



THE FOUNTAIN HOUSE TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

By Lina Sorenson

Every company has them: low-paying, entry level jobs that are hard to fill and even harder to keep people in. Supervisors get frustrated with low morale and bad attitudes, not to mention horrible attendance records. And the turnover keeps HR and departmental supervisors constantly on the search for new blood, rather than attending to their other important responsibilities.

There is a solution, however, one that has worked for many companies throughout the country and throughout the world. It is a unique program called Transitional Employment. Transitional Employment was originally developed in the late 50s by Fountain House, a clubhouse in Manhattan for people with a psychiatric diagnosis. Transitional Employment programs are now in place throughout the US and all six continents, through other clubhouses modeled on the original Fountain House program. The clubhouse world already had a different – and highly successful approach to reintegration for the disabled. It uses work within the clubhouse itself as rehabilitation, and as a way to reintroduce members into society at large. Today, clubhouses that have been modeled after and spearheaded by Fountain House in New York are recognized worldwide as being one of the most successful rehabilitation models in existence, with a success record backed by 60 years of operation. The process includes developing initiative, self-motivation and self-esteem in club-

house members through the accomplishment of work.

A natural extension of the utilization of work as rehabilitation *within the clubhouse* is introducing, and in many cases, reintroducing members of the clubhouse into the competitive workplace. This is where Transitional Employment comes in. Due to interrupted work histories – or sometimes, in the case of younger people, *no* work histories – it is often hard to reenter the workforce at the level they left, much less at the level they may desire to ultimately attain. Also, members of Fountain House are often reluctant to try to return instantly to full-time work in career level jobs, without an opportunity to first get their “work muscles” back. Transitional Employment, a part-time, time-limited work opportunity, with active support from Fountain staff in partnership with the private sector, provides this opportunity.

In order to create a Transitional placement, Fountain House staff search for opportunities in a number of places, ranging from supermarkets, to car washes, to law firms, to Wall Street. Today, among the companies that Fountain House is in partnership with are American Express, the American Stock Exchange, Broadridge Financial Solutions, Estée Lauder, Fox, Morgan Stanley, Newsweek, the Village Voice and numerous law firms, such as Baker & McKenzie, Cravath Swain & Moore LLP, Kramer Levin Naftalis



and many others. Typically a staff person, board member or interested outside party will make inquiries with a potential employment source regarding entry level jobs where there has been difficulty with performance, keeping people and/or morale – or simply where they think a company might be receptive to Transitional Employment placements. The jobs can be full or part-time, but if full-time, Fountain House will request that the job be broken in half, creating two part-time jobs. This not only temporarily preserves disability benefits for clubhouse members, but saves the partnered company in benefit payouts.

A further value to the partnered company is that a Fountain House staff person (and often two or three of them) are assigned to be a permanent liaison with the company. They learn the job themselves, curtailing any future need for company employees to have to train new personnel, when a Fountain House employee moves on. Instead, Fountain House staff takes on the responsibility for training the new employee. Similarly, Fountain House takes over the placement selection process, alleviating a burden on Human Resources in the constant hiring, firing and replacing processes that entry level jobs often entail.

There is yet one more benefit: 100% job coverage. Absenteeism accounts for billions of dollars worth of lost time every year. But in the case of

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using a Fountain House member as an employee, this completely disappears as an issue. If the Fountain House employee is absent for ANY REASON, the pre-trained staff will cover the job until a new member is trained and takes over or the previous member returns.

The Transitional position is time-limited because its primary purpose is to re-introduce members to the workplace, reinforce good work habits and help members to regain those "employment muscles." It typically lasts from 6-9 months, but company supervisors and Human Resources staff are entirely relieved of concerns or responsibilities involving replacement, since Fountain House Staff take full responsibility for procuring another qualified member from the clubhouse and will cover the position until this is done and the new member is trained. Finally, staff are always available for consultations or visits if any difficulties arise regarding performance, job-fit, etc. The end result is a professionally supported environment that has many up-sides for the partnered company and virtually no downsides.

What if the partnered company likes someone so much that they want the person to stay? As Deborah Krulewitch, Senior Vice President of Estée Lauder stated, at the moment she wants to keep a present Fountain House employee because "she's better than anyone else on my team." Requests like these are typically discouraged, however - in part because it may cause long-term confusion about Fountain House's responsibilities towards this employee (long term employees still get support from Fountain House staff, if requested, but it doesn't take the same intensive form that Transitional Employment takes) - and also to give other Fountain House members initial employment opportunities.

The enthusiasm and superior skills that Fountain House members bring to the job, as noted by Ms. Krulewitch above, are a final reason for a company to consider Transitional Employment. Bobby Dixon, the payroll supervisor at Fox Media, recommends that if you have the opportunity to create a Transitional Employment placement in your firm, "Go for it! You're getting qualified, skilled employees who get the job done. And what's unique is that they're friendly, easy-going people, making for a better workplace." Steven A. Schwartz of Publicis Group, where Fountain House has been involved for over 20 years, states: "the guarantee of no absenteeism saves valuable time and resources and ensures that the job is always done," going on to state that "clubhouses provide excellent training and support and at the same time give back to the community."

Should a company want to hire a Fountain House member with whom they've had a good experience, that possibility is always available, as long as the position is a different one than the initial Transitional Employment position, and is mutually satisfactory to all concerned. Judy Klopfer, who's been working in the mail room at Publicis states, "I've reached my limits there. I want something more." Promotions are a natural part of the business world, and the opportunity to move on is encouraged. Indeed, a full, permanent return to the workplace is the desired end goal. To quote Ms. Klopfer once again, "I'm glad I went to Fountain House and happy I have this job, but it's time to move on. I want to get back into the workforce and have something fuller in my life." If the partnering company for which a member has done Transitional Employment can provide this, great. However, what

is typically encouraged is that a member/employee move onto yet another job for a while, then return to the initial company after the change in status has been solidified.

Transitional Employment is a rare opportunity to shore up difficult to fill entry level positions while providing people recovering from mental illness the chance to rejoin greater society and expand their world. Simultaneously, it has a major financial and support upside. Win. Win. Win.

This program has benefited the businesses and members for over five decades. However, work potential is not limited to this one program. For companies who are interested in Fountain House members who've moved through the TE system and are ready for longer term employment, Fountain House also has a Supported Employment program, where there is still a relationship between the clubhouse and the partnered company, but the member goes through the regular competitive hiring process with the expectation of being a permanent employee. These jobs can be either part-time or full time, depending on company need. And finally, for those who are interested in possibly employing Fountain House members who either have passed successfully through these support systems and/or for whom these systems are not necessary, opportunity for Independent Employment - typically full-time, career level employment is always being sought. Fountain House will be glad to hear about a company's job possibilities and pass them on to properly qualified members. Tax benefits often can be had in these hiring possibilities.

Employing people with a psychiatric diagnosis provides excellent,

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enthusiastic workers and the opportunity to reap tax benefits and create social satisfaction. It is an opportunity no company will want to pass up.

For more information, contact the Employment Department of Fountain House at 212-582-0340, X361. If your company is outside the greater New York metropolitan area, you will be directed to other clubhouses throughout the US and the world that have the same program.

About the Author:
Lina Sorenson has a B.A. from Mt. Holyoke in theater and did additional graduate work in music and languages at Cornell. While training to switch from musical theater to opera as a career, she also worked in the private sector, where she traveled with the Prime Minister and Ministers of Finance and Agriculture from Chile, meeting with business leaders in the US and Canada. She also worked as the evening supervisor at a NYC law firm. She is presently contemplating re-entering the entertainment sector doing industrials, voiceovers and instructional videos for companies. Ms. Sorenson is a member of Fountain House in NYC.

Transitional Employment Benefits

- Opportunity to staff hard to fill entry-level positions
- Hardworking, reliable and enthusiastic employees
- Ongoing job support and partnership from the Clubhouse
- Tax benefits
- Employment selection and training is done by the Clubhouse
- 100% coverage of the position, even through turnover
- Employer satisfaction is the top priority

A FEW ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM THE EDITOR ON THE FOUNTAIN HOUSE TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM...

Please note, dear readers, that the Fountain House Transitional Employment program has a large and very special niche in the public-company world - and in the financial services and legal communities. We'd like to give you a little more real-world flavor about TE and about the kinds of jobs the TEs do, in the hope that you will recognize some good fits at your own firms... and will want to explore them further.

The American Stock Exchange, for example, has had six to ten TE employees at any given time since 1980. "We are a trading floor," **Bobby Raquet**, who works at the Main Trading Desk reminded us. "Our TE people pick up and deliver tickets to floor members at various booth locations - like the main trading floor, the mezzanine and Harry's - then rush them over to be entered into the trading system, or over to the D-K room."

"Harry's?" we asked, knowing that they were *probably* not making deliveries to traders at Harry's legendary Wall-Streeters' watering hole and restaurant. "Harry used to have one of his restaurants here, 'Harry's American' before we needed to expand and took over the space," Bobby explained. "It's hard work, since there are many locations, and they're scattered around a lot. We've got about 60 locations up in the balconies. It's important work too; you have to be fast, you have to know exactly where you're going, and it takes a while to learn the

ropes. That's why we like to keep our TEs as long as possible. But we try not to be hogs. We realize that the goal is for them to move on, and that we need to make room for new TE members to get a chance to work here. It's really a pleasure for me to work with TE members. I guess I've worked with 50 or 60, or more, and we've never had a single problem. Fountain House really knows how to screen people for our jobs. These are people who really want to work."

Baker & Mackenzie has had five TE slots since 1991 and the way they use them is fairly typical of what the many other law firm placements are like. "We have four outside messenger slots," mailroom supervisor **Junior Gordon** told us. "They pick up and deliver packages to and from clients, and at the post office, and make bank deposits. We also have one indoor messenger. She sorts mail and makes deliveries inside the firm. We get very good help this way - in fact, tremendous help. They're totally reliable and

always stick tight to the job at hand." "How many TEs to you think you've worked with?" we asked, "And do you keep in touch with any of them?" "Oh boy, since 1993, when I started here, I've probably worked with over 100. And yes, many of them come back to say hello after they move on, and a lot of them call us when they get a full-time job. That's really exciting for us."

Broadridge Financial Solutions has had ten to twelve and sometimes more TE slots in their proxy processing area since the early '90s, when the group was part of **ADP**. "I treasure every single one of our TE positions," **Kenn Dudek**, Fountain House's president told us, "but Broadridge is kind of unique. Because we are able to place so many of our members there at one time, we can bring them out to the Long Island location by van. This makes it an especially good environment for people who are just beginning in TE, and for members who have physical limitations

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Fountain House TE members at the Broadridge Financial Solutions work site: Back row, Pedro Rivera, William Smith, Louise Riley, Helena Smith, Steven Byrne. Front row, Emmanuel Patterson, Frances Daniels, Cecelia Rosario (waving) and Lydia Cruz.

or handicaps. We always have a full-time supervisor with the group, who works right along with them if there's no training to do. Our members really vie to get a placement at Broadridge. They love the cama-

raderie on the bus, the well-organized environment that's always clean and neat, even at the busiest times, the Broadridge cafeteria - in short, the overall experience could not be better."

Lou Auerbach, who's in charge of the TE group at Broadridge tells us, "We use Fountain House members to handle items that don't get opened automatically, and the many over-

stuffed envelopes we get, that often contain materials in addition to the proxies that need to be dealt with, and damaged proxies. Having a Fountain House supervisor do the

training and oversee the fairly large group is a major plus for me. And working with the members is really a pleasurable experience." **Rich Daly**, Broadridge's president, who was the prime mover in bringing TE to ADP gave us one of the best reasons to get involved, and something that's often overlooked: "One of the biggest plusses comes from the satisfaction that our regular full-time employees take in being involved in something that is such a good thing to do, and that is so successful. Best of all I think, is the pride and satisfaction that comes from seeing so many Fountain House members being able to move on in terms of their own successes."

Readers, if you would like some additional first-hand information about Transitional Employment - or to take a tour of the Fountain House Clubhouse, and the nearby Fountain Gallery - or to visit a TE worksite, talk with a long-term supporter there and meet a few TEs on the job, just give your editor a call.