

BC Skills Force Initiative
June 7, 2005
Kelowna, 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

- Approximately 50 percent of businesses in attendance were having difficulty finding staff for vacant positions
- There is a lack of applicants to fill basic labour positions
- There is demand for positions in the manufacturing sector
- Some employers are finding it difficult to fill positions in professional fields such as accounting and engineering
- Businesses receive job applications from individuals with entry level or high level skills; but there is a lack of intermediate skilled applicants
- Employers find it hard to find younger workers for entry level sales positions
- Often skilled applicants apply for positions but they have the wrong skills to match the work available
- Many workers lack computer skills, such as advanced Microsoft Word, Access and Excel
- It is not that people are lacking computer skills, they just do not have the appropriate computer skills
- Employers find it difficult to attract skilled employees from metro Vancouver
- There is a general need for trades people - especially in construction
- Employers are having very little success in hiring employees with skills. They almost always need to train the employees and bring them up to the appropriate skill level

Skills and Education

- Schools are not producing younger workers with appropriate basic skills
- Universities do not train practical skills for the workforce
- Younger workers lack any basic work experience. Too much emphasis in school is placed on acquiring academic skills rather than practical work skills
- Youth need more basic skills
 - o Life skills
 - o Literacy/numeracy
 - o Communication skills
- Employers are willing to train but most younger applicants are not ready for the work force
- Business has a wide range of skills demands of colleges/universities
- Business needs to dialogue with schools/colleges to share their perspective on workplace skills needs
- There needs to be more promotion of trades as a positive career option
- There is a need for more local trades training. There are long waiting lists to get into trades courses

- Colleges need to be more flexible to accommodate trades demands
- Supply/demand issue, employee supply is not matching employer demand
- We do not understand the demand side. Educators and government need to listen to the employers' views regarding training needs
- There is an issue of how older workers learn new skills
- Education system needs to be more flexible to the needs of the market place

Attitudes

- There is a general lack of initiative on the part of employees for additional skill development and training
- Younger people want to work in an environment where they are treated with respect
- Younger work force has a general lack of adequate life skills
- Students graduating from high school have a poor attitude toward trades
- Youth today have a negative view towards physical work
- Trades lack status as a career option; they have a poor reputation among students and their parents
- There is a need for the trade of success stories to be promoted within high schools to change the attitude about trades. Have successful young local trades persons as "poster boys/girls" for promoting trades work. It would serve to validate trades and the technical work it involves. Maybe we should promote a "trade of the week"
- Too much emphasis is placed on preparing youth for university rather than trades training
- Employers are not willing to work at hiring individuals with lower level skills
- Many employers will not take co-op students
- We have a new challenge of children not learning basic skills that, in the past, were taught at home
- Responsibilities of parents are lacking at the home. Parental input has been replaced with computer/TV; results in:
 - o lack of work ethic at home
 - o lack of effort
- Our attitudes towards work are initially developed at home

Infrastructure

- There have been cuts in school funding for shops. There is therefore no capacity to develop basic pre-trade skills
- Apprenticeship programs lack the needed level of support
- There is a relative lack of money made available for trades training compared to the cost of funding support made available to universities

Hiring Practices/HR Strategies

- Small business owners need to target a wider segment of the population
- Apprenticeship pay rates are an issue

- some employers hire first year apprentices then lay them off and hire another first year apprentice
 - employers shoot themselves in the foot - becoming the place people do not want to work at
- Business owners need to clearly communicate their business goals with employees
- Employers should consider profit sharing as a way to retain workers
- Employees need both reasonable compensation and a good work environment
- Many employers lack comprehensive human resource plans - they do not have time to develop them
- Business owners need to broaden the type of recruitment they do to attract new employees
- Employers should consider partnering with schools and universities when it comes to recruitment
- Businesses need to adapt for older workers
- Employers should consider changing some job descriptions to accommodate their aging workforce
- Most businesses have the mind-set of offering only full-time positions. They are often not flexible to the idea of offering shorter hours for older workers
- Immigration should be looked at as a possible avenue for finding employees

Succession Planning

- One employer has made a conscious decision to lower the average age of his workforce. This has required a commitment to in-house training
- There should be tax incentives for employee training and skill enhancement
- Business owners need to be open to hire entry level workers
- Older workers should be utilized to mentor younger workers
- Employers need to develop systems to allow for employee ownership
- More businesses need to develop succession plans
- Small business employers need to develop clear career paths for their employees
- Small business owners struggle to stay alive and are not focused on long-term goals, such as succession planning
- Business owners lack resources or are not willing to spend money to recruit employees
- One small business owner hired an older worker to mentor others in the shop

Final Comments

- There is a need for better interview strategies by business owners
- Attraction of immigrants, especially US citizens should be considered as an option for filling vacant positions. We have an untapped resource in US citizens

- Canada's immigration system needs to be made easier for potential employees
- There is a need to establish discussion group on skill development involving education providers and businesses
- There is a need for greater promotion of programs and services available to business (i.e., trades training)
- The Okanagan Partnership is a potential group to look to for local solutions
- There is a need for employer support programs for business owners
- Development of human resources departments for small business is needed
- Most employers use the word of mouth network and peer groups to recruit employees
- University co-op employee training program needs to be enhanced
- Phase 2 of the BC Skills Force Initiative should involve one-on-one discussions with larger firms to find out what can be transferred from large to small companies
- We need to promote the idea of life-long learning
- Employers need to consider the transition from physical jobs to ones that are more knowledge-based for their older workers
- Employers need to consider the idea of employees becoming shareholders in their business. Use West Jet as an example.