

BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

GOALS OF THIS EXERCISE

1. Understand the relationship between the stress of occupational problems and addiction.
2. Identify connections between occupational problems and addictive behaviors.
3. Identify behavioral changes that would help resolve occupational problems.
4. Identify self-defeating thoughts and feelings associated with current and past work problems.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE USEFUL

- Borderline Traits
- Legal Difficulties

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

The “Barriers and Solutions” activity is suited for clients who have consistently had behavioral problems at work. For those unable to see the connection between addictive behavior and work problems, this exercise will increase insight. For the client who can recognize a relationship between addiction and work problems but needs help identifying relapse risk factors, it will increase awareness and help with solutions. The activity helps clients identify feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that may be barriers to employment and helps them generate possible solutions. Awareness and personal responsibility for behavior are two critical aspects of recovery. Addressing workplace problems and their relationship to addictive behaviors requires dealing with the associated denial, minimization, or blaming. For clients who are not currently employed, it can be used to assess past difficulties so that future employment is geared toward success.

Occupational problems take many forms: problems with authority, conflict with coworkers, stressful work environments, addictive behavior being supported or encouraged, adjustment to retirement or lay-off, underemployment or unemployment due to poor performance or attendance problems, and so on. Cause-and-effect connections between addictions and problems at work run both ways. Addictive behavior may cause work problems, and the work environment may contribute to addiction and relapse. This exercise will help you identify relationships between difficulties you've had with work and with addictive behavior and create solutions.

1. List the last four jobs you've held and the problems you've had in each job.

2. List the common problems you have had in work environments in the left-hand column below. In the right-hand column, identify the connections to addictive behaviors or ways these problems are recovery issues. We've given you some examples.

Problem	Relationship to Addiction/Recovery
<i>Fired for insubordination</i>	<i>Conflicts with authority figures</i>
<i>Lack of meaning to life after retirement</i>	<i>Used addictive patterns to cope</i>
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3. If you are currently working, how does your work environment place you at risk of relapse (e.g., coworker's addictions, job dissatisfaction, long work hours)?

4. What is your plan to address each of the risks you identified in question 3?

5. What discouraging thoughts or self-talk have you had, or do you have now, about your work situation (e.g., "I can't do this job," "I'll fail like the other times," "No one will hire me")?

6. For each negative thought you identified in question 5, write a more realistic, positive replacement thought (e.g., "I'm as capable as the other people doing this job, if they can do it so can I," "I've learned from past mistakes and am better prepared").

7. What behavior changes do you need to make to solve or avoid problems you've had at work in the past? It may help to ask others you trust to make suggestions.

8. What will you do this week to address one of the problems you listed for question 3?

9. What will you do during the next month to address this problem?

10. After completing questions 7, 8, and 9 and carrying out the actions you said you would take, record your evaluation of how you did.

Please bring this handout with you to future therapy sessions and talk over any questions or ideas you have, and be prepared to talk about this assignment with your therapist or your group.