

BC Skills Force Initiative  
June 1, 2005  
Grand Forks, BC

AGENDA

1. Introduction of facilitators Paul Wiest & Ron Trepanier
2. Introduced the BC Skills Force Initiative
3. Introduction of participants
4. Overview of project
5. Background research
6. Focus Group discussion
7. Next steps
8. Wrap up

## Comments and Discussion

### Employer Labour Needs

- Seventy-five percent of employers present are looking to fill vacant positions
- A number of positions are seasonal or part-time
- There are more jobs on the job board than there have been in recent years and those postings are for higher skilled positions
- Grand Forks is close to having a full employment situation
- Economic growth in the region is driving the demand for more employees, making the situation worse
- Employers in the hospitality sector are targeting an older work force because they are skilled and generally do better quality work
- Some hospitality employers have the issue of having only part-time work, four hours per day and often seasonal. They are finding it very hard to find employees willing to work these types of hours
- Need to work on organizing businesses in partnership arrangements so they can tie seasonal, part-time jobs together to create full-time work for the employees
- There is a growing need for apprentices
- There is a lack of skilled workers in the construction trades
- Small business owners who train apprentices often end up losing these workers to large industry
- There is new potential for immigrant workers now that China is issuing visitor permits to Canada
- Businesses are dealing with the issue of high employee turnover
- Businesses are having to tap into the pool of unemployed that lack employability skills
- Retail businesses are taking what workers they can rather than what they want

### Skills and Education

- Apprenticeship programs are a big issue - how they are delivered and promoted needs to be revisited
- Canada needs to look at the European model for how to undertake apprenticeship training
- A significant number of employees are lost to larger industry once they get their trade certification
- There is a lack of in-house training by major industry employers
- Large industry needs to be encouraged to train their own apprentices
- There should be a partnership established between large and small business to develop apprentices
- Cost of apprenticeships for small business is very high relative to financial benefits
- School system needs to promote trades as a career path - beginning at the elementary school level
- Entrepreneurship development programs need to be introduced at the elementary school level
- There is a lack of adequate trades training in schools; the decision to close shop classes needs to be reconsidered
- Too much promotion of university education in school system
- There is a program where students get \$1,000 grant for tools upon graduation - this needs to be better promoted

- School system is not producing the skills that industries require
- College needs to do a better job of engaging small business in the development of their programming
- Schools are disconnected with real world demands of business
- There is a disconnection between the trades and university. There needs to be a better linkage between the two
- Australia has done well in promoting the poly technical university model -- we should do the same in Canada

#### **Infrastructure:**

- Lack of affordable housing and transportation is an issue in Grand Forks
- No public transit to areas like Christina Lake
- Employees need to have access to local apprenticeship training

#### **Attitudes:**

- Today's youth generally lack adequate life skills training
- Personal issues are getting in the way of youth being able to work:
  - o drugs
  - o single parent families
  - o lack of skills
- Life skills that are missing from youth include
  - o Failure to show up for work and not bothering to call in
  - o Lack of respect
  - o Lack of discipline (root cause: poor home upbringing and school system)
  - o Basic budgeting skills are lacking
  - o Basic math skills are lacking; they do not know how to give change to customers
  - o They lack pride in their work
  - o They lack people skills
  - o They have a poor appearance
  - o Their dress code is not appropriate for the workplace
  - o They lack a positive attitude
- Hospitality industry jobs are not viewed as glamorous and seen as too low paying, even though there are skilled positions that pay decent wages
- Trades are seen as being for dummies. Need to be seen as positive career

#### **Hiring Practices/HR Strategies**

- Employers are losing productivity because they lack skilled employees
- High school graduates should receive grants for learning the trades
- Employers are looking for employees with good attitude
- Employers need to be flexible with younger workers
- Business sector needs assistance from government for training employees
- Provide tax relief for businesses willing to train employees
- Financial help is needed for employees who take training
- Target wage subsidy program works
- There is money available for apprenticeship training through IAC
  - o but business do not know about it
  - o high school students do not know about it
- two differing views were presented by the group:
  - o more people are needed

- there are enough people just not enough with necessary technical skills
- To retain employees, employers need to create jobs that are stable, full-time employment positions, and avoid lay-offs in slow periods
- Critical mass issue, business is not doing well enough to offer full-time work and/or pay more

## Succession Planning

### Ownership:

- A number of business owners are not thinking about the issue at this point
- Some informal planning is occurring. Some are increasing life and disability insurance
- When time comes to retire often the plan is to put the business up for sale
- Concern was raised about access to financing when purchasing a business. Often purchasers can not get enough working capital
- Concern is usually around what the value is in the owner's eyes versus what the buyer can afford, given the amount of equity he/she has and the debt service the business can handle

### Aging Workers:

- Most employers have no formal strategy in place
- Strategy is to move up junior staff to senior level (i.e., the apprentice becomes the foreman)
- Leadership issues exist for some workers unwilling to move up the ladder

## Final Comments

### What we need is a multi-pronged approach:

- Support for employer training
- Support for employee training
- Employee loyalty programs are needed for apprenticeship programs
- Basic life skills development should be available for those who need it
- Provide stable employment for seasonal workers
- Encourage large industry to sponsor apprenticeships
- Schools need to connect with employers and raise trades profile in the schools
- Public education programs like "Believe BC" are needed to promote trades
- Increasing our number of skill ed workers will lead to economic growth
- Businesses need to talk to school trustees
- More school field trips to businesses are needed to allow youth to explore the real world
- A central information registry is needed to allow easy access for job opportunities
  - job wave
- Need to create pride in trades as a career
- Trades appreciation days are needed

### Who drives this:

- A partnership involving schools, businesses, colleges, service providers