

EN ESSENTIALS TRANSCRIPT

Building Successful Employer Partnerships

April 9, 2025

Derek Shields: Hello and welcome to today's EN Essentials session entitled *Building Successful Employer Partnerships*. My name is Derek Shields. I'm with the Ticket Program Manager and I will serve as today's moderator. Today we'll be offering some resources and tips for building successful relationships and direct relationships with employers to help place Ticketholders into jobs and careers. This is a topic that's near and dear to me, and I certainly appreciate you tuning in to learn together. Today we will be working with an organization that partners with a lot of ENs, and several of those ENs, such as EmployReward Solutions, or ERS, partner with DirectEmployers, a nonprofit association formed by Fortune 500 companies searching for ways to reduce employee recruiting costs. This is an exciting opportunity to hear from a representative of DirectEmployers, also a member employer, and ERS. And they'll discuss how they all work together and collaborate on building that pipeline and the benefits of that collaboration in terms of accessing an EN relationship with an employer to get those talented and qualified candidates to that employer to do the work that's so needed.

The benefits we'll discuss today will come from an employer, Concentrix. And we have a representative from their talent acquisition team with us to discuss their talent sourcing approach along with some of the successful outcomes from that collaboration. So thanks for joining us. We do have the balance of our 60 minutes together and at the end, we'll have some time for Q&A. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's move to the next slide, please.

Our agenda will cover logistics and introductions of the speakers themselves. Then we'll have a presentation about working with the DirectEmployers Association, and then an opportunity for ERS and the representative to do a presentation about their EN and the relationship that they have with DirectEmployers and Concentrix. And the Concentrix representative will share with all of us their view of the model. And they'll discuss a little bit of the collaboration between the two. After each of these presentations, we'll transition to a panel exchange with the three representatives and we'll end, as I mentioned, with that Q&A session. It's a great opportunity to explore the valuable characteristics of building talent-sourcing pipelines and creating powerful relationships with employers seeking talent today. So with that, let's turn now to the next slide and I'll cover our logistics.

TPM is recording and capturing the transcript from today's meeting. We'll make this available on the Your Ticket to Work website on our EN Essentials Learning Events page. You can find that under the Training and Events section. Please feel free to engage with us and ask questions in the MS Teams chat section. That's an important opportunity for us to collect your questions and get those to our panelists during our Q&A. Also, as you may have seen in the chat, closed

captioning is available for participants who are joining us via the MS Teams application or through the closed caption link provided in your email announcement for today's call and posted in chat. To access closed captions in the Teams platform, please go to the three ellipses in the Teams menu and you select that, and then click on *more*, scroll down the list to *language and speech*, and at that point, you can select *Turn on live captions* to access those through the Teams platform. When using the link option provided through chat, you can paste that link into the browser of your choice and it will open a separate window to view closed captions in a larger format. And finally, per the Ticket Program agreement, EN staff are not permitted to record this meeting nor capture the transcript. That's from the TPA part three, section 11, subsection I. Thanks for the opportunity to cover the logistics, and now let's move forward to the next slide, please.

With this, I have the opportunity now to introduce our panelists. Today we have Shannon Offord. Shannon is a Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and Alliances with the DirectEmployers Association and will provide our first presentation. Shannon will then be followed by Tripp Carter. Tripp is the project director for EmployReward Solutions. And then we'll have our employer partner join us, Maria Gray. Maria serves as the senior recruiter in talent acquisition for Concentrix. And with that, if we can proceed to the next slide.

It's now my pleasure to hand the event over to Shannon Offord to provide remarks about the DirectEmployers Association. Shannon.

Shannon Offord: Thank you, Derek. And thanks for allowing me to join the event today. Definitely appreciate that. I'm looking forward to spending the next 54 minutes with everyone. So, like Derek mentioned, I'm Shannon Offord. I am the VP of Strategic Partnerships here at DirectEmployers. This is my 19th year here at DirectEmployers. And my team basically manages all of our external partnerships here at DE. Those partnerships run the gamut from working with some of our state partners, working with different federal partners, working with partners who help our members bring in talent with disabilities and veteran talent, and also work with all of our HR tech partners as well. Our staff, as far as my team, there are eight individuals that sit on my team. Some of them have worked for the state workforce, some of them have worked for VR, some of them have worked for community-based organizations, and others come from an HR tech background.

So, as Derek mentioned, DirectEmployers, we're a nonprofit association of employers. We started in 2001. We were started by 14 employers, but the person who ran the organization from a day-to-day standpoint was one of the individuals that helped start Monster.com, and his name is Bill Warren, and he's widely considered the founder of online recruitment. These employers came to him really concerned about the escalating cost of online recruitment back in 2001. They wanted to figure out ways they could work with other companies to build technologies that would allow them to reduce some of their dependency on some of the major job boards that were out there at the time, and that are out there even today. We currently have a little over 1,100 member companies. Those member companies primarily come from the Fortune 2000. They are primarily federal contractors. In addition to that, we have a large network of community-based organizations that we partner with. Also, like Derek mentioned,

we do partner with several ENs currently. We do attend the NENA Conference, and we've spoken at that event the last three years. Next slide, please.

So, DirectEmployers, we've got, like I mentioned, a host of partners. Our biggest partner is the National Association of State Workforce Agencies. We do work very closely with NASWA, and we work very closely with each state workforce agency and also work very closely with some of the VRs, whether they are part of the workforce or whether they are on their own. We work with them very closely. We also do work very closely with, right now around 700 community-based organizations, ENs, other organizations that help veterans and disabled veterans find employment. So we've got about 700 of those relationships right now. But like I mentioned, we do have 1,100 members that are spread throughout the country. And a lot of those organizations are working directly with our members, and I'll talk to you a little bit about that in a second. Most of our members, like I mentioned, are federal contractors, and they do have to adhere to OFCCP regulations. The two regulations that we really help our members work in are VEVRAA, which surrounds veterans, and then the 503 regulations that are geared towards individuals with disabilities. Next slide.

So there are really three products that we have that our members take advantage of. One is the NLX and the NLX, National Labor Exchange, is that partnership between DirectEmployers and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies. The NLX feeds job postings into federal sites. Also, we provide about between 50 and 70 percent of the job content that goes into state job banks across the country. The NLX also runs state job banks, so we run the state of New York's job bank, Kentucky. We'll soon run Minnesota, which soft launches in June. We run Puerto Rico, we run part of New Jersey's and part of Montana's currently. The Vet Central tool— Vet Central — basically is a tool that distributes jobs to the local vet reps across the country, primarily to the disabled veteran outreach programs across the country. So there's like 1,800 of the DVOPs and LVERs that are across the country that we get jobs to. And we also have a tool that's called Voc Rehab Plus that delivers jobs to the voc rehabs in all the states across the country and also to the US territories as well. Next slide.

So, how are we working with ENs today? And this is all free what I'm going to describe to you. We have three tools that we utilize to partner with our ENs. The first one would be the Partner Relationship Manager. And basically, what the PRM tool is — it's a tool where we will have our partners go in and create a profile. That profile's basically the name of the EN, if you have job counselors, how many job counselors you have, and it also talks about what areas that you cover from a graphic standpoint. But then it allows you to build out a profile and write your own profile talking about your organization and talking about the types of people that you work with. Once that's done, our members are able to go into the tool and research the different partners that are in there. And I know Tripp from ERS will talk about this a little bit because some of our members have directly reached out to ERS through the PRM tool to learn more about them, and they've been able to build individual relationships away from DE where they can work directly with that EN. The PRM tool is really just that introduction piece because a lot of our members aren't really aware of the different organizations that are out there, and this allows them to figure out who's out there and to communicate initially through that tool. So right now, a DE member would have to reach out to you first through the tool, using the information that you provided. What will be happening soon is that EN or some of our other

partners will be able to reach out to our members through this tool first, without having to wait for our member to reach out to them. So, that's the first tool.

The second tool we have is — we just renamed this in the last few days. It was called Targeted Job Distribution. Now it's called Local Job Distribution. And that's a tool that allows us to email jobs, job listings, job postings out to individual organizations based on the areas that they cover. What I like to—how I talk about this tool is, it allows a partner to have a conversation. So they can say, "Hey, you know what? We've been receiving your jobs through the DirectEmployers Association. Can we have a conversation about how we may be able to support you in your recruitment efforts?" It's just a way to basically break the ice and it's a way for you to start the conversation. We will provide contact information if our partner reaches out to us and asks for that partner information. We give that to them so they would be able to contact our members as they see fit.

The third area would be a marketplace we have. And basically, that's just a tool where we share different things that our partners are doing. It allows our members to know what's going on with our different partners and it's just a way for them to really understand a little bit more about who you are and maybe different things that you're doing out in the community. Another thing that we do that's not listed here, we have what's called a partner happy hour and during that time, we'll invite our members to sit in a session with our partners. We usually do those twice a month. We will have one partner featured and they just talk a little bit about themselves. We usually have between 30 to 70 employers participating in those. But I will say this, I've not heard of one of those sessions that hasn't produced at least one or two direct relationships from those members that attended those events. So those members are very engaged, and they want to work directly with the different organizations from those partner happy hours. Just allows them to learn more about the partners that we have and what they do and those types of things. So, like I mentioned, those things are at no cost. We are, like I mentioned, partnering with several ENs right now and a lot of our EN partners have been able to benefit by using the tools that we're making available to them at no charge. I will stop there and turn this back to Derek and we'll obviously get to Q&A and hopefully, there'll be some questions. Thank you.

Derek Shields: This is Derek. Thank you so much, Shannon, for the overview of DirectEmployers and some of the DE offerings around disability recruitment. Let's go forward to the next slide.

We'll be back with Shannon for the panelists' exchange and the Q&A in just a little bit. For the EN employer partnership, as I mentioned in the introductions, we have two members with us and we're going to start this segment off with a presentation by Tripp Carter. Tripp is a project director with ERS, an Employment Network, and Tripp will then bring in Maria from Concentrix, who works closely together with him in finding placement opportunities for Ticketholders. At this point, though, I'll be pleased to hand the session over to Tripp.

Tripp Carter: Thank you, Derek. Next slide, please.

A little bit about ERS, EmployReward Solutions. We are a national Employment Network that was founded in Florence, South Carolina, back in 2010. We've been with Ticket to Work since 2012. Our mission is to change lives one job at a time by providing individualized career

counseling and support to Ticketholders and building successful employer relationships. I came across DirectEmployers Association back during a Social Security call many years ago and reached out in 2021 to make the connection with them, to learn more about their organization and the services they offer, which Shannon just covered. And we kind of took it from there as we established a profile in their system and kind of let nature run its course, which I'll talk a little bit more about. If we can get to the next slide, please.

So, once we had our profile ready to roll in the DirectEmployers system, I have to say it all starts off with practice makes perfect. And when we first got started exploring partnerships, this was very much trial and error. I think I've learned in that time that a lot of what we do around partnerships is 80% upfront preparation and 20% collaboration on the rest. For us, what was important when we began the process of engaging employers was to have a value proposition in place that covers what sets our Employment Network apart in the Ticket to Work space, how can we best serve Ticketholders in the program, but also what can we bring to the table to serve the employers who, what I have found traditionally, a lot of them have never heard of the Ticket Program. From there, it comes down to understanding the employer's pain points and their workforce needs, which requires research. It requires listening, especially when you engage with them.

A lot of what we do when an employer reaches out to us through DirectEmployers, I immediately fire back a response to them via the PRM tool. I try to establish a Teams meeting or quick telephone call as quickly as possible just to start learning, and if there's not an opportunity to do that, then obviously following up with additional questions through the PRM tool has also proved to be helpful, but it gives you a chance not only to have an introductory conversation, but it gives you a better opportunity for collaboration and understanding. Is the employer looking for retention? Are they looking for reliability? Are they looking for help maybe accommodating an individual or individuals? And they're not quite sure where to go with that. I feel like it's helpful with this process to come to the table with employer-focused marketing materials, especially using plain language, incorporating examples of success stories, as well as demographics.

I know the first couple of times I did this, one of the things that kind of caught me between the eyes was they started asking questions about demographics and I was not 100% prepared to address that question, but it is important to know at a high level what your Ticketholder base looks like and whether the skill sets, the background, and so on and so forth, can align with the employer and figuring out what that looks like. They want— the employer wants to know how your client base can fit their mold, as well as making sure your staff is confident in explaining the program, not just to Ticketholders, but to employers as well.

A lot of the conversations right now for ERS that take place with employers are between me and one or two other individuals on our staff. But we have so many different methods that you can reach out to our organization. There's bound to be a conversation that takes place that I'm not a part of or someone else in the partnership arena. So making sure that your staff can accurately paint a picture of your organization and what you can do is helpful.

And probably the biggest thing right now with this process is streamlining your internal processes. A lot of people use spreadsheets. Some people use case management systems as a way to build the partnership piece into your daily workflows. That was a big project we spent a great deal of time on last year. It's really important not just to track your outreach and communications with individuals but make sure you've got follow-ups in place. If you're sending referrals or encouraging your clients to apply for jobs, ensure that you're tracking all of that information, because then you can go back and gauge how effective current practices are working and what I can do differently to make things better. And it also helps as your follow-up conversations take place with employer partners. Next slide, please.

I want to talk quickly about what matters to employers and some messages behind the marketing. When it comes to your pitch with employers, it's more than just speaking about the benefits of Ticket to Work, you have to speak to their business needs as well. So as an Employment Network or VR agency, you have an opportunity to offer an employer pre-screened and job-ready candidates. Your organization may offer post-hire retention coaching and support to candidates hired by your EN to the employer. These are things they need to know. Some people may want to incorporate the Work Opportunity Tax Credit into the conversation or programs like the Federal Bonding Program. These are additional opportunities that can help support an employer's decision to hire and retain your candidates. The best thing about it is that it lowers the risk and, in some cases, is free.

Another important factor there is your guidance and support around ADA and accommodations. Some employers have reached out to us in generic terms to share that they have a particular situation they need guidance on and it's important to show that you can be a resource in that arena as well. Next slide, please.

I also want to cover some best practices, maybe some lessons learned here too, as well about reaching out in relationship building. It all comes down to building trust and keep showing up. Don't just have a one-off conversation and disappear into the sunset. It's easy sometimes with first impressions. You may miss the mark. You may have to regroup and come back and try to re-engage with an employer, and it's perfectly fine. The key there is you want to be consistent, you want to show up, you want to show them that your organization can provide what they're looking for.

And building genuine relationships. So with us, we start with warm leads when possible. We look at employers we've worked with before, employers of past Ticketholders that have enrolled in Ticket work with us, as well as the DirectEmployers Association and other organizations that support people with disabilities returning to work. Then you have business groups like SHRM, regional HR networks, and other spaces that have been helpful in bringing connections between ENs and employers.

For us, our message focuses on the bottom line when it comes to each employer. We try to explain how we can reduce turnover, improve retention, and help tap into a candidate pipeline they may not otherwise think of or even reach. And that message may change from employer to employer. You'll find that out as you're engaging with them and doing research. We try to emphasize that we're not transactional, we follow up with updates, success stories where we

can share, and new referrals when appropriate. If we hear about shifting hiring means, new jobs, or other things that may be affecting the market, we try to re-engage with our employer partners to do an assessment and see what else our organization can do to support them. We want to keep the partnership successful. We want to keep providing qualified Ticketholders job opportunities. We track the employer interactions and results, what candidates we've sent, what outcomes we see, what feedback we've received, both through employers and Ticketholders. And then we celebrate the success, whether it's a hire, a great employer quote, a Ticketholder who found a good fit. These help us reinforce our value, not just to that relationship, but to any other that we have or want to build. With that being said, I would like to turn the presentation over to Maria Gray with Concentrix to talk a little bit about her organization and how we work together. Maria.

Maria Gray: Thank you. Hello, and welcome everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to allow us to share information about our company and our partnership. As Derek mentioned, Maria Gray is my name and I'm a senior recruiter here at Concentrix. Today we also have Tamara Thomas as a recruiter and Angela Mackay, who is the Assistant Director of TA Concentrix. We're excited to share our passion with you all, why our partnerships have been successful and rewarding.

First off, Concentrix is a global provider of customer experience and solutions and technology. We focus on innovative technology, high-value interactions, and customer lifecycle management. As Concentrix grew, we acquired 450,000 game changers worldwide. They support our clients with tech support, sales, customer service, and we continue to grow and expand. We have over 2,000 clients and are in 70 different countries.

As far as the birth of Work at Home at Concentrix, that occurred in 2014. We started with just a handful of talent acquisition team members and built the foundation. Today, our Work at Home recruiting team has since grown to 100 game changers as recruiters and coordinators. The team really understands the nuances of the remote world and many of them are seasoned and have watched the virtual space change and grow over time and over the years. One of the ways we make work at home as seamless as possible is developing strong relationships with our partners like EmployReward Solutions.

So, if we can move to the next slide. I'm just going to share as recruiters we can post on job boards and deeds at Recruiter, social media, and that kind of thing. And we generate hundreds of applications daily; hundreds of applications that our team must vet for assessments, work history, skills, those kinds of things. However, with Tripp's partnership, he and his team look for great candidates. They share our needs, vet them for a good fit; they understand us, they assess candidates, and send us top-notch quality candidates, making our jobs easier. It's truly these partnerships that bring us the most qualified candidates.

So how is that possible? Well, Tripp was talking about it earlier. Our partnership kicked off from the very first meeting that we had. Tripp was so engaged, asking questions and learning about Concentrix. Tripp would ask, "What kind of candidates are you looking for? What are the qualifications? How can I help assess? What are the roles?" And from there, it just kept evolving. We have had several career fairs specific for EmployReward Solutions with hundreds

in attendance, thanks to Tripp and his team. He kept them engaged and excited about joining the event, utilizing their database and reaching hundreds of candidates to RSVP for the event. It was a huge success thanks to our partnership. Tripp, do you want to share some statistics?

Tripp Carter: Yeah, sure. So, I would say since late 2023, our partnership with Concentrix has allowed us to do outreach to at least 9,600 Ticketholders. We've had two national webinars where we've had over 1,500 people register, well over 600 in the live audience, plus people watching on demand. We were bombarded with over 370 questions between the two sessions, where a lot of it was geared towards judging whether remote work is right for me versus being in an on-site role, which Concentrix offers both. And most importantly, what are the steps in the application process? If I go online and do my application today, what comes next? And out of that, I believe we've had recently over 400 job leads for Concentrix alone get referred out to our client base. From there, I know recently we've had 18 formal referrals, five people that were offered positions, and four that are actively employed with the organization today. And while that number may seem small, I think the important thing to point out here is the quality of the match and the long-term supports in place for the individuals that we do get in the door and get hired. Neither organization is just placing them in a position and then saying, "You're free, call me if you need me." We're in it with them for the long haul to make sure this is the right fit.

Maria Gray: Now, I love that. Thank you so much, Tripp. And again, to keep the partnership successful, Tripp and I are in constant communication with each other. If anything changes on the Concentrix side, for example, a change in the job description or skills needed, we alert them. We discuss what upcoming opportunities we have for job seekers and entertain additional career fairs or information sessions. We trust each other and we value each other, and we have a passion for what we do. So back to you, Derek.

Derek Shields: Thank you so much, Maria and Tripp, for your comments and really framing how the partnership came together and then talking more specifically about this pipeline of candidates. It's pretty impressive how many attendees went into the webinar model and how many were solid leads that were provided to those that retain employment today. You've impressed most of us I think here today with demonstrating a command for that information and it's clear that you also enjoy working together, which I really like too. Let's switch over now to our panel discussion where we're going to bring all three individuals, Shannon, Tripp, and Maria, back on and just focus a little bit in an exchange. And as we do that, I encourage you to start putting more questions into chat so we could have those ready for that exchange.

Let's go back to Shannon. Shannon, you went through really the three or four, if you include that happy hour offering, things that DirectEmployers offers to your members and including community partners. I wanted to ask a little bit, like why did DirectEmployers a long time ago look at targeting employment for people with disabilities, including beneficiaries of Social Security benefit programs as part of the audience that you cared about? What's the background? Why did you get involved there?

Shannon Offord: Well, I think there are several reasons, but I think the best or probably the biggest reasons why we got into it is because our members came to us and asked, "How can

you help us in this area?" They had been trying to, in many cases, find different organizations that they could work with, and you would think that these big companies would be able to do that pretty easily. But the reality is a lot of times they're getting bombarded with calls and different things from a lot of different people trying to help them fill some of their openings. And it's hard for them to sort through some of that. So being able to vet some of these organizations and providing them with the organizations that we feel that through our process are the best ones to work with, just kind of fell into place and we've been doing it ever since. And I think along with that, like I mentioned, many of these companies are federal contractors and they really need to do this as part of the obligations of being a federal contractor.

Derek Shields: This is Derek. Thanks for that, Shannon. So there was a membership value that you could provide potentially for these companies. It wasn't their mission, it's not something that they're good at, but you could do that and bring value to them. Describe a little bit about that, how to connect like with your technical platform. You mentioned the PRM kind of as a profile tool, and then you mentioned local postings. But is this an opportunity where DirectEmployers is allowing a technical connection between everyone to occur? Just explain a little bit more for us.

Shannon Offord: Yes, so really, like I mentioned at the beginning, there are different individuals on my team that cover different areas, and really it's more of a connection with one of those individuals that support the PRM tool from the DirectEmployers' side, and working with one of those individuals and figuring out if PRM is the right direction for you; is it TJ or LJD, Local Job Distribution? Is that the right direction for you? Or is it both of those things? Once we kind of figure that out, we get you into the right tool and get you set up there. And what we've started doing as we get new partners entering into one of those tools or both of those tools, we make an announcement, right? We get that out through our connect tool, which is that partner marketplace that members have access to, and then we also put those new organizations in our newsletter that we send out because we want to make sure that companies know that we've partnered with new organizations. And in addition to that, in the PRM tool when you log in, it'll give you a list of the new partners there as well, so you'd be able to search for them there. But we want to do everything we can to make sure that our members know the new partners that are in there, and give those new partners a spotlight opportunity so our members know what's there. And hopefully, our members will reach out to those organizations and make relationships like we've heard about today.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Shannon. This is Derek again. Can you just tell me —if I'm an EN right now and I'm interested and I don't have a partnership, how does somebody connect with DirectEmployers so they can meet with one of your team members and receive that technical assistance and advice?

Shannon Offord: Yeah, probably the easiest way is to reach out to me directly, and that my email address is just Shannon. It's shannon@directemployers.org. And once I get that email, what I would do is get you in touch with one of the individuals on my team that would be able to assist you in getting into PRM or into the Local Job Distribution tool, or even just having a conversation and figuring out if maybe a partner happy hour would be right. There's many

different ways that we can support an EN, not just through the PRM and the Local Job Distribution tool.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Shannon. Yeah, pretty impressive having 700 community partners in there, some of them being ENs, but also the free offering to all ENs to participate, to get the benefits like ERS has, and Concentrix, really at the end of the talent pipeline here. Speaking of Concentrix, I've really enjoyed getting to know Maria in our prep calls, and it seems like I want to make sure people know about your infectious energy, Maria. So talk to us a little bit about what's your favorite part about working for Concentrix.

Maria Gray: Oh, my goodness. So, I don't have one favorite part, there's just too many. I absolutely love recruiting — it's in my blood. I don't want to do anything else. I absolutely love the team, not just within recruiting, but partnerships like Tripp, externally and internally with our operations team, training, workforce. We are truly one team at Concentrix. It's a family.

Derek Shields: Awesome. So, with that, you mentioned in 2014 you started this work from home program. I think you have— was it a thousand participants? Refresh my memory. How many game changers?

Maria Gray: Yeah, we call them game changers because they are game changers, right? So, yeah, we started in 2014 for work at home. There were maybe five of us recruiters and we have just grown and exploded so much that we're up—it's 101 and not 100. It's 101 on Angie's team who is here with us today, between recruiters and coordinators. It's just been phenomenal.

Derek Shields: And you're getting talent from ERS that is helping fill those positions. You're also getting interest and attention, which is good for the Concentrix brand in a few ways. Explain to us the kind of evolutions in the past few years of that interest and talk to us about the types of candidates you're receiving. Like, why do these candidates with disabilities show interest? What kind of disabilities they have or typical jobs that these individuals are applying for?

Maria Gray: Yes, so we developed over the years, past five years and on, seamless recruiting processes. We're on the cutting edge of technology. We're constantly learning. We're staying ahead of the competition. We're continuing to build new partnerships. Although we still have onsite locations, 75% of Concentrix is now remote. I can tell you personally, my brother has cerebral palsy, and it was challenging for him to find work. But he did and he can do it in the comfort of his own home, which gives me the chills. But, yeah, I mean, the partnerships with Tripp, and it's just so heartwarming. And to have that trust with him and knowing he's doing—he and his team are doing everything in their power to get a fit for us and a fit for that candidate is just remarkable. So, I'm just beyond blessed to be on this call and a part of the community with Tripp. I'm going to get emotional, so I'm going to stop.

Derek Shields: This is Derek. Thanks, Maria. The emotion and passion and commitment you have is certainly acknowledged by all of us, and we appreciate Concentrix having this commitment to the employment of talent with disabilities. You mentioned Tripp. Let's go to Tripp now. Tripp, thinking of ERS and how you develop the partnerships, putting the value proposition to DirectEmployers so they can get to their members, but also to Concentrix so they can really understand the services and supports that EN and EN-like ERS provides. We're

going to have a prepared candidate. We're going to be there after the job offer for job retention support services. Mention a few things that are—these four employees that are at Concentrix, tell us the characteristics that made those success stories happen from your perspective at ERS.

Tripp Carter: Well, truth be told, I think a lot, looking at our client base overall, a lot of the individuals we deal with have a mental or emotional disability. Something that— I know one of the common questions our call center gets all the time when we're talking to leads about Ticket to Work is, "I want to work from home. How can you guys help me work from home?" Until we came across partnerships with organizations like Concentrix, that was a challenge for us as an EN is being able to help clients who want to focus solely on remote work. When we had to attack that from a lot of different angles including, okay, that may not be my strong suit but I do want to help you get into a career path that you're comfortable with, looking at other opportunities maybe outside the home first. Once organizations like Concentrix came into the mix and we got a better feel for what their— how their organization operates, what they look for in their candidates, our staff has been able to do a better job of engaging with our Ticketholders and assessing, is this ultimately— if I'm able to help you get in the door with this organization, is this going to be a good fit for you? And what do you need from us as your EN to support you once you're in that role? And I think right now a lot of what we're doing basically revolves around providing ongoing communication with the Ticketholders, especially in the first few weeks after they start employment, constantly pushing opportunities to upskill and better themselves.

We've partnered with platforms like Coursera and Open Sesame to help somebody who may have basic typing skills to advance so they can move up into a higher-level position within a group like Concentrix. We try to offer those opportunities where we can, in addition to giving them guidance on navigating performance expectations and workplace culture.

Working in a remote position is different, but you still have common workplace themes and challenges just like a brick-and-mortar office would and our coaches have engaging conversations with our Ticketholders on how to navigate those situations and deal with them as best they can. We try to provide encouragement and troubleshooting when things come up, whether it's technical concerns, if there's something we can do to help, we try to help. If it's something that is on the employer's side, we try to guide them on how to best engage with their employer to resolve those issues. It could be anxiety, and it could be something as simple as, okay, this is the first time I've worked in a number of years, I'm having some adjustment challenges. How do I get through this? I really want to make this opportunity work out as best I can.

And then I think lastly, just helping them consider long-term growth, we don't want to just place an individual in a position. That's not our goal. If somebody graduates from the Ticket to Work Program, we want them to graduate knowing that they're in a successful career position, they're no longer reliant on SSI or SSDI benefits, and that they're in a better position now than they were when they got started.

Derek Shields: Thanks for that, Tripp. This is Derek again. I just want to call out that you said earlier that you support a lot of individuals with mental health or mental illness-related disabilities and some emotional-related disabilities. Specifically, when it comes to preparing candidates for interviews or after they're in Concentrix, do you assist with any reasonable accommodation advice, how to talk to Concentrix about that in advance?

Tripp Carter: Our coaches do have conversations around reasonable accommodations. I don't have any specific notes on instances that have gone back to Maria's team about a request for accommodations, but I do know the staff with other partners have engaged in that conversation.

Derek Shields: This is Derek. Thanks, Tripp, for that. I think preparing individuals for perhaps when the time comes, but a lot of folks may have non-apparent disabilities and potentially aren't necessarily disclosing as well. So that's up to that individual, of course. Well, I know our time, it always goes fast when we have presentations and panels. I'm going to encourage our audience to prepare questions as we get ready to open up for Q&A. You can put them into the chat or raise your hand. I do have one last question for our panelists, though, Tripp, Shannon, and Maria. When you think about leaving people today around a successful attribute or resource or tool to drive employer relationships, and quality for placements of Ticketholders to employment, what's something that you would like to leave folks with — a key tip or recommendation? Tripp, I was just talking with you, let's stick with you.

Tripp Carter: Can you hear me?

Derek Shields: Yes.

Tripp Carter: Well, I'll keep it simple. Start with a conversation and get to learn and understand the employer and what their needs are and then turn it around and show them how your organization can support their hiring needs and make it easier.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Tripp. Shannon, tip or a key resource that you would like folks to consider when developing employer relationships.

Shannon Offord: Well, obviously, I think that the PRM tool is a really good tool to be a part of. A lot of our members are using that on a regular basis. And I think a lot of relationships are started through that. But one thing I would also add — I would kind of echo what Tripp said. It's really trying to get to know the employer. There are some employers who are very skilled at this and do a really good job of trying to reach out to organizations and trying to build those relationships. There are others who are just getting started and may not send the right email through the PRM tool, may not know what to say. I would just say try to be patient with those organizations and don't just let that initial email set the stage for the relationship; really try to figure out what those employers need. Try to work with them and just know that not everybody, like I mentioned, is as skilled at building these relationships as others are. So it may take some time, but I do think if both sides are willing to work at it, you can get to a good point just like this relationship.

Derek Shields: This is Derek. Thanks, Shannon. I appreciate that. Meet the employer where they are and kind of listen and customize. And sometimes, I've heard this term a lot, a drip

campaign. Just stay in touch. Stay in someone's email box. Keep driving them value. And when the time is right, you can meet them at that spot. And of course, the PRM tool and DirectEmployers is the resource of choice, Shannon advises. And we had Sonya touch in chat, "I'm looking forward to working with you," as an example. I think there's a few other responses. And then Lisa mentioned she's going to be attending the DEAM conference in Arizona in May. I recall being at one in Seattle years ago, which was a fantastic learning opportunity for me, too.

Shannon Offord: That's a good place to connect with employers in person, too. That's a good event.

Derek Shields: Yeah, so SHRM has these events, Society for Human Resource Management, Tripp mentioned them, DirectEmployers, and there's other organizations. But talking about meeting employers where they are, go to large employer events that talk about finding talent. While speaking of that, we haven't heard from Maria on her tip or resource. And none of this is possible, meaning employment for Social Security beneficiaries through the Ticket Program, unless employers provide that opportunity. Maria, we're interested in learning your tip or resource recommendation.

Maria Gray: I have to echo what Shannon said because it is about the relationship. A key factor is just keeping those relationships, building that partnership, and keep it going. Really listen to the people you interact with, get on the same page. We're all wanting success for our candidates, right? So, just really— just having that strong partnership and it's why it makes it easy with Tripp because he's awesome.

Derek Shields: Nice. So, the power of relationship building builds collaborations. I think understanding each portion of that collaboration's goals and then working in support of somebody else. In this case, if you give, then you will receive in return and it's clear that the three of you and your organizations have been able to do that with successful placements. Well, with that, let's turn, we have some time left now for our Q&A, and I think the idea is to bring back some slides, remind folks how to ask questions. If we can go forward one slide.

You can certainly put your questions into the MS Teams chat, and we encourage you to do so as comments or questions have done. If you prefer to raise your hands and are using a telephone today, please press star 5 and then we will unmute your phone and call upon you. You will then need the second step to press star 6 to speak. If you prefer to raise your hand on MS Teams, use the "raise your hand" feature at the top of the menu. Seeing that we have about five minutes, we ask each of you to please keep your questions to a single one today. And if you're having a need to use an email, you can email us at enoperations@ssa.gov with your question. So, with that, I'll bring in our team to see if we have any questions. Brittany, check with you first on questions coming in through chat.

Brittany: Yes. Hello, Derek. We've just had a question come in. "What is the PR tool?" They may have missed what that was during the presentation.

Derek Shields: Thanks. That's for Shannon, the PRM tool, I think it is. Shannon, go ahead and describe that again for us, please.

Shannon Offord: Yeah, it stands for Partner Relationship Manager. And basically, what it is, it's a tool where our partners can enter and build a profile — what the organization does, if they've got employment coordinators, what areas from a geographic standpoint they cover. And what that tool does once you put that information in there, it allows our members to reach out to you when they're doing searches geographically for certain organizations that may be able to help them contact and connect with an individual with disabilities or veterans or whatever the case may be. Right now, the member has to reach directly out to you once they find your organization. But coming soon, you'll be able to reach out to those member companies who are participating who are using the PRM tool. So once that happens, there will truly be two-way communication, but that's just a good place to start the conversation. We don't think that that conversation will be ongoing in that tool, but it's just a really good way for that initial conversation to occur.

Derek Shields: Thank you, Shannon, and thanks for that question, Lixon. We appreciate that. I wanted to— again, if we see a raised hand, we'll call on you, or if you have another question, put it in chat. In the meantime, I wanted to ask Maria. Maria, like from an employer perspective, you have an opportunity to send a message to a lot of service providers, disability employment service providers that work as Employment Networks. As an employer, what kind of talent are you seeking? And what would you recommend to them in how they're preparing these recruits or candidates with disabilities for today's market or workforce?

Maria Gray: So, the positions here, we have sales, tech support, and customer service roles. Work at home continues to be a very viable option for folks. And we're so proud to be able to place so many folks that thrive in a remote environment. Every role is different with specific job descriptions. And that's one of the key things that Tripp and I and Kyve and the other recruiter that's the point of contact, really share. All the details specifically on what role, what skills, and qualifications. And that's when Tripp puts on his recruiting hat and gets us those fantastic top-notch quality candidates that we look for. So, really just communicating the needs of our company to our partners.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Maria. I'm going to go to Tripp with a follow-on question and then we'll get to the question in chat. Tripp, speaking of connecting with talent acquisition, how often do you engage with talent acquisition professionals or in smaller employers that could be the HR single point of contact depending on the size of the company in talking about position descriptions and like looking at position descriptions to ensure that they're filtering in candidates with disabilities instead of filtering out. Any thoughts on that?

Tripp Carter: Lately, I would say within the past two weeks, I've only engaged with maybe two or three employers. On average, on a monthly basis, we have about 10 to 12 organizations that will periodically message us through like DirectEmployers. As far as job descriptions go, I will share this. There has been at least one occasion where I've had an engagement with an employer around positions they were looking to fill, and I ultimately had to come back and say that I didn't feel that our organization would be the best fit to assist them specifically because the positions were wanting to support only part-time employment. And when explaining the goals of the program and advancing people to Substantial Gainful Activity and other measurements of Ticket to Work, we couldn't really find common ground on what the

employer could do reasonably. So I continued to market the employer as a stepping stone for individuals who were just getting back into the door. But then on the flip side, my staff's engaging with the Ticketholder about the long term. We're here to help you grow and advance. But back to your question, specifically about the job description piece. I have not had that happen too often.

Derek Shields: Okay. Well, that's great. I'm going to interject because we're going to run out of time, and we've got to get back to two more. So, Shannon, we have a question from Anne and that's participating in the PRM tool, asking, "Is there a way to start messages from employers, and also is there a way to export the messages we get into the spreadsheet?" Any response there?

Shannon Offord: Today, no. However, we are working on some enhancements to make it easier for people to go back and look at messages and for them to get those messages out of PRM. So we know that's an issue, we're trying to figure out the best way to go about fixing it.

Derek Shields: Great. Thanks, Shannon. And thank you, Lori, from My Employment Options, for the question. And then the last question from Sandra. "One of the barriers people with disabilities encounter is employment gaps. What advice can you give to individuals for demonstrating skills and abilities to perform the job?" Anyone want to step up? We have about 30 seconds for that response.

Tripp Carter: I was going to say, Maria, we addressed that in one of the webinars we did with our client base last year. I think that was another question that came up. I think when it comes to the resume and even when you're talking directly with the recruiters, especially at Concentrix, these organizations do have an expectation that we may refer candidates to them with gaps in employment. I think it just comes down to how you coach the Ticketholder on having that conversation with the recruiting staff, just like helping them get to a point where they're comfortable with disability disclosure or even requesting a reasonable accommodation. There are challenges there, and there are lessons to be learned, but that's what I would say.

Derek Shields: Tripp, thank you so much. Using the coaching and potentially also identifying what was learned during those gaps in employment, too. Perhaps there are ways to turn training knowledge gain into gap spaces, too. And with that, we are at our hour. At this point, if we can go to the next slide, please?

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our panelists, Shannon Offord with DirectEmployers, Tripp Carter from ERS, and Maria Gray from Concentrix. We appreciate your time in preparing for today with our team and also for, of course, your comments and supporting Ticket to Work and the employment of Ticketholders across the country. With that, I'd also like to thank all of you for joining us. If you do have feedback or questions, please email the EN Development and Training Department at enoperations@ssa.gov with such feedback or recommendations for future EN Essentials programs. And with that, we will conclude today's webinar. Thank you and have a good day.