

BC Skills Force Initiative

June 8, 2005

Merritt, 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:

- There is both a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour
- There is a need for heavy equipment operators. Employers are currently bringing in heavy equipment operators from Kamloops
- The demographic bubble is having a big impact on the trades
- Businesses don't have personnel to keep up with the work
- Businesses are getting contract work, however they don't have staff to meet deadlines
- Labour shortage is causing delays in construction projects
- There is a shortage of trades people - plumbers, electricians, carpenters
- One employer could double the size of their business if they could find employees
- It is hard to attract and retain people in the retail and service sectors
- The region lost a number of skilled workers to Alberta in 1990s
- Some employers are paying bonuses to hire people. This is driving up prices for goods and services

Skills and Education:

- There is a willingness by employers to train new apprentices
- There is a need to connect Industrial Training Authority (ITA) with schools
- Today trades are more high tech, less brawn
- College is not in-line with business needs. Business needs are a mix of:
 - o Technical skills
 - o Practical skills
 - o Life skills
 - o On-the-job skills
- Need Junior Achievement program in schools and colleges
- There is a strong trades program in Merritt school system
- Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) program seems to be working well - could be expanded
- The local First Nations Group has a good work experience program
- We need to encourage trades as an option for youth in the school system
- We need to communicate to the students what jobs are in demand
- We need to validate and promote trades in the school and college systems
- Graduates of university do not have practical skills
- To have access to employees with better practical skills, employers are willing to support more co-op type training programs for university and college students

Attitudes:

- Generally there is not a strong work ethic among younger workers
- Lots of young people apply for employment but can't hold a job because they lack a proper work ethic
- Issues with younger workers:
 - o They look for instant gratification
 - o They have unreal expectations for entry level positions
 - o They lack basic life skills
- We need to raise the bar for younger workers
- Teachers and parents need to set the example for life skills

Infrastructure:

- Bureaucracy and too many rules make it difficult to hire apprentices

Hiring Practices/HR Strategies:

- Many people have a poor perception of Merritt. Makes it difficult to attract employees
- Employers need to build a company that attracts employees (i.e., build a reputation as being a good place to work)
- One local business advertised across Canada, then internationally, to find trades employees
- Local employers are trying to attract employees that were lost to Alberta
- Regular advertisements in Calgary and Edmonton have had little success
- To compete, small business needs to offer bonuses or introduce alternative approaches to compensation to attract and retain employees
- There is a willingness by employers to work with local First Nations groups as a potential supply of labour

Succession Planning:

- Targeted Wage Subsidy (TWS) is a great program but could be expanded to provide skill development for younger or less skilled employees
- Change TWS to allow older workers to train younger workers
- TWS should have the following aims:
 - o Skill development for employees
 - o Retraining of older workers
 - o Mentorship by skilled of less skilled employees
 - o Support the establishment of a mentor pool for trades
- Employers are willing to train and mentor workers but need support to do this (i.e., tax credits for employee training)

Final Comments:

- Need to reverse migration from rural communities to Vancouver
- Create a marketing program directed at urban centres, promoting rural communities and lifestyle
- Merritt needs to attract young families from outside the area
- Need a unique approach for native population to increase their participation in the work force
- Employers do not want their apprentices away on training for long periods at a time
- Need for local apprentice training, shorter periods, evenings and weekends
- There is a need for a Junior Achievement-type program with a trade focus in schools