



Barbara Casteel, T-PALS Receptionist, Goodwill Industries of Northwest Texas; and Matt Rodriguez, T-PALS Employment Specialist, Goodwill Industries of Northwest Texas, Lubbock, TX)

The Power of Work

By Kim Lehman-Brown, Goodwill Industries of Northwest Texas, Communications Consultant

Barbara Casteel and Matt Rodriguez are each a unique success story, but they share some common ground. Both employees with Goodwill Industries of Northwest Texas (GINWT) were Goodwill clients before beginning their new careers with the organization. They also share the qualities of how the power of work changes lives—not just their own lives, but those of the people they interact with at GINWT.

Barbara's Story:

The last few years of Casteel's retail career had been fraught with difficulties due to stressful physical demands and being passed over for advancement opportunities into full-time employment for better pay and benefits. The reason for not rising in her career, Casteel said, is that management relayed to her she was too valuable in her present position. A friend suggested to her she might be interested in Goodwill's Training, Placement and Life skills Program (T-PALS) to acquire free computer skills training to change the course of her stagnant career path. Casteel took her advice.

"When I walked through the door as a student, the Goodwill team looked at me as a person of value, and they have not dropped the ball since then," Casteel said.

After graduating from both basic and intermediate computer skills classes, that also earned her credit hours from Goodwill's T-PALS partner, South Plains College, Casteel received a call from Goodwill asking her if she might be interested in applying for a receptionist job.

"I didn't give it a second thought," Casteel said. "I gave my retail job 2-week notice to be a part of an organization that takes broken lives and helps mend them. We are here to give them encouragement, support and a smile and when I walk them to the door, they hopefully carry that with them."

Casteel began working as the full-time receptionist for T-PALS in September of 2016 and said Goodwill has helped her have the confidence to know her own worth.



"I don't think I've ever been as valued anywhere else. I'm so much more than my title. They were there to support me when I had just started working here and tragedy struck my family and they went above and beyond for me. I am here, I am happy, I am where I need to be," Casteel said.

Matt's Story:

Matt Rodriguez has been an employment specialist at GINWT since January of this year, helping those with barriers to employment in the community gain the skills they need to find sustainable employment. A couple of years before coming to work with Goodwill, Rodriguez had just retired from a career with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in Brownfield. He had also served in the U.S. Army, the National Guard and the Reserves. He later worked for the city and the Lubbock County Sheriff's Department. He said instead of staying retired, he wanted to continue in service of others, but without any computer skills, he felt his options were limited. His sister encouraged him to apply for computer classes at Goodwill's T-PALS program.

The first person Rodriguez encountered when he walked through the doors of T-PALS was Barbara Casteel. He asked the receptionist if there was a charge for classes and after hearing there was no charge, he decided to apply.

"I didn't think they would accept me because I had an extensive background, but I was approved to start basic computer classes right away. When I first started classes, I could only type about 10 to 15 words per minute, but I dug in and ended up graduating with basic and then graduated intermediate computer training," Rodriguez said.

With computer skills under his belt, Rodriguez applied with an area hospital. But when an employment service specialist at T-PALS heard about his job search, Rodriguez said, "She asked me, 'Didn't you want to help people? We have an employment specialist job open and you could help people find employment.'" Rodriguez turned in an application with GINWT.

The same day he turned in an application with Goodwill, Rodriguez was called back for an interview with the hospital. He thanked them, but turned down the job saying he had already found the job he was looking for.

"Taking the computer classes had opened two doors for me, but I wanted to continue to help people, so I came here to work." Rodriguez said.

As an employment specialist, Rodriguez said he assists clients with enrolling in employment development programs with Goodwill such as computer skills, job search skills and assistance, developing interview skills and building resumes.

"Many people have barriers to employment," Rodriguez said. "It's a challenge for me and I enjoy helping them know they can do better. It has made me a better person, knowing when I'm helping people, it will have an impact. I can see the positive benefits from what I am doing."