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Workers Want Jobs, but Seven Barriers are in Their Way.

An Express Employment Professionals White Paper

“In a growing economy, it can be easy to forget about those who are unemployed. Like everyone, they want to work, but there are seven barriers that stand between them and a regular paycheck.”

—Bob Funk, Founder, CEO and Chairman of the Board
Express Employment Professionals

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ROADBLOCKS TO OPPORTUNITY

Barriers to Work and Employment



People Want to Work, but There are Seven Barriers in Their Way.

Unemployment is reaching new lows in America,¹ and it is easy to overlook those Americans who are still on the sidelines. They want to work but are unable to secure a job. The headlines hide the struggles of millions of families who feel they're down and out and a deeper look reveals seven barriers to employment that might be standing in their way.



—The New York Times, June 2, 2017

There are 6.6 million people officially counted as “unemployed” by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).² Another 5.1 million people say they want a job but are no longer counted as part of the labor force because they haven’t looked for a job in a month.³ Despite the low unemployment rate of 4.1 percent, the labor force participation rate, which is a better measurement of the active workforce, is still a stubborn 62.7 percent.⁴ For one reason or another, such as the belief there is no work for them or their inability to apply for or keep a job, they have stopped looking regularly.

America has plenty of job openings. According to the BLS, 6 million jobs remain unfilled⁵ and Express Employment Professionals alone had 13,000 openings to fill across the country in January 2018. Something is stopping people from working.

6.6 MILLION

people counted as “unemployed” in America

5.1 MILLION

additional people who want a job but haven't searched in a month

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics⁶

THE SEVEN BARRIERS

Drawing from the real-life experience of Express owners and the companies they serve, Express has identified seven common barriers to employment. These are the challenges that too many Americans face. For those who have quit looking for work, these can be hard to overcome, at least without help.

- 1** TRANSPORTATION
- 2** CHILD CARE
- 3** ELDER CARE
- 4** JOB TRAINING
- 5** DRUG USE AND DRUG TESTING
- 6** CRIMINAL RECORD
- 7** COMMUNICATION ISSUES



Express Employment Professionals was founded on giving hope through jobs that help people provide for their families and giving peace of mind to employers in need of talented workers. Hope Through Employment is our year-long exploration of how great jobs impact the more than 800 communities we serve throughout the U.S. and Canada.



TRANSPORTATION

There are few things as frustrating as being able to work, knowing there are available jobs, and having no way to get there. The distance between home and work can be insurmountable if a job seeker does not have a car and the workplace is not accessible by public transportation. It is an afterthought for so many workers, but for some of America's most eager job seekers, this is a regular barrier to steady employment.

In a survey fielded by Express, 12 percent of businesses said transportation issues had stopped job applicants from accepting jobs at their companies.⁷

Deb Gray, an Express owner in the Pittsburgh area, estimates about half of the time an applicant turns down a job, it is due to transportation issues.

Reid Bates, an owner of Express offices in Olympia, Centralia, and Aberdeen, Washington, reports, "Our local transit authority does not have a bus route to a significant employment zone. We've told associates we can't send them to work in that zone if they don't have their own transportation. This happens a few times per week."

Transportation needs have led staffing professionals, businesses and community members to take matters into their own hands.

Gray reports her office bought a bike for one job seeker so he could get to and from work. They paid for auto repairs for another when he had car trouble during the holidays.

John Calabrese, an Express owner in Utica, New York, says they've turned to ridesharing companies.



"In my market, we would greatly benefit from more assistance when it comes to transportation. Approximately 60 percent of my workforce has to commute 45 minutes to reach our jobs and reliable transportation seems to be their biggest barrier to employment with us. This segment of my workforce would benefit greatly from some type of subsidized van pools."

—Yvonne Rockwell, Owner, Express Employment Professionals, Santa Clarita, CA

"We have utilized ridesharing quite a bit in our area to assist workers in getting to job interviews, as well as to get them started in positions until they can secure reliable transportation," he said. "It's an affordable option that gives workers a chance to get started. We also set up carpool teams and study the bus routes so we can give workers options to overcome this barrier to employment."

More robust public transit in many cities would help solve this problem. But if jobs are located in remote areas and job seekers can only reach the location by car, they will often find themselves out of luck, and there may be little that can be done from a public policy standpoint.

Transportation issues affect more than just short-term job prospects. Harvard researchers have found that commuting time has the biggest impact on determining upward social mobility.⁸



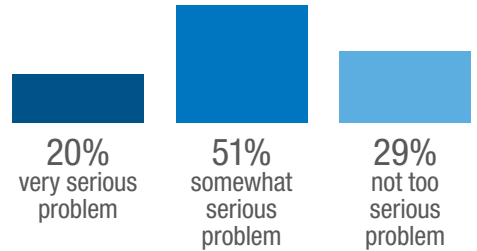
CHILD CARE

For working parents, a job is essential to providing for their children, but the rapidly rising cost of child care can put them in an impossible bind. They can go to work and incur a hefty new bill or stay at home and have limited resources to provide the essentials. In many cases, the breakdown of the traditional family model has led to situations that defy any easy solution.

Today, almost two-thirds of children either have a working single parent or two parents who both work outside the home, meaning they must rely on some form of regular, outside child care.⁹ When a parent is trying to head back to work for the first time in a while, child care can be an even more daunting challenge. It is expensive in almost any case, but it is even harder to foot the bill if the parent has not had a steady source of income.

Indeed, almost one-third of parents who pay for child care say that it has caused a “financial problem,” according to a study from NPR, Harvard and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.¹⁰

Thirty-one percent (31%) of parents who pay for child care say it’s posed “financial problems.” Among those, 71 percent say the problem is “very serious” or “somewhat serious.”



Source: NPR, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation¹¹

“The big factor is that most families are now either dual income or single-parent homes, so the majority of families need some kind of child care support system. Often, people are locked into needing a very specific schedule or set of hours that will work with their child care options.”

—David Robb, Director of Marketing, Express Employment Professionals, Grand Rapids, Michigan



Even with a job, families will often find that professional child care is out of reach. Infant child care can cost \$10,000 a year on average, which is just under 20 percent of the median family income of \$55,000¹². With costs like that, families have to depend on relatives or friends who may have unreliable schedules or limit themselves only to the jobs with the most flexible hours.

Once a working parent has secured a job, there’s no guarantee child care will not re-emerge as an issue that threatens their job security. The NPR/Harvard study also found that three-fourths of working parents had to miss work due to a sick child, and about half said it had an impact on their job. Lower income parents are even more likely to see their jobs affected.¹³ Additionally, with budget constraints forcing some school districts across the country to consider transitioning from five-day to four-day weeks, working parents may also be faced with missing work if they cannot secure or afford an added day of child care.¹⁴

It’s not just women who face this challenge, though they are disproportionately burdened.

“We have recently seen a trend in men not taking jobs or losing jobs due to child care issues,” said Ronnie Morris, an Express owner in western Tennessee. “We have always had women lose jobs over this issue, but just recently we are seeing more men facing the same predicament.”



ELDER CARE

With Americans living longer, more adults are finding themselves taking care of aging parents. And with Americans staying in the workforce longer, that means many have to balance the demands of holding down a job while caring for mom or dad—and, in some cases, covering the additional living expenses.

Just as their children leave the house, middle-age workers are becoming caregivers for parents, putting demands on their schedule and limiting the kinds of jobs they can easily accept. And, as Baby Boomers get older, they, too, are likely to depend on their children for care and attention.

Medicare and most private insurance plans are not designed to cover long-term care, so families that neither qualify for Medicaid, nor can afford large medical bills, have few options but to provide that care themselves.¹⁵



“Aging parents (Baby Boomers) will continue to trend upward.”

—Reid Bates, owner,
Express Employment Professionals,
Olympia, Centralia, and Aberdeen, Washington

“The danger of losing one’s life savings to long-term care may be the first challenge families face as their parents and grandparents age, but it isn’t the only one. As 76 million baby boomers creep into retirement, America’s system of looking after its old folks faces a broad, multi-pronged crisis. From senior living centers to hospice, the country is struggling to adapt a rickety system to handle the demographic wave that is crashing over it. At stake are the health, wealth and dignity of a generation.”

—TIME¹⁶

Elder Care and Work

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, “More than 1 in 6 Americans working full-time or part-time report assisting with the care of an elderly or disabled family member, relative, or friend.”

Excerpted from the Family Caregiver Alliance:

- 70% of working caregivers suffer work-related difficulties due to their dual roles. Many caregivers feel they have no choice about taking on caregiving responsibilities (49%).
- 69% of working caregivers caring for a family member or friend report having to rearrange their work schedule, decrease their hours or take an unpaid leave in order to meet their caregiving responsibilities.
- 6 out of 10 caregivers (61%) experience at least one change in their employment due to caregiving, such as cutting back work hours, taking a leave of absence or receiving a warning about performance/attendance, among others.

Source: Caregiver.org¹⁷



JOB TRAINING

For years, Express has sounded the alarm about the mismatch between the skills required by jobs that are in demand and the skills possessed by people who need jobs. That mismatch hasn't gone away; if anything, it's gotten worse as the pool of potential workers has shrunk.

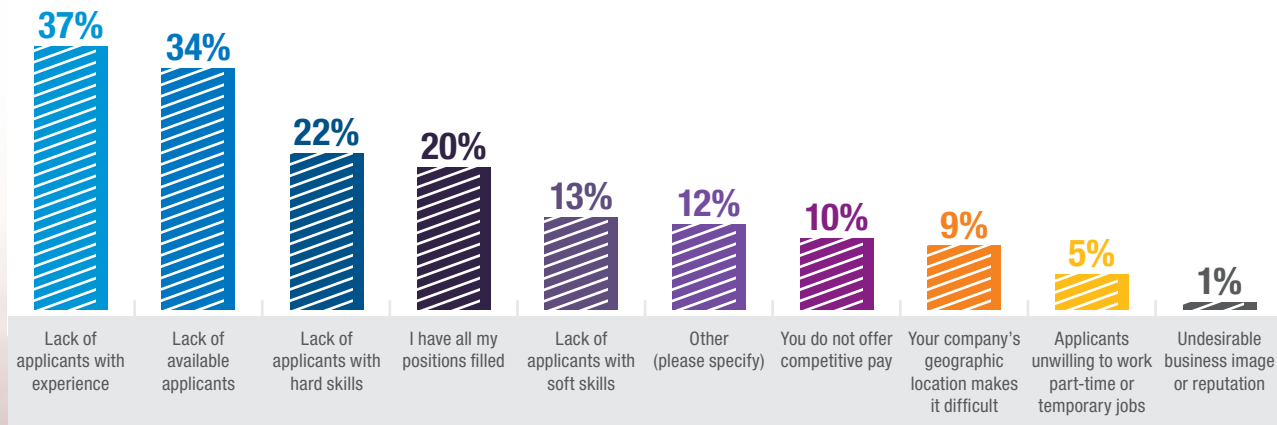
But for many, the problem is not just that they lack the required skills or training; it's that they cannot attain them. They lack the money, access or time to enter the right training programs.

There are plenty of resources out there, but does the average person have the ability and capability to actually access different resources and support systems?

The focus is often on the quality of training programs and making sure they are targeted to the in-demand jobs. That is part of the puzzle, but the quality of the program itself is only a secondary issue if the job seeker cannot get to a training program in the first place—whether they lack transportation, time or a means to identify and find classes.

In Express surveys, businesses regularly report applicants lack the right experience, hard skills and soft skills, making it difficult for them to hire.¹⁸

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON THAT YOUR OPEN JOBS ARE NOT FILLED?



Source: Express Employment Professionals Job Insights 2018 1st Quarter Survey, November-December 2017, 462 respondents.

Soft Skills

Technical skills are not the only requirement for employment. Other soft skills—leadership, creativity, adaptability, attitude—are essential. Lacking them, or lacking the ability to demonstrate them, can also be a barrier to employment.

In western Tennessee, Ronnie Morris, an Express owner said his offices provide “Second Chance” training for people who have had issues getting or holding onto a job because of a lack of soft skills and related traits.

“We have been doing Second Chance classes or ‘How to Keep a Job’ training for years,” he said. “We take people who have had issues and talk to them about the importance of being dependable, having a positive attitude, taking the initiative and being flexible on the job. Then we do our best to re-assign them and give them another chance.”

According to a recent Express survey, work ethic, integrity and attitude are among the top traits businesses look for when hiring new workers.¹⁹



“We have an associate at one of our clients who bounced around for a few assignments. He had issues staying with a job and being dependable. He went through the Second Chance class before going to the company and a light came on in his head. His attitude about work and his future has completely changed. He credits the teaching he got on the importance of showing up, adding value and being flexible to his new outlook on work. He has been at the company for nearly 90 days and is well on his way to being hired full-time. He helps us coach and motivate other Express associates to hang in there, make work a priority and add value by learning to do multiple jobs on location.”

—Ronnie Morris, Owner, Express Employment Professionals, Henderson, Jackson, Lexington, and Paris, Tennessee



Source: Express Employment Professionals Job Insights 2018 1st Quarter Survey, November-December 2017, 462 respondents.

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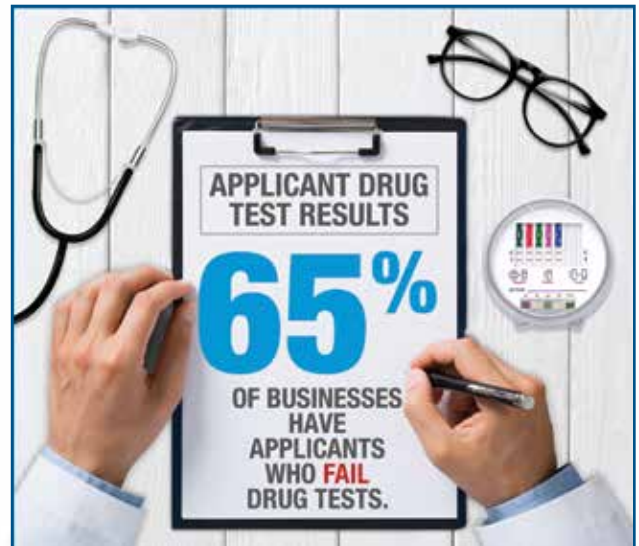
DRUG USE AND DRUG TESTING

Failing a drug test is one of the most frequent and preventable reasons why applicants cannot get a job. Still, 65 percent of businesses in an Express survey report they have applicants who fail drug tests. And, at 28 percent of businesses, more than one-in-twenty job applicants fail a drug test.²⁰

What's more, the mere possibility of having to face a drug test can discourage people from applying for a job. Applicants fear they may test positive for a substance, even one, like marijuana, that has been legalized or de-criminalized in certain jurisdictions.²¹

Certainly, some jobs, particularly those involving the operation of heavy machinery, may be too high-stakes to be trusted to someone who has a demonstrated history of drug use. But jobs with minimal physical requirements or that do not involve the use of machinery may not be affected by an employee's past use of certain substances—or use of the substances during hours that would not affect job performance.

Thirty states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana, medicinal or recreational, in some form.²² As Express has discussed before, an employer may be setting an unnecessarily high standard by excluding people from their workforce simply for failing to pass a simple drug test.²³



Source: Express Employment Professionals Job Insights 2018 1st Quarter Survey, November-December 2017, 462 respondents.





CRIMINAL RECORDS

More than 70 million Americans, or roughly one in three adults, have arrest records—as many as have college degrees.²⁴

70+ MILLION

Americans have arrest records.

A study by the National Institute of Justice found that “any arrest during one’s life diminishes job prospects more than any other employment-related stigma.”²⁵

After citizens have paid their debts to society, they often find it impossible to get back on their feet and support themselves because they are dismissed out of hand for jobs. Many job applications ask prospective employees about their conviction history.

As part of a broader background check, this may be a logical question. But if checking a “yes” box means an automatic disqualification, it does a disservice to everyone. If a job applicant checks the box indicating they have some sort of criminal record, an employer may be less likely to consider that applicant against another with no conviction history.



“Employers are far off the mark and do not understand the law in this area. However, they are open to being educated and are appreciative of our help so the candidate pool is deeper for them.”

—Deb Gray, Owner, Express Employment Professionals,
Pittsburgh West, Pennsylvania



COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

Most people who work in the staffing industry have a story about someone who encountered a language barrier. The job seekers want to work, but their English proficiency is too limited to perform core job functions or to prove they can comply with basic safety regulations.

“We work with Somali refugee placement, and the language barrier has been difficult,” says Gray in Pittsburgh. Though English coaches and classes are available, “it does not meet the need,” she says. “More challenging is the lack of employer empathy and care to understand workers from different ethnic backgrounds.”

In Utica, New York, Calabrese has a similar issue.

“We see this situation quite a bit due to our diverse population in central New York. Employers are sometimes hesitant to bring individuals on board who may have a lack of English proficiency needed for safety reasons, as well as technology issues.”



“We have some English as a Second Language associates who can’t work for a larger client because they can’t take safety directions.”

—Reid Bates, owner,
Express Employment Professionals,
Olympia, Centralia, and Aberdeen, Washington



“Lack of English comprehension is always a barrier. Most companies require someone be able to read and speak English. Only a small handful of companies can work with people who do not know any English. This really limits someone’s ability to get a good job.”

—Janis Petrini, Owner, Express Employment Professionals, Grand Rapids, Michigan

But it is not just English skills that pose communication challenges. Age differences can also pose challenges. As Gray says, “We experience generational communication challenges, and some leaders, supervisors and managers struggle to work with different generations.”

Express explores this topic and solutions to overcoming communication barriers in its Faces of Change training program.²⁶ Currently, there are four generations in the workforce, making cross-generational communication a crucial piece to the workforce’s success.

MOVING PAST THE BARRIERS

Some barriers are almost insurmountable. Others require large commitments of time, energy and money to overcome—learning English, moving to a new part of the country, finding new resources for elder or child care. The first step for many is taking personal responsibility and recognizing that with the right work ethic, many of these problems can be solved or avoided in the first place.

Employers can provide some help, offering flexibility and a generous dose of understanding. Increasingly, companies themselves are paying for job training and skills certification, recognizing that the need is not going away and won't be solved by someone else. Others are partnering with municipalities to find transportation solutions.

Local, state and federal policymakers can help provide some solutions. Local governments can facilitate increased or improved transportation options. State and federal governments can take the lead in helping educational institutions and businesses align training curriculum with in-demand skills—in addition to making such programs more accessible.

State and federal governments also have a role to play in examining laws and employment policies related to drug testing and criminal records.

Generations of Americans have faced similar problems before and overcome them. Especially in a growing economy where workers are needed, some innovative thinking from employers and smarter, effective government policies can help empower any individual who faces barriers to employment so he or she can get back in the workforce and move up in life.



ABOUT EXPRESS EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

Express Employment Professionals puts people to work. It generated \$3.4 billion in sales and employed more than 540,000 people in 2017. Its long-term goal is to put a million people to work annually. For more information, visit ExpressPros.com.

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