



## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is Lifetrack?

#### False Start

Lifetrack is an organization dedicated to helping people help themselves, by placing hard-to-employ individuals in work situations and training them to succeed.

#### Analysis

“Helping people help themselves” sounds right but is unlikely to be persuasive in this context.

Focuses on individuals rather than a broader view.

Charitable approach (which this is) has inherently limited power.

Doesn't acknowledge default patterns of thinking about work, workers and the economy.

#### Reframed

Lifetrack is an organization dedicated to improving the quality of life in Minnesota communities by helping to bring all segments of the community into the mainstream of productive work.

#### Analysis

Highlights the ideas of Community and Interdependence, which have proven most effective on this issue.

Prevents listeners from defaulting to judgments about the worthiness of Lifetrack clients.

### 2. Who needs its services?

#### False start

There are many people in Minnesota, like Ruth Wilson, who need help finding and keeping a job. She is 26 years old and the mother of two school aged children. She is a single parent now, having left an abusive relationship.

Analysis

Focuses on one individual and invites questions about her worthiness (Why did she have children so young? Why did she get into an abusive relationship?)

Excludes consideration of the community's stake in such situations.

Reframed

There are many members of our communities who face difficult obstacles to full participation in community life. They may be kept on the margins by physical or mental handicaps, by learning disabilities, by backgrounds that have included severe trauma, by prison records, or by language difficulties. By taking the right approach we can help all these people become productive members of the community, as they hope to be.

Analysis

Cues the Community frame.

Helps people bring to bear values of interdependence and the common good, while also making explicit the populations targeted by the programs.

Frames participants as neighbors rather than competitors by relating them to community life.

**3. Why do people need this help?**False Start

Without assistance, some people in society cannot overcome serious obstacles such as mental illness, physical disability, a language barrier, or a criminal past. Those who suffer from multiple barriers find it nearly impossible to lead a productive life.

Analysis:

Creates a Sympathy or Charity Frame, which are overused frames and ineffective on this issue.

Lodges the problem with individuals.

Defines categories of defective individuals, which distracts people into finding fault with those who need help.

Reframed

In every community there are people who live at the margins for a variety of reasons. By working to bring people into the mainstream of society, we can make communities healthier, more prosperous, and improve quality of life for everyone.

Analysis

Creates a Community Frame, which is effective on this issue.

Lodges the problem with society and citizens.

Defines the problem as those living at the margins, which avoids blaming the victim.

Relies on values such as community and prosperity.

#### **4. Why aren't these people able to find and keep jobs on their own?**

##### False Start

When we look around us in the Twin Cities, we see many people who have mental disabilities, substance abuse problems, prison records, language difficulties and other impediments to employment.

##### Analysis

Fails to bridge to a more Community-oriented perspective.

Without the right context, these problems are likely to be seen as “excuses” or even moral failings.

Unnecessarily distances Minnesotans who live outside the Twin Cities and do not identify with urban problems.

##### Reframed

There are a variety of situations that can make it very difficult for people to participate in the productive work life of our communities, including handicaps of various kinds. But Lifetrack programs have effectively helped people in all these situations fit into the work world – and we can continue to do so.

##### Analysis

Bridges to the idea of benefits to community and quality of life.

Focuses on the future rather than the past.

Conveys “Can-do” rather than focusing on the daunting nature of the problem.

#### **5. Why is this someone else's or government's responsibility?**

##### False start

Not everyone in our society has equal advantages or equal opportunity. Those at the bottom of the economic ladder need a hand up – it's the responsibility of the rest of us to reach out and help those less fortunate than ourselves.

##### Analysis

Sets up an Us vs. Them dichotomy that works against the Lifetrack programs.

Calls for charity, which is likely to be understood as voluntary action taken by individuals, not a systemic policy.

Provides an image that evokes competition rather than cooperation – the economic ladder.

### Reframed

As a community, when we help people to help themselves, we're strengthening the community. As more people are active, productive, and included in the community's life, the quality of our interactions and of our social fabric improves. Instead of neglecting problems that weaken our community and allowing those weaknesses to create new problems, we can improve everyone's quality of life by making sure everyone has the opportunity to be a working member of the community.

### Analysis

Leads with values of Self-Sufficiency and Community Stability.

Community context allows a message of Prevention without cueing judgments about the individuals who need help.

## **6. 6. What does Lifetrack do to make a difference?**

### False Start

Lifetrack works with each individual to provide whatever skills or assistance that person needs to become employable, and then matches that person with a job for which they are suited.

### Analysis

Implies that Lifetrack is an employment service for the down and out.

Reminds people that lots of workers need skills and assistance in the current economy.

Defines the problem as lodged in individuals, not systems – calls for "Transformation."

May create backlash, i.e. anyone can find a low-skill job if they want to.

### Reframed

The key to success is work. When people work they are contributing to society and feel better about themselves and the community. Therefore, we find ways for everyone to be a productive member of the community.

### Analysis

Emphasizes self-esteem as the value of work, not monetary reward.

Makes the community part of the solution as well as the goal of Lifetrack's efforts.

## **7. How do we know it works?**

### False Start

I see it every day. For example, there is a young woman, Mary, who came to Lifetrack one year ago. She couldn't speak English, she struggled with depression, and she had not been able to keep a job for more than a month at a time. With Lifetrack's help, she now speaks adequate English and has been with the same employer for six months.

### Analysis

Brings attention to one vivid story, which causes the reader to analyze the mistakes that person made.

Implies that force of will is all that is needed to get on track.

### Reframed

Lifetrack's approach has successfully helped thousands of people over the years, and here's how we ensure that it does: We don't just place a person in a job and walk away. We work closely with individuals over time, to move them through stages of employment until they are standing solidly on two feet. That's the point at which we call it success – when a person is a fully contributing member of society.

### Analysis

Reinforces that the objective is becoming a productive member of society.

Distinguishes Lifetrack's holistic approach from an employment agency.

Offers a clear causal story.

Could serve as an introduction to statistical evidence.

## **8. What is the benefit to the community?**

### False start

The more people we have working, the stronger our economy becomes. Right now, roughly 20% of Minnesota's workforce is unemployed or underemployed because of a lack of skills and training. By getting training to these people, we help employers get the workers they need to keep our economy thriving.

### Analysis

Triggers a competitive Economy frame, where listeners are competing with Lifetrack clients for scarce jobs.

Draws no distinction between Lifetrack clients and others.

### Reframed

The whole community benefits when people are more self-sufficient and have a sense of belonging and participation. Lifetrack moves people from the margins, where they are dependent and vulnerable, to a position in which they have greater control of their own life, and are able to provide for their own needs as productive and contributing members of the community. Lifetrack fits people in need of a job to do with jobs that need doing. As they gain in self-esteem, their success ripples out to the wider community, to everyone's benefit.

#### Analysis

Frames clients as neighbors whose stability increases the stability of the whole (rather than competitors).

Associates work with personal and psychological value, rather than just money.

### **9. How/Could these be prevented in the first place?**

#### False Start

Many of the problems we address, like mental or physical disabilities, or problems facing immigrants, can't really be prevented, but we can work with individuals to keep a bad situation from getting worse.

#### Analysis

Says prevention is not possible.

Implies that the role for community is limited; a person has to seek help.

Relies on charity or sympathy to build support.

#### Reframed

Communities need to stop pretending that these problems don't exist and instead be proactive about bringing people from the edge of society into the mainstream. For example, many communities make little effort to establish ex-offenders as productive citizens upon release. Without the skills or contacts to get employment, they go right back to the lifestyle that got them in trouble. That's an unnecessary waste.

#### Analysis

Says prevention is possible.

Establishes being on the edge as the problem to be prevented, not criminal behavior, etc.

Employs Can Do and Responsible Management Frames.

Places responsibility with the community.

## **10. Won't this problem solve itself for most people when the economy turns around?**

### False start

An improving economy will only help those whose skills and life experience position them to take advantage of it. There are too many people with multiple barriers to work who can't find employment no matter what the general economic conditions may be.

### Analysis

Suggests economic competition among different segments of the unemployed.

Raises questions about the moral worth, or poor decisions, of the chronically unemployed.

Makes the problem seem hopeless.

### Reframed

When people in our community don't have useful work to do, everyone's quality of life deteriorates. Businesses suffer because they lose customers. The tax base for schools and infrastructure suffers, because instead of contributing taxes people need public assistance. The appearance of our neighborhoods suffers, as stores are shuttered and homes deteriorate. But we don't have to get stuck in this cycle. One thing that will help the economy turn around is to help people solve the problems that keep them on the margins of society. We know these problems can be solved, because we've seen it happen with thousands of people who have had access to Lifetrack's services over the years.

### Analysis

Encourages big picture thinking – frames the economy in terms of its effects on the larger community rather than on individuals.

Treats the problems as solvable, as demonstrated by the track record of past work.

## **11. Why should employers (have to) train people when there are plenty of people without jobs?**

### False start

The chronically unemployed don't have the basic skills they need to get into a situation where they can be trained for a specific job. They don't have the experience of getting to work on time, and meeting the expectations of employers. To get these life skills, they need transitional work that will prepare them for the job market.

### Analysis

Puts all the emphasis on helping individuals rather than the community.

Frames the unemployed as a different kind of person.

Triggers images of people who are not full adults.

### Reframed

Businesses invest in the things that are needed to make and keep a business successful, including the workforce. Just as businesses require a working physical infrastructure of roads and communications in order to conduct its business, they also require a social infrastructure that prepares people for work through education and a healthy, functioning community life. By helping remove the barriers that keep people from full participation in community life, employers and supporting organizations like Lifetrack help maintain the social infrastructure, and contribute to the community's quality of life.

### Analysis

Frames the problem in terms of systems instead of individuals, and  
Offers a concrete analogy (the community's physical infrastructure) for the systems that make people ready for work.

## **12. Why should government help these people and not other people who need jobs?**

### False Start

The individuals served by these programs are among the neediest of the needy. Others in our communities are much more able to "fend for themselves" in the job market, and there are also other services which can help place them in suitable positions.

### Analysis

Frames Lifetrack work as charity for individuals and obscures benefits to community.  
Doesn't challenge the competition, zero-sum frame inherent in the question.  
Frames clients as hopeless cases, people who will never be able to contribute productively.

### Reframed

Responsible leadership of our state and our towns means working to strengthen communities as a whole, helping to bring *all* segments of the population into the productive social and economic life of the community. Different approaches are appropriate for different groups.

### Analysis

Takes a big-picture, community perspective immediately.  
Does not perpetuate the Competition frame.  
Frames clients as community members and workers with potential to contribute.



### **13. Why should immigrants be helped to find jobs?**

#### False Start

Immigrants who have come to this country, and to Minnesota, expect to work hard in order to achieve their dream of a better life. Our work is about helping these people overcome the obstacles they typically face in making their way into the job market.

#### Analysis

Praises immigrants (for hard work) but still frames the issue in terms of the wellbeing of *individuals*.

Takes the “bait” and defends a specific subpopulation, as opposed to refocusing on the big picture.

Doesn’t take account of likely feeling of competition with immigrants for jobs.

#### Reframed

When all groups are helped to overcome obstacles to becoming productive members of our communities, the quality of life in the community as a whole goes up. The community is like a building whose many parts all need to be in the best shape possible for the structure as a whole to be strong.

#### Analysis

Reframes as community benefit.

Doesn’t allow conversation to devolve to defense of particular groups.

Uses a concrete analogy to help reinforce the idea of interdependence.

### **14. Why should addicts be helped to find jobs when they have no one to blame but themselves?**

#### False Start

Addiction is increasingly understood as a disease, and as a public health issue rather than a moral failing. With the right support, individuals with substance abuse problems can be helped to overcome their problems and get on with their lives.

#### Analysis

Reinforces idea of Personal Transformation.

Underestimates negative views of addicts.

Fails to bridge to big picture.

Focuses exclusively on benefits to individuals.

(Educating people about addiction is at best a secondary goal.)

Reframed

The strength of our communities as a whole depends on bringing as many segments of the population into the productive social and economic life of the community as we can. Studies show that productive employment actually helps people with substance abuse problems overcome their dependency.

Analysis

Highlights the benefits to the community as a whole.

Undermines the false choice between helping individuals and helping communities.

**15. Minnesota has a great public education system – why did these people not take advantage of it??**

False Start

Many of them did. The individuals served by Lifetrack come from a wide range of backgrounds, including some who are very well educated, but who face other barriers to employment.

Analysis

Ends up minimizing problems and implying that clients may not need help.

Falls for “trap” of defending subgroup of clients.

Reframed

Minnesota’s great public education system reflects our understanding that a strong and prosperous society is the payoff when we invest our resources into our communities. Lifetrack continues to be a very successful part of that commitment.

Analysis

Rejects the zero-sum thinking inherent in the question between schools and Lifetrack services.

Uses the topic of schools to bridge to a community perspective.