

Towards Successful Seniority™ From Family Leave to Work

Supplement to the Trainer's Manual

Salla Toppinen-Tanner, Pia Pulkkinen, Paula Pajunen,
Tommy Larvi, Mikko Nykänen, Heli Kuitunen, Jukka Vuori



Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health

Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health
FIOH Bookstore
Topeliuksenkatu 41 a A
00250 Helsinki
Tel. +358 30 474 2543
Fax +358 9 477 5071
www.ttl.fi/bookstore

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Dear Trainer,

Thank you for becoming a trainer of the From Family Leave to Work group method. We hope that this experience will be rewarding for all parties and will encourage you to continue this activity in the future.

This group method is based on the Towards Successful Seniority™ method which was originally designed to be used at workplaces. It is geared towards participants who are still on parental leave or have recently returned to work after parental leave. The target group may vary in many other ways. Some participants may be returning to their previous workplace or may already have returned to work, some may not have a job to return to and others may be considering a new career, entrepreneurship or studies. A common factor for these participants is that they are aiming to re-enter the labour market after a long period at home, and need to reconcile work and family life.

The From Family Leave to Work method can be used at work or in occupational health services, but it can also be offered via municipal family activity groups, associations, foundations, parishes, unemployment offices or family health clinics. The programme aims to support the facilitation of the method and to maintain its uniform use despite individual needs of different groups.

This trainer's supplement is intended to be used in conjunction with the original Towards Successful Seniority™ group method's Trainer's Manual, which functions as the basis for this group method. Only a few of the original pages have been replaced. Each page in the From Family Leave to Work supplement replaces an original page of the Trainer's Manual, making it easy for the trainer to follow the original Towards Successful Seniority™ method.

The fundamental ideas and aims of the Towards Successful Seniority™ group method remain the same: to reinforce participants' motivation to take part and produce their own solutions, to learn from other group members and recognize the skills that they have acquired in various life domains, and to use these skills when applying for work and when at work. The purpose is not to provide answers but to guide the participants to find information sources and gain support from the peer group. The trainer can, however, pass on information about job search services, benefits for the parents of small children, and options for easing the workload of parents with small and school-aged children.

As a trainer, you should keep in mind the factors that are relevant to this target group, even if the original manual does not always take them into account. For example, it is recommended that the visitor for the information interview has some experience of reconciling work and family life, leaving a child at day care and negotiating care responsibilities at work and at home. When discussing roles, personal networks, conflicts and well-being at work, it is advisable to pay attention to the demands arising from outside the workplace such as support from one's spouse and other relatives or the lack of it, conflicts between workload and home demands, and personal aspirations in relation to the life situation.

The From Family Leave to Work project was funded by a grant from the European Social Fund, awarded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health via the development Fund for Gender Equality.

As a result of the project, a Participant's Workbook and this trainer's supplement to the Towards Successful Seniority™ method were developed in order to support return to work from family leave. Both applications are available on the internet and the Participant's Workbook can be ordered in printed form at cost price via the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health's online bookstore.

Online bookstore:
www.ttl.fi/bookstore

Research project website:
www.ttl.fi/familyleave

*We would like to thank all the participants and trainers as well
as everybody who supported and contributed
to the organization and implementation of the project.*

From Family Leave to Work research and development team
Finnish Institute of Occupational Health



Course of the programme

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
Introduction of the programme and orientation towards the topics ▲	Lifelong learning ▲▲▲	Structure of work community and own job description, resolving conflicts	Coping with stress and mental well-being ▲▲▲▲
Work life goals -interview ▲▲	Developing at work ▲▲▲▲	▲▲▲▲	Orientation towards work life action plan ▲▲
Identification of strengths, skills and transferable skills ▲▲▲	Managing changes at work and in one's career ▲▲▲▲	Personal networks and social support ▲▲▲▲	Compiling an action plan ▲▲
Emphasizing your own skills ▲▲▲▲	Personal change situations ▲▲▲▲	▲▲▲▲	Committing to the action plan ▲▲
Career expectations ▲▲	Information interview ▲▲▲▲	Controlling workload ▲▲▲▲	Conclusion of the programme ▲

▲ Orientation towards the topic and conclusion of the programme

▲▲ Action plan for goals

▲▲▲ Recognizing personal strengths and development goals, lifelong learning

▲▲▲▲ Managing work and career

Emphasizing your own strengths and skills

Duration: approximately 30 minutes

Aim

Participants learn to present their skills and strengths by using practical examples. They start to comprehend the value of their previous work and trainee experience and skills gained in other domains of life, and acquire confidence in disclosing information about them at work and when applying work in the future.

COURSE OF THE EXERCISE

- » **The trainers introduce an example.**
- » **The group discusses how the job applicant could reply and emphasize skills.**
- » **The trainer summarizes the discussion and emphasizes the importance of practical examples when presenting strengths and skills.**
- » **The participants write down concrete examples of how to emphasize their skills.**

Instructions

Explain to the participants that when applying for a job it is important to emphasize one's own strengths and skills in a way that interests the employer.

The trainers introduce an example. One of the trainers is the employer and the other is the job applicant. Act out the example situation.

EXAMPLE

Place: employer's office

Employer **(E)** = appears positive

Job applicant **(J)** = sits straight, looking at the employer and speaks briskly

E: Could you tell me something about yourself as a worker?

J: I am patient.

Ask participants to comment on the job applicant's performance. Ask if he made the most of his opportunity to impress the employer. Write down on the flip chart a strength or skill (e.g. patience). Collect the participants' views on the flip chart: when, where and how did he use the skill? What were the beneficial results of using the skill? How would the employer benefit from this skill?



Task

Divide the participants in the groups of three and ask them to describe practical examples of their skills and strengths in their workbooks on page 12. The participants write down the skill or strength that they chose, for example: “I am reliable”. Then they describe when, where and how they have used this skill. They discuss what resulted from using the skill or strength, and how this skill or strength could benefit their employer.

Participants can practice emphasizing their strengths and skills using the practical examples that they wrote down themselves. Group members take turns in playing the role of the job applicant, employer and observer (see p. 34 of the Workbook, “Role of the Observer”).



Conclusion

Ask if the participants gained ideas about their own skills and how to bring them out in different situations.

Work community structures and job descriptions

Duration: approximately 20 minutes

Aim

The aim of this exercise is for participants to recognize their own roles in their work community and in other areas of life, and consider whether these roles are in conflict with one another.

This exercise acts as an introduction to the social conflict exercise (page 62).

Time use, changes in family routines, lack of free time, division of housework, taking children to/from day care can create conflicts between work and home roles. The third exercise (page 64) deals with social networks at work and outside of work. In a family with small children or children with special needs, social networks are crucial for obtaining help and information.

COURSE OF THE EXERCISE

- » **Participants discuss various work roles and related conflicts as a group.**

Task

Ask the participants to consider whether they have noticed typical warning signs in their own behavior (Workbook page 37). Ask them to reflect on ways in which to help them deal with the situation. Allow 8–10 minutes for this task.

Finally, ask the participants what means they use to overcome stressful situations. You can tell them it can be helpful to refer back to these Workbook pages now and then in the future.

Note

The employer is responsible for their employee's safety and health at work. As well as the employee's physical and mental safety, the employer is also obliged to monitor the work community's social functionality, which should already be taken into consideration when designing work and the work environment. However, one should remember that in order to move things forward, it is important to participate actively and constructively in presenting needs for change and in developing activities.

Instructions

Read or ask someone to read aloud the following example case (Workbook p. 41).

L had been working as a nurse in a hospital for a long time. She was on family leave, when a head nurse's position she had always dreamed of opened up and L was asked to take it. L hesitated because it meant returning to work earlier than planned.

The group discusses L's situation. What should L do? What kind of challenges may arise? Write down the answers on the flip chart.

Then ask for ways in which to resolve the situation. Solutions facilitating return to work may concern for example child care arrangements, participation of spouse and relatives, or arrangements at the workplace.

Continue the discussion by informing the group that temporarily lightening your workload or some other arrangement is sometimes necessary to, for example, facilitate commuting or a particular life situation. Ask the participants what sort of options they know of that are already in use.

Replaces the page 79 of the Trainer's Manual

The variety of working time arrangements can be discussed with the employer. However, the employer is not obliged to provide, for example, part-time work.

It can be helpful to obtain updated information about the range of working time arrangements, leave options and benefits available to families with children in your country in electronic or printed format.

Note

In this exercise, it is important to discuss the way in which things are done in the particular organization to which the participant is planning to return or is considering applying to work at. If this is not possible, ask the participant to think about a previous workplace. It can be useful to provide participants with material about the option of flexitime or other types of working time arrangements that the employer can provide, or information about the activities that accrue pension.

Temporary and permanent flexible working time arrangements

Flexible work and working time arrangements allow an employee to adapt work according to their life situation. Flexible working times make it easier to reconcile work and other life demands, and improves motivation and the atmosphere at work. These arrangements can increase well-being at work.

It is possible to negotiate work time and flexible work arrangements for reconciling work and family responsibilities. These arrangements must be agreed on with your employer. Flexible working time arrangements can apply to both mothers and fathers.

Find out more information about

- Family leave options
- Benefits for families with children
- Research results and information about flexible working time arrangements and reconciliation of work and family.

APPENDIX 4

Form for feedback or performance appraisals with your supervisor

Attached is a list of topics you can bring up with your supervisor.

What goals do you have regarding your work and career? If you have returned to your prior work, how have your work requirements or opportunities changed? Have your goals changed? Would you like to try something new or gain further knowledge or skills?

How well do you think you can reconcile work and family life? You could ask about flexible working time arrangements, for example.

How do you need to develop your work ability and promote your well-being at work?

From Family Leave to Work is an application of the *Towards Successful Seniority*[™] group method and is designed to support the return to work, mental well-being and reconciliation of work and family life among those on family leave or caring for family members.

From Family Leave to Work is a group method during which the participants recognize their own strengths and needs for development, and set personal goals for their future careers. The group discusses ways in which to balance work, family, rest, and other life needs.

The *Towards Successful Seniority*[™] method Trainer's Manual, and its supplementary pages (available on the internet) provide the group method trainer with detailed instructions throughout the programme. The Participant's Workbook is a manual for each group member and helps the participants work on their goals during the programme.

The method can be targeted towards different subgroups, ranging from an organizations' personnel to groups in different family situations.

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