

Barriers to Employment Success Inventory



Identify Barriers to Getting and Keeping a Job

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INTRODUCTION TO BESI

This brief guide was written to provide additional information for professionals using the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI)*. *BESI* helps individuals identify their major barriers to obtaining a job or succeeding in their employment. It is designed to be self-scored and self-interpreted without the use of any other materials, thus providing immediate results for the respondent and/or counselor. It is especially useful with counselees who are about to begin looking for a job, those who have been unsuccessful in securing employment, and those who are unable to keep a job.

BESI provides a standardized approach for counselors to use in identifying, understanding, and finding solutions to barriers to successful employment. It is not a test, but a counseling tool intended to initiate a dialogue concerning the person's barriers to successful employment and ways in which those barriers can be overcome.

THEORETICAL BASIS

The workplace of today has changed considerably and will continue to do so. These changes have created many critical barriers to employment success for today's employees. This section will review some of the research related to how changes in the world-of-work have created such barriers and the theoretical basis for *BESI*.

The United States Bureau of the Census (2002) indicated that the number of people entering and succeeding in the workplace has dwindled and will continue to do so. Hansen (1997) suggests that the American workplace revolution has just begun. In order to understand the many barriers confronting people, career and employment counselors need to understand the changes that have taken place in our society and in the world of work. Liptak (2006) further suggested that identifying and finding ways to overcome barriers to employment success is one of



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the most critical interventions that can be used with clients. He concludes that overcoming these employment barriers is often the first step in helping people enjoy successful employment.

A review of the literature that describes programs and interventions designed to help clients overcome barriers revealed that, across the board, clients' barriers tend to cluster in five distinct categories: financial concerns, psychological issues, career decision-making and planning skills, job search skills, and education and training. These categories make up the individual scales on *BESI* and are discussed in more detail below.

I. Personal and Financial Barriers

People need to know how to live while in the midst of a career transition and how to manage their finances until they can find employment. Lock (2005a) suggested that financial planning is a critical part of attaining employment success. He said that clients who are unemployed or in the midst of a career change need to feel financially secure before beginning to think about a job search campaign. He suggested that in order to cope effectively, people must do things such as apply for unemployment benefits as soon as possible, develop a budget, lower expenses while in the midst of change, and find ways to bring in extra money.

II. Emotional and Physical Barriers

People often need to overcome many different emotional and physical barriers to attain employment success. Research indicates that the stress of unemployment can be linked to a variety of psychological disorders, including depression, suicide, alcoholism, and child abuse. Such stress and disorders can interfere with the job search process, in turn causing additional stress for the individual.

Winegardner, Simonetti, and Nykodym (1984) have described unemployment as “The Living Death,” and say that it can have “a devastating impact on the human psyche, just as the major crises of divorce, the death of a loved one, and facing death itself strongly affect each individual” (p. 149). Their research suggests that the unemployed go through five stages that parallel those confronting individuals facing serious emotional trauma. The stages include the following:

Stage One: Denial and Isolation — In this stage individuals deny that they have been terminated from or have lost their jobs. They may be confused about their job loss. They are probably shocked by the realization that they are dispensable. This can lead to feeling inadequate, questioning their self-worth, and even feeling guilty.

Stage Two: Anger — In this stage the reality of the termination has registered, and individuals begin to feel anger toward the organization, management, and/or immediate supervisors. The union, the system, or foreign competition may later become the target of their discontent. After they have expressed anger at all possible outside sources, their anger is turned inward. Self-analysis can become self-criticism.

Stage Three: Bargaining — In this stage, individuals begin to calculate, compute, reflect, and compromise. They attempt to bargain with the company or an immediate supervisor in an attempt to reverse the decision. As their attempts to compromise fail, they give up. They also try to identify their options. Their focus is on the future and on the possibilities that are available. They may feel that when they get through this ordeal, they will be a better person for it.

Stage Four: Depression — In this stage, individuals become more silent and withdrawn, thus contributing to feelings of depression. Because they have focused so much on being unemployed, they may feel meaningless. They are probably frustrated and doubting their ability. They feel lethargic and simply want to be left alone.

Stage Five: Acceptance — In this stage, individuals focus on the reality of the situation; analyze their skills, abilities, and resources; and face the future. They realize that their job is gone and that it is time to search for a new one. They experience more energy as they begin their job search. They have adjusted to being unemployed and are excited about getting on with their life (pp. 150–153).

III. Career Decision-Making and Planning

In addition to mass downsizing, other major changes in the workplace force people to take control of their own career development. Average wages have steadily declined over the last decade. Employers pay less toward employee pension plans and health insurance costs, and employees pay more. To cut costs and improve efficiency, most major companies now use temporary workers for piecemeal, consulting, freelance, part-time, and outsourced work. As a result, Pink (2001) suggested that workers in the twenty-first century will need to develop excellent career planning and career-resiliency skills to be successful.

According to Charland (1993), labor market estimates in the United States indicate that at least a third of all job roles are in transition, a third of all vocational-technical schools have become obsolete, and a third of all workers will eventually leave their jobs. Transitions in the workplace have become commonplace. Most companies even have career and outplacement services as a part of their human resources departments. Many authors contend that in the future, workers will change jobs more frequently, be required to move more often to get a job, and have to retrain for new employment opportunities.

Lock (2005b) concluded that people working in the twenty-first century will need to take charge of their careers. He suggested that many employers no longer provide job security or loyalty to employees, and employees must develop and utilize effective career planning skills. He recommends that workers provide their own job security by setting and working toward long-range goals and that individuals should “treat every job as though you are self-employed and look out for yourself because no one else will” (p. 309).

IV. Job-Seeking Knowledge Barriers

The number of jobs available for today's U.S. workforce has decreased. Many workers have been or worry about being laid off from their jobs. Many companies have streamlined their operations and released unnecessary labor, moved their operations outside the United States to countries with lower labor costs, or replaced their workforce with production-efficient technology.

Gysbers, Heppner, and Johnston (1998) concluded that “job loss has economic meanings as well as social and psychological meanings” (p. 19). Amundson and Borgen (1987) identify four stages that an individual undergoes as the stress of conducting a job search negatively affects the mental and physical health of the individual. These stages include the following:

Stage 1: Enthusiasm — The initial stages of the job search are characterized by high hopes, high energy, and unrealistic expectations about job possibilities.

Stage 2: Stagnation — After the initial enthusiasm, job search efforts stagnate as the results of the job loss become apparent. Individuals at this stage might start to tire from the effort required in finding a job.

Stage 3: Frustration — Over time, the individual often feels frustration and anger resulting from continual rejection during a job search campaign. Unemployed individuals often vent their frustration and anger on friends and family.

Stage 4: Apathy — During this stage, the individual now spends a minimum amount of time on the job search, and a negative self-fulfilling prophecy emerges. Individuals often give up at this point, believing there must be something wrong with them and consequently spend less time looking for a job (p. 563).

In the initial stages of the job search, unemployed workers are relatively positive about looking for a job. However, as these individuals experience long-term unemployment, the stress eventually leads to abandonment of the job search. In order to lessen the effects of burnout and speed up the job search process, counselors need to be more aware of the levels of stress their clients are experiencing and of the various stress-reduction techniques that can help their clients cope with unemployment and the job search campaign.

Liptak (2006) suggested that people who experience frustration in their job search efforts are prone to be affected by a syndrome referred to as learned helplessness. Wood (1989) described learned helplessness as “a phenomenon that results when repeated life experiences are interpreted by people to be an indication that they are not in control of their own fate” (p. 4). Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) say that people's attributions

about their perceived inability to have any control over past situations leads to expectations about what will occur in the future. The explanations people use to answer “What caused this to happen to me?” cause helplessness deficits in the areas of cognitions (beliefs that events are beyond control), motivation (passivity/withdraw), and emotions (sadness, anxiety, and hostility). This leads to low self-esteem, further expectations of failure, and self-fulfilling prophecy.

V. Education and Training

To be most successful in the world-of-work, people need to embrace the notion of lifelong learning and get as much education and training as possible. Lock (2005a) said that the need for training and retraining will only increase. He suggested that a college education is no longer sufficient and only acts as a springboard to additional education and training. He believes that people should anticipate lifelong learning experiences that will involve returning to the classroom several times over their working life and that “continuous learning will be required in any job where people want meaningful work” (p. 54). For example, because technology is driving many of the new opportunities and changes in the world of work, people will need to have greater training and education in computer applications and technology.

Specific Client Barriers and Correlations to *BESI*

Borgen (1999) described a program called Starting Points, a group-based needs assessment program “designed to assist unemployed people to make informed choices about the types of assistance that they may find helpful in beginning the process of reconnecting with the labor market” (p. 98). In this program, group members identify specific barriers to employment that they have encountered and the negative feelings associated with the barriers. In a study of the program, clients expressed the need for the most assistance in areas that mirror the *BESI* categories:

- Education and training (chosen by 30% of the respondents as an area in which they needed the most assistance) correlates with the Training and Education scale on *BESI*.
- Career exploration and testing (22% of the respondents) and career information (19% of the respondents) correlate with the Career Decision-Making and Planning scale on *BESI*.
- Job search skills and opportunities (19% of the respondents) correlates with the Job-Seeking Knowledge scale of *BESI*.
- Issues related to financial assistance, transportation, and day care (12% of the respondents) correlates with the Personal and Financial scale on *BESI*.
- Psychological problems (10% of the respondents) correlates with the Emotional and Physical scale on *BESI*.

In addition, some of the research and programs that address barriers to employment success among cultural, ethnic, or other minority groups include the following:

Roberts, Harper, and Preszler (1997) studied FRESH START, a program that works with Native Americans who have multiple barriers to employment success. They concluded that “career development, or even job placement, is a great challenge with clients confronted with multiple barriers” (p. 121). FRESH START included client assessment, job search and retention skills, career exploration, personal counseling, remedial education, general education development, and job-specific training.

Herring (1996) identified several major barriers to Native Americans securing employment, including problems of anxiety, lack of education and training, negative stereotypes, and inadequate career- and self-knowledge regarding work.

Martin (1991) studied the barriers to employment success among urban Native Americans and those residing on reservations. He found that barriers included feelings of cultural conflict, lack of dependable transportation, culturally sensitive assessments, and the use of English as a second language.

Westwood and Ishiyama (1991) said that “a special challenge exists for counselors who work with distinct minority groups because of the additional barriers to employment” (p. 130). They noted that immigrant clients in the

United States faced such barriers as language difficulties, lack of knowledge of the world of work, limited networks, and lack of knowledge of job search and interviewing techniques.

Similarly, Cheatham (1990) suggested that African-Americans face certain barriers to employment success including inadequate information about the labor market, perceptions about the meaning of work, structural or racial discrimination, and a lack of available career information and guidance.

Worthington and Juntunen (1997) suggested that more research is needed to better understand and promote the school-to-work transition of both Eurocentric groups, as well as other diverse and at-risk groups. They said that transitioning students face many barriers, including disabilities, economic disadvantages, limited English proficiency, lack of education, and a lack of career guidance.

These programs are all designed to help people overcome the employment barriers that are included as the scales of *BESI*. The research indicates that while individuals, groups, and cultures all encounter a variety of employment difficulties, certain key barriers are almost universal.

Identifying Barriers to Employment Success

In 1997, the National Employment Counseling Association (NECA) developed competencies needed by counselors to identify and help eliminate barriers to their clients' employment success. These competencies apply to workforce development, welfare-to-work, school-to-work, One Stop, job service, and other employment counseling programs. Many of the competencies included such statements as

“The ability to provide ongoing assessment in individual and group assessment skills and to use formal and informal assessment methods that comply with EEOC regulations. The ability to provide ongoing assessment in individual and group settings involving the appraisal and measurement of the customer's needs, characteristics, potentials, individual differences, and self-appraisal.”

“The ability to assist customers in obtaining the services needed to address barriers to employment, which might interfere with successful employment and career objectives.”

The NECA competencies call for the ability to recognize special needs and barriers of minorities, women seeking nontraditional occupations, culturally different immigrants, the disabled, older workers, and persons with AIDS. Similarly, Angel and Harney (1997), in their text *No One Is Unemployable*, contended that “overcoming barriers to employment is a challenging yet central part of helping candidates secure and maintain employment” (p. 27). The *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI)* is designed to help career and employment counselors identify quickly and efficiently the barriers that are keeping their clients from obtaining employment in this new economy.

ADMINISTRATION AND INTERPRETATION

BESI is a self-administered assessment device for use with individuals or groups. The average time to complete *BESI* is approximately 20 minutes, depending on such factors as age and reading ability. This assessment can also be administered online. For details, go to www.jist.com.

BESI should be administered under optimum testing conditions. The person overseeing the assessment should follow these steps.

Before Beginning

Make sure that each person has a copy of the booklet and a pencil or erasable pen. Inventory takers should be informed why they are taking *BESI* and how the results will be used. Tell respondents that they should mark all their answers directly on the inventory.

Ask respondents to write their names and other information on the front of the inventory booklets. Review the directions on the front cover of *BESI* with the individual or the group before they begin. Explain that *BESI* is not a test and, therefore, there are no right or wrong answers.

Step 1: Completing the Inventory

Respondents are asked to circle one response for each item to indicate their primary concerns using the following 4-point Likert scale:

1 = No Concern 2 = Little Concern 3 = Some Concern 4 = Great Concern

Review the procedures for Step 1 and answer any questions that may arise. Make sure that each respondent understands how to mark his or her responses. Stress that respondents should circle only one number after each statement and should respond to each of the 50 statements.

Steps 2 and 3: Scoring

BESI is composed of five scales that represent the range of barriers an individual might encounter in looking for or succeeding in employment: Personal and Financial (P); Emotional and Physical (E); Career Decision-Making and Planning (C); Job-Seeking Knowledge (J); and Training and Education (T).

Scoring requires calculating the numerical values for each of the scales (marked P, E, C, J, and T). To do so, respondents should add the “subtotals” for each horizontal line of the Inventory, as explained in Step 2. Then in Step 3 they should plot each of the raw scores on the Profile by placing an X over the appropriate number on the graph.

Scores on *BESI* are reported in the form of raw scores. Raw scores between 10 and 19 indicate that the respondent has fewer barriers than most unemployed adults do. Raw scores from 20 to 30 are in the average range, and indicate that the effects of the barriers are about the same as for most unemployed adults. Raw scores from 31 to 40 indicate that the respondent has more barriers than most unemployed adults.

Steps 4 and 5: Interpretation

The *BESI* Interpretation Guide in Step 4 provides more specific information about the barriers that are interfering with respondents' career development and ability to find a job. Respondents should begin interpreting their scores on *BESI* by examining the barrier categories in which they have the highest scores (the most concern). Some respondents will have high scores in several barrier categories, while others might have high scores in only one type of barrier.

In Step 4, respondents can indicate their most troublesome barriers. Recommendations are provided on how they can overcome these barriers in Step 5. Respondents should be encouraged to use this information to explore options that will work for them. They should also be encouraged to use the worksheet in Step 5 to set short-term and long-term goals for overcoming their most troublesome barriers.

Dimensions Measured on *BESI*

The scales that make up *BESI* were developed from the research of Miller and Oetting (1977). The scales represent 30 or more barriers the researchers identified. Following is a brief review of each of the five scales used in *BESI*.

Personal and Financial: The P scale measures barriers that arise from a lack of basic survival resources. Respondents scoring high on this scale are concerned with meeting such basic needs as sufficient childcare, transportation, health and dental care, housing, and money. They are concerned about having enough money to sustain themselves and their families.

Emotional and Physical: The E scale measures barriers stemming from physical problems and feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Respondents scoring high on this scale are concerned with maintaining their health or a positive attitude. In addition, they may be concerned about dealing with the anger and depression associated with unemployment and/or underemployment.

Career Decision-Making and Planning: The C scale measures barriers arising from a lack of career planning and career decision-making skills. Respondents scoring high on this scale are concerned with obtaining more information about their interests and values, occupations and leisure activities, and small business and

home-based business opportunities. Respondents may also be concerned with making effective career decisions, setting goals, and developing plans to achieve these goals.

Job-Seeking Knowledge: The J scale measures barriers resulting from a lack of knowledge about how to develop an effective job search. Respondents scoring high on this scale are concerned with developing an appropriate job search plan, mastering effective job search skills, and learning to communicate better with prospective employers. They see a need to present themselves well both on paper and in person.

Training and Education: The T scale measures barriers arising from a lack of education or training for the type of job desired. Respondents scoring high on this scale are concerned with enhancing their employability by upgrading their knowledge and skills. They are interested in on-the-job training as well as classroom training opportunities.

DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL DETAILS

The rational-empirical method of test construction (Crites, 1978) was used in the development of *BESI*. In the rational-empirical approach, existing theory identifies the concepts or behaviors that are considered principal to measure. Miller and Oetting's (1977) research about barriers to employment served as the primary research in the development of the Inventory.

From this initial conceptualization and research, an individual's success in finding or succeeding in a job is determined largely by the barriers he or she faces. No psychometric instruments were found that would assess an individual's barriers to employment. Therefore, the decision was made to develop an instrument to measure an individual's barriers to career development and finding a job.

The third edition of the *BESI* was created to reflect continuing research being done on the instrument and to implement changes to improve its administration and interpretation. Changes from the second edition include

- A few of the items were revised for ease of reading and to better reflect the world-of-work, including the increasing role that computers and the Internet play in employability and the job search.
- The interpretation instructions have been streamlined to cut down on repetition and decrease administration time.
- New specific barriers and strategies have been added to Steps 4 and 5, including the addition of Web sites for further assistance in overcoming barriers and a worksheet for setting short- and long-term goals.
- The administrator's guide was updated to reflect new research and additional testing on the instrument.

Measures of Reliability

Evidence of reliability for *BESI* was computed in terms of internal consistency (Alpha Coefficients) for adults (see Table 1), stability (test-retest correlations) for an adult population (see Table 2), and split-half reliability (see Table 3).

Anastasi (1988) found that internal consistency estimates of reliability are essentially measures of homogeneity. Anastasi states, "because it helps to characterize the behavior domain or trait sampled by the test, the degree of homogeneity of a test has some relevance" (p. 156). Coefficient Alpha was the method used to assess reliability. As Table 1 shows, the Alpha Coefficients for *BESI* ranged from a low of .87 on the Job-Seeking Knowledge scale to a high of .95 on the Career Decision-Making and Planning scale. The reliability of all five sub-scales on *BESI* is equal to or greater than .87. The level generally considered adequate is .70. This indicates that there is high confidence that the items on each of the *BESI* scales are similar and that they measure what they are intended to measure.

The original testing sample consisted of 150 unemployed adults participating in government-sponsored job training programs. Test-retest reliability was determined by retesting a sample of this initial pool of subjects approximately six months after the initial testing. Table 2 shows the test-retest reliability ranging from .79 to .90. These ranges indicate that the measures used in *BESI* are consistent over time.

To examine further evidence of the internal consistency of the *BESI* scales, a split-half reliability estimate was obtained for the Inventory. This coefficient is presented in Table 3. A correlation of .90 was obtained for *BESI*, well within an acceptable range for this measure.

TABLE 1
Internal Consistency
(Alpha Coefficients)*

Personal and Financial	.88
Emotional and Physical	.91
Career Decision-Making and Planning	.95
Job-Seeking Knowledge	.87
Training and Education	.92

* N = 150 adults

TABLE 2
Stability (Test-Retest Correlation)*
(6 months after original testing)

Personal and Financial	.86
Emotional and Physical	.90
Career Decision-Making and Planning	.85
Job-Seeking Knowledge	.79
Training and Education	.82

* N = 95 adults

TABLE 3
Split-Half Reliability Correlation
(for the entire Inventory)

	SH-1	SH-2
SH-1	1	—
SH-2	.90	1

Measures of Validity

The validity of a test is determined by what the test measures, how well it does so, and what can be inferred from the test scores (Anastasi, 1988).

To develop inventory statements that were realistic, the author of *BESI* examined resource materials from case studies, interviews with unemployed adults, and research and journal articles about a variety of job search programs. He determined that the five scales that make up *BESI* were representative of barriers to career development and employment.

To ensure integrity of the content validity, the author initially developed a pool of 100 statements based on a careful review of the literature and input from employment and career counselors. To ensure the appropriateness of the statements included on *BESI*, the author requested that the counselors place the statements into the most appropriate and descriptive scales, eliminate any that did not represent the barriers to employment, and modify or reword any unclear statements. This input made it possible to combine and reduce the number of statements to approximately 75. *BESI* was then given to sample respondents enrolled in a government-sponsored job training program. From the results, Alpha Coefficients were calculated (see Table 1). Statements were then screened to eliminate any reference to race, gender, culture, or ethnic origin.

Concurrent validity for *BESI* is shown in the form of interscale correlations for an adult sample (see Table 4). The interscale correlations for *BESI* ranged from .451 to .694. These low correlations provide evidence of the independence of the scales for the inventory.

TABLE 4
Interscales Correlation Matrix for Variables X1 through X5

	P	E	C	J	T
Personal and Financial	1				
Emotional and Physical	.643	1			
Career Decision-Making and Planning	.498	.661	1		
Job-Seeking Knowledge	.451	.598	.481	1	
Training and Education	.562	.651	.694	.643	1

Means and standard deviations were computed for *BESI* (see Table 5). In a sample of 150 adults, males and females had similar scores. Males (mean score = 27.37) identified Job-Seeking Knowledge as their biggest barrier to employment, while females (mean score = 27.46) identified Personal and Financial issues as their biggest barrier to employment. This suggests that men tend to be more concerned about developing an effective job search, while women tend to be more concerned with solving problems related to such personal issues as child-care, transportation, and housing. Both males (mean = 23.34) and females (mean = 23.77) identified Training and Education as the least significant barrier to employment. The most noticeable difference occurred on the Emotional and Physical scale. Although they both saw Emotional and Physical barriers as important, females (mean = 26.31) tended to identify them as more significant than males (mean = 25.11).

TABLE 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Original Sample of Adults

	Total (N = 150)		Male (N = 83)		Female (N = 67)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Personal and Financial	27.09	6.49	27.31	6.26	27.46	6.64
Emotional and Physical	25.25	7.41	25.11	7.16	26.31	7.51
Career Decision-Making and Planning	26.09	7.57	26.17	7.25	25.54	8.26
Job-Seeking Knowledge	26.88	8.21	27.37	8.19	27.23	8.65
Training and Education	23.41	8.23	23.34	7.93	23.77	8.88

Barriers to Employment Success Inventory has subsequently been tested with a variety of populations, including long-term unemployed, offenders and ex-offenders, students, and welfare-to-work clients (see Table 6). As can be seen from this table, for these populations, Personal and Financial barriers (M = 27.42) and Job-Seeking Knowledge barriers (M = 27.14) are the greatest to overcome. On the other hand, Training and Education (M = 23.61) remains the barrier that the people sampled are least concerned about.

TABLE 6
Means and Standard Deviations of Subsequent Administrations *

Barrier	Means	Standard Deviation
Personal and Financial	27.42	6.64
Emotional and Physical	25.54	6.82
Career Decision-Making and Planning	26.36	7.72
Job-Seeking Knowledge	27.14	6.94
Training and Education	23.61	8.18

* N = 695

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In addition to the *BESI*, Dr. Liptak has created the following assessments for JIST Publishing: *Transition-to-Work Inventory (TWI)*, *Job Search Knowledge Scale (JSKS)*, *Job Survival and Success Scale (JSSS)*, *Career Exploration Inventory (CEI)*, *Career Exploration Inventory EZ (CEI-EZ)*, *Job Search Attitude Inventory (JSAI)*, and *College Survival and Success Scale (CSSS)*. Dr. Liptak consults on the development of assessments for schools and agencies around the country and has developed specialized assessment instruments for use with clients. He is a regular speaker at national and international conventions on the topic of assessment and assessment development and is also a JIST-certified trainer.

This assessment can be administered online. For details, go to www.jist.com.

Barriers to Employment Success Inventory works well with other assessments to help individuals understand all of the factors that contribute to job search and success, including attitudes towards the job search and knowledge of job search methods. The Triadic Job Search Model uses *BESI* along with the *Job Search Knowledge Scale (JSKS)* and the *Job Search Attitude Inventory (JSAI)* to fully explore all of these factors and help individuals be more successful in their job search. To learn more about the Triadic Job Search Model and these other assessments, please visit www.jist.com.

