

## A 100% Job Placement Rate for Women in Non-Traditional Occupations



**Host:** Donna Milgram, Executive Director, Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science

**Presenter:** Ede Slovin, IWITTS Trainer and Former President and CEO of the Options! Program, a Community-Based Organization for Empowerment, Education and Employment

### Interview Transcript:

**Donna:** Hello and welcome. My name is Donna Milgram, Executive Director of the Institute for Women in Trades, Technology and Science. And I'm so excited to welcome you to this session of the *STEM Success for Women Telesummit*, funded by the National Science Foundation.

We have an interview with a very special guest. And then at the end of the session, you'll have an opportunity to ask our special guest questions.

Our guest today is Ede Slovin, former president and CEO of the Options! Program, a community-based organization for empowerment, education, and employment. And Ede has also been a WomenTech Educators trainer for the past 17 years.

Ede Slovin served as Executive Director at the Options! Program and had a **phenomenal job placement success rate of 92% for her clients**, many of them displaced homemakers. While she was director of the New Directions Program at Seminole Community College in Sanford, Florida, the program had **100% job placement rate and 38% of the placements were non-traditional occupations for women**.

In this session, Ede's going to share her best practices that she learned over her decades of hands-on experience and recruiting and retaining women in STEM career pathways. Welcome, Ede, and thank you so much for joining me for the STEM Success for Women Telesummit.

**Ede:** Hi, everyone. I'm Ede Slovin and I'm honored to be part of this discussion.

**Donna:** Ede, it's such a pleasure to have you here. And I know you've done so many different things around preparing women for STEM career pathways, especially in the community college and job training system, particularly with displaced homemakers.

**Is it really true that you had 100% job placement rate at Seminole Community College in the New Directions Program?** It seems unbelievable. Were there only two students in that program? Tell me about it. You must have been really disappointed when it went down to 92% at the Options program.

**Ede:** First of all, let me address the first part of your question. Yes, it was more than two students. On average, the New Directions Program was required by several of our grants to have at least 200 students. So that's what we did. We averaged 200 every calendar year. We had a quota in order to get

the full funding, so I made sure we made it. Our typical student was a 35-year-old female who had within the last 10 years or less a life-changing event where she now found herself in the position of having to earn her own livelihood.

I was not at all disappointed when our numbers dropped to 92% because that's when I started my own not-for-profit. I was a sole practitioner no longer located on the college campus. And to be honest with you, the reason I went out on my own is I wanted to offer these particular students their options in the community; hence, the name of the program. So women attending any college or technical program they wanted to, I wanted to be able to have the funds so they could go where they want and go into what they wanted to do.

I was restricted at my previous college, because when we wrote different grants we would talk about the programs we had. I was operating all of a sudden a not-for-profit without the normal support system that you have available at colleges, such as student services, career counseling, testing, novice placement office.

So to sum it up, I was positively delighted to see that we were still at such a high rate of 92%. It was a confirmation.

**Donna:** And Ede, you realize that I was joking about that, because the 92% placement rate is phenomenal.

**Ede:** I know. , I do.

**Donna:** I still can't believe that you got 92%. And now that you're telling me that you had 200 students and you had a 100% job placement rate, I know the questions are going to be coming. That really is phenomenal. Whether you were at the community college or you were running your own non-profit, you did an amazing, amazing job.

Before I have you tell our listeners how you did it, could you just describe for us what some of those jobs were like? Actually, I want you to focus on the 38% that were in non-traditional occupations for women. By the way, I don't like the word "non-traditional" because most women don't consider themselves non-traditional. In my training, I always tell people, "Don't use that word." But I know that we're talking about male-dominated career pathways with less than 25% women.

**Can you describe what they were so that we can have a sense of what those jobs were that you're placing people in?**

**Ede:** Sure. Okay, well, I know you don't like the word "non-traditional" because I had heard that over and over again in my training. But I think deep down, most women just lack confidence. In reality, they want to be trailblazers and innovators. And if the opportunity presents itself with the funding and support, I think they're more than willing to be non-traditional. That's just my opinion.

We had a number of women in the IT area. We had a very large, three-prong automotive program at the college, so I pushed a lot of them in that direction. And due to an equity grant I got following 9/11, a

large percentage of our students were in criminal justice, ranging from 911 operators to law enforcement corrections probation.

We had women in underwater welding, which is very big in Florida because of the shipping and cruise lines, as well as electronics, waste water management, and manufacturing. I'd say across the board, we had women in just about everything that was offered at the college.

When I did get out on my own and I had an open avenue to place women in programs all over the state of Florida, I saw students going into all sorts of different programs: global positioning, forest conservation, fire safety, EMT, civil technology, residential building and terrains, heavy equipment, HVAC, trucking, aviation maintenance, etc.

We actually sent a student 400 miles away to attend a program in the panhandle for mortuary science. So we sent them where they wanted to go and what they wanted to go into, as long as it was something within the STEM area.

**Donna: Wow. I mean, I think I just heard you mention about 30 different career pathways. It's really a wide range – underwater welding, mortuary science, 911 operator, law enforcement, IT. That is fantastic. That is amazing. And so I know that everybody wants to know – what were your secrets? You said your average student was 35 years old and first time in the workforce in a long time.**

Did they all secretly have ten years of prior experience earlier than that? Did they have PhDs prior? I mean, did you handpick these students? How did you get this 92%, 100% job placement rate? Seriously, what were the strategies that you used because that really is phenomenal?

**Ede:** Okay, well, first of all, it would have been lovely to handpick my students, but the program ran our grants and funding was raised in the community. I basically had to follow the restrictions of the allocations. So most of the grants were if anybody had a desire to improve their reading capacity, we had to fund them.

The majority of our students either had no previous college or had some many years before in ops-lead areas, data processing, things like that. Some students had a few years of volunteer work within the community and were interested in going in that direction. I think in the 150 years I've been doing this, I've probably worked with 10 people that had usable four-year degrees, maybe four with Masters and one with an EED who wanted to get out of education.

We weren't allowed to handpick our students. We just did a tremendous job of marketing, fundraising, and we're fortunate that we could offer full tuition and a very huge grant from Disney World for childcare. Those were probably the two best things that we had going for us. We had a tremendous menu of things that students had to do first in order to get ready to attend school, and ongoing things that they needed to do once they were in classes.

**Donna: Are you going to tell us about some of the things that they had to do? Also, how long was your program?**

**Ede:** The program, we had a three-week what we called “get ready to go to school” program, where we did study skills, testing anxiety, budgeting. We talked about money management, time management. That's when we put them through all kinds of testing and assessment, where we did just hours of career counseling.

We found that an awful lot of the women in our program had no idea of the number of careers that were not only offered in our state but that were available to anybody that wanted them and did not take a tremendous amount of specific skills. So it was information.

As far as the actual placement and employment, most of the programs that our students went into either had internships, externships, required volunteer experience, co-op, clinicals, or rotations. That usually led to employment if they did a good job. And we just literally pounded it into them that when you are off-campus doing anything related with the pursuit of your career, you were on a job interview and you are to dress and act appropriately. And believe it or not, most of these led to employment.

**Donna:** Let's back up because I want to get some more of the specifics. I know everybody wants to be able to replicate this success. So you had a three-week program that was assessment, a lot of career information, and also getting them ready in other ways, maybe setting up childcare, helping them figure out tuition.

**Can you talk more about the career information piece?** What did that look like? Was it presentations? Was it on the computer? Was it from role models? How did you get them the career information about this wide array of careers that they were not familiar with?

**Ede:** Most of the time we brought in people from the different departments when I was at the college to talk about their programs and what it entailed. A lot of them had some testing and assessments that they themselves did, which they brought in. Once I was out on my own, I brought people from industry in to talk about their programs.

It was labor-intensive getting it set up, but once I had it set up, the word kind of spread within the community and I had people from the industry calling me, saying, "Can I come talk about what we do and see if we can get some possible employees out of your group?" So that really worked out well. I'm not saying any of this stuff is easy to do. It's labor-intensive to get it going. But once it's up and going and you figure out what works well, then you run with it.

**Donna:** How many speakers would you have come to speak to a typical class?

**Ede:** I'd say probably about 20. What we did is we asked the students what they thought they were interested in. And so we would ask the speakers in. One of the other things that we found is asking students to do job shadowing of careers that they thought they were interested in.

I don't know if I have time for a quick story for a really funny but potentially disastrous thing I had with a dental hygienist.

**Donna:** You do have time, but I want to ask you some questions first before we move on to the job shadowing, which you said that you would ask them what they were interested in. Now, I know that generally, if you ask female students that haven't been given any career exploration what they're interested in, they're often going to say being a nurse or doing something – be an administrative assistant and traditionally female areas with no background. So I'm curious how you managed to bring in speakers from different areas if the assessment was driving it.

**Ede:** Well, we basically told them. **We had a questionnaire. Do you know what this career is? We would do something like HVAC.** And it was kind of like fill in the blank. Most of them didn't have a clue.

And then we would say, **"Do you know how much money you can make per hour or per week depending upon what it was and how the salary was generally paid?" That usually would spark a tremendous amount of discussion.** A lot of the time, they didn't know what the salary was. Nor did they know how long the training was and that was a huge piece. "I'm in a hurry. I need to be up and – my rehabilitative alimony is almost up; I'm running out of money; he's left town; I'm not getting any child support. I need something as quick as possible."

A lot of times, I found that they thought these careers were just years and years and years, when actually some of them were actually two, three semesters, and they were out the door. So it was just a way to get dialogue going. I used to joke around with them when they say, "Well, I want to be a teacher." And I go, "No, you don't. You may not want to be teacher."

And I said, "Well, how much money do you need?" And one of the first things we did is we had them do a budget of what they needed to live on. And they were like – it was a phenomenal amount of money.

**And I said, "Well, let me show you some careers where you can get in the ballpark of making that."**

And then that led to a discussion of what you would make upon graduation, what you would make five years later, what you would make if you added a four-year degree to this, a Masters, and on and on. So I found that the money part and the shortness of the program really got most of them to turn their heads.

**Donna:** Okay, so you actually were giving them some information as part of the assessment process that then piqued their interest. So it wasn't simply a straight –

**Ede:** Right.

**Donna:** Because I have found – and you can let me know if this is different – but periodically, I have done searches for assessments that are not gender-biased, so to speak. For example, if you have built something, then you would possibly be interested in a career in that trade.

However, if you actually sew – although not that many people sew these days but that has the same kind of spatial reasoning type of skills, putting things together, etc. – often, the assessments wouldn't clue in on this. Or else the assessments showed only males, the computerized ones, when it would come up with something in a male-dominated career pathway and vice versa.

**So were there particular assessments that you use that you found were gender-neutral that way? How did that work?**

**Ede:** Well, okay, I never found any that I just 100% liked. And a lot of them had fees that you had to pay for and I didn't want to spend my money that way. We just kind of asked questions. Your sewing is a good example because a lot of people don't sew nowadays – and it's like have you ever thought about sewing? Have you ever thought about being able to repair your own car?

**And it's more like “have you ever thought about this”, not necessarily “have you done it” because so many women have not had the opportunity to do these things.** We just wound up over the years kind of putting together an assessment of things that we felt would guide them to thinking about these different careers.

And also when we had the department chairs come in. We made sure I would work with them beforehand and I would say, “Be honest, be up-front. What kind of experience do they need to bring to this?” Most of them would say a willingness to learn. That's the only experience you need to bring. So I found the simpler we kept it, the more open the women seemed to be.

**Donna:** Okay. **That brings me to another question that I had on this side of things, which was did you have female role models coming in all the time?** That's something that I recommend to do whenever possible. You want women to see women doing these positions. But I know that you said you had the chairs of the departments. These people are not necessarily females themselves, but they're in the right position. So tell me about that.

**Ede:** Okay, if I could get my hands on a female role model somewhere, somehow, I did. It got easier as we went on, and I had alum. As I started working with different companies in manufacturing and different career lines within the community, I would always say I'm looking for women. And, of course, that always got a chuckle. "I'm looking for women. I need women."

So by word of mouth, I found a lot of people that way. And any student that came into our program, I would say, "Do you know anybody in this field?" Sometimes, they did and then I'd say, "By chance, is it a woman?"

I've also found that there are a lot of organizations throughout the country who have speaker bureaus and who'd be more than glad to send you people. I'm fortunate because I'm located in central Florida, so anything that I needed automotive, I got from NASCAR. We all know there are people in the pits that are women who are automotive techs and they're female drivers.

I also have Cape Kennedy right near me, and that helps because they have a percentage of female engineers because of all the government work they do. They're required to meet certain quotas. So I can't say that was ever really a major problem for me — getting females to come in.

The biggest thing was getting them to come in at the times I wanted to because we ran these programs this way: the first three weeks would be at night, the next three weeks would be during the day. So sometimes, I would have more women, depending around their work schedules as far as role models,

and sometimes, I didn't. It just depends. But that got easier after the word got out that I was looking for women in these industries.

**Donna: And as you said, you started to have alumni that would come back. Of course, alumni are your absolute best seller of your program and of being these areas that maybe they wouldn't have considered, these STEM career pathways. Okay, I'm going use that word – the non-traditional. So here you have program graduates. And I would imagine since you had – well, I'll ask you. So did you keep track of your students with that 100%?**

**Ede:** Yes.

**Donna:** Did you know where they went?

**Ede:** Yes, I did. **And when I do these presentations for IWITTS, that's one of the things I highly recommend – track your alum.** Even if you just do a simple spreadsheet, if nothing else – it doesn't have to be elaborate. We would send them postcards. Of course, we knew where they first went to work because that was part of our program.

And we would send them postcards every 6 months and we would try to do something funny. "Are you alive? Are you happy? Where are you working? What's your current salary?" We put these in an envelope and send it to them and they would fill them out and send it back to us.

Then, we always had a P.S. we need you to volunteer. Please call us so we can tell you what we need you to do. That was also part of our program, as we told them paybacks are really, really tough. And people would laugh and say, "Do you want to be paid financially?" And I'd say, "No, but I want you to come back and do things for us and talk about what you're doing and get other women excited about it."

And then one of the women, the first woman to go through automotive, who's done exceptionally well, she started an alumni association basically on her own and told everybody that they needed to donate money to us if they had been successful. That was just a wonderful bonus. That woman will remain one of my favorite people.

**Donna:** Well, that reminds me of Community of Rhode Island, where we had one of our sites for our WomenTech National Project. There was a Women in Technology Club that was developed as part of the work that we did with them. But the alumni developed a scholarship that they gave out through the Women in Technology Club and that was really a heartwarming thing to see.

Again, we're not quite at the job placement part. I want to understand better your model. So the three weeks, they get all this intensive assessment and career information, career counseling. They now go into a program initially when you were at the college, in the college and after that, wherever it was best for them to get a placement.

**So was your involvement only in those three weeks or did you also stay in touch with them during however long their programs were? I imagine they were varying lengths. How did that part work? What kind of support did you provide?**

**Ede:** Okay, as far as the actual placement, and then I'll back up as far how we stayed in touch. As I said, most of the programs had the co-op internships so that usually led to jobs. If the program didn't have one of these, I did my best to work with the department and the employers to create something that would give the student the experience of being on the job.

And that also gave the employer the opportunity to see what the student knew and how they fit into their workplace. I also continually had key community employers on my board. When I asked somebody to be on the board, I told them it was a working board and I expected them to be involved with the program.

The students were given a passport, for lack of a better name, or a list, when they first came to meet me one-on-one of everything that was expected of them to do during their time in the program. "Time in the program" is defined from when they first walked in the door to when I came to the graduation.

They had to return with it signed when they first started to work with us. And it was easier for them to do whatever we expected because we explained that from our experience, if they did everything, this would guarantee success. I have fine-tuned it over the years.

We knew what worked and what they needed to do, and what they didn't need to do. The bottom line is that if they didn't do certain things, we didn't pay for their next set of classes. I know sounds mean, but that was the way we worked it.

I didn't pay for a few students right at the beginning of a program who didn't do what they were supposed to so I got a reputation. I probably can't say badass, but it's a woman who meant what she says.

And that rumor spread far and wide and people actually started doing the stuff in the program. People want to be held accountable and I thought what better training for the workplace? I thought that was like really stupendous. We had elaborate testing and counseling and they had to go to that. They had to work one-on-one. They had to work in groups. We sent them out to figure out what the expenses of the program were, whether they needed uniforms, where they could get them.

They had to bring grades to me at midterm. And at the end of the term, they had to come and see us at least once a semester. Those that we paid child care for, they had to come. We did a voucher system, so they had to see me once a month to get their checks. The ones that had the childcare benefit, I would see at least once a month.

When they hit their next to the last semester in whatever program they were in, they had to start their job search and attend resumé workshops and interviewing sessions. I would say on the average, we saw everybody in our program at least once every three weeks.



**Donna:** So you have the power of the purse strings for both the hard skills training programs they wanted to go into and then also for their childcare.

**Ede:** Yes.

**Donna:** And they signed an agreement at the beginning that they would do all of these things that you knew would enable them to be placeable and successful in the workplace.

**Ede:** Exactly.

**Donna:** And then you enforced it, is what I'm hearing.

**Ede:** Yes.

**Donna:** Yeah, in the beginning you had a few people who didn't get to continue, but word got around and everyone knew you were serious about this. And that's a lot of work.

**Ede:** I don't want to paint a picture that it was all roses and sunshine because we had people who came into our program and saw how intense it was and how ongoing it was. And I would get things like, "Well, can't you just mail me the check?" No. "Can't you just pay my tuition? Why do I have to come in here and get a voucher?" Because that's the way we set it up with the colleges. "Well, that sounds like a whole lot of bother, I'm not going to do it." And I'd wish them good luck and that would be it. I'd say that was probably about 10% of the people who came in to see us did not. One woman told me it was like being in jail. And I said, "Oh, you want to see the corrections officer?" So she said no.

**Donna:** So maybe about 10% self-selected out in the initial few weeks is what I'm hearing you say.

**Ede:** Right, yes.

**Donna:** Okay, before you tell your story, let's talk about the nature of the internships. I have to tell you, I also have a huge bias for doing internships. I wish that we could have a level playing field in a workplace, but we don't. And that's why, for example, our organization has the New Workplace for Women Project, working directly with employers. We did, in particular, a lot of successful work with law enforcement and also with the fire departments.

But it's not a level playing field. When students have internships, it prepares them so much more. And from what you're telling us, it's also an entrée to get a job in those places. **So I'm curious, how long were the internships? What percentage of your students had them? Can you just give us a little more detail on these work-based learning experiences that I think really helps give female students and student in the minority? It really helps level the playing field.**

**Ede:** Well, from the student standpoint, I had them approach it as – and I had mentioned this earlier – as an interview, whether it was a three-week internship or a three-month one. Some of them, like automotive, was a co-op. They were in school for three weeks and then they worked for three weeks.

Some of the law enforcement was that way as well. These programs were either in place when I got to the college in the 1800s or when I started with Options!, I wanted every program that we worked with where the student had the opportunity to see exactly what was going on in the workplace and see if what they learned was applicable to it. Could they do the job?

**Most of the internships were not paid, but if they were built into the program, which I tried to get them to do, then they got credit hours for them.**

**Donna:** Oh, good.

**Ede:** So they would register for them. On some of them, I could get some of the money back because it wasn't like a full semester of tuition. And then I would give that to the student so they'd have some money to float them over. It just all depended upon what the program was and how long the internship was.

A lot of the resistance we found at first was from companies that had not done this before and were concerned about the liability issue. What we worked out on that is these community colleges are required for most grants to carry at least a million dollars of liability insurance. That goes with the student, so if the student is in some place as a school-sanctioned internship, they're covered. Once you told the employer they didn't have to cover it, they were more than willing to open up to these internships, these co-ops, rotations.

**Donna: Sure. And so would you feel like 75% of the students did internships? I mean, just a ballpark number.**

**Ede:** I'd say higher than that, probably close to 85% because a quite a few of these programs have something attached to it with the work experience.

**Donna: And ballpark on were most of them three weeks, one week, two week? Just a ballpark or range.**

**Ede:** It kind of went along with the length of the program. If it was an AS program and it was a two-year program, it was usually a trimester or a quarter. It was built in as part of it. If it was a certificate program, it could be as short as a week. It just really depended upon the program.

You wanted to suit the length of time that they're in school, too. You don't want to have somebody in a certificate program where they're going to be there for eight years and have four of it as an internship. That doesn't make sense.

**Donna: Sure. Now, did you have any students who, once they got into the internship, actually realized, "Hmm, this is not for me. "What did you do? Did that ever happen?**

**Ede:** No, because we made everybody do job shadowing during that three weeks. We had some job shadowing opportunities that we kept track of and put people in. Otherwise, they had to find their own

and go see what the job was like. I learned that lesson the hard way, and that's that story about the dental hygienist.

**Donna:** Okay, this might be the right moment for the story.

**Ede:** Okay, I get to tell my story. Anyway, I had this woman come in who wanted to go into dental hygiene. So although that's not a STEM choice or a non-traditional student, I had some other money and she really, really, really wanted this. So I said "That's okay, fine."

So she started doing her prerequisites. And every Groundhog's Day in Florida – and this is a statewide thing – we do a job shadowing activity throughout the state. It includes the high schools and the community colleges.

She wanted to go to a dentist office and see what this was like to be a hygienist for the day. Of course, they can't do anything, but they can observe. And so as it worked out, no one else wanted to do a job shadowing that day at a dental office so I called my personal dentist, who's a really nice man. And he said, "Sure, she can come along." He said, "Make sure she knows she's not going to be doing anything. She's just going to be observing."

So I dropped her off in the morning because the bus that was going around to all the other industries was not going to make a stop for one person. I dropped her off. By the time I got back to my office, they had said the doctor called and he wants you to call him. So, I called him and I said, "What, what, what?" He said, "She's sitting out on the curb waiting for you to come pick her up."

And I said, "Good lord, what happened?" And he said, "She'll explain it to you." And I'm going "Aaghh!" She gets in the car. I said, "Janice, what's the problem?" And she goes, "Ms. Slovin, do you know what a dental hygienist does?" And I said yes. So she says, "They have their hands in somebody's mouth all day. That's all they do." I said, "What did you think they did?" She said, "Not that."

**So that's when we started requiring job shadowing because I had already paid for a semester of prerequisites for this woman.**

**Donna:** Oh, my, oh, my. Yep, yep.

**Ede:** So it was an expensive lesson, but I learned it. And I tell that every time somebody would complain about, "Why do I have to job shadow? I know what it's like." And it's like "You have to. That's it."

**Ede:** I've had other people who come back and say, "You're right. That isn't what I want to do."

**Donna: Oh, okay, that's the other side of it. I would think this would be especially important for females who are going into careers that they might not know much about. Generally, what I always tell people recruiting females in STEM career pathways in which there are very few women, a big part of it is career information, which is what you just described over those three weeks.**

These careers were not on their radar screen. They don't know about them. And they haven't been thinking about them. So maybe if their father or brother or male cousin talked about it, they weren't

cluding in because they were never thinking they were going to be heating, ventilation, air conditioning mechanics. They weren't really listening.

In particular, they don't have much information about these careers that are not on their radar screen. I think job shadowing would be particularly important. Now, you also mentioned – and I want to hear some more about this – that you treated this internship as if it were a job interview and you really prepared them with résumés and interviewing.

**I know sometimes for female students in traditionally male STEM career pathways, they might get asked more questions. Legally, it's not supposed to happen, but the employer really wants to make sure that they really know how to do this or really want this job. Did you prepare them in a special way for that? Tell me a little bit more about that piece.**

**Ede:** Okay, when we were preparing them for interviews, we would tell them about what I refer to as the supercilious question, like, "Do you squeeze the toothpaste from the top or the bottom of the tube?" And as absurd as that is, I have continually heard questions like that.

And what the employer's trying to do is watch your reaction to something absurd. Do you roll your eyes? Do you move around in your seat? Do you look at them and say, "You got to be kidding me?" or "What does that have to do with the job?" We have taught the women to just kind of smile and just say, "I squeeze it from the middle."

Usually, that gets a laugh out of them and they'll say, "Well, all we were trying to do is to see how you would react if a fellow worker said something absurd to you or your boss, or something like that, because people are people and that happens." And so that's just a behavioral thing that they're checking.

The questions that are not legal – and we would make sure that they were well-versed on that – we would say, "This is basically a test," and just say to them, "I don't believe you have the right to ask me that." If the employer gets all out of bent out of shape, it's probably not a place where you want to work anyway. **And most of the time, they are; the employer's testing to see if you know your rights.**

**Donna: And did that ever come up with any of your students?**

**Ede:** Yes, it did. This is an interview, believe it or not, at a very large and well-known engineering company. Somebody was interviewing there for a tech position. And she was asked is there going to be a problem with getting your children into after-school care?

And this particular woman had kids who were – I think she had one in high school and two in college, so that was not a concern – but she knew that that was not a legal question. I had instructed them that this is a test; they want to see if you know your rights. She said, "I don't believe that's something that you have the authority to ask me."

The gentleman turned around and said to her, "Do you know we ask this question of every woman who comes here and you are the first one with the correct answer?"

**Donna:** So, did she get the job?

**Ede:** She did. She did. She's been there about ten years now. She's doing great – all kinds of promotions and everything. An interview, as far as I'm concerned, is the final exam. And they just want to know what you've learned and how smart you are.

**Donna: Speaking of childcare, you mentioned that you had a grant from Disney World for childcare. Can you just talk a little bit about the childcare piece?**

**Ede:** Well, we did it as a voucher because in order to have childcare on our campus, it was outrageously insurance-intensive and our president just unfortunately would not go for it. So I had already gotten the money and so I came up with the idea, and I can't really tell you where I got it from – doing it as a voucher.

What that person would do is decide where or who they wanted their child to be taken care of. We paid \$5.00 an hour and it was only for the hours that you were in class. So if you were taking 12 credit hours you got paid 12 times 5 per week. At the end of the month, we would have their teacher sign off that they attended every single class because we weren't going to pay if you weren't in class.

Then, we gave them a check made out to their childcare provider. That way, that childcare provider became a – what's the word I'm looking for? – like a contract employee. And so at the end of the year, they got the tax form. That alleviated the school of any liability. The only cost to the school was to have an accountant check my assistant's numbers at the end of the month.

They had a check-writing machine and she would make it out and had the electronic signature. We made the students come by and pick up the checks and sign. That was just another way to keep tabs on them.

**Donna: So I think actually your description of how you were able to use the voucher program could be very helpful to other schools and job training programs as well. Before we close, I actually want to leave time for question and answers because I think there's going to be a lot of questions.**

I remember many, many years ago when you came to one of the first WomenTech Educators Trainings that I did. I remember you told a story. I hope you're going to remember this, in which you used to do the career assessment right away and then the person who did the assessment went on vacation and so you did it a bit later. And then you got totally different results.

I think you told that. I think you were at the very first WomenTech Educators Training I ever gave about 18 years ago. Do you remember that story?

**Ede:** Yes, the assessment is exactly as you told it. The career counselor who came in and did it was out sick and he said, "I'll come in another couple of weeks" when he had some free time. And so **I found that if you expose these students to these different programs that are out there – and I continually say it, and to this day I say it – the majority of the people that come through the door have no idea of the different careers that are out there.**

Most of these women have been out of the workplace for years and even the young ones coming in don't have any idea because they just have not had the exposure to it for whatever reason. We realize that after we exposed people to these different careers, they responded differently on the assessment test.

**Donna:** Well, when I first started giving the WomenTech Educators Training 18 years ago, it was only one day. And then the knowledge base expanded and now, it's two days. I think I had a few handouts, as opposed to the wealth of information that we have now. Even our in-person trainings, when the manual got to be about 200 pages-plus and people say they want to carry them home, we created a certain amount of e-files. That's in addition to the online training that we did.

But that was all those years back then. Of course, an important part of the training that we do is the development of the plan. **Now, you've been a trainer for us I think about 17 years now, almost from the beginning. I know that something that you enjoy in particular is not just helping the participants with their individual plans, but also helping them with Perkins plans. Can you talk a little bit about your experience with that?**

**Ede:** Yes. I have found over and over again that the schools do not take Perkins statistics seriously. And the one good thing about Perkins is they'll warn you over and over your numbers aren't good, your numbers are falling, your numbers are not growing. They actually are a good group of people to work with. They want you to be successful.

A lot of schools use Perkins to pay adjuncts and even full-time instructors, or to purchase key equipment needed in labs and classrooms. I tell them at some point in time, the Perkins folks will become punitive and how is your school going to function then? Unfortunately, I've seen that happen in my home state. Many years ago, we received a very large cut and it took a long, long time to build up to it.

People who have the numbers are able to ask for more money in the next grant process. But one of the things that the Perkins people and I try to get across – I always talk about Perkins in my training – is how many jobs would be lost? I ask how many people in the room are Perkins-funded?

If their school does not pay for faculty or adjunct, how many of these programs would be able to continue without the latest in lab equipment? I recommend that they get serious, refine or create their recruitment plans to bring in the best qualified students with the support plan. Of course, IWITTS would be more than glad to help them with that.

**But an awful lot of the programs do not have a succinct plan. They have a statewide plan and then they go, "Well, that doesn't apply to us." Well, you have to have something that applies to you so you can work it.**

**Donna:** And that's what they developed in the WomenTech Educators Training. They can actually customize the plan, both the recruitment plan and the retention plan.

Well, before we go to the questions and answers: **If you could only give one piece of advice to our listeners who are interested in having the same kind of job placement rates that you have had in the programs that you've run, what would it be?**

**Ede:** **Have a plan and continually update it based on your results.** Seriously critique it. See what works, what doesn't. In order to do this, you need to learn proven strategies, not just what's worked for you, but what has worked for other people in both recruitment and retention. You need to develop them into plans that work for you and your school. They have to be extremely personalized and almost to the point where it's just not a school plan, it's an individual discipline plan. What works for automotive might not work for GIS, which might not work for law enforcement. So yeah, you just have to have those plans and continually revise them and see what works.

**Donna:** Well, thank you, Ede, for joining us for the STEM Success for Women Telesummit and sharing your secrets about job placement and recruitment of women in STEM career pathways. I just want to remind everybody that you'll have the opportunity to ask Ede questions. Thank you so much, Ede.

**Ede:** Oh, you're welcome. This has been fun. And aren't you glad I bugged you all those years ago to hire me?

**Donna:** Absolutely. I am glad.

**Our first question is from Peggy and she's from Bloomington, Minnesota. She asks, "Do you use any online resources to help remediate basic skills for new students? And did students normally have easy access to the computer?"** I'll let you go ahead and answer that, Ede.

**Ede:** Okay, when I was at the college, we had access to a computer lab that had like 30 terminals in it. There are a lot of online things that are free that you can access that do some of these basic skill levels.

When we were out on our own in our not-for-profit, we had ten computers. We found that over time, most of the people liked to work from home on these and so I'd say about 50% were used on a regular basis. But when they went to a particular college, they had to go through the testing for the math levels and one of the things we talk about in the training is making sure that your prerequisites that students actually need in order to be successful in the program.

I've done a lot of work with the different schools, making sure that those prerequisites weren't something that somebody decided 20 years ago that you need calculus in order to go into automotive technology. You do not. So once we got these prerequisites in mind we found that students were pleased with the idea that they didn't have to spend a solid year getting ready to go into a program.

**Donna:** With unrelated prerequisites, which often happen. I would just like to add in that I know many schools around the country that have worked with MathLab and have found MathLab to be a good online resource for those prerequisites that really are related and that they need to master.

**Ede:** There's a lot of good stuff out there. You have to find what's at the level that the beginning student is comfortable with. You don't want to put them into so that's going scare them to death.

**Donna:** Good point.

**Ede:** So be careful when you're selecting these programs as well.

**Donna:** I have a question from Dr. Gajic from Villanova and she asks, "Is there any compact material that specifies inappropriate questions during an interview, especially for women?"

**Ede:** You probably can go to your particular state bar association and ask for them to recommend an attorney who works with employment law in your community, and they can provide you with what's appropriate, what isn't.

**Donna:** That is a great suggestion. Well, we are actually at our one hour. I wanted to thank you again so much, Ede.

**Ede:** Well, thank you. I enjoyed it.