would be for that employer. And so it's still good to know, if you don't have that close working relationship with that employer, that you can still help the employee know how to respond and how to approach the employer without fully disclosing or having to form a partnership or relationship on the business end of things. And that kind of leads into the employee's reality when it comes to return to work and stay at work. And this, Chris, does talk to some of the other concerns that may come up with participants.

So the first thing is disclosure. Should I disclose to my employer that I have an injury or an illness, or a disability that is impacting my ability to perform the essential functions of a job. And some of the concerns, naturally, that employees are going to have is, if I disclose that I'm having problems, will that automatically result in disciplinary action, or maybe I'm going to be demoted, or maybe I'm not going to have an option to be promoted in it the future, or maybe it may even end in termination.

So, whereas an employer is very well-aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the nondiscriminatory aspect of that act, an

employee is not as aware. And so they are going to have these natural concerns and fears when it comes to any possibility of disclosure occurring if you don't already have that established working relationship with that business to where the business is just referring people to you. If you've got an individual that's been referred to you from perhaps a healthcare provider and they don't want their employer to know.

Then these are some of the reasons why they may not continue to participate or choose not to participate in the first place. And so if you can maybe educate them about the Americans with Disabilities Act and educate them on how they can approach their employer to ask for a reasonable accommodation. Do they need a reasonable accommodation? Those are the sorts of discussions to have. Another reality for an employee is, again, kind of going back to well, there's short-term disability and long-term disability benefits. So perhaps I can do without that little difference or big difference, depending on, somebody's bills or living arrangements.

But dealing with that difference in income. And without as much income, what gets cut off first? What does somebody cut back on first? And those are those going and doing and being out there and enjoying things in the community, because that cost money. So they're going to cut that out. And to then comes in lack of socialization. And then from that is lack of activity. And then from there comes a worsening condition. So the fear is if I disclose to my employer, or if I have

an injury or an illness and I have to go out on short-term disability or long-term disability, I am going to lose income. And, therefore, it's just going to snowball into my condition worsening because I'm not at work, and continuously having that level of activity I would normally have if I'm working.

So another reality is the supervisor or the coworker conflict. One of the issues we see, or I see when I'm working with an individual, is what is my supervisor -- are they going to be upset because maybe I have to do a task differently? Or I'm asking for an accommodation and it puts extra work on my supervisor. Or perhaps my coworkers are going to think I'm getting special treatment and various things like that, so they may choose not to move forward with any kind of services to assist them in retaining or staying at work.

And ultimately, it will eventually get to the point where they will lose their job if there's not intervention, and early intervention as well. And then last but not least, when we come back to disclosure, we look at their fear of lack of confidentiality. And will that diagnosis follow them, whether it's within that company, or if they move on to a different company or business. There's that fear that the next employer, the next department is going to know about their disability. So again, these are just pointing out some fears and concerns. And if you can create conversations, or programs, counseling resources to help overcome the concerns of the employee or the employer, you will be better-prepared to be more receptive

in meeting those needs of both of the participants so that you can ensure participation and long-term participation within the program.

So, let's move on to talk about strategies to strengthen RETAIN and your business connections. So, we've kind of talked about the fact that there's some motivating factors. There's also some risk involved. But there is absolutely good news on the horizon, as Shara shared with us. This is a valuable service to businesses. And they do want to retain their workers. So when we talk about convincing an employee to participate in a RETAIN program, we want to look at what's in it for me. So if you look at that employee and you're like, what are the benefits for that employee to participate in this program?

So we look at the fact that through your return to work coordinators, you're providing an outside support mechanism. So the case manager is not an agent of the employer. It is a safe place for that employee to go to talk and to discuss what their needs are and to be open about their concerns without it getting back to the business. And that's a huge safety mechanism for that employee. It's also a resource for accommodations, modifications, and personal use items. A lot of employees say I know if I had an accommodation, I could do this job, I just don't know what's out there and available.

So you can be a resource for that for the employee. It absolutely helps that employee maintain their socioeconomic status. It also helps them maintain that skill level and even improve skill levels,

especially if they're looking at having to go into a different type of position. Perhaps you can partner with the career centers or vocational rehab to provide training funds to help them improve their skills as well. And then last but not least, it does reduce the chances of declining due to that illness or injury, and also becoming dependent on pain medications.

Because if they're working, they're not able to take the opioids and high-level pain medications. So it absolutely reduces dependency on that. And so I'll let Shara speak to the -- providing the what's in it for me for the employer.

>> SHARA: All right. So, from the employer aspect of what's in it for me, the fact that the employer gets an independent case management service. And then that in turn gets better support from healthcare practitioners because they have that relationship with the healthcare provider. They are able to work independently to utilize resources, to manage the accommodations piece of it. So the employer -- that's something valuable for them, to know that that is available. Also, the resource for accommodation/modification assessments. So, that goes back to utilizing a rehab engineer, a case manager to be able to work with -- hand in hand with that employee to determine what those accommodations need to be for that employee to return to work.

And I will say from this perspective, when it comes to the individual employee, they need to have feedback in their

accommodations. They need to be able to say yes, this will work, no, this won't work. I mean, we're talking about employees who have been in this job. They have been doing this job for some time. So they know best as far as what might be an accommodation that will be feasible for them to do or what may not be feasible for them to do. And then that gives the employee more buy-in, also. Avoid replacement and training cost of hiring a new employee. That's just reiterating that retention piece.

You're able to retain that employee who already has the skills and knowledge, who is able to come back to work and provide the job that they were doing. Then that's an added benefit for the employer. Reduces the chance for permanent disability. So, permanent disability costs the employer. And so any way that we can help avoid that is a benefit to us. Increases morale within the company. This is something big, especially for my company. We have employees here who are 30, 40, 20-year plus employees.

And they're the majority. So, knowing that we want to retain those employees and that we're doing everything we can to get them back to work helps to increase the morale within our company. And then the return to work coordinator, they help to --showing the employer that they help to coordinate anything that needs to be done to get that employee back to work. And then also letting them know that there is continued follow up after that. These are great. If I had to sum it up all into one slide, this would be it.

Take this, utilize this information, because I really think that you can provide an employer this information alone to show them the value that the RETAIN program will be for them. And then we had a question from Ron. Some of the employee what's in it for me would only apply to the treatment group. What is the what's in it for me for the control group? Does your control group feel cheated for not receiving the help? So, Leslie, can you answer that question for him?

>> LESLIE DAWSON: Sure. And I'll do the best that I can, Ron, because I'm not 100% familiar with how you guys are doing your research aspect. I think what it would fall -- kind of come down to is, do you have a set of services that you're providing across all groups? And then provide enhanced services for the treatment group. And you have to kind of identify what's in those enhanced services, whether it be -- maybe more access to modifications or accommodations in the treatment group. And maybe more information resource for your control group.

I definitely think that you have to have a balance there to where you don't have your control group feel cheated, because -- and again, sometimes I'm just too blunt. But I'll put it out there. This is the person's job. So we have to help maintain that person's job. And when you're working with an employer, they're going to want the same treatment for every employee. Now, that may totally throw a wrench in the research aspect of the RETAIN grant, but I think that there

is a workaround. I think that there is a way that you could say, okay, for the control group, maybe the employer focuses more on an aspect.

And then for the treatment group, the return to work coordinator would focus more on a particular aspect. I think that would maybe be more of a community of practice opportunity for more discussion around that. But that's an excellent, excellent question. So, when we talk about building partnership with employers, just down to our last couple of points to make, if you're interested in outreaching to an employer and you're kind of wondering where I get started, who do I go to within a company, some of the divisions or departments within a company that would be good to target would of course be your occupational health departments.

And I think you guys may have a good understanding of that. But also looking at going to your safety officers. Definitely the human resource office, employee relations department, anybody that's involved with their risk management, benefits, ADA coordinator. Shara, do you have any other suggestions on how do you actually get your foot in the door with that employer? How would you approach an employer?

>> SHARA: I think it just goes back to what I said about one valuing their input. But to get your foot in the door, just being accommodating to their time schedule, how they're going to be available to you, whether it's in person or through a conference call. So, just showing that you can be accommodating to their time

constraints. I think that would be the easiest way. And definitely through HR. I would start there for sure.

>> LESLIE DAWSON: Very good. Absolutely. So, the last thing when you're looking at your partnership with an employer, some important things to keep in mind is that when it comes to job retention, rapid response is critical. So, the majority of -- I think the people in the RETAIN programs are state employees. I'm a state employee. And we tend to be a bit slow at times. But businesses operate literally at the speed of light. So we have to be willing to do quick turnaround to provide rapid response.

If we get a referral, we respond immediately, especially if that referral comes from a business. When somebody's job is in jeopardy, if early intervention is not part of that particular employee's referral, you really have to respond quickly. You have a little bit more time if the person has been referred to you at the very onset of an issue. But the majority of the time when you start marketing or talking to the employers about a RETAIN program, they're going to start hitting you with some of their most significantly volatile cases.

So you still have to have that rapid response. It's important that you are able to speak the language of business. You need to know what LTD, STD, long-term disability and short-term disability, occupational language is for these companies. They don't need to learn our language, we need to learn theirs. Again, be responsive.

That kind of goes along with the rapid response. You need to be an expert on ADA and accommodations, because businesses are going to look to you, as Shara said earlier that they love the assistance with the accommodations.

It keeps all the weight from being put on their shoulders for having to come up with an accommodation. But we also have to be cognizant of those essential functions of the job so that we're not misleading that employer into an area that they should or should not be addressing according to ADA. You want to make sure that you're learning that company's job, learning their culture, you're learning the environment, because there's a lot that goes into job retention than just the doctor said they're released to return to work. Well, what is their work, what is their job, what are the essential functions of their job?

You have to really get in and learn those particular jobs. And then last but not least, be willing to educate the employer staff on what do you guys mean by early intervention, at what level should somebody be referred to you. Maybe they are a smaller employer and are not familiar with the reasonable accommodation process, because that needs to be put in place. Just because an employee is working with the RETAIN program doesn't mean that they automatically get an accommodation. So that process needs to be put in place.

And then last but not least, offer some disability-specific training, etiquette, awareness. When you come into a company with

a program like RETAIN there will be a lot of hype and excitement about it. But there will also be some concern about how do I now have a conversation with somebody who I know has a disability now, or someone who has disclosed a disability, or they're coming back to work and maybe it's awkward. So how do we have these conversations and kind of open up that atmosphere to be more accepting of an open illness, injury, or disability within the workplace.

So, Shara, anything to add to that?

>> SHARA: I think that that pretty much covers it. Anytime that we've had these cases, the vocational rehab, ADRS has been so accommodating. And I think just getting that point across to the employer that they're very accommodating, they work with your schedule. They're not overly emailing you or calling you. They keep it to what the points that they need to know, even when they come out to analyze the job. I've walked out on a plant floor with them and gone through, the job responsibilities, the essential functions of the job.

And they've just been so accommodating. So I think if you can just hit on those bullet points of what the value is for the employer and then be accommodating to their schedule, I think that like I said, businesses want to retain their employees, so I feel like they would be open to that.

>> LESLIE DAWSON: Thank you. So, that is the conclusion of today's webinar for me and for Shara. So, does anybody have any last

questions that we can answer for you? And if you have questions afterwards, you certainly have your TA state assigned folks, so please reach out to them and I know that they will be happy to assist in any way.

>> JEREMY: Hi, everyone. I know we are at time, but if you could fill out the survey, the link in the presentation is live. If you could give us your feedback, that would be great. I'm also pasting a link into the chat here. And one more thing. ODEP and SSA invite you to a webinar, Reflecting, Refining, and Refreshing RETAIN, on Monday, December 16th at 2:30 through 3:30 eastern time. So, please join us for that as well. And with that, that will conclude our webinar today. Thank you very much for joining us. We appreciate it.

(Session concluded at 2:02 p.m. CT)

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