

Man Credits Better People For Teaching Him To Find The Answers Within Himself

When William Robinson stepped to the podium last spring to receive his graduation certificate from Better People, it was the culmination of a journey that had led him through some very dark places.

One of the darkest times came in March 1998 when he pulled a 16-month stint in the Mill Creek Correctional Institution. He vowed during that time to turn his life around, and when he was released in June 1999, he acted liked he meant it. He landed a job at Portland Community College, started classes, tried his hand at sobriety — something that's been a challenge for him through the years.

Then a seemingly minor bump in the road threw everything out of whack. For most people, being transferred to the nightshift would be an irritant. An inconvenience. For Robinson it was an excuse to return to old patterns; a path back to the bars and the bad decisions that come under the influence. And in one instance, a path back to the courtroom when Robinson got in a drunken fight.

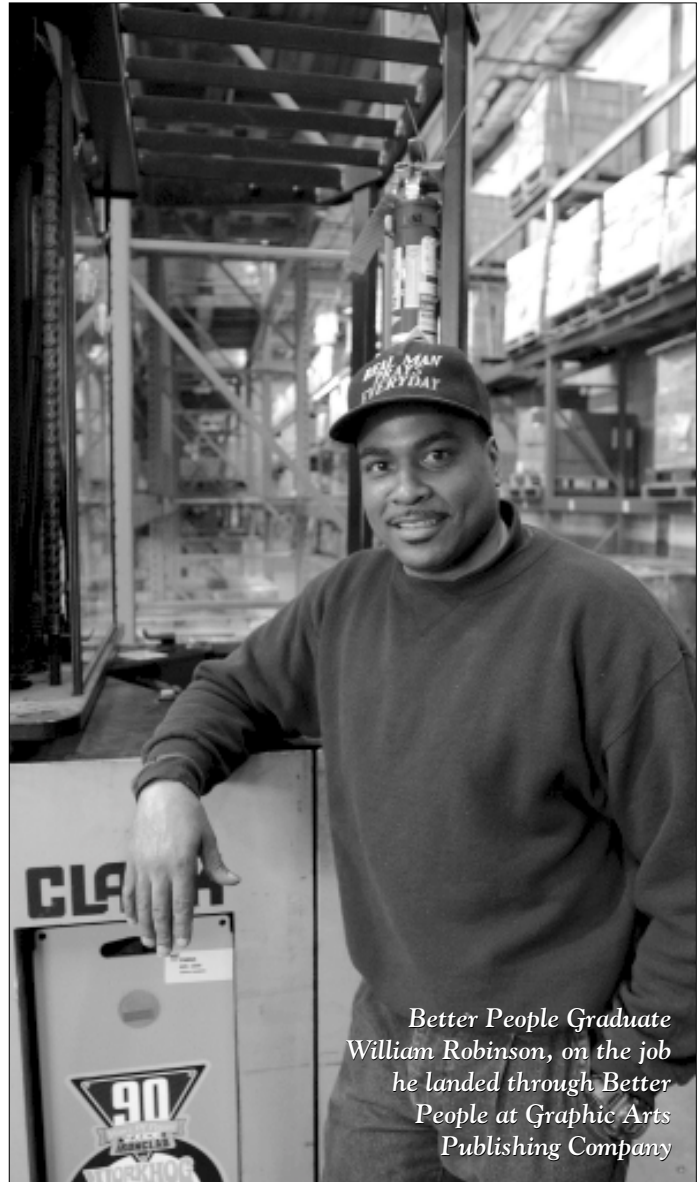
When Robinson looks back, he can discern a straight line from that low point to the higher ground where he resides today, with one important way station in the middle: Better People.

As Robinson tells it, you don't just get a job through Better People. You get a giant mirror and a staff of people to help you understand what you see. You get a support team of other former offenders who can see through your denial and excuses, and if you avail yourself, you get the tools through Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) to recognize the wrong turns in the road before you take them.

"They gave me the opportunity to look at my past and understand the things inside of me that led to the decisions I made," said Robinson, who earns more than \$10 an hour plus benefits as a warehouse supervisor for Graphic Arts Publishing Company, a book distribution company on NW Yeon. He landed the job through Better People's referral program.

"They helped me understand how much time I spent focusing on the bad things in life... how I'd get frustrated, start settling for the easy way out, the shortcuts. They taught me to rethink my value systems... but more than that, they gave me the feeling that I'm part of something.

"One thing that's different about Better People," Robinson said, "is they allow the clients to help each other find the answers. They teach you that the answer is in you, and then they give you the tools and the peer support to dig inside yourself and find the answers."



*Better People Graduate
William Robinson, on the job
he landed through Better
People at Graphic Arts
Publishing Company*

***Better People works
only with employers
who pay at least \$8
per hour and offer
health benefits.***



Better People Recruitment Specialist Clariner Boston, MS, MPA at the Fall 2002 graduation.



Better People Board members Sam Jackson, Jr., Jim Curtis and Ed Hill congratulate graduate Reggy deFeniks at the Fall 2002 graduation.



Better People Executive Director Chip Shields and Portland City Councilor Dan Salzman at the Fall 2002 graduation.

What People Are Saying About The Better People Approach

“Better People’s specific focus on serving ex-offenders plays a significant role in explaining the program’s success. Better People has a very solid reputation in the corrections community for strong job placement and job retention outcomes.”

– *Faye Gentle, Training and Transition Coordinator
Oregon Department of Corrections*

“When Mr. Shields approached me in 1997 about being involved in the evaluation of Better People, I was impressed... his ideas for Better People were very much in line with what the research says is effective — treating dynamic factors like living-wage employment and criminogenic needs like how offenders think.”

– *Annette Jolin, Ph.D.,
Professor, Mark Hatfield School of Government,
Division of Administration of Justice, Portland State University
to Multnomah County Commissioners May 17, 2001*

“Better People is distinctive in its larger organizational mission of advocating on issues that affect the criminal justice system and, in turn, ex-offenders. For instance, [Better People Executive Director Chip] Shields is involved in efforts to reprioritize state funding for education rather than for more prisons, and he advocates restructuring of sentencing, including elimination of the death penalty in Oregon.”

– *Maria Buck, Public/Private Ventures
Getting Back to Work: Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders
(A national field research report of promising practices that featured Better People).*

Better People Staff

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Recruitment Specialist

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William (Chip) Shields, M.S.W.
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A special thanks to former staff Ray Allen, Andy Olshin and Berry Schieb. Thanks also to retiring board members Ed Hill, Sam Jackson, Jr., Maceo Pettis and Nancy Pasternack. Best wishes in your new endeavors.