

# Barriers to Employment Success Inventory

  
Fifth Edition

Identify Barriers to Getting and Keeping a Job

John J. Liptak, EdD



St. Paul

This booklet is designed to accompany the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory* (978-1-63332-319-3). © 2019 by John J. Liptak. Published by JIST Career Solutions, an imprint of JIST Publishing, 875 Montreal Way, St. Paul, MN 55102. Phone: 800-328-1452. Fax: 877-800-328-4564. E-mail: [service@JIST.com](mailto:service@JIST.com). Website: [JIST.com](http://JIST.com). All rights reserved. Duplication of this document is permitted for internal distribution to staff using the *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory*. No other use is permitted without written permission from the publisher. For additional career resources, please visit [JIST.com](http://JIST.com). For a JIST catalog, call 800-328-1452 or visit [JIST.com](http://JIST.com).

# Table of Contents

<b>Interrelationship Among Marginal Employment, Unemployment, and Barriers to Employment Success .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Employment Success Barriers .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Personal and Financial Barriers.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Emotional and Physical Barriers .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning Barriers .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge Barriers .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Education and Training Barriers.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Programs to Eliminate Employment Success Barriers.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Collaboration with Career and Employment Counselors .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Creation of an Assessment Tool for the Identification and Elimination of Barriers.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Development of the <i>BESI</i> .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Theory Behind the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Item Selection for the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Item Standardization for the <i>BESI</i> .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Reliability of the <i>BESI</i> .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Internal Consistency .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Split-Half Reliability.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Stability .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Validity of the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Components of the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Target Audience for the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Revisions to the Fifth Edition of the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Administration of the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Scoring of the <i>BESI</i>.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Use of the <i>BESI</i> Results .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Employment Success Plan .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Helpful Resources .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Personal and Financial .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Emotional and Physical .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Education and Training .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>About the Author.....</b>	<b>41</b>

# ***Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI), Fifth Edition***

## **Administrator's Guide**

**John J. Liptak, EdD**

The workplace and the workforce are evolving in ways that make it more challenging for job seekers to secure jobs and thrive in those positions. Changes in the workplace include an increasing dependence on technology, mass downsizing, labor reductions, and the outsourcing of work to other countries. These workplace initiatives result in a decreased number of available jobs. Changes in the workforce include an increasing number of applicants for the same position and a highly educated and trained pool of applicants. For that reason, job seekers must work hard to place themselves in a position to compete with others. To do so, job seekers must address barriers that are keeping them from getting *and* keeping jobs. Such barriers may include a lack of appropriate education or training; a limited English proficiency; physical, mental, or psychological issues; a need for child care assistance; a lack of transportation to get to a job; or a poorly written résumé.

These combined workplace and workforce changes have contributed to the unemployed population. A report published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in April 2017 stated that 1.4 million unemployed workers in the United States had been out of work for 6 months or longer. These unemployed workers accounted for 21.5% of the total unemployed population. The report also indicated that 1.7 million people were marginally attached to the labor force. Individuals in this category wanted and were available for work and had looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months. In addition, there were 451,000 discouraged workers who were no longer seeking jobs because they believed that no positions were available for them. Consequently, individuals who have been unemployed for an extended period face additional barriers from their unemployment status.

With that in mind, the *Barriers to Employment Success (BESI), Fifth Edition*, provides a standardized approach for career counselors to use in helping individuals identify, understand, and find solutions to the barriers that are preventing them from successful employment. The *BESI* is designed to be self-scored and self-interpreted with the use of additional materials, thus

providing immediate results to the participants and/or counselors. In addition, norms for the *BESI* have been developed for an adult population and are available to administrators.

This brief administrator's guide was written to provide additional information for professionals using the *BESI*. The guide describes the effects of unemployment, offers research findings to support the importance of addressing and eliminating barriers to employment success, explores the correlations between specific client barriers and the content of the *BESI*, and discusses the creation and revision of the *BESI* as an assessment tool through which individuals can be more successful in finding and keeping a job.

## **Interrelationship Among Marginal Employment, Unemployment, and Barriers to Employment Success**

Due to changes in the workplace and in the workforce, current employees are finding it challenging to keep their jobs, and prospective employees are struggling to find jobs. Those individuals who are struggling to keep their jobs are considered marginal employees if their employment situation does not allow them to earn enough money to make a decent living. They are also considered marginal employees if they are unable to meet employers' expectations, fail to perform some or all of their designated tasks, or adopt a negative attitude regarding their work responsibilities. These factors, outlined in Chris Newton's article "What is Marginal Employment?" for the online business website Bizfluent, may result from ineffective management, poor employee training, lack of communication about work tasks, or stress. Regardless of their origin, these factors have an impact on individuals, their families, and their employers.

Marginally employed workers, as well as unemployed individuals, face similar barriers that hinder employment success. These barriers include a lack of education and training; an inability to manage a career; a pattern of job absences due to health problems, transportation difficulties, or child care issues; a lack of motivation; financial limitations; and a poor attitude. Over the past several decades, studies have explored the far-reaching effects of marginal employment and unemployment on individuals' physical, mental, and psychological well-being; their relationships; their ability to find employment success; and their earnings potential and financial security. Selected research summaries are presented below.

The state of unemployment itself has a significant effect on individuals' quality of life. In 2001, Griffith University professors Peter A. Creed and Sean R. Macintyre conducted a study of unemployed adults in Australia. Their article, "The Relative Effects of Deprivation of the Latent and Manifest Benefits of Employment on the Well-Being of Unemployed People," concluded that unemployed individuals felt deprived in five interrelated social-psychological functions that employment fulfills: structure of time, social contact, goals, social status, and positive activity. As a result, these individuals experienced a deterioration in overall well-being and severe psychological distress. The lack of time structure, due to an absence in the routine of work, was the most important predictor of well-being. The absence of the other four functions—social contact, goals, social status, and positive activity—initially impacted these individuals' affect and self-esteem, which triggered an inability to set goals and engage in positive activity with others. The study highlighted the effect that unemployment has on the social and psychological functioning of individuals, which often causes barriers to employment success.

In addition, some unemployed recipients of government assistance may need increased support and guidance before reentering the workforce. This conclusion stemmed from a 2001 report published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). The report, *Welfare Reform: Moving Hard-to-Employ Recipients into the Workforce*, stated that individuals receiving government assistance shared one or more characteristics that presented barriers to employment success. These characteristics included substance abuse, poor mental or physical health, disability, low educational attainment, limited work experience, limited English proficiency, low basic skills, or domestic violence. Individuals who had one or more barriers to employment success had the most difficulty entering the workforce. The report suggested that these individuals participate in work-preparation programs and counseling to help them address their employment barriers.

Heidi Goldberg of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, an organization that analyzes the effects of federal and state government budget policies, agreed that many individuals who received government assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program almost always experienced several barriers to employment success. In her 2002 report, *Improving TANF Program Outcomes for Families with Barriers to Employment*, she cited barriers such as finances, transportation, language barriers, education, and lack of child care. Of the individuals studied for her report, 85% of them experienced at least two barriers to

employment success, whereas 44% experienced as many as four barriers to employment success.

Sheila R. Zedlewski, director of the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute, made similar observations in her 2003 report *Work and Barriers to Work Among Welfare Recipients in 2002*. According to Zedlewski, the presence of barriers to employment success did not prevent individuals from gaining satisfactory work; however, those individuals with multiple barriers were significantly less likely to be working than those with no barriers. Zedlewski also found that almost 50% of long-term welfare recipients had two or more barriers to employment.

Research conducted in 2006 by the Center for Law and Social Policy—a nonprofit organization that advances policy solutions for low-income individuals—corroborated the findings of the previously cited reports: hard-to-employ, low-income individuals face barriers to securing and maintaining successful employment. Challenges such as substance abuse, poor mental and physical health, disabilities, low educational attainment, limited work experience, limited English proficiency, low basic skills, and domestic violence were cited in the organization’s publication *Transitional Jobs: Helping TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment Succeed in the Labor Market*.

John J. Liptak, a leading expert of career assessments and counseling, has completed extensive research since 2006 on potential employment barriers. One of those barriers includes learned helplessness, as he addressed in his 2006 publication *Using the Triadic Job Search Counseling Model to Help Clients Overcome Learned Helplessness*. Liptak also suggested that helping individuals to identify these barriers and find ways to overcome them are the first steps in guiding them toward employment success. To that end, Liptak developed a list of potential barriers that employees and prospective employees face. These barriers are addressed in Liptak’s 2011 online publication *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory Administrator’s Guide*.

Similar to the findings of Creed and Macintyre, Julian Barling and Cary L. Cooper—experts in organizational leadership, psychology, and behavior—completed an extensive study in 2008 on the multiple effects of unemployment on individuals. The study, titled *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Behavior: Volume One—Micro Perspectives*, cited physical health problems, mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety, emotional issues such as stress and

low self-esteem, and relationship difficulties as being residual effects of unemployment and, consequently, barriers to reentering the workforce. This study solidified the notion that unemployment can have detrimental effects on individuals attempting to return to the workplace. These effects go beyond the traditional job-search barriers such as writing a résumé and cover letter to include physical and emotional health barriers.

Binyamin Appelbaum, an economic policy correspondent for *The New York Times*, reviewed much of the research related to the effects that unemployment can have on people in his 2012 article “The Enduring Consequences of Unemployment.” He concluded that the results of employment are enduring and devastating: “People who lose jobs, even if they eventually find new ones, suffer lasting damage to their earnings potential, their health and the prospects of their children. And the longer it takes to find a new job, the deeper the damage appears to be.”

Steve Crabtree, a survey methodology consultant and writer for Gallup, concurred with the findings that unemployment affects the health and well-being of individuals. In particular, Crabtree noted the mental-health impact of long-term unemployment. His report—*In U.S., Depression Rates Higher for Long-Term Unemployed*—focused on a Gallup survey of 356,599 Americans, including 18,322 unemployed adults in 2013. The survey findings revealed that the longer that individuals are unemployed, the more likely they are to begin experiencing various signs of poor psychological well-being. In fact, about one in five individuals who have been unemployed for a year or more report that they have received or are receiving treatment for depression. This statistic is twice the rate for individuals who have been unemployed for five weeks or less. The survey also found that unemployment is associated with a variety of psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Crabtree concluded that the loss of hope that often accompanies long-term unemployment may be detrimental not only to job seekers' quality of life but also can be a barrier to their ability to find good jobs.

## Employment Success Barriers

A review of the literature that describes programs and interventions designed to help individuals overcome barriers reveals that these barriers tend to cluster in five distinct categories:

- personal and financial difficulties
- emotional and physical issues

- career decision-making and planning problems
- job-seeking knowledge inadequacies
- education and training concerns

These categories are reflected in the *BESI* self-assessment and are discussed in detail below.

## **Personal and Financial Barriers**

Workers who are contemplating a career change due to a lack of advancement or those individuals who are laid off or unemployed may face personal and financial barriers to employment success. Personal issues such as a language barrier, a criminal record, limited or no access to transportation, or a lack of appropriate clothing may impede both the job interview process as well as the potential to secure a position.

Some of these personal obstacles may also be tied to individuals' financial situations. For example, financial constraints may make it difficult for individuals to afford transportation or work clothing. Other financial considerations such as adequate and affordable housing, sufficient food, adequate medical and dental care, and affordable child care are significant factors for unemployed and struggling workers. For that reason, financial planning is an important part of achieving employment success.

Robert D. Lock, a career development instructor at Jackson Community College in Michigan, agreed that financial planning is a key part of employment success. In his 2005 publication *Taking Charge of Your Career Direction*, Lock stated that individuals 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 these individuals must initiate immediate actions to cope effectively with their financial insecurity. These actions included applying for unemployment benefits, developing a budget, lowering expenses while in the midst of change, and finding ways to earn income.

Personal and financial issues were particularly significant among African Americans in vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs. This finding was noted in the 2011 publication *Perceived Barriers to Employment Success: Are There Differences between European American and African American VR Consumers?* The authors of the publication—Stephen A. Zankas, Daniel C. Lustig, and Terry T. Ishitani—studied the perceived barriers to employment success in European Americans and African Americans in VR programs. They utilized the *BESI*



self-assessment and found that African-American participants perceived significantly more barriers to obtaining a job or succeeding in employment than their European-American counterparts for all five barrier categories. They also discovered that African-American participants' primary perceived barriers were personal and financial matters, such as housing, transportation, medical care, financial resources, and sufficient education or training for the type of job sought. European-American participants perceived their barriers to be more related to career decision-making and planning and job-seeking knowledge.

Liptak also found that some of the most important barriers for unemployed workers were personal and financial problems, as noted in his 2012 publication *Planning Your School-to-Career Transition* and in his 2015 publication *Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success*. Liptak said that “people facing such barriers are most concerned about supporting themselves and their families while they look for work.” Some of the barriers Liptak identified included having enough food and clothing, adequate housing, transportation to get to a job, and child care. Additional personal and financial barriers included understanding the impact of a criminal record on employment, managing money, budgeting, and planning a financial future.

## **Emotional and Physical Barriers**

Individuals 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. Stress from these types of barriers can interfere with the job-search process, in turn causing additional stress for individuals.

University of Toledo researchers Donna Winegardner, Jack L. Simonetti, and Nick Nykodym, authors of *Unemployment: The Living Death*, were the first to describe unemployment as “the living death” due to its devastating impact on the human psyche. They likened the impact to a major crisis such as a divorce or the death of a loved one. Their research in 1984 suggested that unemployed workers go through five stages that parallel the stages that individuals who suffer serious emotional trauma face. These 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 also be confused about their job loss and shocked by the realization that they are dispensable. Other emotions that individuals

may experience include feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and guilt. Their emotional state may serve as a catalyst for isolation from their families and friends rather than for assistance from their support system.

- *Stage Two: Anger*—In this stage, individuals recognize the reality of the termination and begin to feel anger toward the organization, management, and/or immediate supervisors. The union, the system, or foreign outsourcing companies may later become the target of their discontent.
- *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 to try to reverse the decision. As their attempts to compromise fail, they give up. They also try to identify their future available options. Individuals may convince themselves that this experience may eventually lead to self-improvement and, consequently, increased self-worth.
- *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 worthless. They are probably frustrated and doubting their own abilities. They feel lethargic and have difficulty engaging in activities.
- *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 lives.

Since the publication of *Unemployment: The Living Death* in 1984, other researchers have provided evidence that unemployment is “the living death.” Margaretha Voss, Lotta Nylén, Birgitta Floderus, Finn Diderichsen, and Paul D. Terry, researchers in the Department of Clinical Neuroscience at the Institute of Environmental Medicine in Stockholm, concur with the damaging effects of unemployment. Their 2004 study investigated the association between unemployment and early cause-specific mortality to determine whether the relationship was modified by other risk indicators. They found that unemployment was associated with an increased risk of suicide and early death from causes such as emotional issues, personality disorders, serious or long-lasting illness, and limited education. They concluded that an increased risk of death from external causes supported the need for helping those individuals experiencing unemployment to overcome barriers to employment success.

Journalist Megan McArdle, in her 2014 *Time* article “Unemployment: A Fate Worse Than Death,” stated that—short of death—unemployment tends to plunge people into despair more than any other event that can be experienced. McArdle suggested that, unless unemployed individuals work toward positive change by actively pursuing jobs and finding solutions to overcome barriers, they will likely stay unemployed.

## Career Decision-Making and Planning Barriers

Career analyst and author Daniel H. Pink was one of the first to suggest that career-planning skills are critical in overcoming barriers to employment success. In his 2001 book *Free Agent Nation: How America’s New Independent Workers Are Transforming the Way We Live*, he suggested that workers in the 21st century need to develop excellent career-planning and career-resiliency skills to be successful. Pink stated that employers no longer feel responsible for the career development of their employees. Therefore, individuals should consider themselves as free agents in the workplace and develop their own career plan. This plan would allow individuals to manage their workplace stress, adapt to evolving situations, and account for all barriers that can interfere with workplace success.

Robert D. Lock agreed that people need to take charge of their career planning in his 2005 publication *Job Search: Career Planning Guide, Book 2*. He asserted that many employers no longer provide job security or loyalty to employees, and, consequently, employees must develop and utilize effective career-planning skills. Lock recommended that individuals provide their own job security by setting and working toward long-range goals, acting as if they are self-employed, and taking charge of their own career path.

Sharing the observations of Pink and Lock, John J. Liptak stated that many individuals are unable to find jobs simply because they do not know what types of jobs they are looking for and, therefore, are unable to develop effective career plans. For that reason, career decision-making and planning is a focus of Liptak’s 2015 publication *Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success*. Liptak concluded that, although career decision-making and planning barriers seem less important than other barriers (for example, financial barriers), career planning can have a profound impact on a job search and long-term employment success.

Research suggests that one of the biggest changes in the current workplace is employee turnover. Millennial workers in the 21st century change jobs more frequently, move more often

to obtain a job, and undergo more retraining for new employment opportunities than their older counterparts. Editor Jeffrey R. Young explored this concept in his 2017 article “How Many Times Will People Change Jobs? The Myth of the Endlessly-Job-Hopping Millennial.” Young reported that a recent interview with a LinkedIn executive revealed that individuals change careers—more specifically, jobs—15 times during their working years. In addition, LinkedIn economists crunched the numbers for some of its 500 million users over the past 20 years. Their data revealed a jump in employment turnover, especially among millennials, and indicated that employment turnover was accelerating. The LinkedIn study also found that millennials will change jobs an average of four times in their first decade out of college, compared with about two job changes by Gen Xers their first decade out of college. The study concluded that this increased frequency in job change requires workers to have skills in making effective career-related decisions and planning a career trajectory.

## Job-Seeking Knowledge Barriers

The number of jobs available for today’s U.S. workforce has decreased. Many workers have been laid off 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. These factors have resulted in unemployed workers embarking on a job search while trying to manage the stress of their situation. This stress can manifest in several ways, as evidenced by research over the past decades.

The impact of a job search on individuals’ health was addressed in the 1987 publication *Coping with Unemployment: What Helps and What Hinders*. The authors, Norman E. Amundson and William A. Borgen, identified four stages that individuals undergo while conducting a job search. These stages include the following:

- *Stage 1: Enthusiasm*—The initial stage of the job search is characterized by high hopes, heightened 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, individuals often feel frustration from continual rejection during a job-search campaign. This frustration may lead to anger. As a result,

unemployed individuals often vent their frustration and anger on their friends and families.

- *Stage 4: Apathy*—During this stage, individuals devote less time to their job search. They become disinterested in pursuing employment opportunities and feel that they are not worthy of becoming contributing members of a workforce.

In the initial stages of this job-search model, Amundson and Borgen noted that unemployed workers were relatively positive about looking for a job. However, as these individuals experienced long-term unemployment, the authors observed that the stress and exhaustion associated with job hunting led the unemployed workers to abandon the search. They recommended that career counselors become attuned to the negative effects of a job-search campaign on their clients' emotional state and to find ways to help their clients cope with these effects.

Employment experts Paul Edwards and Sarah Edwards, in their 2001 book *Changing Directions Without Losing Your Way*, stated that individuals feel helpless if they allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the enormity or impossibility of change in their lives. One change addressed in their publication is a job change. Edwards and Edwards suggested that job seekers should understand the process of change and its ability to empower them to forge a new career path and way of living. In addition, the authors underscored the importance of a positive attitude in overcoming job-seeking barriers. Edwards and Edwards concluded that individuals should create a strategy for changing directions and igniting a job search.

More recently, researchers have explored why people experience stress in the job-search process. Ken Sundheim, an expert on job search and recruitment, discussed the impact of stress in his 2014 *U.S. News & World Report* article "Stop Stress from Taking Control of Your Job Search." Sundheim described the job-search process as beyond the control of individuals and cited the following reasons:

- While searching for a job, job seekers receive no feedback as to why they were not invited to interview for a position or why they did not receive an invitation for a second or third interview.
- Job seekers do not know their competition.
- Job seekers are unaware of interview phases and the intentions and strategies of hiring managers or human resource managers.

- During a job search, uncontrollable events such as economic shifts, internal hiring freezes, or unexpected mergers and buyouts may occur.
- Job seekers often lack confidence during a job search because they have had limited practice in this venture.

For these reasons, a job search can quickly veer off course if individuals do not manage the stress that is inherent to a lack of control. Sudheim concluded that the stress levels of job seekers can be reduced by adopting the right mental attitude, remaining in control of their reactions to negative situations, and using the experience to invigorate their career aspirations.

John J. Liptak agreed with Sudheim's assertion that a job search does have a number of uncontrollable factors. However, Liptak also suggested that job seekers focus on factors that are within their control, such as recognizing job-search knowledge barriers and finding solutions to overcome these barriers. Liptak identified many job-search knowledge barriers in his 2015 publication *Overcoming Barriers to Employment Success*. Some of these barriers include a poorly written résumé, unprepared or unrehearsed interviewing skills, or inadequate job-search techniques. Because these challenges have easily accessible resources to help job seekers find solutions to the problems, Liptak asserted that individuals can address these barriers more easily than other barriers and improve their opportunities for employment success. Liptak concluded that job seekers should gain a better understanding of the job market, networking methods, interviewing skills, and job-counseling resources.

## Education and Training Barriers

To be successful in the workforce, individuals need to embrace the notion of lifelong learning and to obtain as much education and training as possible. Although most workers recognize the importance of learning new concepts to stay current in their jobs, many of them face a multitude of barriers to pursuing educational and training opportunities, including:

- a lack of knowledge regarding how to locate and utilize information about education and training programs
- inadequate financial resources
- a learning disability
- limited time availability due to current responsibilities
- a lack of confidence about their ability to return to a learning environment and achieve success

Although these barriers can be significant, they must be overcome for people to have employment success.

Robert D. Lock observed the need for additional education and training in his 2005 book *Taking Charge of Your Career Direction: Career Planning Guide, Book 1*. Lock suggested that a college degree is no longer sufficient and only serves as a springboard to additional education and training. He emphasized that continuous learning is required for meaningful work and that individuals should anticipate returning to the classroom several times over the course of their career. For example, Lock cited the expanded role of computer technology in today's workplace as a driving force for individuals to have additional education and training in computer applications.

Lynda W. Carville identified several barriers that prevent individuals from obtaining vocational training or college degrees in her 2005 thesis *Barriers to Educational Attainment for Rural Women Exiting Welfare*. Carville cited the following types of barriers in her research:

- *Attitudinal barriers:* When families diminish the role of education, diminish the self-esteem of people attempting to go back to school, or fail to act as role models for completing educational opportunities
- *Personal/situational barriers:* When individuals are unable to return to school because of family commitments, lack of partner support, financial difficulties, rural or isolated housing situations, domestic violence, transportation issues, or criminal convictions
- *Institutional barriers:* When individuals are unable to return to school because of a lack of child care facilities at the school, an inability to meet the requirements for admission, or a realization that their uneven school attendance may be penalized
- *Health problems:* When individuals suffer from mental, physical, or psychological disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, drug or alcohol dependence, heart problems, or learning disabilities
- *Socioeconomic problems:* When individuals are unable to return to school because of transportation costs, child care costs, the need to work full time or overtime, or other costs related to attaining additional education

Like Carville, John J. Liptak noted the presence of barriers to education and training. He underscored the importance of overcoming these obstacles in his 2008 publication *Assessing Barriers to Education Administrator's Guide*. Liptak suggested that educational attainment is one of the key aspects to employment success. He argued that most of the emerging or fastest-

growing jobs required some type of postsecondary education or training. However, he recognized that many individuals face numerous barriers that prevent them from furthering their education or training. Liptak concluded that “a person’s education level directly impacts that person’s employability, job prospects, income, and overall life and career satisfaction. Postsecondary education and training opportunities are considered the best gateways to high-skilled and high-paying jobs in the 21st century.”

## Programs to Eliminate Employment Success Barriers

Over the past several decades, many researchers and organizations have recognized the employment success barriers that are commonly experienced among all struggling workers. These universal challenges are represented by the barrier categories of the *BESI* self-assessment. Still, certain populations face additional employment obstacles related to language and cultural issues; physical, mental, and emotional disabilities; age; criminal records; and poverty. To address these needs, many organizations instituted programs to identify the specific barriers of individuals and to find opportunities to allow them to be successful in the workforce.

One of the first programs was a revolutionary program created by William A. Borgen in 1999. Borgen’s program, called “Starting Points,” was a group-based, needs-assessment program designed to assist unemployed individuals to make informed choices about the types of assistance that they may find helpful in beginning the process of reconnecting with the labor market. In this program, group members identified 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 were chosen by the greatest number of respondents as areas in which they needed the most assistance. For that reason, one of the categories of the *BESI* addresses Education and Training.
- The area of career exploration and testing was chosen by the next largest segment of respondents. A related area, career information, was chosen by many respondents as well. These two areas are reflected in the Career Decision-Making and Planning section of the *BESI*.



- Job-search skills and opportunities were areas cited by many respondents, and these areas correlate with the Job-Seeking Knowledge section of the *BESI*.
- Issues related to financial assistance, transportation, and child care were barriers noted by a smaller but still significant percentage of respondents. These areas correlate with the Personal and Financial section of the *BESI*.
- Psychological problems, cited by a small percentage of respondents, correlate with the Emotional and Physical section of the *BESI*.

Specific barriers faced by visually impaired individuals were the focus of research conducted by Adele Crudden, William Sansing, and Stacy Butler from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. Their 2005 study explored strategies for identifying and treating employment success barriers in the visually impaired population. They found that some of these obstacles included negative employer attitudes, inadequate transportation, lack of access to print materials, changing technology, emotional adjustment, and inadequate job-search skills.

The use of transitional job programs to provide a bridge for individuals to reenter the workforce was the focus of the previously cited 2006 study *Transitional Jobs: Helping TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment Succeed in the Labor Market*. The Center for Law & Social Policy conducted the study and suggested that the use of transitional job programs can provide a bridge for clients to begin working as quickly as possible. Prior to placement in these programs, individuals were given preplacement assessments to identify their barriers to employment success. Once the barriers were identified, the participants were placed in part-time jobs and provided with life-skills training, job-readiness training, and worksite supervision to help them overcome these challenges.

A 2007 report titled *Four Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Unemployment*, by Dan Bloom and other management leaders at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, described a variety of programs for individuals who face serious obstacles to employment, such as long-term welfare recipients, formerly incarcerated individuals, people with disabilities, and individuals with health or behavioral problems. These programs included assessment, education, barrier elimination, and job-search and retention training.

In 2013, the National Alliance to End Homelessness developed a program to help homeless populations overcome employment barriers. The organization noted that “research consistently shows that people experiencing homelessness want to work but they face a variety of barriers to employment success including the experience of homelessness itself, a lack of experience, physical barriers, mental health barriers, hospitalization, and challenges related to re-entry from incarceration.”

Another special population that faced significant challenges in finding and keeping jobs were young adult refugees. To support that population, the United Way’s Toronto and York Region recently created the Career Navigator Program. According to a 2018 United Way blog written by Nick Thomas, this education-to-employment program helps young people achieve financial stability by offering job training, internships, and support systems. Providing these opportunities eliminates several employment barriers and helps these individuals secure the credentials and experience required for in-demand jobs.

## **Collaboration with Career and Employment Counselors**

Career and employment counselors play a key role in helping individuals identify and overcome barriers in order to secure and maintain employment. For that reason, the *BESI* is designed to help career and employment counselors identify the barriers that are keeping their clients from obtaining employment in this new economy.

The role of career and employment counselors in recognizing barriers to employment success can be traced back to the landmark 1997 publication *No One Is Unemployable: Creative Solutions to Overcoming Barriers to Employment*, written by career development specialists Elisabeth E. Harney and Debra L. Angel. The authors of the publication suggested a 10-step process that provides a collaborative approach between prospective employers and job seekers for identifying and eliminating barriers to employment success:

1. Identify barriers to employment success.
2. Identify the person’s perception of each barrier.
3. Identify how an employer views the perceived barrier of a potential employee.
4. Determine an approach to address each barrier, including providing a resource, working to adjust the person’s outlook, teaching a new skill, or providing additional assessment.

5. Eliminate the employer's concern.
6. Identify the person's selling points to meet the needs of the employer.
7. Turn barriers into positive selling points.
8. Put it all together in the person's own words.
9. Practice answers until they become natural responses by the person.
10. Match the person to appropriate employers.

In 2001, the National Employment Counseling Association (NECA) proposed that career and employment counselors must have certain competencies to help their clients identify and eliminate barriers to employment success. These counselor competencies, outlined in the NECA publication *National Employment Counseling Competencies*, applied to workforce development, outplacement programs, correctional programs, welfare-to-work, school-to-work, one stop, job service, and other employment counseling programs. Some of the competencies cited included the ability to:

- conduct effective intake to ensure that the applicant is suitable and able to benefit in the agency's programs
- assist the client in developing and implementing a suitable employment plan that helps move the job seeker from current status through any needed employability improvement services, and into a suitable job
- recognize the need to refer the client to appropriate resources to remove barriers to employment
- manage clients through placement and retention in a job position

According to the 2002 publication *Addressing Employment Barriers* released from the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS), individuals' success in employment depended on their ability to be their own career developer. By participating in a program in which employment activities are available and utilized, individuals were able to succeed in addressing and surmounting their own barriers to employment. ODJFS suggested that career counselors use multiple strategies, at different intensities and in different combinations, to adequately meet the needs of individuals. Specifically, the department made the following recommendations:

- Barriers cannot be addressed all at once because they can be overwhelming. Some obstacles need to be handled prior to the beginning of a job search, others during a job search, and still others after beginning employment.
- Addressing barriers can clear a path to employment.

- Multiple barriers require career counselors to provide comprehensive services, rather than separate services, for individual barriers.
- Addressing barriers requires career counselors to focus on the strengths of individuals. A sole focus on challenges may result in self-defeating behavior.

Career writer Ronald Krannich agreed that individuals must take charge of their own future. However, he also asserted that career and employment counselors need to help their clients with “re-careering,” or the process of overcoming barriers while acquiring skills for a challenging job market. In his 2005 publication *Change Your Job, Change Your Life: Careering and Re-Careering in the New Boom/Bust Economy*, Krannich stated that millions of workers are displaced due to the continuing transformation of the economy and workplace. He suggested that unemployed workers need assistance in finding strategies to identify and overcome barriers to their employment success. This approach allows them to conduct an effective job search.

## **Creation of an Assessment Tool for the Identification and Elimination of Barriers**

The aforementioned research clearly indicates that individuals who are frustrated in their current jobs or who are looking for employment often encounter many types of employment success barriers. These challenges include personal and financial barriers, emotional and physical barriers, career decision-making and planning barriers, job-seeking knowledge barriers, and education and training barriers. For that reason, career and employment counselors need to be aware of these employment success barriers so that they can help their clients identify their own obstacles and create a plan to reduce and/or eliminate them. The *Barriers for Employment Success Inventory (BESI)* was designed to assist counselors in these tasks. The *BESI* provides individuals with insight into their specific barriers to employment success, activities to help them overcome the barriers, and an opportunity to develop an employment success plan.

## Development of the *BESI*

The *BESI* is a brief self-assessment developed to help individuals identify their barriers to employment success and to find solutions to eliminate those obstacles. As such, the *BESI* was designed to:

- measure which critical barriers to employment success need to be reduced or overcome for a person to achieve employment success
- contain items that were not gender-specific and that were applicable to individuals ages 21 to 64
- be user-friendly in its implementation, scoring, and interpretation

## Theory Behind the *BESI*

John J. Liptak, the author of the *BESI*, based his research for the self-assessment on the 1977 article “Barriers to Employment and the Disadvantaged” by C. Dean Miller and Gene Oetting. In this article, the researchers identified more than 30 barriers to employment success and confirmed that an individual’s success in finding or succeeding in a job is determined largely by the barriers he or she faces. In light of that, Liptak recognized the need for a psychometric instrument that would assess an individual’s barriers to employment success. As such, Liptak found common threads among the 30 barriers cited by Miller and Oetting and subsequently established five barrier categories for the self-assessment: Personal and Financial, Emotional and Physical, Career Decision-Making and Planning, Job-Seeking Knowledge, and Education and Training. Therefore, the rational-empirical method of test construction was used in the development of the *BESI* due to its basis on Miller and Oetting’s theory.

## Item Selection for the *BESI*

A large pool of items representing the five barriers to employment success was created and later revised during the development of the *BESI*. This process eliminated any items that did not correlate well with the specific barrier areas. The wording of the items reflects the language that is currently being used in the career and job-search literature and research as well as in job training and counseling programs.

After the items were developed, they were reviewed and edited for clarity, style, and meaning. This process ensured that participants could understand the item, respond appropriately, and

gain insight into their specific barriers to employment success. Items were additionally screened to eliminate any reference to gender, race, religion, culture, or ethnic origin.

## **Item Standardization for the *BESI***

Experts in the fields of career and employment counseling were asked to sort the items into employment success barrier categories to ensure item standardization. The result of their efforts was a final pool of 10 items for each barrier category on the *BESI*.

The author identified several unemployed, adult populations to complete drafts of the *BESI* for statistical validation. This initial research yielded information about the appropriateness of items for each employment success barrier category; the reactions of participants concerning the inventory format and content; and the reactions of participants concerning the ease of administration, scoring, and profiling of the *BESI*.

The collected data was then subjected to Cronbach's alpha correlation reliability coefficients to identify the items that best represented the five employment success barrier categories on the *BESI*. Based on this analysis, 10 items were selected for the final self-assessment and were again reviewed for content, clarity, and style.

### ***Reliability of the BESI***

Reliability is often defined as the consistency with which an assessment measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of reliability for the *BESI* was computed in terms of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha correlation reliability coefficients), stability (test-retest correlations), and split-half reliability.

### ***Internal Consistency***

Psychometric expert Anne Anastasi, in her book *Psychological Testing*, found that internal consistency estimates of reliability are essentially measures of homogeneity. Anastasi states the degree of a test's homogeneity has relevance because it helps to characterize the behavior domain or trait sampled by the test.

With Anastasi's theory in mind, the alpha correlation reliability coefficient method was used to assess the reliability of the *BESI*. The results, shown in Table 1, reveal that the alpha coefficient correlations ranged from a low of .87 in the Job-Seeking Knowledge section to a high of .95 in the Career Decision-Making and Planning section. The reliability of all five correlation

coefficients on the *BESI* is equal to or greater than .87, which is above the adequate level of .70. The correlation coefficients were all statistically significant at the 0.01 level. These results indicate a high confidence that the items on the *BESI* self-assessment are internally consistent (homogeneity) and that they measure what they are intended to measure.

<b>Table 1: Internal Consistency of the <i>BESI</i> (Cronbach's Alpha Correlation Reliability Coefficients)*</b>	
<b>Barrier Categories</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficients<sup>†</sup></b>
Personal and Financial	.88
Emotional and Physical	.91
Career Decision-Making and Planning	.95
Job-Seeking Knowledge	.87
Education and Training	.92

\* *N* = Data was culled from 150 unemployed adults participating in government-sponsored job-training programs.  
<sup>†</sup> Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level.

### ***Split-Half Reliability***

To provide further evidence of the internal consistency of the *BESI* self-assessment, a split-half reliability estimate was obtained. Items on the *BESI* were split into even and odd groups, and then an analysis was conducted between the two sets of items to ensure that they yield similar true scores and error variances. This coefficient is presented in Table 2. A correlation of .90 was obtained for the *BESI*, a measure that is well within an acceptable range.

<b>Table 2: Split-Half Reliability Correlation of the <i>BESI</i>*†</b>		
	<b>SH-1</b>	<b>SH-2</b>
<b>SH-1</b>	1	—
<b>SH-2</b>	.90	1

\* Data reflects the entire inventory.  
† Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level.

### **Stability**

The stability of the *BESI*, also referred to as *test-retest reliability*, was determined by retesting a sample of the original pool of participants approximately six months after the initial testing. Table 3 shows the test-retest reliability, which ranges from .79 to .90. This range indicates that the measures used in the *BESI* are consistent over time.

<b>Table 3: Stability of the <i>BESI</i> (Test-Retest Reliability)* †</b>	
<b>Barrier Categories</b>	<b>Correlations‡</b>
Personal and Financial	.86
Emotional and Physical	.90
Career Decision-Making and Planning	.85
Job-Seeking Knowledge	.79
Education and Training	.82

\* *N* = Data was culled from 150 unemployed adults participating in government-sponsored job-training programs.  
† Data was obtained six months after original testing.  
‡ Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level.

### **Validity of the *BESI***

Validity is often defined as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. To develop inventory statements for the *BESI* that were valid, Liptak examined resource materials from case studies, interviews with unemployed adults, and research and journal articles about a



variety of job-search programs. Based on his findings, he determined that the five barrier categories of the *BESI* represent commonly acknowledged barriers to career development and employment.

To ensure the validity of the content, Liptak initially developed a pool of 100 items based on a careful review of the literature and input from employment and career counselors. To ensure the relevance of the items included in the *BESI*, the author requested that the counselors place the items into the most appropriate barrier categories, eliminate any items that did not represent the barriers to employment success, and modify any unclear items. This collective input made it possible to combine certain items and, consequently, reduce the total number of items from 100 to 75.

Once the number of items was reduced, the *BESI* self-assessment was administered to participants who were enrolled in government-sponsored job-training programs. Cronbach's alpha correlation reliability coefficients were calculated from the results (see Table 1). Then the items were screened to eliminate any reference to race, gender, culture, or ethnic origin.

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

<b>Table 4: Validity of the <i>BESI</i> (Interscale Correlation Matrices for the Five Barriers to Employment Success)</b>					
	<b>Personal and Financial</b>	<b>Emotional and Physical</b>	<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning</b>	<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge</b>	<b>Education and Training</b>
<b>Personal and Financial</b>	1				
<b>Emotional and Physical</b>	.643	1			
<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning</b>	.498	.661	1		
<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge</b>	.451	.598	.481	1	
<b>Education and Training</b>	.562	.651	.694	.643	1

Means (M) and standard deviations (SDs) were computed for the *BESI* self-assessment (see Table 5). A sample population of 150 male adults and female adults had similar scores. Male adults (M = 27.37) identified Job-Seeking Knowledge issues as their greatest barrier to employment, whereas female adults (M = 27.46) identified Personal and Financial issues as their greatest barrier to employment. These results suggest that men tend to be more concerned about developing an effective job search, whereas women tend to be more concerned with solving problems related to such personal issues as child care, transportation, and housing. Both male adults (M = 23.34) and female adults (M = 23.77) identified Education and Training as the least significant barrier to employment. The most noticeable difference occurred in the Emotional and Physical barrier category. Although both male adults and female

adults recognized Emotional and Physical barriers as important, female adults (M = 26.31) tended to identify these types of barriers as more significant than male adults (M = 25.11).

**Table 5: *BESI* Means and Standard Deviations for Adults**

BARRIER CATEGORIES	TOTAL POPULATION*		MALE ADULTS <sup>†</sup>		FEMALE ADULTS <sup>††</sup>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Personal and Financial</b>	27.09	6.49	27.31	6.26	27.46	6.64
<b>Emotional and Physical</b>	25.25	7.41	25.11	7.16	26.31	7.51
<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning</b>	26.09	7.57	26.17	7.25	25.54	8.26
<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge</b>	26.88	8.21	27.37	8.19	27.23	8.65
<b>Education and Training</b>	23.41	8.23	23.34	7.93	23.77	8.88

\* Total (N = 150 adults from original sample)  
<sup>†</sup> Male (N = 83)  
<sup>††</sup> Female (N = 67)

The second edition of the *BESI* self-assessment was tested using a variety of populations, including long-term unemployed adults, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, students, and welfare-to-work clients (see Table 6). For these populations, Personal and Financial barriers (M = 27.42) and Job-Seeking Knowledge barriers (M = 27.14) were the greatest challenges to overcome. On the other hand, Education and Training barriers (M = 23.61) were of least concern for the sample population.

<b>Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations Based on the Administration of the <i>BESI</i>, Second Edition*†</b>		
<b>Barrier Categories</b>	<b>Mean<sup>††</sup></b>	<b>SD</b>
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
Education and Training	23.61	8.18

\* *N* = 695  
† Data was culled two weeks after original testing.  
†† Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level.

The third edition of the *BESI* was tested on a population consisting of 148 unemployed adults in job-training programs. The results, shown in Table 7, indicated that the greatest barriers to employment success for these participants were Education and Training challenges (M = 30.39) and Emotional and Physical issues (M = 28.00). The significant increase in these two barrier categories from the second-edition testing was probably indicative of changes in the workplace, particularly downsizing. Individuals viewed education and training as enhancing their employment possibilities and increasing their potential for retainment if currently employed. The anxiety related to downsizing, whether anticipation of the event or the need to find employment, was indicated by the increased score in the Emotional and Physical category. Interestingly, Career Decision-Making and Planning issues (M = 26.38) and Job-Seeking Knowledge challenges (M = 26.66) were the least recognized barriers to employment success, most likely because other barriers overshadow them in the current workplace.

<b>Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations Based on the Administration of the <i>BESI</i>, Third Edition*†</b>		
<b>Barrier Category</b>	<b>Mean<sup>††</sup></b>	<b>SD</b>
Personal and Financial	26.89	4.61
Emotional and Physical	28.00	4.10
Career Decision-Making and Planning	26.38	3.81
Job-Seeking Knowledge	26.66	4.53
Education and Training	30.39	4.45
* <i>N</i> = 148		
† Data was culled two weeks after original testing.		
†† Correlations were significant at the 0.01 level.		

The fourth edition of the *BESI* was tested on male and female unemployed adults (see Table 8). Overall, participants had the most concern about Personal and Financial barriers ( $M = 29.79$ ) and Job-Seeking Knowledge barriers ( $M = 29.36$ ). Participants were least concerned about Career Decision-Making and Planning barriers ( $M = 26.74$ ) and Emotional and Physical barriers ( $26.94$ ).

Male adults had the greatest concern about Job-Seeking Knowledge barriers ( $M = 30.74$ ), as shown in Table 8. The result suggested that men were having trouble finding a job in a workplace that is now dependent on technologically skilled workers. Their lack of computer skills also affected their ability to conduct an effective job search and apply for jobs. Men were also concerned about Personal and Financial barriers ( $M = 29.43$ ), including transportation issues, child care problems, and housing concerns. Male adults were least concerned about Emotional and Physical barriers ( $M = 26.33$ ), such as managing their extreme emotions, handling stress and sadness, and maintaining their self-esteem throughout the job search and while employed. In addition, they did not see Career Decision-Making and Planning ( $M = 27.14$ ) as a major barrier.

Female adults were most concerned about Personal and Financial barriers (M = 30.15) and Education and Training barriers (M = 28.24), as revealed in Table 8. The results suggested that these women were challenged by a lack of basic needs and services— including adequate financial resources, child care, transportation, health care and dental care, and housing—while searching for a job or trying to succeed while on a job. The results also indicated the women’s perceived need for more education and training to find a job and be successful in a workplace. On the other hand, female adults were least concerned about attaining information about their interests, values, and small-business or home-business opportunities, as shown by the score in the Career Decision-Making and Planning barrier (M = 26.34). This result suggested that these women made effective career decisions, set goals, and developed plans to achieve these goals. Female adults also had few concerns about Emotional and Physical barriers (M = 27.54), which may indicate their ability to manage any anger or depression associated with unemployment, underemployment, or lack of job success and to maintain a positive attitude.

<b>Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations Based on the Administration of the <i>BESI</i>, Fourth Edition</b>						
<b>BARRIER CATEGORIES</b>	<b>TOTAL POPULATION*</b>		<b>MALE ADULTS<sup>†</sup></b>		<b>FEMALE ADULTS<sup>††</sup></b>	
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Personal and Financial</b>	29.79	7.31	29.43	6.98	30.15	7.63
<b>Emotional and Physical</b>	26.94	7.56	26.33	7.36	27.54	7.76
<b>Career Decision-Making and Planning</b>	26.74	8.08	27.14	7.18	26.34	8.97
<b>Job-Seeking Knowledge</b>	29.36	8.23	30.74	8.12	27.98	8.33
<b>Education and Training</b>	28.06	8.25	27.87	7.75	28.24	8.74
* Total (N = 359)      † Male (N = 183)      †† Female (N = 176)						

## Components of the *BESI*

The culmination of the research, development, and testing of the *BESI* has led to a revised, fifth-edition self-assessment consisting of 50 items that have been grouped into five barriers to employment success categories. Participants read each item and use a modified Likert scale to rate the applicability of the item to their current level of concern.

The *BESI* also includes scoring directions, a scoring profile, descriptions of the five barrier categories, and an interpretive guide with suggested actions for individuals to implement to help them overcome their acknowledged barriers. Finally, the self-assessment provides an employment success plan to help individuals set goals and identify concrete actions to achieve those stated goals.

## Target Audience for the *BESI*

The *BESI* is appropriate for distribution to individuals or groups and is intended for use in programs that provide career counseling, job-search assistance, or vocational guidance including:

- comprehensive career guidance programs
- employment counseling programs
- rehabilitation counseling programs
- college counseling centers
- college career and placement offices
- high school guidance programs
- outplacement programs
- prisons and parole-oriented programs
- military transition programs
- school-to-work programs
- welfare-to-work programs
- employee development programs

The *BESI* is written for individuals at or above the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, according to the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. Because none of the items are gender-specific, the self-assessment is appropriate for a variety of practitioners and client populations.

## Revisions to the Fifth Edition of the *BESI*

The following changes were made from the fourth edition to the fifth edition of the *BESI*:

- In Step 1, items in the *BESI* were updated to be less redundant, reflective of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace, and more representative of each of the five barrier categories in the *BESI*. In addition, the term *barriers* was replaced by the term *concerns* to better represent the items contained in each section. Finally, boldfaced lead-in phrases (“What is my current level of concern about”) were added to provide participants with a framework for understanding the context of each item.
- In Step 2, the profile instructions were changed to simplify the scoring. Similar items were grouped so that they could be scored together, rather than recalculated multiple times. Therefore, all of the color-coded items from the same barrier category were grouped together.
- In Step 4, additional possible actions were included so that participants would be better able to develop strategies for addressing and overcoming any barriers to employment success they may be experiencing. Another change in Step 4 was the elimination of the Helpful Resources section. These resource websites are included later in this Administrator’s Guide to ensure that administrators have the opportunity to verify the URLs before recommending them to participants.
- In Step 5, the identification of achievable goals and concrete steps to achieve those goals was added.
- In the Administrator’s Guide, means and standard deviations were included for both men and women.

## Administration of the *BESI*

The *BESI* requires a pen or a pencil and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete, depending on such factors as reading ability. The first page of the self-assessment contains spaces for data including name, date, phone, and email. Administrators of the *BESI* should ask participants to fill in the required information. Then they should ask them to follow along as they read aloud the description of the *BESI* and the directions on the first page. Next, administrators should ensure that participants clearly understand the instructions and the response format.



Finally, they should encourage participants to read all 50 items and to mark their responses directly on the inventory booklet.

The *BESI* uses a series of steps to guide participants through the self-assessment:

- *Step 1:* As mentioned earlier, the *BESI* contains 50 items, with 10 items in each of the 5 barriers to employment success. In this step, participants are provided directions in taking the self-assessment. They are instructed to read the opening phrase that appears in boldfaced type before reading the remainder of the question. Then participants are asked to use a modified Likert scale to describe their current level of concern regarding the item:

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

Examples are provided to clarify the instructions for participants.

- *Step 2:* Participants are asked to add up the scores that they circled for each barrier category in Step 1. Then they are instructed to place the total score for each barrier category in the designated space on the right-hand side of the self-assessment.
- *Step 3:* For this step, participants are directed to transfer their total scores from Step 2 to the second column of the table. Then they are asked to use the designated score levels to determine if their total scores are high, average, or low and to record these score levels in the third column of the table.
- *Step 4:* To interpret their profiles, participants are asked to locate the barrier categories in which their score level was in the high range or average range. These areas represent their greatest challenges. Participants are then asked to locate these barrier categories in the table and to select actions they would like to attempt to address their acknowledged barriers. Lastly, participants are asked to repeat these directions for the low-scoring barrier categories.
- *Step 5:* For this step, participants are instructed to create an employment success plan. This plan helps them to set goals for overcoming their acknowledged barriers and to list the concrete steps they will take to achieve those goals.

## Scoring of the *BESI*

The *BESI* yields content-referenced scores in the form of raw scores. For this self-assessment, the raw scores are the point totals for each of the five categories that represent barriers to employment success. Raw scores between 10 and 19 are in the low range and indicate that the participant has fewer barriers to employment success than most unemployed adults or adults struggling to advance in the workplace. Raw scores from 20 to 30 are in the average range and indicate that the participant has about the same barriers as most unemployed adults or adults struggling to advance in the workplace. Raw scores from 31 to 40 indicate that the participant has more barriers to employment success than most unemployed adults or adults struggling to advance in the workplace. Some participants will have high scores in several barrier categories, whereas others might have high scores in only one type of barrier.

An interpretation of these scores as they pertain to each of the barrier categories is outlined below:

- *Personal and Financial Barriers*—This barrier category measures obstacles that arise from a lack of basic survival resources. Participants scoring high in this category are concerned with meeting basic needs, such as earning a sufficient income to sustain themselves and their families, finding affordable child care, having access to transportation, receiving health care and dental care, and finding affordable and adequate housing.
- *Emotional and Physical Barriers*—This barrier category measures obstacles stemming from physical problems and feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Participants scoring high in this category are concerned with maintaining their emotional and physical health while struggling in their current job or during unemployment. In addition, they may be concerned about dealing with the anger and depression associated with unemployment and/or underemployment.
- *Career Decision-Making and Planning Barriers*—This barrier category measures obstacles arising from a lack of career decision-making and planning skills. Participants scoring high in this category are concerned with obtaining more information about their interests and values, occupations and leisure activities, and small-business and home-business opportunities. Participants may also be concerned with making effective career decisions, setting goals, and developing plans to achieve those goals.

- *Job-Seeking Knowledge Barriers*—This barrier category measures obstacles resulting from a lack of knowledge about how to develop an effective job search. Participants scoring high in this category 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.
- *Education and Training Barriers*—This barrier category measures obstacles arising from a lack of education or training for the type of job desired. Participants scoring high in this category 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.

## **Use of the *BESI* Results**

Administrators should encourage participants to examine their *BESI* results to find the barriers that are significantly interfering with their attainment of employment success. The high scores indicate the area(s) in which participants are likely to face the most barriers and need the most assistance and career counseling. Administrators can assist participants in overcoming these barriers by encouraging them to create an employment success plan.

## **Employment Success Plan**

The creation of an employment success plan helps participants to recognize the specific barriers they need to improve and to devise an action plan for improvement. Administrators should encourage participants to identify achievable goals for these barriers to employment success and the actions or strategies they need to perform to meet the established goals.

## **Helpful Resources**

A variety of helpful resources for addressing barriers to employment success are available. These resources can be used by individuals or by career or employment counselors to help their clients in one-on-one or group settings.

### ***Personal and Financial***

[www.americasaves.org](http://www.americasaves.org)

[www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)

[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)

### ***Emotional and Physical***

[www.ssa.gov/disability/](http://www.ssa.gov/disability/)

[www.givespot.com/gov/programs.htm](http://www.givespot.com/gov/programs.htm)

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

### ***Career Decision-Making and Planning***

[www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)

[www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)

[www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

### ***Job-Seeking Knowledge***

[www.usa.gov/find-a-job](http://www.usa.gov/find-a-job)

[www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov)

[www.rileyguide.com](http://www.rileyguide.com)

### ***Education and Training***

[www.brookings.edu/research/strategies-for-assisting-low-income-families/](http://www.brookings.edu/research/strategies-for-assisting-low-income-families/)

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/incomelevels.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/incomelevels.html)

## References

- Amundson, N.E., and W.A. Borgen. 1987. Coping with unemployment: What helps and hinders. *Journal of Employment Counseling* 24 (3): 97–106.
- Appelbaum, B. 2012. The enduring consequences of unemployment. *The New York Times*, March 28, 2012. Retrieved from:  
<https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/the-enduring-consequences-of-unemployment/>
- Barling, J. and C.L. Cooper. 2008. *The SAGE handbook of organizational behavior: Volume one – Micro perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bloom, D., C. Redcross, J. Hseuh, S. Rich, and V. Martin. 2007. *Four strategies to overcome barriers to employment: An introduction to the enhanced services for the hard-to-employ demonstration and evaluation project*. New York, NY: MDRC. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/four\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/four_strategies.pdf)
- Borgen, W.A. 1999. Implementing “Starting Points”: A Follow-Up Study. *Journal of Employment Counseling* 36 (3): 95–114.
- Carville, L.W. 2005. Barriers to educational attainment for rural women exiting welfare. Unpublished master’s thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Etd-11152005-152738. Retrieved from:  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4230&context=gradschool\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4230&context=gradschool_theses)
- Center for Law & Social Policy. 2006. *Transitional jobs: Helping TANF recipients with barriers to employment succeed in the labor market*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.
- Crabtree, S. 2014. In U.S., depression rates higher for long-term unemployed. Gallup Poll: Well-Being, June 9, 2014. Retrieved from:  
<http://news.gallup.com/poll/171044/depression-rates-higher-among-long-term-unemployed.aspx>

- Creed, P.A., and S.R. Macintyre. 2001. The relative effects of deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits of employment on the well-being of unemployed people. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* Oct. 6 (4), 324–331. Retrieved from:  
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.474.3197&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Crudden, A., W. Sansing, and S. Butler. 2005. Overcoming barriers to employment: Strategies of rehabilitation providers. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* 99 (6), 1–20. Retrieved from:  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ718709.pdf>
- Edwards, P., and S. Edwards. 2001. *Changing directions without losing your way: Managing the six stages of change at work and in life*. New York, NY: Putnam.
- Goldberg, H. 2002. *Improving TANF program outcomes for families with barriers to employment*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1476>
- Government Accountability Office. 2001. *Welfare reform: Moving hard-to-employ recipients into the workforce*. Washington, DC: GAO.
- Harney, E.E., and D.L. Angel. 1997. *No one is unemployable: Creative solutions for overcoming barriers to employment*. Hacienda Heights, CA: WorkNet Publications.
- Krannich, R. 2005. *Change your job, change your life: Careering and re-careering in the new boom/bust economy*. Manassas Park, VA: Impact Publications.
- Liptak, J.J. 2006. *Using the triadic job search counseling model to help clients overcome learned helplessness*. St. Paul, MN: JIST Publishing.
- Liptak, J.J. 2008. *Assessing barriers to education administrator's guide*. St. Paul, MN: JIST Publishing.
- Liptak, J.J. 2011. *Barriers to employment success inventory administrator's guide*. St. Paul, MN: JIST Publishing.
- Liptak, J.J. 2012. *Planning your school-to-career transition*. St. Paul, MN: JIST Publishing.

- Liptak, J.J. 2015. *Overcoming barriers to employment success: The key to getting and keeping a job*. St. Paul, MN: JIST Publishing.
- Lock, R.D. 2005. *Taking charge of your career direction: Career planning guide, book 1, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning Inc.
- Lock, R.D. 2005. *Job search: Career planning guide, book 2, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning Inc.
- Lore, N. 2008. *Now what?* New York, NY: Fireside.
- McArdle, M. 2014. *Unemployment: A fate worse than death*. Retrieved from:  
<http://time.com/9009/unemployment-is-worse-than-death/>
- Miller, C.D., and G. Oetting. 1977. Barriers to employment and the disadvantaged. *Journal of Counseling & Development* 56 (2), 89–93.
- National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2013. *Overcoming employment barriers*. Retrieved from:  
<https://endhomelessness.org/resources/overcoming-employment-barriers/>
- National Employment Counseling Association. 2001. *National employment counseling competencies*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.employmentcounseling.org/national-employment-counseling-competencies.html>
- Newton, C. 2017. What is marginal employment? Bizfluent. Retrieved from:  
<https://bizfluent.com/info-10029888-marginal-employment.html>
- Ohio Department of Job & Family Services. 2002. *Addressing employment barriers*. Retrieved from:  
<https://jfs.ohio.gov/owf/prc/Guidance/prc50a.pdf>
- Pink, Daniel. 2001. *Free agent nation: How America's new independent workers are transforming the way we live*. New York: Warner Books.

- Sundheim, K. 2014. Stop stress from taking control of your job search. *U.S. News & World Report*, March 20, 2014. Retrieved from:  
<https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2014/03/20/stop-stress-from-taking-control-of-your-job-search>.
- Thomas, N. 2018. *Overcoming barriers to youth employment*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.unitedway.org/blog/overcoming-barriers-to-youth-employment>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. *The employment situation*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>
- Voss, M., L. Nylén, B. Floderus, F. Diderichsen, and P.D. Terry. 2004. Unemployment and early cause-specific mortality: A study based on the Swedish Twin Registry. *American Journal of Public Health*, December 94 (12): 2155–2161.
- Winegardner, D., J.L. Simonetti, and N. Nykodym. 1984. Unemployment: The living death? *Journal of Employment Counseling* 21 (4): 149–155.
- Young, J.R. 2017. How many times will people change jobs? The myth of the endlessly-job-hopping millennial. *EdSurge*, July 2017. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-07-20-how-many-times-will-people-change-jobs-the-myth-of-the-endlessly-job-hopping-millennial>
- Zanskas, S.A., D.C. Lustig, T.T. Ishitani. 2011. Perceived barriers to employment success: Are there differences between European American and African American VR consumers? *Rehabilitation Research, Policy, and Education* 25 (3–4): 127–134.
- Zedlewski, S. 2003. *Work and barriers to work among welfare recipients in 2002*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.



## About the Author

**John Liptak, EdD**, is one of the leading developers of quantitative and qualitative assessments in the country. He is the Associate Director of the Center for Career and Talent Development at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. In addition, Dr. Liptak provides career assessment and career counseling services for students, administers and interprets a variety of career assessments, consults on the development of assessments for schools and agencies around the country, and speaks at national and international conventions on the topics of assessments and assessment development.

In addition to the development of the *BESI*, Dr. Liptak has created the following assessments for JIST Publishing: *Transferable Skills Scale (TSS)*, *Career Exploration Inventory (CEI)*, *Workplace Excellence Inventory (WEI)*, *Transition-to-Work Inventory (TWI)*, *Job Search Knowledge Scale (JSKS)*, *Job Survival and Success Scale (JSSS)*, *Job Search Attitude Inventory (JSAI)*, and *College Survival and Success Scale (CSSS)*.