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Disability Coordinators and Service Providers -- A Love Story
Saturday, April 27, 2013
Chanel Carlascio

Chanel Carlascio [Presenter]: This is going to be low tech!

I think we are settled in. This presentation is about coordinators and providers. It's a love story!

[Participants laughing.]

It's very important for providers to understand the role of the coordinator and all the things they are doing for you or what you can do for them to make things run smoothly.

I want to do something before we start. Let's take a survey of who we have in the room so I know who I'm talking to. If you are a coordinator, raise your hand. Oh, there are four of you. Please feel free to jump in.

Raise your hand if you are at a large university. What about a community college?

Let's pair up. Don't talk to the person you work for. I want you to do a paired share about what you love about your job, your work right now and what you think is your biggest challenge. Do a paired share for one minute, switch, and share for another minute. We'll talk about that and bring it forward.

You guys pair up like this. I'll tell you when to switch. Go ahead.

[Participants pair sharing.]

Chanel: Okay, switch.

[Participants continuing to pair share.]

Chanel: Okay, stop.

What did you find out? Did you find a lot of similarities? What about differences? Does someone want to share?

Caroline: We like to be in interesting classes with good teachers. This is what we both liked.

Chanel: Was there something in particular that either of you didn't like or what was your biggest challenge?

Caroline: I am not comfortable when disconnected with email, for example. I would like to send off a quick email sometimes. If you are at an office you can do that, but with TypeWell in the classroom, I am removed from that. I'm at FIT in New York. There is no cell reception because we are in a concrete maze.

Chanel: So you feel disconnected because you aren't able to access technology.

Does someone else want to share? The purpose was for you to share with a partner what you love and are frustrated by. We are all isolated.

Janet: We both had the same loves and dislikes. The biggest dislike is not being able to budget for how many hours you'll get and summer is a slow time. That's a challenge.

Female: Yes!

Chanel: You aren't just working for your health. It's not a hobby. You are trying to support yourself and/or your family.

We'll talk about how you can get more hours and how you can be the person who gets the call when they want someone to fill in. How do you make yourself a resource to your coordinator? If you are a resource to them, you help solve problems.

Female: That means you are willing. If I call someone and they will take a class in half an hour, they make themselves indispensable. The supervisor knows they are willing at all times and not just when it's convenient.

Chanel: We'll talk about that.

We heard a little bit about this, this morning. You are doing an important job. It always gives me tingles to think about what we do. I don't know how many of you have seen the

BCIT video. It interviews the students and transcribers. Kristi, you are in that. In one video, a student says TypeWell is manna from heaven.

Joe in another session said he knows what he's doing is so important because every semester students come to him crying and saying how important his services are to them. You aren't just typing over here like Dana and counting words. You are giving people access to their life, education, information and their human potential. We are the access point for them.

I want to acknowledge all the work you are doing. I transcribe and interpret. I have a great respect for what you are doing and how hard it is to be in the field. You got yourself here on a Saturday from wherever you came from. You came from places like Vancouver and New York. You got yourself here because you are committed to the students and the work you are doing. You are a huge asset to your coordinator. You need to let them know that.

How do you show you're an asset? Laura pointed to one thing. How do coordinators make decisions about who they will work with? They have a whole list of people. How do they work that out? I don't know if I can do this, but I want to show you a schedule. I think Joe said there are 11 classes happening at the same time. The coordinator, as one of their jobs, is getting someone in the room to do that.

Sharon: -- or a team.

Chanel: Right. I want to give you the coordinator's perspective and show what they have to carry and balance. This is a precarious situation for them most of the time.

How many people feel they know the scope of their coordinator's job, other than scheduling? We know they're responsible for scheduling, but do you know the other things they are responsible for?

Leslie: They meet with students all the time and supervise staff if they have alternate media or anything like that. Most all of them are serving on every committee on campus probably, and also dealing not with just educational stuff but community outreach programs. It's a lot.

Laura: Service coordinators are between a rock and a hard place. The students need them and administrators are telling them to cut the budget. They are stressed because they want to make sure everyone gets what they need.

Barbara: Our coordinator also takes care of equipment requests like chairs and tables.

Chanel: Does your service coordinator do a variety of things?

Barbara: She's an accommodation specialist, but she wears a lot of hats.

Chanel: In small schools, they might have one person who coordinates everything. They coordinate not just Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, but *all* students. They are not just thinking of interpreters and transcribers, but all the other students too. That's a huge piece of their attention. Some small schools, depending on what the population is in their area, might not come across a Deaf student often. When they do have this student come in the door, holy cow, their hair catches fire! They don't know how to coordinate the service. That one student is a low incidence disability. That person can eat up their entire budget. You can understand what Laura talked about. The administrator questions why this one student eats up the entire budget in three months. Can you imagine the pressure?

Sharon, how many students do you coordinate for right now?

Sharon: 25-45. It depends on the term.

Chanel: I'm going to put you on the spot. How many transcribers are you coordinating?

Sharon: 20.

Chanel: How many students do you have?

Sharon: I have anywhere between 25 to 45 students.

Chanel: How many transcribers and interpreters do you have?

Sharon: 30.

Chanel: That's a lot of students, even if they are part time. This is an ungodly number of hours. Can you imagine trying to -- I've seen Sharon's office. There are stickies all over the wall and she has a huge spread sheet too. She hasn't caught up with the software thing! That's okay. We like her that way. [Joking.]

Chanel: What about you Kristi?

Kristi: I interpret part time. There are five students.

Chanel: The scope varies broadly. You can see that. One thing the coordinator is thinking

about as they are coordinating is not just that they need to get someone in the class. There is all this background about the philosophy that they are still kids and there are opportunities for them to learn lessons about responsibility in a confined space. There's the philosophy that we need to make sure we are helping them be responsible. We also want to help them be powerful and self-advocate. We want to help them use services and transition from college to work.

On top of that, some people don't want to work together. They might be fighting and I might have to separate them! [Joking.]

[Participants laughing.]

I think the way you solve your problem is to solve the coordinator's problem, right? You become an asset instead of a liability. Laura talked about it a little bit. Can you see now with what we discussed, some ways you could promote yourself as an asset to your coordinator? What do you think some of those ways might be?

Kelly: Our university is in Nebraska and it's not huge. We have 7,000 students or so. There are only three transcribers. The coordinator is one of them. In that situation, we are in one office. Student support services for disabilities is in the same building. I work part time. I go to school full time. This is an issue regarding hours for me. They're very accommodating, but a lot of times I'm in class and they need a transcriber. We try to find ways to work around that.

My point is when I was trying to pick up hours, I started looking at what she did for disability services that was extra work. I started doing some of that stuff in the office myself. It helped her a lot. It was good for me to be in the office and pick up hours, so this works for both of us. But we keep getting more and more students. We have extra boys coming in the fall.

It's challenging for the three of us to try to help her and also transcribe. It's not what I thought it was going to be -- in a good way! I got a new perspective when someone here shared with me what she does. Thank you for letting us do that.

Chanel: The thing is, it's not a challenge just for your coordinator or just you. It's a challenge for both of you. Ultimately, you both want the same thing: You want everyone to get enough hours. Coordinators ask all the time how they can support their transcribers and get them a lot of hours. There is a cycle and it's up and down. Transcribers need to get used to that cycle and prepare for it and be available.

Sharon and I were talking about this. If we are in a crunch and I have a last minute thing

come up like someone has an accident or whatever, the first call I make is to the person who said yes to me the last time. If they can help, I say to myself, "Great, I'll call you again." If I ask what their availability is and they get super complicated with the times, it's difficult for me as a coordinator to figure out their schedule. Coordinators will go to the person who is easier to schedule.

Becky: As far as a coordinator's perspective, the service and the level of things getting done for the student before they enter college is very different from what the student will experience in post-secondary. As coordinators we try to remember that piece, but I have another 130 students in a different population. You have to make sure both the students and transcribers get what they need. I find the transcribers who communicate with me the least, but with the most information, are the best. I don't like to get a lot of different emails about the same thing. If I get one email that says they are available, that's good. Take the time to make sure you give me the information I asked for and not create too much back and forth, because there's not much time for that. Be clear. If you have difficult availability, just tell me when you *can*, and not when you can't. Make your emails precise. You don't have to tell me why you aren't available and when you aren't available.

Chanel: Right. Besides the scheduling, how are you in the class and how are you interacting with the student and the teacher? Do I have to worry about you being inappropriate or worry about you wearing shorts and flip-flops -- though that might be okay for a swimming class! [Joking.]

The administration is talking about the coordinator always being over budget and they try to make it cheaper, because they have a certain focus on their fiduciary responsibilities. There is that piece, and also the whole "developmental growing young people" piece. Then there's the responsibility to provide access. As the transcriber, you represent the coordinator and the school. Your responsibility is huge in that role. Your actions will impact not only the student's ability to get access, but if severe enough, there can be complaints and lawsuits. You, the coordinator and the school are on the hook if the student isn't getting services. That would put you on the bottom of the totem pole.

How do you get to the top of the totem pole? Are you ethical? Are you giving me the information you get in the classroom that I need as a coordinator, such as classes being canceled?

Female: What situations might there be?

Chanel: The teacher might decide to cancel class the next day, for example. The student and the teacher should let the disability office know. That doesn't always happen!

Female: Never! [Joking.]

[Laughing.]

Chanel: I was trying to be nice! So you would tell the coordinator that the class is canceled and should ask, "Do you need me for anything else?" I have days where I need to be in three places at the same time.

Janet: There are a lot of different schools and you know the different transcribers. You might know you aren't available to go to a class. Instead of just reporting that to your coordinator, you could suggest a substitute for you. This is a huge benefit!

Chanel: I would love that message! Then I don't have to go through all the hours to find a replacement.

Sharon: That depends on the coordinator. You let me know they are available, but it's my decision. That person might not be the perfect match for that class. I have a bigger picture, but at least I know someone is available.

Room changes happen a lot. I need to know about that, because I might send a substitute three weeks later to the wrong room.

Sometimes there is information about a student that I need to know that the in-class person might feel like they shouldn't pass along because they might think it's confidential. I'm the coordinator. I need to know about everything. We can get other resources for the student if I get the information. I can't say, "This student might have an issue," because I shouldn't be telling you confidential information. But if you tell me the student is sleeping in class, thank you, because a counselor is already working with them. I have pieces I can't tell you. Even though you may not know it, your information will fit into this bigger picture.

Chanel: We talked recently about students needing additional help. If you are a contractor, you might observe behavior that you need to report to keep everyone safe. When you were talking, I was thinking about coordinators asking transcribers to do things that they don't understand the background information for. Transcribers might wonder why they have to tell the coordinator every time the student is late, for example. Part of this is if they are contracting for services and the student isn't using them or canceling without notifying anyone, we need to help them understand how to use the service. In the real world outside of school, when they don't cancel something there are consequences. Maybe they won't get services. The school is obligated, but they need to teach them to be

respectful and advocate as well. If the transcriber or interpreter isn't working out for the student, the student has the right to ask for someone else. You as the transcriber in that case have to be responsible enough to know you are in over your head. You might need a replacement, a team, or a sign language interpreter. The coordinator doesn't know this if you don't tell them.

Transcribers are a critical piece of the puzzle. Your coordinators really count on you to communicate with them and be a resource. You have the power to create yourself to be that way. Think about how you present yourself and how available, ethical and diligent you are. The fact that you are here and doing professional development is huge. We only have 70 people here. A lot more people are trained in TypeWell, but you have put forth a special effort. I want to thank you for that. That's a huge contribution.

Kristi: On days when you transcribe and question your services, don't be so hard on yourself. It's true. The services you provide are huge. I had a student do her thesis. Someone asked her when it is that she feels free and liberated from her hearing loss. She said, "It's when I'm swimming, and right now, because I have communication access." I said, "Oh!" It's that little story on a crappy day that you can remember. The service you provide is huge.

Chanel: We don't know what the human potential is and what that one person will go on to do. You have contributed to what they have accomplished with access to communication. Communication is a central function in life. You don't have a life without it.

You all are very important. Like Kristi said, you might think, "She wants me to go all the way over there?" Don't you want hours? This isn't just a feel-good thing. You are doing it to support yourself. It's great that your work contributes so much to so many people. How you solve your problem is to solve the coordinator's problem. Be available and reliable and be the stellar people that you are.

We have five minutes left. You came in here for a reason. I don't know if you had a burning question or comment.

Janet: This doesn't actually apply to me because I don't do remote, but could people look into increasing their hours with remote work?

Chanel: Absolutely. I'm so glad you said that. It reminds me of something important I want to say. It's challenging to make sure people have enough work. Many people are doing remote work to fill that space. That's a great idea, but be loyal to the school that trained you. If you end up lured away somewhere else and they are guaranteeing you hours and more money, make sure they are reputable. There are a lot of agencies out there.

Make sure they support you with best practices and that they are ethical in dealing with you and your school -- and be loyal to who trained you.

What you don't want to happen is you go over here because they promised you a lot of things, but then something happens. They promised you a lot of hours and it all crashes down. You then have to go back and say, "Sharon, I didn't get the hours. Do you have work for me?" At that point, you go back to the bottom of the list.

Sharon: -- if you get back on at all.

Chanel: You better send her some chocolate! [Joking.]

Another thing that happens is the school is short on people so they send out a bid and my name is on the list of people they use to fill in because I was gone. So Sharon trains me and then I say, "I'm going to go over here." Sharon is short so she contacts agencies and tells them she needs them to fill in. So one agency I work for bids and submits me as one of their workers.

Sharon: You were mine and now you work for them and charge three times as much!

Chanel: This doesn't sit well to lure people away. It's disloyal on a number of levels. The transcriber isn't under obligation necessarily, but it would be nice if they remained loyal.

Lynn: I have a question for coordinators. At the social hour last night, I spoke to a transcriber working with a college. She was dismayed because this semester she started with 30 hours and it dropped to 12 because the students dropped classes. In six years, I have never had a student drop a class. Is it common to have that percentage? Do you just top load your schedule as a transcriber? Do you assume you will lose that many hours?

Female: It might have been one student that dropped and the transcriber was going to do five courses for them.

Chanel: Right. You try to spread out the schedule so one student doesn't get one transcriber for all their classes. When I freelanced, it always seemed to play out this way. As an agency, we lose hours and the student drops or whatever, but it somehow gets made up. You need to be available. I might know Lynn lost a bunch of hours and try to replace those hours. This transcriber needs to be available. If they complain about not enough hours and they aren't available, this isn't the college's problem. You can't tie the coordinators hands.

Lynn: I'm sure she was available. I was just surprised to hear that.

Chanel: One way to make up hours is to take on substitute work. If you are easy to work with and almost always say yes, you can recoup it.

Another thing you shouldn't do is always give work back or say, "I didn't know the term was 10 weeks," or, "Do I have to be available for *all* the classes?"

Sharon: "Is Halloween a holiday?" [Joking.]

[Participants laughing]

Chanel: I hope you found this presentation valuable and appreciate your coordinators more. You can set up your relationship with them. Tell them "I want to be a resource for you." You want this to be a love story! You don't want it to be dysfunctional. This assumes you have a semi-reasonable coordinator and there's nothing weird going on. That happens. All things considered, we are all a little bit off. [Joking.]

Thank you for coming and have a great afternoon.

[End of presentation.]