

## Peer Tutoring Beyond the Writing Center

By Katy Rank

When graduation day arrived and I had no idea what to do with myself, I decided to register with a temp agency with hopes of maybe being a radio station mascot. The consultant at the agency read my resume and his face lit up. “We have a client looking for someone to help tutor factory workers! Are you interested?” Was I interested? Do students confuse there with their? I knew I would ace that interview before I even learned more about the assignment.

A major glass manufacturing company was closing down one of their plants, leaving 1,000 manual laborers unemployed. The company was providing outplacement services for the employees and sought a temp worker to “check over grammar and help out with some resumes.” I don’t think the company dared to expect someone with tutoring experience and the patience necessary to help these workers create cover letters and resumes, things they had never even heard of.

I knew I would have to encourage the tutees to describe their jobs by asking them leading questions. I couldn't simply ask them to tell me about their work. If they mentioned a fork truck, I would have to ask who taught them to drive it, who certified the training, and how many other employees they then trained on the equipment. This strategy quickly became second nature for me as I realized I was dealing with a population of tutees who had no experience vocalizing their 20 years of work experience. Tutees with technical licenses never realized something they took so much for granted should go on a resume. If I didn’t learn to ask people about their training, they didn’t know to list it on their resumes. This job was an almost overwhelming challenge because I never got the A-student who just needed a second opinion that his or her paper was thorough and thought provoking. Every tutee needed 100% of my concentration and all the patience I could muster.

My co-workers, all Human Resource professionals, were relieved by my writing center experiences. These consultants, while brimming with knowledge about the job market and insider tips on getting through to recruiters, were not trained collaborators. I was able to contribute a lot of my writing center philosophy at meetings, discussing the importance of giving the client a voice, building confidence through successful pieces of writing, and the evils of red-pen syndrome. My experiences as a peer tutor were fantastic practice for the tremendous responsibility of tutoring adults who were truly dependant on my advice. Other outplacement services provided by government agencies provide cookie-cutter resumes to the unemployed, often created by internet programs or fill-in-the-blank charts. When tutees came into our center and actually learned the elements of a resume and wrote or typed the information themselves, they beamed with pride. For the first time, the tutees felt ownership of a piece of writing—a piece of writing that would be pivotal in landing them jobs.

As I completed my 6-month assignment, I was able to expand my tutoring repertoire to cover letters and even school applications. Somehow, helping a displaced factory worker apply for nursing school is infinitely more rewarding than helping a college student with a law school personal statement. I don't know if I could tutor in such an intense environment for the rest of my life, but the outplacement center was the perfect place for me during the months following graduation.

I eventually got a permanent job with Prentice Hall, an academic publisher. I found that throughout my interview process, every interviewer focused on my experiences at the Writing Center. The job leant itself to excellent communication skills, teamwork, organization, attention to detail and ability to prioritize. I no longer use my tutoring skills on a daily basis, but I am confident that my experiences as an undergraduate peer tutor and an outplacement tutor gave me the edge I needed to land my current job. In today's cut-throat job market where all the applicants have the same passion and GPA as me, having had the experience of helping others for such a long time made me stand out above the rest.