



Survival Topic #11: Employment

Questions to Ask:

What kind of work did you do?
What kind of skills do you have?
What do you do well?
Did you work in a refugee camp?
What are your plans for the future?
What kind of job would you like to have?

Topics to Share:

Discuss your current job and your employment history, as well as your future goals. What has been difficult for you during job searches or employment transitions? Describe how you found jobs and how you decided to do what you do now.

English Language Learner Tips:

For lower levels of English, practice identifying people in various occupations. Use the newspaper magazines to find pictures. Look through the want ads together. Want ads often have abbreviations and jargon. Help your mentees to identify key words and read common abbreviations.

Practice completing job applications. Use an application form for your work place or a local business. Ask them to see their "job folder." They should have a resume proofread by a RefugeeOne staffer.

Role-play to call a potential employer and set up and interview. Also practice an actual interview. Many refugees may come from cultures that expect them to be humble so they may not answer with confidence.

Other Notes:

Many refugees receive some kind of assistance when they first arrive in the U.S. Although many refugees traditionally relied on their own families for support, many

struggle to become self-sufficient here because of large family size, lack of education, poor English skills, many years of non-productivity in a camp, or trauma.

In Chicago, refugees receive assistance called Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) for eight months (single cases) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for a maximum of five years (families). They receive cash assistance, food assistance, and Medicaid coverage. While this means that refugees can focus on improving their English for a few months, it is important for them to get a job as soon as possible.

Supporting a large family on a minimum wage job with no benefits is a terrific challenge, unless there are multiple wage earners in the family. Previously, your mentees were more self-sufficient. They may have to start all over again, and they have to survive in a highly competitive world that often measures human worth in terms of economic success.

Your mentees might not be sure if they have any skills. They may not have ever had to describe their capabilities as they will when they apply to jobs. As you get to know them, you will notice their strengths, talents, and skills. Tell them what you notice and help them to use their skills to find employment. Confidence in their abilities will increase their drive to strive for self-sufficiency.

Many refugees will have to start with entry-level jobs, regardless of whether they were professionals or came from an agrarian background in their own country. Some would benefit from going to school and working at the same time, as is common for many Americans. It may be helpful to show refugees how they might study English or get skill training while working.